

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

The Gospel of John plays a unique and influential role in the Christian Bible. In this account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we learn that Jesus is the Son of God,¹ sent² by God the Father to give eternal life³ to all who believe in him. Jesus repeatedly shatters people's assumptions, teaching that salvation is not earned but rather is a free gift received through a miracle of grace—being born again. John's Gospel also sounds a constant theme of mission. Just as the Father sent Jesus to earth, Jesus sends his followers to continue his mission by testifying that Jesus is the Son of God so that “whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16).

Of the four Gospels, John was probably the last one written. It is the most theologically and philosophically profound Gospel account. John does not narrate Jesus' birth. Instead, he begins his Gospel at the very beginning, stating in his opening sentence that Jesus has eternally existed and that “all things were made through him” (1:3). John roots Jesus' identity in eternity past, providing a lofty vision of the Son of God sent to earth as fully God and now also fully man. Other than the feeding of the five thousand, the anointing at Bethany (12:1–8), and the passion narrative, John does not share any sizable blocks of teaching

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with the Synoptic Gospels. John is organized around carefully crafted narrative strands that highlight both the signs and teachings of Jesus. This gives John's Gospel a sense of depth as the reader is presented with a rich, multi-layered, and cosmic display of the identity, works, words, and mission of Jesus.

John's purpose is to present Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, sent to earth to fulfill all that the Old Testament anticipated: bringing new life—eternal life—to a dark world.

Placing It in the Larger Story

While Matthew focuses on Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, Mark focuses on Jesus as the one who ushers in the kingdom of God, and Luke emphasizes Jesus as the one who welcomes the outsider, John emphasizes Jesus as the eternal Son of God. Through his signs and teaching, through his death and resurrection, and through the mission he entrusts to his disciples, Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament hopes and promises. He inaugurates the long-awaited new age.

Key Passage

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30–31).

Date and Historical Background

The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. He was a Palestinian Jew and a member of Jesus' inner apostolic circle. John most likely wrote his account of Jesus between AD 70 (when Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans and the temple was destroyed) and AD 100 (the approximate end of John's lifetime). Most likely he wrote his Gospel in Ephesus, one of the most important urban centers of the Roman empire. John's Gospel was aimed at both Jews and Gentiles living throughout the Greco-Roman world. John frequently explains Jewish customs and Palestinian geography to non-Jewish readers. John also presents Jesus as the eternal Word that has now become flesh, utilizing the background of Greek thought familiar to his Gentile audience. Yet John clearly also has a Jewish audience in mind: he reveals Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of many Old Testament themes, and the eternal Son of God sent by God the Father to mediate a new relationship between God and man.

John thus wrote his Gospel about two generations after the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the time of writing, the other three Gospels had been written and the Greco-Roman world was in a state of change. Jerusalem had been sacked by Rome. Jews were increasingly dispersed throughout the Roman empire, causing Jews and Gentiles to come into even more frequent contact. It is to this mixed and dispersed Jewish and Gentile audience that John directed his Gospel.

Outline

- I. Prologue: The Incarnate Word (1:1–18)
- II. The Signs of the Messiah (1:19–12:50)
 - A. John the Baptist and the start of Jesus' ministry (1:19–2:11)
 - B. Jesus' expanding ministry (2:12–4:54)
 - C. More signs amid mounting Jewish opposition (5:1–10:42)
 - D. The final Passover: the ultimate sign (11:1–12:19)
 - E. The Messiah's death at hand (12:20–50)
- III. The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (13:1–20:31)
 - A. Jesus' final teaching and prayer (13:1–17:26)
 - B. Jesus' arrest, trials, death, and burial (18:1–19:42)
 - C. Jesus' resurrection and appearances (20:1–29)
 - D. Purpose statement and epilogue (20:30–21:25)

As you get started . . .

What is your general understanding of the role of John's Gospel related to the other three Gospels? Do you have any sense of what John uniquely contributes?

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How do you understand John's contribution to Christian theology? From your current knowledge of John, what does this account of the life of Jesus teach us about God, humanity, sin, redemption, and other doctrines?

What has perplexed you about John's Gospel? Are there any confusing parts to this Gospel that you would like to resolve as you begin this study of John?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of John. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that you would like to learn throughout this study of John.

Definitions

¹ **Son of God** – Designates Jesus as the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). This term gathers up many strands of Old Testament expectation about a coming "anointed one" who would lead and rescue God's people.

² **Sent** – John's favorite designation of Jesus is to call him the Son of God "sent" by the Father. This is set against a Jewish background in which a messenger represents the sender himself. Jesus is the ultimate "sent one"; he is the perfect revelation of God.

³ **Eternal life** – For believers, the new life that begins with trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and that continues after physical death for all eternity in God's presence in heaven.

WEEK 2: PROLOGUE: THE INCARNATE WORD

John 1:1–18



The Place of the Passage

This opening passage of John sets the stage for the rest of the Gospel. John opens with the words “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). From his very first sentence John proclaims that Jesus is the eternal, preexistent Word¹—the one-of-a-kind Son of the Father, the Son who is himself God. Yet this eternal Word has now become incarnate² in history (1:11–18). In this prologue John introduces many of the major themes developed later in the Gospel, such as Jesus as the life, the light, and the truth; believers as God’s children; and the world’s rejection of Jesus. These first eighteen verses are the grand entryway into John’s breathtaking account of Jesus Christ.

The Big Picture

John 1:1–18 shows us the good news that Jesus is God and that he has taken on flesh and come to earth as the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, John 1:1–18. Then think through and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2019–2020; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

John roots the opening verses of his Gospel in the opening verses of Genesis. Compare John 1:1–5 with Genesis 1:1–5. What parallels do you see, and what do these parallels teach us about the message John wants his readers to hear?

The Gospel of John has a different starting place than the other Gospels. Look briefly at the opening verses of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What is unique about the opening of John’s Gospel?

John 1:14 makes clear that when John speaks of “the Word,” he is speaking of Jesus. Thus, John begins his Gospel by providing a lofty portrait of Jesus: revealing that Jesus is God, giving glimpses of the Trinitarian³ nature of God,

and teaching that Jesus was crucially involved in the very creation of the universe. List everything we learn about Jesus in these opening verses (1:1–5).

Continuing to draw upon Genesis motifs, John speaks about Jesus as the “life” and “light” who has come to shine in a dark world. What do John 8:12 and 10:10 teach us about the life and light we receive in Jesus?

In verse 6 we read that “there was a man sent from God, whose name was John” (this is John the Baptist—not to be confused with the author of this Gospel). According to verses 6–8 and 15, what was John’s role and ambition?

According to verse 11, Jesus came “to his own, and his own people” (the Jews) “did not receive him.” From what you know from the rest of Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, what are a few other instances where God’s people reject God?

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What do verses 9–13 teach about how to become a child of God? Where do you see God’s grace⁴ in these verses?

Verse 14 announces the greatest event in human history: the eternal, omnipotent Son of God took on human nature and lived among humanity as one who was both fully God and fully man at the same time, in one person. Before Jesus, who were some others who were sent from God to bring deliverance to God’s people? In his mission to bring light and life to a dark and dying world, why is it critical that Jesus be both fully God and fully man?

Verse 14 speaks of the “glory” of Jesus. Read Exodus 33:18–23 and Deuteronomy 5:22–27. What do these passages teach us about what glory is, and about what John is communicating with his words, “we have seen his glory”?

Note verse 17. This verse is not drawing a contrast between law and grace in the sense that the Mosaic law was bad and Jesus is good. Rather, John is stating that both the giving of the law and the arrival of Jesus mark decisive events in the history of salvation. Through the law, God revealed his righteous character and requirements. Through Jesus, however, God reveals himself most fully, displaying his grace-soaked mission to meet the demands of the law for a dark world

that has broken his law. What is superior about Jesus’ ministry over Moses’ ministry? What did Jesus accomplish that Moses did not—could not—accomplish?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

GOOD NEWS. These opening paragraphs of John’s Gospel announce good news. Note that these first eighteen verses contain not a single command to obey, but simply news to believe. Consistent with the overarching story line of the Bible, this Gospel begins with gospel—with the good news that God has taken on flesh to rescue sinners living in a dark world. This is the resounding theme of John: good news. Jesus has come so that we, the undeserving, might receive “grace upon grace” (1:16).

PROMISES KEPT. John shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. We see the grace of God in his commitment to keep his promises to his people, despite their rebellion. “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” was a constant refrain throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23). Yet God’s people were consistently faithless, giving God every reason to cancel his promises. Nevertheless, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). Despite our wickedness, God became flesh—he set up residence in a first-century Middle Eastern neighborhood—in order to be our God and save us. God keeps his promises.

CHILDREN OF GOD. These opening verses proclaim the best news in the world: estranged sinners can become God’s children. How does one become a child of God? Not through turning in a resume or an application, or through some process of proving yourself worthy. John tells us we become God’s children simply through believing in Jesus as God works in us the miracle of new birth: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become

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children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:12–13). Anyone can become a child of God. All it takes is trusting in Christ.

Whole-Bible Connections

IN THE BEGINNING. John begins where the Bible begins. Genesis begins with these words: “In the beginning, God.” John is saying the same thing with his introductory sentence: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John makes it clear that the eternal Son of God was vitally involved in the creation of the world. John 1 echoes Genesis 1, showing that Jesus is God and showing that the Son of God’s incarnation is as significant an event as the Father, Son, and Spirit’s initial creation of the universe.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS. The first thing God creates is light (Gen. 1:3). Thus, human sin and all that is broken in the world is often described as “darkness.” One of the plagues God brought upon Egypt was the plague of darkness: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt’” (Ex. 10:21). John announces that, finally, with the arrival of Jesus, there is a true answer to the darkness in the world: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (1:9).

A BETTER MOSES. Long before sending Jesus to earth, God had been sending his people leaders such as prophets, judges, and kings to deliver them from their troubles. One of the greatest prophets God sent was Moses. God used Moses to deliver and shepherd the Israelites. Through Moses God gave his people the law. Yet Moses was an imperfect leader, a sinful man just like the men and women he was leading, who couldn’t provide the deeper deliverance God’s people needed. Moses couldn’t accomplish the great act of grace that Jesus came to accomplish. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (1:17–18). John 1 taps into this whole-Bible theme of men sent from God, showing us that Jesus is the ultimate man sent from God. Indeed, he is God himself.

Theological Soundings

DEITY OF CHRIST. Jesus is “the Word,” and “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John wastes no time in telling us that Jesus is divine. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is included in the divine identity (Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:3). While there are distinctions of persons

within the one Godhead, Jesus Christ is as much God as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

TRINITY. The opening verses of John make clear that the Son of God—the Word—is also the same God who created the universe “in the beginning.” Putting John 1 together with Genesis 1, we see here all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit. John 1 plays a central role in revealing the doctrine of the Trinity. Broadly speaking, Christian theology teaches that the Father orchestrates salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation.

LAW AND GRACE. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). Both the law⁵ and grace are gifts from God. The Psalms are full of exclamations about the delight God’s people take in his law. God gave his law to his people through Moses. The law revealed God’s righteous character and the righteous requirements God made of his people. The law was and is a gift. But the law doesn’t save. This verse from John teaches us that Jesus brings us a better revelation than Moses, for now in Jesus we receive a full picture of God’s grace. The essence of grace is the news that God has met the requirements of the law for us through the perfect obedience of Jesus. It is only through this grace that we find the power to follow God’s commands.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of John 1:1–18 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. John 1:1–18

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you engage in this study of John. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Word** – Translation of the Greek term *logos*, literally meaning “word” or “logical principle.” Equated with Jesus and God in John’s Gospel (John 1:1–18). John is likely drawing upon the rich reservoir of meaning for the term both in Hellenistic thought and in first-century Judaism.
- ² **Incarnation** – Literally “(becoming) in flesh,” it refers to God becoming a true human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
- ³ **Trinity** – The Godhead as it exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one God, yet he is three persons; there are not three Gods, nor do the three persons merely represent different aspects or modes of a single God. While the term Trinity is not found in the Bible, the concept is repeatedly assumed and affirmed by the writers of Scripture (e.g., Matt. 28:19; Luke 1:35; 3:22; Gal. 4:6; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; Heb. 10:29).
- ⁴ **Grace** – Unmerited favor, especially the free gift of salvation that God gives to believers through faith in Jesus Christ.
- ⁵ **Law** – When spelled with an initial capital letter, “Law” refers to the first five books of the Bible. When spelled with an initial lowercased letter, “law” refers to the entire body of precepts set forth in those five books (also referred to as the “law of Moses”). The law contains numerous commands of God to his people, including the Ten Commandments and instructions regarding worship, sacrifice, and life in Israel.

WEEK 3: JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE START OF JESUS' MINISTRY

John 1:19–2:11



The Place of the Passage

This introductory section of John's Gospel gives the account of the first week of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is declared to be "the Lamb of God" by John the Baptist; is followed by his first disciples; and performs his first sign, turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana. The first half of John's Gospel (1:19–12:50) highlights Jesus' messianic¹ identity through the many signs² that he performs.

The Big Picture

John 1:19–2:11 shows us that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away sins, calls disciples, and performs miraculous signs.

Reflection and Discussion

This section of John contains three significant events in the early ministry of Jesus. Read John 1:19–2:11 and consider the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2020–2023; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Testimony of John the Baptist (1:19–34)

The Pharisees³ sent messengers to John to ask him one question: “Who are you?” (v. 19). Who are the three people John denies being, and how does John answer the Pharisees’ question in verse 23?

In verse 23 John the Baptist identifies himself with the prophet Isaiah’s words. Read Isaiah 40:1–5. What is John the Baptist saying about who he is and who Jesus is?

In John 1:29 John the Baptist declares who Jesus is and what Jesus does. Read Exodus 12:1–14. What connections do you see between this description of Jesus and the grace God showed his people in instituting the Passover ritual? What does John 1:29 say about what our broken world most needs?

How would you explain the difference between the baptism⁴ performed by John and the baptizing Jesus came to do?

2. Jesus Calls the First Disciples (1:35–51)

What made the disciples⁵ of John the Baptist decide to follow Jesus? What do the events of John 1:35–37 teach us about John the Baptist’s ministry and about what all Christian ministry is ultimately meant to do?

After leaving John the Baptist to follow Jesus, Andrew exclaimed to his brother, Peter, “‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ)” (John 1:41). The Old Testament repeatedly speaks about the coming Messiah, the coming king or “anointed one.” Isaiah 9:6–7 sums up many of these expectations. What does this Old Testament passage teach us to expect from the Messiah?

In John 1:35–51 Jesus calls his first five disciples. As these disciples get to know Jesus, they say different things about him. List these various declarations. What is the significance of each of these declarations, and how do they deepen our understanding of who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish?

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In John 1:51 Jesus alludes to Genesis 28:12 and Jacob's vision of a ladder between heaven and earth. Here Jesus reveals that *he* is the ladder that links heaven and earth. In today's culture, what "ladders" do people try to build between heaven and earth, attempting to bypass Jesus as Savior?

3. Jesus Performs His First Sign (2:1–11)

Jesus' first sign is turning water into wine, an act that saved a party from ending early. What do we learn about the ultimate purpose of what Jesus came to do, given that his first miracle kept a party going?

According to John 2:11, why did Jesus perform this first sign, and what was the effect of this sign?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE SIN REMOVER. John 1:29 summarizes who Jesus is and what Jesus does: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus takes away sin. In the Old Testament the people of God traveled to the temple and made sacrifices, following elaborate instructions, in order to ensure that their sins were taken away. These sacrifices all pointed forward to the day that an ultimate sacrifice would be made for sin. Now, with the arrival of Jesus, we don’t need to do anything to cover for our sins. Jesus covers for our sins. Jesus takes away the sin of the world. To have our sin totally taken away, all we must do is believe in him.

THE CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP. In John 1:35–51 Jesus summons five men to follow him, to be his disciples. Notice that Jesus initiates the relationship. And notice that Jesus doesn’t ask his disciples to meet certain qualifications. To enter into a relationship with Jesus, only one thing is required: faith. As the Gospel accounts all testify, Jesus’ original band of disciples didn’t have it all together—they routinely sinned, failed, and made a mess of things. Yet Jesus loved them. It was Jesus who first called them to follow him. This passage makes clear that the deciding factor in this relationship is Jesus and his grace, not us and our qualifications. In fact, the only way to have a relationship with Jesus is to know that you do not qualify!

A LADDER TO HEAVEN. Recalling events and imagery from Jacob’s dream (Genesis 28), Jesus tells his first disciples of the great things they will see from him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Ever since man’s relationship with God was severed in the garden of Eden, we’ve been trying to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, trying to construct a ladder from earth to heaven. Here Jesus proclaims that no such ladder can be built—that we need a ladder that moves from heaven to earth, a ladder that only God can provide. Jesus states that he is this ladder; he has come from heaven to earth to be the ladder men and women need in order to enter back into a relationship with the God of heaven and earth. This ladder stands on grace, not works. In Jesus, God has moved toward us, providing access to heaven for sinners. Faith in Jesus takes us to the top of the ladder.

Whole-Bible Connections

LAMB OF GOD. Jesus, by his perfectly righteous life, sacrificial death on the cross, and victorious resurrection from the grave, fulfills all the symbolism

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of the Passover lamb and other Old Testament sacrifices. As the apostle Paul states, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). In the Old Testament, deliverance through the shed blood of an animal, most notably the Passover lamb, prefigured the coming of Jesus as the Lamb of God who once and for all obtained salvation for God’s people. John, the author of this Gospel, continues to speak of Jesus in this way in the final book of the Bible, Revelation, as he depicts Jesus as the apocalyptic warrior Lamb who brings final judgment to the world (Rev. 5:6–13; 7:17; 21:22–23; 22:1–3).

MIRACLES. Throughout Scripture, whenever God is up to something big and new, his work is accompanied by miracles. We see this most notably in God’s creation of the universe (Genesis 1–2), the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 1–12), and God’s reforming work through the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 and 2 Kings). In John, immediately after calling his first disciples, Jesus performs a miracle (sign), turning water into wine. As John’s Gospel progresses, so do the miracles of Jesus—the miracles become more and more significant. Consistent with the story line of Scripture, the many miracles in Jesus’ ministry are a sign that a new epoch has arrived in God’s dealings with his people.

Theological Soundings

MESSIAH. Jesus’ identity as the long-awaited Messiah is clearly proclaimed in this section of John. Consider the diversity of declarations made about Jesus in this section. John the Baptist: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29) and “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (1:34). Andrew: “We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ)” (1:41). Philip: “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: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (1:49). And Jesus himself reveals his messianic identity: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51).

HOLY SPIRIT. The third person of the Trinity shows up in this section of John, as John the Baptist testifies: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him [Jesus]” (1:32). Reminiscent of the presence and activity of the Spirit in the opening sentences of Genesis, here we see the Holy Spirit fill and remain upon Jesus. This was a messianic anointing, empowering him to begin his ministry of discipleship, miracles, teaching, and suffering. We see in the ministry of Jesus what we see throughout the Bible: the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers ministry.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of John 1:19–2:11 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. John 1:19–2:11

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of John. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Messiah** – Transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “anointed one,” the equivalent of the Greek word Christ. Originally applied to anyone specially designated for a particular role, such as king or priest. Jesus himself affirmed that he was the Messiah, sent from God (Matt. 16:16–17).
- ² **Signs** – Miracles that attest to Jesus' identity as Messiah and Son of God and lead unbelievers to faith.
- ³ **Pharisee** – A member of a popular religious/political party in NT times characterized by strict adherence to the law of Moses and also to extrabiblical Jewish traditions. The Pharisees were frequently criticized by Jesus for their legalistic and hypocritical practices. The apostle Paul was a zealous Pharisee prior to his conversion.
- ⁴ **Baptism** – Literally “to immerse” or “to wash.” Refers to the Christian practice of immersing a new believer in water as an outward sign of the inward reality of regeneration. This regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit (see John 3:5, 8; Titus 3:5) and may be received only by grace through faith (see Eph. 2:8). Considerable disagreement exists as to method of baptism (e.g., pouring or sprinkling versus immersion) and who may be baptized (e.g., believers and their infant children versus believers only).
- ⁵ **Disciple** – Any person who submits to the teachings of another. In the NT, refers to those who submitted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, especially those who traveled with him during his earthly ministry.

WEEK 4: JESUS' EXPANDING MINISTRY

John 2:12–4:54



The Place of the Passage

In this section of John, Jesus' Jerusalem ministry begins with the clearing of the temple.¹ Jesus then has three major encounters with three very different types of people: Nicodemus, a representative of the Jewish religious establishment; a Samaritan woman; and a Gentile official. The main effect of these chapters is to reveal more of who Jesus is and to highlight the expansive extent of what Jesus came to do.

The Big Picture

John 2:12–4:54 shows that there is only one way to God and eternal life: through belief in Jesus.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, John 2:12–4:54. Then review the four sections listed below and write your notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2023–2030; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)



1. Jesus Cleanses the Temple (2:12–25)

Jesus' first major confrontation with the Jewish leaders in John's Gospel occurs as Jesus clears the Jerusalem temple during the Jewish Passover. Why did Jesus clear the temple, in light of the true purpose of the temple? What does this scene teach us about Jesus?

After cleansing the temple, Jesus converses with the Jewish leaders and makes a statement about his approaching death and resurrection, as well as about his identity as the true and better temple for God's people. Skim through Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple (2 Chron. 6:12–42). In what ways do you see Jesus as the ultimate answer to this prayer?

2. Jesus Teaches a Jew about Salvation (3:1–36)

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a respected scholar among the Jews, who approaches Jesus “by night.” Why might Nicodemus have approached Jesus at night? How and why does Jesus steer the conversation in the direction that he does?

According to John 3:3, what must happen for someone to see the kingdom of God? According to 3:4–8, what must happen for someone to be born again?²

John 3:16 is probably the most well known verse in the Bible. If this were the only verse we had, what would we know about God and salvation?³

3. Jesus Teaches a Samaritan about Salvation (4:1–45)

In this scene Jesus does something scandalous for a first-century Jewish rabbi: he enters into compassionate dialogue with a Samaritan woman with a questionable past. Jesus is always doing things like this, crossing boundaries to

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show that God's grace is not limited to a certain type of person. According to Jesus, salvation is for sinners. In other words, salvation is for everyone. What does this scene teach us about what Jesus is like, and what does it teach us about salvation?

What does the woman do after her encounter with Jesus? What do we learn from this?

4. Ministry by Deed (4:46–54)

John has shown Jesus bringing the gospel to a respected Jewish teacher (John 3:1–21), then to an outcast Samaritan woman (4:1–42), and now to an official working for the Roman government (4:46–54). This drives home the truth that the good news of God's grace is available for all types of people, to everyone in the world. Reflecting on these three different people, consider how they each respond to Jesus. What do their responses to Jesus teach us about how we should respond to the Son of God?

How did Jesus heal the official's son? What is John communicating to us about the power of Jesus' words?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

RESURRECTION POWER. Foreshadowing his own death and resurrection, Jesus told the religious leaders, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). This is what Jesus can do with death: undo it. There is no life so broken that Jesus cannot fix it. Jesus turns spiritually dead people into living people. His resurrection power works best in graveyards!

NEW BIRTH. According to John 3, salvation comes not fundamentally through a human decision or fresh resolve but by being “born again.” This requirement Jesus issues—“You must be born again” (3:7)—cannot be performed by men or women themselves any more than was their first, physical birth. The Spirit of God must accomplish this. God himself must grant and perform the miracle of new birth. According to John 3, salvation is not at its core mental assent to a new doctrine or resolution to live differently. Salvation comes, most fundamentally, through the miracle of new birth, whereby our hearts are set free to put our trust in Jesus.

COSTLY LOVE. John 3:16 is surely the most famous verse in the Bible. It is famous for good reason—this sentence powerfully summarizes the gospel message. The heart of this message is costly love. God’s love for the world was so great that he endured the loss of his only Son in order to save us. The Son of God lost his life in order that we might gain life. God’s love is free for us, but it cost him dearly.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE TRUE TEMPLE. After clearing the temple, Jesus issues a bold claim: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). For centuries the Jerusalem temple had stood as the meeting place between God and man—the physical place where heaven and earth met, atonement was made for sins, and God communed with his people. Here Jesus declares that he is the true temple, the true meeting place for God and man. Jesus states that after being destroyed by death, he would come back from death. And this, indeed, is what Jesus did—proving that he is the true and better temple, the temple that cannot be destroyed.

MISSIONARY GOD. From Genesis 1:1 on through Revelation 22:21, God reveals himself as a missionary God. God is constantly engaged in missionary activity, making himself known to people who are far from him. God initiated his missionary plan with Abraham, stating that through his offspring “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Jesus, the true and final offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), demonstrates God’s missionary heart here in John 3 and 4. He brings the message of salvation to three different kinds of people who desperately need to know God: a Jewish leader, an out-cast Samaritan woman, and a Gentile official. Jesus brings to a climax God’s missionary activity, for in Jesus God became flesh in order to make himself known to a lost world.

Theological Soundings

GOD’S INITIATIVE. Our relationship with God starts with God, not with us. God always makes the first move in establishing a saving relationship with his people. John 3 states that for a person to know God, God must first take action as he grants “new birth.” In the Old Testament we see that people entered into a relationship with God only because God initiated it, because God called them. And in the New Testament we see the same thing—a relationship with God starts with God. As John puts it in one of his letters, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

THE WORD OF GOD. God’s word is powerful. In Genesis 1 God creates the universe through his words: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Throughout the Old Testament God saves people, destroys nations, and performs miracles, all through his word. And throughout the New Testament it is through the word of God that events of significance happen. Jesus, God in the flesh, heals an official’s son simply through speaking words: “Go; your son will live” (John 4:50). As Jesus said to Satan, quoting

Deuteronomy, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Indeed, Jesus himself *is* the final “Word” of God (John 1:1)—Jesus and his saving work is what God has to say to the world.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of John 2:12–4:54 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

WEEK 4: JESUS' EXPANDING MINISTRY

4. John 2:12–4:54

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of John. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Temple** – A place set aside as holy because of God's presence there. Solomon built the first temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, to replace the portable tabernacle. This temple was later destroyed by the Babylonians, rebuilt, and destroyed again by the Romans.
- ² **Born again** – A phrase used by Jesus in John 3 to describe how a person enters the kingdom of heaven. Natural birth is not sufficient. Instead, through the work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, a person must experience a second, spiritual birth, in which he or she becomes a new person in Christ.
- ³ **Salvation** – Deliverance from the eternal consequences of sin. Jesus' death and resurrection purchased eternal salvation for believers (Rom. 1:16).