

# The Gospel According to John

## Part One



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John 1–10

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with Little Rock Scripture Study staff




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Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at



# Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

## **The Gospel According to John, Part One** **John 1–10**

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into six lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet six times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website ([www.littlerockscripture.org](http://www.littlerockscripture.org)). Please note that there is only one intro lecture for two-part studies.


Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gath-



erings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree how much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

## WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of the Gospel of John, chapters 1–10, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.
- Commentary by Scott M. Lewis (which has also been published separately as part of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary series).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of the Gospel of John being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the video lectures available online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is:

[http://www.little-rock-catholic.org/lectures](#) Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

## HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

### **Prepare in advance**

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.



- Read the assigned material for Lesson One (pages 12–19) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session.
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 20–22.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 22 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

### **Meet with your small group**

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. View the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

### **A note to individuals**

- If you are using this resource for individual study, simply move at your own pace. Take as much time as you need to read, study, and pray with the material.
- If you would like to share this experience with others, consider inviting a friend or family member to join you for your next study. Even a small group of two or three provides an opportunity for fruitful dialog and faith-sharing!



Palestine in the Time of Jesus

# The Gospel According to John

## Part One

### LESSON ONE

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#### Introduction and John 1

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Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

#### *Prayer*

*Come now, Word of God made flesh, and direct us to see and hear in the sacred words of Scripture your very presence.*

Read the Introduction on pages 12–13 and the Bible text of John 1 found in the outside columns of pages 14–19, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 20–22, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 22 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

## INTRODUCTION

At first glance the Gospel of John seems deceptively simple and straightforward. As we read and study the text carefully, however, it becomes obvious that there is more to the text than we thought. John is a master of irony, and as the privileged readers we are in a position to appreciate the irony-laden words and actions of the Gospel's characters. John's Jesus uses ordinary words in a manner charged with different layers of meaning, which his listeners usually misunderstand. Water is not just water, nor is bread only bread. Finally, many concepts with which we are familiar are used in a unique way. The word "truth" in verse 14 of the prologue will be unfolded along with the narrative of the Gospel. We are familiar with the word "life," which is used fifty times in the Gospel of John. Its Johannine meaning, however, dances tantalizingly beyond our immediate comprehension. It is wise not to approach the text with preconceived ideas, but as if we are reading it for the first time. Let the text provoke, challenge, and enlighten you. Don't be afraid to question the text or argue with it.

One of the most striking features of the Gospel of John is its different portrayal of Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), we see much more of the humanity of Jesus. In John, Jesus is a majestic, serene figure, omniscient and totally in control of his destiny at all times. One scholar described John's Jesus as "God striding across the face of the earth." There are no exorcisms in John, and only seven miracles are described. Important miracles such as the raising of Lazarus in John 11 are absent in the other Gospels.

It is likely that John represents a parallel but independent tradition and is not dependent on the Gospel of Mark, as in the Synoptic tradition. Although the name "John" is ascribed to the Gospel, the actual author is unknown, the text referring to him merely as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (see 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). The text as we have it went through at least three stages of development and represented the tradition

and teaching of the Johannine community rather than just one individual.

The Gospel of John reflects the tensions, pressures, and influences of the time and place in which it was written. John has a very black-and-white view of the world: good and evil, light and darkness, spirit and flesh. His narrative is not given to the sort of nuance that we would normally expect and can seem unduly harsh and abrasive at times. Scholars tell us that the Gospel was written around A.D. 90, while the community was involved in acrimonious polemics with fellow Jews. The term "the Jews" (*hoi ioudaioi*) is often used in a very pejorative way, usually to describe the enemies of Jesus. It is important to remember that the author and his community were also Jews. We should not assume that the historical Jesus vilified or rejected his people.

Likewise, John reserves his strongest vitriol for fellow Christians who differ with him in matters of theology, especially those matters that relate to Jesus (christology). Reading the text in a superficial and unquestioning manner often leads to sectarian or anti-Judaic misuses of the Gospel. Tragically, this has occurred often in our history. As we study the text, it is helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of the "enemies" of Jesus. What does the world look like through their eyes? Why did they respond as they did? Would we respond differently if we were in their place?

The famous prologue (1:1-18) is often described in terms of the overture to an opera, giving the reader a foretaste of the themes that will be developed at length through the rest of the Gospel. It contains John's theology in a compact form and introduces us to the plot of the Gospel narrative. Matthew and Luke narrate the earthly birth of Jesus, but John develops the theme of preexistence and takes us back to the very beginning, before the world was ever created. We as readers know where Jesus is really from, while most of the characters of the Gospel of John do not.

John's Jesus is not the product of human societies; he is a stranger and alien in the

world, even though it was created at his hands. The prologue introduces the theme of the descent and ascent of the emissary of God, as well as the opposition arrayed to thwart the mission of the Word made flesh, an opposition that is

represented by the “world” and the “Jews.” Finally, it contains the promise that the revelation and perfection of God’s gifts brought by the eternal Word will make it possible to become children of God.

**STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

Prologue	John 1:1-18	The preexistence and incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ
The Book of Signs	John 1:19–12:50	The ministry of Jesus, including seven “signs” or miracles
The Book of Glory	John 13:1–20:31	The glorification of Jesus in his passion, death, and resurrection
Epilogue	John 21:1-25	A later ending with an additional resurrection narrative

## I: Prologue

### CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup>All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.  
What came to be <sup>4</sup>through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human  
race;

<sup>5</sup>the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup>He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

*continue*

## PROLOGUE

John 1:1-18

### 1:1-3 In the beginning

The phrase “In the beginning” in verse 1 echoes Genesis 1:1 and alerts the reader to the new creation motif present in the Gospel. The “Word” (*Logos*) is present in the Old Testament as the creative energy of God, as in Genesis 1 and Isaiah 55. The Greek term *logos*, a widely used philosophical term meaning “order,” “reason,” or “harmony,” was chosen to express this aspect of God. The role of the *Logos* is parallel to that of divine Wisdom in the late Old Testament, as in Psalm 33:6; Wisdom 7:25; 8:5; 9:1; 9:9-11; and Proverbs 8:22-31. These passages describe a feminine Wisdom figure who is the divine artisan and co-creator and who was with God before creation. The *Logos* in John is the one through whom all things were created and who was with God and turned



toward God even before creation. This is not a simple identification of God and the *Logos*, but a statement that what God was, the *Logos* also was.

### 1:4-5, 9 Life, light, and darkness

In verse 4 the theme of “life” (*zōē*) is introduced. Jesus has the power of life in him and is able to impart it to whomever he chooses (5:24; 11:25; 14:6). John sees the world in a stark contrast of light and darkness (vv. 4 and 9). The light comes from above, while darkness is from below (3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). The contrasting themes of light and darkness would have been readily understood by people in a variety of religious and philosophical traditions.



John often contrasts opposites to emphasize the clear choice that must be made to follow Jesus: light vs. dark, truth vs. falsehood, living water vs. still water, etc. This use of dualistic imagery is also found in the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, a collection of ancient Jewish writings found between 1946 and 1956 in caves near Qumran close to the Dead Sea, astonishingly preserved in clay vessels for centuries in the salt air.