

# The Gospel of John

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## *Introduction and John 1:19-4:42*

### Structure

The structure of the Gospel is as follows<sup>32</sup>:

- **Prologue: The Word made Flesh (1:1-18)**
- **The Book of Signs: The Signs of the Messiah (1:19-12:50)**
- **The Book of Glory: Jesus Preparation of the messianic Community and his Passion (13:1-20:31)**
- **Epilogue: Witnesses to Glory: Resurrection and Witness (21:1-25)**

### The Book of Signs: The Signs of the Messiah

The overarching purpose of the Gospel is to tell the story of the revelation of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John wants to show him to us using stories that reveal his glory: through signs, works and words. He uses the testimonies of others to reveal Jesus identity and call. His goal in writing is that the reader would see and believe.

This first half of the Gospel divides into four main sections:

<b>The Book of Signs: The Signs of the Messiah</b>		<b>1:19-12:50</b>
I.	Prelude to Jesus public ministry	1:19-51
II.	Early Ministry: The Divine Groom and the New Temple	2:1-4:54
III.	Rising opposition: more signs, works and words	5:1-8:11
IV.	Radical Confrontation: climactic signs, works and words	8:12-10:42

John structures his Gospel not only to reveal Jesus as the Messiah, God in the Flesh, but also to show increasingly hostile opposition to that revelation. Before Jesus public ministry ever begins we see hints of the Jewish rejection in the questions to John the Baptist.

### ***Prelude to Jesus public ministry (1:19-51)***

#### **The Testimony of John (1:19-34)**

As the prologue highlights, the Messiah has a forerunner named John whose role is to bear witness to the coming of the “true light which enlightens all men”.

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<sup>32</sup> Adapted from the outline by Andreas Kostenberger, John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2004) pgs. 10-11.

John's witness to Jesus as Messiah is a testimony to three main aspects of Jesus nature: his divinity, his humiliation, and his anointing.

As the prologue says, John was not the light but he points to it like a mirror. The "Jews" interrogate John about his identity and role. As the questioning progresses John becomes increasingly curt revealing certain impatience with their hostility. John is clear on his own identity, he is the prophesied forerunner announced in Isaiah, "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'" The word translated in English as "LORD" in the Isaiah quote is the Hebrew proper name for God—YHWH. John understood that he was the one whose job was to ready Israel for the visitation of her God, YHWH in the flesh.

John also understands that his function is that of a sign which points to the thing signified—Jesus, the Lamb of God. In identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God, he connects Jesus coming humiliation with the Passover and the Temple sacrifices which propitiated divine judgment to accomplish divine mercy and grace. The Gospel will develop this connection as the story unfolds and builds toward Jesus sacrificial death on the Cross to "take away the sin of the world". (1:29)

The third major component of John's testimony is to the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and Jesus' ministry as one who anoints. The word Messiah means "Anointed One". John bore witness that Jesus was indeed the Spirit-filled One. The preparatory and physical water baptism in John's ministry will give way to a "more powerful" baptism of Holy Spirit by Jesus the Baptizer.

### **Responding to the Testimony (1:35-51)**

If the Jews were skeptical of the witness of John, there were others who responded positively. The opposition will surely grow as the gospel unfolds, but so will the belief of those who follow Jesus. John's first testimony began a chain reaction.

Two of John's disciples respond by following Jesus, Andrew and an unnamed disciple (possibly the Gospel writer John). Two quickly becomes three, when Andrew testifies to his brother Simon. Three then becomes five, when Jesus calls Phillip and Nathaniel. Jesus is building a group of those who believe the word that Jesus is the Messiah. The exclamations of the first followers are a combination of testimony and confession:

*"We have found the Messiah!" (1:41)*

*"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph?" (1:45)*

*"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" (1:49)*

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Belief in Jesus spreads in the first disciples for two main reasons: the testimony of other believers to their own personal experience with him and Jesus own self-revelation to them. Jesus invites them into a personal relationship, "Come and you will see! (1:39) These men's own questions are resolved by the testimony of their peers, and the welcome and divine foreknowledge of Jesus.

Nathaniel is called an “Israelite with no guile”. This is an illusion to the patriarch Jacob whose name was later changed to Israel. Jacob was a deceiver of his brother. Jesus reveals to Nathaniel that he knows him personally and intimately—he is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. We do know what Jesus saw Nathaniel doing under the fig tree. Some conjecture that he was praying. Regardless, Jesus insight of Nathaniel’s activity, spoke volumes to Nathaniel. He instantly believed—“You are the Son of God, the King of Israel! Jesus, encouraged by Nathaniel’s humility informed him that he would see greater things:

*And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you,[a] you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” –John 1:51*

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The story of Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12) was to be fulfilled in Jesus. The patriarch was given a vision of a ladder from heaven to earth, where the angels of God ascended and descended onto Jacob. Jesus informs Nathaniel that he will see Jacob/Israel’s role as mediator of the divine to the world fulfilled in him, the divine Son of Man (cf. Daniel 7:13-14). The place of that divine mediation in Genesis 28 was called “Bethel” house of God. This location will become a discussion point with the Samaritan woman later in the Gospel (cf. John 3: 13-22 and 4:20). The Gospel is beginning to make the case that Jesus is the New Temple. Glory!

### ***The Divine Groom and the New Temple! (John 2:1-4:54)***

#### **Glory: Here comes the Groom! (2:1-12)**

Critical to John’s story line is that Jesus is YHWH the bridegroom who has come to claim his bride. John chooses to tell the story of the first sign which manifests Jesus’ Glory in the setting of a wedding at Cana of Galilee. The statement to Jesus mother, “My hour has not yet come” begins a common theme of Jesus self awareness of a messianic timing and divine providence. His hour of glorification where the divine wedding banquet overflows with wine is a future reality yet to reach its consummation (eg. Je. 31:12; Ho. 14:7; Am. 9:13-14 cf. Rev. 19:6-8; 21:2). Every action of Jesus is purposeful toward the fulfillment of the will of Jesus his divine Father. Yet here, it is the will of his human Mother that prevails!

In changing water in to the “best wine” the text tells us:

*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)*

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Glory is the visible manifestation of the attributes of God. Jesus reveals in this sign the divine Word making dwelling among us. We have seen his Glory. YHWH has come to claim his bride.

#### **The New Temple (2:13-23)**

In Israel, God’s glory dwells in the Temple. John however is telling the story of how the presence of the God is making his dwelling in the flesh. The old physical structure is corrupt, irrelevant and inappropriate. Jesus prophesies its judgment and declares his own body to be the new temple:

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. —John 2:19-22*

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There were mixed responses to Jesus signs, deeds and words. Many believed, (2:23) but the Gospel reveals that there was an aspect of Jesus self disclosure that that would be withheld because "he knew what was in a man"(2:25). The prophets of the Old Testament recognized that the problem of humanity is a bad heart. They anticipated a coming day when YHWH, the husband of Israel, would provide the gift of a new heart through a new covenant:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. —Jeremiah 31:31-33*

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The prophets specified that there would be a heart transplant needed which would be given through the Holy Spirit of God.

*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. —Ezekiel 36:26-27*

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Here the wedding and the temple theme come together. YHWH's presence among his people was no longer to be in a building made with human hands, but in human hearts recreated by the Lord.

Israel's teachers knew these passages, yet were too hard hearted to accept them as the Gospel's next story illustrates.

### **The Need to be Born Again (3:1-36)**

The fundamental quality necessary to "see the kingdom of God" is to be re born of the Spirit of God. Nicodemus illustrates the need by his density. Here he is a teacher of Israel, and yet he is blind to plain testimony of Jesus. (3:10) Jesus is the fulfillment of all of Israel's salvation stories. This time he connects the story of salvation offered in the "lifted staff" by Moses in the desert to the Son of man being "lifted

up”. (John 3:14; cf. Num. 21:4-9). Everyone who looks to the son will be saved! In believing in Jesus, one is given eternal life. But men love the darkness, because their deeds are evil.

Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Those who would have life will put their trust in him. John tells his disciples that his role is to announce the coming of the divine husband: he is here and will give “the Spirit without measure”. (3:34)

### **Jesus and the Unlikely Samaritan Bride (4:1-42)**

The Gospel has already introduced several themes which come together beautifully in the story of Jesus the Samaritan woman: Jacob/Israel, Marriage, Messiah and Temple. The context is Jacob’s well, quite possibly the location where Jacob met his bride (Genesis 29; cf. Gen 24 Isaac and Rebekah; Ex. 2:16 Moses and Zipporah).

The discussion begins with an acknowledgement of the divorce between Jews and Samaritans. Nevertheless, Jesus invites the interaction with an offer of “living water”. In the Old Testament, living water is a symbol of God’s life and abundance and the promise of the new covenant restoration (cf. Jer. 2:13; Zec. 14:8; Ezek. 47:9). Living water develops within the Gospel of John as a sign of the Holy Spirit and Eternal Life (3:5; 4:10-15; 7:38; 19:34). The woman is amazed at the offer and the offer-er. “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” (4:12). She accepts the offer. (15)

Jesus then changes the subject to marriage. When he reveals that he knows of her several marriages, she then changes the subject to worship! This woman had been “looking for love in all the wrong places” with 5 husbands, but now she had met the true husband, the Messiah Jesus—at Jacob’s well of all places!

The worship issue which the woman raises concerns a long standing debate between Jews and Samaritans as to whether the Temple should properly be located in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerazim. Jesus settles the debate in two moves. First, he affirms the Jewish line of interpretation as being authoritative for salvation. Samaritans only accepted the first 5 books as Scripture. Secondly, he ends the debate by announcing:

*Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”—John 4:21-24*

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Jesus the Husband, New Temple, Spirit Baptizing, Anointed One of Israel has found his bride. The worship of the Lord will be in the person of Jesus through Spirit and truth. Jesus is the one who offers and gives the Word and Spirit—the Living Water.

A direct contrast can be made between Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman:

*He was learned and powerful, respected, orthodox, theologically trained; she was unschooled, without influence, despised, capable of only a folk religion. He was a man, a Jew, a ruler; she was a woman, a Samaritan, a moral outcast. And both needed Jesus.*<sup>33</sup>

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We might add—he came at night, she met Jesus in the light of day at high noon. Nicodemus’ faith in Jesus is questionable, her zeal and belief in Jesus was explosive. She testified to her entire village concerning Jesus:

*<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."*

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*Jesus is inviting all the people of this world to believe in his name. The testimony of the Samaritan woman should be encouraging to all people. We all seek love and fulfillment in the wrong places. Yet the one who can truly satisfy our deepest needs for love, spiritual renewal, forgiveness has come into the world. He knows us intimately, the good and the bad; he is indeed the Savior of the World!*

*Have you received the gift of living water from Jesus? Have you made a covenant with the divine husband? Have you beheld the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World? Come and see, is the invitation that rings through the Gospel of John.*

*"Come, see a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"*

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<sup>33</sup> DA Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar NT Commentary (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1991) p. 220.