

John 1:1-18

The author of the Gospel of John

Most Biblical scholars believe that this Gospel was written by the apostle John around 90 A.D., near the end of his life.

1. **Read Mark 1:19-20.** Here we learn the names of two of John's family members. His father was _____. His brother was _____. They worked as _____.
2. By comparing the names of women standing at the foot of the cross and those who went to the tomb on Easter, (see Matthew 27:56, Mark 16:1, and John 19:25) it is possible to conclude that John's mother was Salome, and that Salome and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were sisters. If so, Jesus and John were first cousins. This might explain the nickname (Sons of Thunder) that Jesus gave to John and his brother (see Mark 3:17).
3. **Read Revelation 4: 6b-7.** Tradition says that the four creatures represent the Gospel writers: Matthew (the Lion), Mark (the man), Luke (the ox), and John (the eagle).

The eagle stands for John, because the eagle soars toward heaven and because of all creatures it alone can look into the sun without being blinded. John's gospel carries us into the heights of God's eternal intention and fastens our gaze on the dazzling glory of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

This leads us to our next consideration.

John's Purpose in Writing this Gospel

4. Compare the opening verses of Matthew, Mark and Luke.
Read Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, and Luke 1:1-4. What seems to be the purpose of these three books? They are often called the *synoptic* Gospels, from two Greek words meaning "to see together".
5. John's opening verse is quite different.
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The first 18 verses serve as a prologue to John's Gospel, were possibly written as a poem. Let's explore further – to determine why John wrote his Gospel. John begins his gospel with the words "In the beginning". What other part of the Bible begins with these words? What point is John trying to make?

We'll talk more about John's purpose later, but first let's look at the first 18 verses as a poetic unit.

Part 1: "In the beginning"

Read John 1:1-5.

6. Pay careful attention to words that are repeated. What are they?

Let's look at verses 1-2, written in a different format.

In the beginning was the **Word**,
and the **Word** was with **God**,
and the **Word** was **God**.
He was in the beginning with **God**.

These lines show a structure called *staircase parallelism*.

7. What does "the Word" represent in these verses?
8. What do these verses tell us about the relationship between the Word and God?
9. How does verse 3 add to the information?
10. Verses 4 and 5 give us another example of staircase parallelism.

In him was **life**,
and the **life** was the **light** of men.
The **light** shines in the **darkness**,
and the **darkness** has not overcome it.

11. What are the significances of the words
"life",
"light",
and "darkness"?

Part 2: Enter John the Baptist.

Read John 1:6-8.

12. These verses seem to interrupt the flow of the poetry. Why did John (the apostle) feel a need to write about John (the Baptist) at this point in history (AD 90)?

Read Luke 3:15.

Part 3: "The true light"

Read John 1:9-13.

13. Here John writes of conflict. The true light came to the world, ... yet *his own* did not receive him. Which people were "his own"? Why didn't they receive the true light?
14. God is Lord of all, but only certain people have the right to become children of God. According to this passage, who are those people?

Part 4: "the Word became flesh"

Read John 1:14-18.

15. John (the apostle) uses several Old Testament images to make his point. One of these is an indirect reference to the tabernacle. Can you find it? (Hint: in the first verse of this part)
16. What is the significance of this reference and the relationship to the Word?
17. What did John the Baptist testify about this person?
18. John then uses another Old Testament image – Moses giving the law. How does this compare to the work of Jesus? Note: this is the first time that John uses the name "Jesus Christ."
19. The last verse of the passage seems to explain the role of the incarnation of Jesus. What is that role?

Conclusion:

20. It appears that the purpose of John's Gospel is more than adding to the already existing historical accounts of the synoptic gospels. What do you think this purpose was? (If you want to read ahead, look at John 20:30-31.)

If time permits, let's listen to John's Prologue again. The full text is at the end of the hand-out.

Supplemental Bible Readings

Mark 1:19-20.

And going on a little farther, he [Jesus] saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boats mending their nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with their hired servants and followed him.

Revelation 4:6b-7

And around the throne, on each side of the throne are four living creatures, full of eyes, front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

Matthew 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Mark 1:1

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Mark 1:19

And going on a little farther, he [Jesus] saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boats mending their nets.

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John 1:1-5

Verses 1 & 2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

Verse 3

All things were made through him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Verses 4 & 5

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:6-8

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not that Light, but came to bear witness about that Light.

Luke 3:15

[T]he people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ[.]

John 1: 9-13

The true Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become 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.

John 1:14-18

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 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.

John 1:1-18 (ESV)

- (1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has not overcome it.

- (2) There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not that Light, but came to bear witness about that Light.

- (3) The true Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become 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.

- (4) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 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.