

INTRODUCING JESUS

A PRIMER FOR READING THE GOSPELS



Produced By
Pastor Luke Thompson, 2016

St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Ottawa, ON, Canada

PART I: INTRODUCING THE BIBLE

HOW IS THE BIBLE DIFFERENT?

2 Peter 1:19-21 We also have a prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophesy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Compare what the Bible is like to other types of books. Similarities? Differences? Identify the key differences. As you've gotten to know Scripture, have you found Peter's description to be accurate? For example, have you found it reliable?

Let's point out three things we can say about Scripture based on 2 Peter.

- 1) **The bible is God's Word.** Although humans wrote it down, its origin is clearly from God.
- 2) **The bible is truth.** After all, if prophets were carried along by God, and God is totally good and never lies, his words have to be entirely true. That's why Peter calls it 'reliable.'
- 3) **The bible has divine authority.** Again, if the bible is God's Word, it is the highest authority in our lives, above all other authorities.

ARE THERE ANY RULES ON HOW TO READ THE BIBLE?

Leviticus 11:9-12 ⁹Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales. ¹⁰But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales—whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water—you are to detest. ¹¹And since you are to detest them, you must not eat their meat and you must detest their carcasses. ¹²Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be detestable to you.

Often enough, critics of Christianity will label Christians hypocrites for picking and choosing which biblical commands to keep. For example, God commands the Israelites above to abstain from shellfish (among other 'unclean' animals). How would you respond to someone who says the Bible commands you not to eat shrimp and lobster?

Mark 7:17-23 ¹⁷After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸"Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'?" ¹⁹For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean." ²⁰

He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ “

Colossians 2:16-17¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

In Leviticus 11, God commands the Israelites on Mount Sinai to live very special lives by obeying special laws. In Mark 7 and Colossians 2, we see that something theological has happened that makes these laws no longer binding. So we know they no longer apply to us today.

James 2:24,26²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone...²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Maybe we don’t need to keep all the Old Testament Laws to be saved, but James seems to say we have to do at least *something* to be saved. How do you respond to someone who says James requires faith *and* works to be saved?

Galatians 1:15-16¹⁵ “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Ephesians 2:8-10⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The rest of Scripture makes it crystal clear in numerous places that Jesus alone, grace alone, and faith alone save us. If we contributed even the smallest amount to our salvation, it would no longer be a gift of God. James, speaking to a different audience than Paul, is simply saying that, if you have faith, it will necessarily produce works.

The examples above illustrate our first and most important rule for reading the Bible. How might you summarize this rule?

Genesis 1:3-5 ³ God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Genesis 1:14-15 ¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so.

Genesis 2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when [Hebrew: *in the day*] they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

How is the same word **day** used differently in the three different passages above? How do you know it's being used differently in each example? What does that tell us about language, and so how do we determine the meaning of a word? How might you summarize this as a rule or guideline for reading Scripture?

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

What do you know about Pharisees and tax collectors during Jesus' time (1st century Palestine)? How does knowing a little bit about their social status help us understand this parable? What literary ironies are evident when we know these historical details? How might you summarize this as a rule or guideline for reading Scripture?

From the examples above, we can point out three clear rules to keep in mind as we read Scripture.

- 1) **Let Scripture interpret Scripture.** If the Bible is God's Word, and thus completely true, how do we go about interpreting parts of the bible we don't understand? We look to other parts that we do understand.
- 2) **Apply basic rules of reading.** Let the context determine the meaning of words (whether the immediate or larger). Use basic rules of grammar. Know the book's genre.
- 3) **Know your history.** Understand the culture and target audience of the book you are reading.

PART 2: INTRODUCING THE GOSPELS

WHAT GENRE OF LITERATURE DO THE GOSPELS BELONG TO?

In groups, scan different books of the bible (and look up the noted passages if needed), and fill in the chart below with the different genres of literature found within the bible.

OLD TESTAMENT

Genre:

Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
(Consider Genesis 14:1-4; Ezra 1:1-6)

Genre:

Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
(Consider Leviticus 19:1-8; Numbers 15:1-5)

Genre:

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
(Consider Psalm 103:1-5; Isaiah 5:1-5)

NEW TESTAMENT

Genre:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
(Consider Luke 2:1-3; John 18:1-3)

Genre:

Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon,
Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude, Revelation
(Consider 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; Revelation 1:1-5)

WHY ARE THERE FOUR GOSPELS INSTEAD OF JUST ONE?

Luke 1:1-4 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

John 21:24-25 ²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. ²⁵ Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

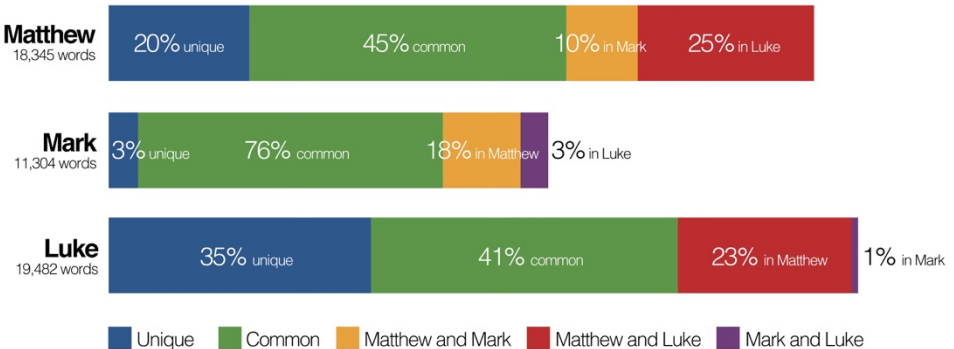
How did Luke go about writing his gospel? How is this different than John's? Why might God want us to have multiple accounts of the life of Jesus?

WHY SO SIMILAR?

Take a look at the chart below. If the gospels were written by different people, why might portions be so similar? (Consider the Luke passage above again.) And if God wanted us to have multiple perspectives, why repeat so many stories?

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels

A comparison of the amounts of unique and shared text in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke



WHY AREN'T THE GOSPELS CHRONOLOGICAL?

Take a look at the life of Christ in Part 3. You'll notice that many events in the gospels do not happen in a strict chronology like you may be used to in biographies and histories. Why not?

We can point to at least three principles that guided 1st century Palestinian biographical writing as the gospel writers composed their works:

- **Selectivity:** The evangelist selected the historical accounts that best served his purpose. We'll soon explore the different purposes of each gospel writer.
- **Topical/artistic/geographical Arrangement:** Rather than arrange accounts chronologically, often writers would group events that happened generally around the same period for literary purposes. For example, a main theme in Matthew's gospel is the **Kingdom of God**. Events are grouped thematically in relation to that theme:

Ch. 4-7 Living in God's Kingdom

Ch. 13 Parables about God's Kingdom

Ch. 18-20 The Upside/down nature of God's Kingdom

- **Adaptation:** The evangelist at times did not record every word Jesus spoke, but needed to summarize what Jesus spoke, and adapted his summarization with his audience and purpose in mind. (This does not mean that what they recorded was not true. A statement does not have to be verbatim in order to carry the truth of another statement's meaning. Understanding this takes care of most gospel discrepancies.)

PART 3: INTRODUCING THE WHOLE LIFE OF JESUS

Below is a timeline of the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospels. Jesus' life can be divided into roughly four parts: his birth, his public ministry, Holy Week, and resurrection appearances. Read the following excerpts from the bible to get a general feel for the life of Jesus.

Jesus' Birth: Matthew 1:18-25

- What reason does the angel give for Jesus being born?

Jesus' Ministry: Mark 1:9-18,34

- Name some of the things Jesus did during his ministry?
- Why begin Jesus' ministry getting baptized? (What happened during his baptism that set the stage for his ministry?)
- Why did Jesus need to perform miracles?

Jesus' Crucifixion: Romans 3:23-25a, Hebrews 7:26-27

- The angel told Joseph that Jesus would save the world from their sins. How did his death on the cross do that?

Jesus' Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, 13-17

- If Jesus' death is what gives us forgiveness of sins, why did Jesus need to rise from the dead? Why is the resurrection so important?

CHILDHOOD

Matt 1-2

Luke 1-2

John 1:1-18

Angels appear to Mary, Joseph, and Zechariah

Jesus is born in Bethlehem, is presented in the temple

Jesus receives a visit from magi from the East

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to Egypt and live there 3 to 5 years

The family then moves to Nazareth in Galilee

Nothing else is known of Jesus' childhood other than a Jerusalem trip at age 12

EPIPHANY OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

Matt 3:1-4:11

Mark 1:1-13

Luke 3:1-4:13

John 1:19-2:11

John the Baptist baptizes Jesus

Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness

Jesus calls the first disciples

Jesus performs his first miracle at the wedding in Cana

EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY

John 2:12-4:43

Jesus travels to Jerusalem for Passover, cleanses the Temple for the first time

Nicodemus visits Jesus at night

GALILEAN MINISTRY

Matt 4:12-13:58 Mark 1:14-6:13 Luke 4:14-9:6 John 4:43-4:54

Jesus calls all 12 disciples and begins his formal ministry of teaching, miracles, and casting out demons.

Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead

The Sermon on the Mount is delivered by Jesus

Jesus teaches the Pastoral Parables

In Nain, Jesus raises the widow's son from the dead

WITHDRAWALS

Matt 14:1-18:35 Mark 6:14-9:50 Luke 9:7-9:50 John 6:1-71

John the Baptist is beheaded

Jesus feeds the 5,000 and teaches the Bread of Life discourse

Jesus feeds the 4,000

The Transfiguration of Jesus takes place

LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY

John 7:1-10:42

Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, heals a man born blind

Jesus delivers the Good Shepherd sermon

Jesus remains until the Feast of Dedication, claims to be God, is almost stoned

PEREAN MINISTRY

Matt 19-20 Mark 10 Luke 9:51-19:28 John 10:42-11:53

Jesus journeys to Jerusalem one last time, by way of Perea.

Jesus blesses the little children

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

HOLY WEEK

Matt 21-27 Mark 11-15 Lk 19:29-23:56 John 11:54-19:42

On a donkey, Jesus enters Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

Jesus cleanses the temple a second time

Jesus teaches his End Times parables, 7 woes

Jesus institutes **Communion**

Judas betrays Jesus, the Temple Guard arrests Jesus.

Jesus is on trial before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod

The crucifixion

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea bury Jesus

Guards are sent to guard the tomb

RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

Matt 28 Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20-21

Jesus rises from the dead, appears to women and disciples (except Thomas)

Jesus appears to disciples on the road to Emmaus

Jesus appears to at Jerusalem, Sea of Tiberias, and the mount of Galilee

Jesus ascends

PART 4. INTRODUCING MATTHEW: AN UN/EXPECTED JESUS

TO WHOM WAS MATTHEW WRITING?

His chief audience were Jewish Christians. This is made clear by the facts that (a) his gospel points to Old Testament prophesy fulfillment more than any other, (b) he presupposes an understanding of Jewish practices and customs, as well as a knowledge of Israel's geography, and (c) he especially focuses on Jesus' engagements with Jewish religious leaders and Pharisees.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS MATTHEW WRITING?

The Jewish community in general was waiting upon a military and political freedom fighter, and so Jesus was ultimately rejected and executed. Matthew writes to encourage Jewish Christians that they were not mistaken to put their hope in Jesus.¹ He is certainly the prophesied Messiah. And so Matthew emphasizes more than the other gospels (a) the fulfillment of OT prophesy², and (b) although not what the Jewish community was expecting, Jesus was every bit the Messiah.

AN OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

Since Matthew's audience is a Jewish community waiting for the Kingdom of God to be established, one major theme that runs through Matthew is how Jesus did establish that Kingdom of God, even if it didn't look like it. One possible outline is as follows:

1-3	Introduction, the fulfillment of prophesy.
4-7	How to live in God's Kingdom (Jesus as Prophet, Sermon on the Mount)
8-10	Stories of healings, and 2 "follow me" accounts. Jesus then sends out the 12.
11-13	How people respond to Jesus: Some positive, some neutral, the leaders especially negative. Ch. 13 are parables about the kingdom.
14-20	Explores expectations for the Messiah. The response of the feeding of the 5,000 is to withdraw. The Pharisees reject Jesus,

¹ Consider Mt 28:11-15, the story of the religious leaders paying off the centurions, and how Matthew is including this to put to rest the rumors his Jewish Christian audience is dealing with.

² C.f. 1:22; 2:17,22; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9,35. Note Matthew repetition of phrases regarding prophesy fulfillment.

and Jesus teaches he's going to suffer. 18-20 the upside down nature of God's Kingdom (being a servant).

21-25 The Clash of 2 Kingdoms, Christ's and the Religious Leader's Kingdom, a long critique of the Pharisees.

26-28 Climax and Conclusion.

READING MATTHEW

The Parable of the Two Sons: Matthew 21:28-32

- 21:23 tells us to whom Jesus is talking. Review our description above regarding who Matthew is writing to. How is this parable a good example of writing directed towards that audience?
- What is the point of the parable?

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet: Matthew 22:1-14

- Both of these parables are unique to Matthew. What do they share in common, and how do they serve Matthew's purpose?
- Why include this parable? What is different about it from the first one in how it serves Matthew's purpose?

WHO NEEDS MATTHEW?

Can you think of who in your world today would appreciate hearing Matthew tell the story of Jesus? Who could benefit from hearing how Jesus fulfilled thousands of years of Old Testament prophesy? Who could benefit from hearing how Jesus came to establish a spiritual, not political, kingdom?

PART 5: INTRODUCING MARK: SUPERHERO JESUS

TO WHOM WAS MARK WRITING?

Mark most likely writes to Western gentiles. Clement of Alexandria records that Mark wrote down the teachings of Peter in Rome.³ This is supported by the facts (a) Mark includes added explanation for Jewish practices and customs, (b) and Mark stresses Jesus as courageous and powerful, fitting for a Roman populous that valued above all else courage and valour.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS MARK WRITING?

Mark writes to provide a gospel account for the Roman world. Mark stresses (1) Jesus rules over all things, whether demons, the elements, or disease, and (2) Jesus willingly gives himself completely to his purpose of redemption, yet remains in control. These two themes are emphasized in Mark's choice of material: Mark includes the greatest number of miraculous events.

AN OUTLINE OF MARK

1	Jesus busts out onto the scene.
2-3:6	Conflict between Jesus and the Scribes.
3:7-6:13	Jesus among the people.
6:14-8:26	Activity of Jesus culminates, as does rejection
8:27-10:45	Jesus with disciples, stressing the need of his suffering
10:46-13	Jesus willingly goes to meet his death
14-15	The passion, unfolding as Jesus had planned
16	Resurrection [and ascension]

³ Eusebius II:15.

READING MARK

Portrait of Jesus: Mark 1:21-39

- Where do you see examples of Jesus wielding power and authority?
- How much time passes between v21 and v39? List what Jesus accomplishes in that time. What impression does that give us of Jesus?

A Suffering Superhero? Mark 8:27-38

- This section of Mark comes right in the middle of the book, bridging the first half, Jesus as superhero, with the second half, the story of Jesus' trial and death. Why put this right in the middle? What function does it serve?
- Why does Jesus need to tell his disciples that he's going to suffer? Why is it important for us today to know that Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him before he ever arrived in Jerusalem?

WHO NEEDS MARK?

Can you think of who in your world today would appreciate hearing Mark tell the story of Jesus? Who do you know that needs to be told that Jesus is powerful, in complete control, and has willingly died for them?

PART 6. INTRODUCING LUKE: GLOBAL JESUS

TO WHOM WAS LUKE WRITING?

Luke was a physician, well-educated, that traveled with Paul during his mission trips. The Gospel of Luke and Acts were meant to be one unified work dedicated by Luke to Theophilus, but written for Gentiles. Considered together, Luke and Acts tells the story of the gospel's departure from Jerusalem (the center of the Jewish world) to Rome (the center of the Gentile world). As a companion of Paul to the Gentile world, Luke's gospel has unmistakable Pauline marks. Paul reached out to gentiles and the marginalized (including women), and so Luke's audience seems to be the same.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS LUKE WRITING?

Three major themes run throughout Luke's gospel.

- **The gospel message itself is power.** The word "evangelize" appears 10 times in Luke (compared to once in the other 3 gospels), the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah is stressed in accounts unique to Luke (the announcements of John the Baptist to Zechariah, Gabriel to Mary, the Magnificat, Zechariah's Prophecy, the angels and the shepherds, the Song of Simeon, etc.). Jesus as a preacher and evangelist is stressed.
- Luke wrote to demonstrate that **Jesus is a world issue** the universality of the gospel is stressed. Consider Luke's genealogy that goes back to God himself, as well as his especial attention to gentiles, women, and social outcasts. (17:11; 7:36; 18:9; 19:1; 23:40)
- Luke stresses the **historicity of the life of Christ** (that it happens within the world for the world. (Consider the mention of Caesar Augustus' census, and his work gathering data in the introduction.)

OUTLINE OF LUKE

Luke's gospel organizes the life of Christ around journeys to Jerusalem, first in his childhood, and then again as an adult from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus actually visited Jerusalem multiple times, and so Luke arranges these events as one journey for literary purposes, stressing Jesus' spiritual journey to Jerusalem as our Saviour (similar to how our church year is generally arranged). Apart from this literary technique, Luke's work is otherwise chronological of Jesus' life.

1-2	Childhood of Jesus, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem
3-4:13	Jesus' ministry preparations (baptism and temptation)
4:14-9:50	Jesus' ministry in Galilee
9:51-19:27	The journey to Jerusalem
19:28-21	Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem
22-24	Jesus' passion and resurrection

READING LUKE

Word and Resurrection: Luke 7:11-16

- Note the themes within Luke's gospel we outlined above. Where do you see them in this account unique to Luke?
- In v13, Luke writes "His heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'." Explain the significance of recording this detail for you, a Christian reading 2000 years later.

Word and Weeping: Luke 7:36-50

- Note the themes within Luke's gospel we outlined above. Where do you see them in this account unique to Luke?
- The major comparison here is between the hearts of the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Can you think of what a modern parallel to this could be? Are there times you can relate more to the Pharisee, and times you can relate more to the sinful woman?

WHO NEEDS LUKE?

Can you think of who in your world today would appreciate hearing Luke tell the story of Jesus? Who do you know that needs to be told that Jesus is for all people despite class or ethnicity or past sins, that Jesus existed in real history, and that the message of the gospel itself has power when we share it?

PART 7: INTRODUCING JOHN: MY GOD AND MY FRIEND, JESUS

TO WHOM WAS JOHN WRITING?

John wrote his gospel in Ephesus around 90 AD. Christianity had grown, as well as misunderstandings and false teachings regarding Jesus and his nature, with which the Church is struggling against. And so John writes to Christians who are asking, “Was Jesus really God or a lesser creation?” “Was Jesus really a human?” “What is the nature of faith, and is it necessary to be saved?”

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS JOHN WRITING?

John writes to answer all these questions and more. His purpose is summed up aptly by his words, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (20:31) And so John writes for two major polemic and apologetic purposes, (1) to make the nature of Jesus clearly understood (Christology) and (2) to make the nature of how he saves us through faith understood (Soteriology). This is made clear by the following traits of this gospel:

- **John uses the language of testimony** and bearing witness more than any other gospel writer. John uses the term “testify” 31 times, compared to Luke’s two times, Matthew’s once, and Mark’s none.
- **John calls miracles “signs,”** stressing how they are evidence not simply of power (as in the other gospels), but of Jesus’ claim as the Son of God
- John’s unique discourses of Jesus largely revolve around the **relationship between the Father and the Son.** (3:16ff; 5:19ff; 6:44ff; 8:49ff; 10:14ff; 12:26ff; 14-17)
- **John talks about belief** in Jesus more than any other gospel. The verb “to believe” is used 11 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 9 times in Luke, and 97 times in John.

Beyond his specific theological objectives, John also writes to give testimony to a very personal Jesus who is not only Lord, but also friend and teacher. John calls himself, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and includes special discourses of Jesus spoken only to his disciples, revealing his deep love, concern, and care for them (ch. 14-17).

OUTLINE OF JOHN

As John has written considerably later than the other gospels, he presumes the readers have a knowledge of the others. And so he (a) leaves out many significant events, such as Jesus' birth, transfiguration, the parables, prophesies of the kingdom of God, the Lord's supper, and the ascension, as well as (b) includes events found nowhere else, such as the wedding at Cana, the Samaritan woman at the well, the raising of Lazarus, and many now famous sermons.

1-12 **The Book of Signs.** Jesus performs 'signs', yet we see hostility from both the people and the Jewish leaders growing. This larger section is broken up by three major discourses/metaphors for Jesus. (ch.3) the Light, (ch.6) the Bread of Life, and (ch.10) the Good Shepherd.

13-17 **Jesus and his Disciples.** Jesus ministers to his disciples, preparing them for his crucifixion. Includes the major discourse/metaphor (ch.14) the Vine.

18-19 **Trial and Crucifixion.** Includes the discourse/metaphor (ch.18) the Truth.

20-21 **Resurrection and Appearances.**

READING JOHN

The Word: John 1:1-14

- We mentioned above that one of John's major themes is making the nature of Jesus known. What does John's introduction tell us about what and who Jesus is?
- Why begin John's gospel with these words? Why should these be the first words people read when they begin John's account?

The Signs: John 20:19-31

- Look at the purposes above for John's gospel. Where do you see these themes in this section of his gospel?
- Use v31 as an explanation for everything John is writing. How are the events he's writing about 'signs'? (Maybe first determine what the purpose of a sign is.)

WHO NEEDS JOHN?

Can you think of who in your world today would appreciate hearing John tell the story of Jesus? Remember especially the two themes of (a) giving evidence or testimony, and (b) showing the heart of Jesus for his beloved disciples.

PART 8: HARMONIZING THE GOSPELS

Some of the accounts recorded by multiple authors appear to contradict each other. Yet the bible claims of itself that it is God's irrefutable, unbroken word, and that it cannot contradict itself. To work through these, when you come across differences, ask the following two questions:

- 1) **Is it a difference or a contradiction?** Differences in accounts might be due to different perspectives, amounts of detail recorded, etc. A contradiction are account details that are irreconcilable.
- 2) **Is it a liberty allowed by Greco-Roman biography?** Certain liberties were allowed in ancient biography, such as variation in minor chronological details and time compression.

Make note of all the ways the following two resurrection accounts are not similar. Now decide if each is simply different or a real contradiction.

Luke 24

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

John 20

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).