

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY

THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN: AN AWE-INSPIRING FOREVIEW OF THE BOOK

The very first line of The Gospel According to John states the purpose of the inspired writer in recording this story of “Jesus, the Son of God”; and the entire Prologue (John 1:1-14) forms one of the most majestic, awe-inspiring, comprehensive passages to be found in all the Holy Scriptures. It takes us back to the first line of the book of Genesis — “**In the beginning God . . .**” and tells us that the God who was “**in the beginning**” is none other than the Lord Jesus, the Living Word, who was “**made flesh, and dwelt among us.**”

1. His Names of Deity.

The very titles here ascribed to Christ speak to us of Deity: “**The Word,**” “**God,**” “**Creator,**” “**Life,**” “**Light,**” “**The only begotten of the Father.**” He is here set forth as the One who came to reveal God to man, to show forth His uncreated glory, to bestow eternal life and light upon all who would believe that He was “**God manifest in the flesh.**”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The Greek term for “**Word**” is “*Logos*,” meaning “*a thought*” or “*a concept*.” Just as words express thoughts, so the Lord Jesus speaks to us the thought of God toward sinful man — and that thought is love! Kindred passages only emphasize the meaning here:

- “**God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us by his Son**” (Hebrews 1:1, 2).
- “**Christ . . . the wisdom of God**” (I Corinthians 1:24).
- “**In whom (Christ) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Colossians 2:3).
- “**For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily**” (Colossians 2:9).
- “**No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (i.e., ‘revealed’) him**” (John 1:18).

Such passages as these literally fill the pages of the book of John, as they are stated and explained by the Lord Himself. As the eternal Word, He came to make known to man who God is and why He came into the world — to redeem **“as many as received him.”**

2. The Eternity of the Second Person of the Godhead.

Twice in these opening lines we are told that **“the Word was with God,”** thus signifying that the Lord Jesus is a separate Personality, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, yet equal with the Father and with the Spirit; for in the same breath, as it were, the inspired writer adds, **“... and the Word was God.”** And twice in these opening lines we are told that the Word was **“in the beginning.”** That is, He is eternal! The God who came down to reveal His heart of love to sinful man is everlasting!

3. The Living Word — The Creator of All Things.

Twice in this Prologue we read that Jesus, the Living Word, is the Creator of all things:

- **“All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made”** (1:3).
- **“... the world was made by him ...”** (1:10).

And again we are reminded of similar passages in other portions of the Scriptures:

“... by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16, 17).

“God ... hath ... spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (i.e. ‘framed the ages’)” (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

“Who ... upholding all things by the word of his power ...” (Hebrews 1:3).

“Unto the Son he (the Father) saith ... Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Hebrews 1:8,10).

“Him ... for whom are all things, and by whom are all things ...” (Hebrews 2:10).

4. The Living Word — The Life-Giver.

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (1:4).

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (1:12).

This self-existent One, **“in whom was life,”** is the only One who can bestow eternal life.

5. *The Living Word* — ***“The Light of Men.”***

“And the light shineth in darkness” (1:5).

John the Baptist was sent from God to be a witness of the **“true Light”**; but **“the darkness comprehended it not.”**

“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (1:10).

When He came **“unto his own”** things, His own people **“received him not.”** Yet **“Jesus, the Son of God,”** is the Light of the world still. Later in this Gospel He Himself said so more than once.

6. *One “Only Begotten Son”* — *Many “Sons of God.”*

The comprehensive scope of the Prologue of John is found, not only in its marvelous declaration of the deity of Christ, but also in its presentation of the real purpose for which He came into the world — that believing in His deity, we might **“have life through his name.”** Thus the New Birth, so clearly taught in chapter three, is summarized briefly in these wonderful words:

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:12, 13).

It is not the physical birthday of which we read here; it is the spiritual birthday, when the sinner is born again by faith in the Living Word of God. And to be born again is to become a **“son of God,”** a child in the family of God.

7. *The Incarnation.*

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (1:14).

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem; **“the Word was made flesh,”** the eternal God came down and “tabernacled” among men. Just as the Shekinah Glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish tabernacle, so also the Lord of Glory tabernacled in human flesh — **“Immanuel, God with us.”**

Just as the Pillar of Cloud and Fire dwelt **“in the midst”** of Israel’s camp, so also the God of Glory walked among men, **“in the likeness”** of human flesh.

Why? To reveal God to man!

The inspired writer “**beheld his glory**” more than once during his earthly pilgrimage. Upon the mount of transfiguration and in the appearances of the risen Lord John “**beheld his glory**.” Later he saw the glorified Lord Jesus on the Isle of Patmos. He knew whereof he spoke, even as he expressed this same truth in his letter to the church, saying,

“**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . .**” (I John 1:1; cf. verse 2).

John knew that Jesus was the virgin-born Son of God; therefore, he could say that He was “**the only begotten of the Father**.” He knew that He was holy, sinless, “**undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens**.” Therefore, he could say of Him that He was “**full of grace and truth**.” Grace — unmerited favor; truth — absolute holiness — these are the attributes of God alone!

What a marvelous beginning to a marvelous book this Prologue is!

In it we read of the eternal Lord, the Living Word, the Creator, the Self-existent One, the Life-Giver, the Light of the world, unknown by the world He made, rejected by the nation from whence He came, yet received by born-again sons of God, because He humbled Himself to tabernacle among men, reveal His glory, and show forth His matchless grace and truth! And this Prologue gives us just a glimpse of the blessings in store for us as we read on in this God-inspired record of the earthly life of “**Jesus, the Son of God**.”

PASSAGES RECORDED ONLY BY JOHN

Without going into too much detail just here, let us try to get a bird’s-eye-view of some of the passages which only John records. We shall consider these further later on in this lesson, as we see how they prove the deity of Christ.

1. Five of the Seven Miracles.

Of the seven miracles performed by Christ before He went to the cross, recorded by John, only two are found in one or more of the other Gospel stories; they are the feeding of the five thousand, told by all four evangelists; and the Lord’s walking on the water, told also by Matthew and Mark.

Only John tells of Jesus’ turning the water into wine, a creative act which only God could do; healing the nobleman’s son by His spoken word; healing the impotent man, also by His spoken word; healing the man born blind; and raising Lazarus from the dead.

While all of Christ’s miracles were the work of “**The mighty God**,” yet humanly speaking His raising Lazarus from the dead appeared the most wonderful. Twice on other occasions He raised the dead: Jairus’ daughter had just died; and the son of the widow of Nain was being taken to the sepulchre. But Lazarus had been “**in the grave four days**.”

It seems, therefore, that the Holy Spirit reserved this fresh and striking evidence of our Lord's deity for the express purpose of including it in the fourth Gospel record, to meet its special purpose.

2. Christ's Seven Discourses. Seven of the most wonderful messages that ever fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry are written only in John:

- (1) *The New Birth*, chapter 3.
- (2) *The Living Water*, chapter 4.
- (3) *Christ's Equality with the Father*, chapter 5.
- (4) *The Bread of Life*, chapter 6.
- (5) *The Light of the World* — The Eternal "**I AM**," chapter 8. Really chapters seven and eight have to do with the deity of Christ as proclaimed by Him during the controversy in the temple.
- (6) *The Good Shepherd*, chapter 10.
- (7) *Christ's Farewell Discourse to the Eleven*, chapters 14-16.

These seven discourses of the Lord Jesus hold some of the most profound and precious truths in all the Word of God. Later in this lesson we want to look at them more closely to see how they prove beyond controversy that "**Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.**"

3. *The Seven-Fold "I AM."*

Only John quotes the Lord as having taken the name which God gave to Moses for Himself from the burning bush, and as having applied it to Himself while He was on earth. Seven times in the fourth Gospel the Holy Spirit describes that name for the Lord God in terms descriptive of things which our finite minds can comprehend, each time stating expressly through the lips of Christ that He is the very God who talked to Moses in the wilderness from the burning bush.

None other than God could have made that stupendous claim! But Jesus was God — "**God manifest in the flesh**"!

Not only does the Lord Jesus use seven descriptive terms or figures to explain the meaning of His name "**I AM THAT I AM**"; but on several other occasions in this fourth Gospel He says plainly, "**I AM.**" Our English Bible adds in italics the word "*he*"; but we know that all italicized words in our English Bible were added by the translators to make the meaning clear. In these instances it would be better to omit the word "*he*." Then the force of the Lord's statement is brought home to us. We shall note these passages as we come to them in the text.

The closing verses of chapter eight give us the key to these titles used by Christ to describe Himself. The controversy in the temple at the feast of tabernacles was drawing to a close. Repeatedly the unbelieving Jews had questioned Christ as to who He was and whence He came; and repeatedly He had told them that He "**proceeded forth and came from God**" (8:42). Yet again they asked him, saying, "**Whom makest thou thyself?**" And His answer, in part, was the remarkable statement,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? (Abraham had lived some two thousand years before Christ was born in Bethlehem). Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:56-58).

The Jews knew what the Lord meant by these words; they knew that He was claiming to be the very same God who had said to Moses from the burning bush, **“I AM THAT I AM”** (Exodus 3:14). That is why they **“took up stones to cast at him.”** They accused Him of blasphemy because of His claim to eternal deity. But the miracle of it was that they could not touch Him until His **“hour had fully come.”**

This expression, too, is often repeated in John, reminding us again and again that no man could take the life of the Son of God from Him; He laid it down of Himself. Therefore, on this occasion, as on many others, He **“hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by”** (8:59).

Now the name **“I AM THAT I AM,”** recorded in Exodus 3:14, all in capital letters, expresses at least two significant truths about the Person of God:

- (1) His self-existence; and
- (2) His eternity.

It might be paraphrased in some such words as these, **“I AM JUST BECAUSE I AM”**; that is, no one created God — no one created Jesus; He is self-existent! Moreover, He is the One who **“was, and is, and is to come,”** as the name implies — **“The everlasting Father,”** the One **“whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”**

With the authority that was His from all eternity, therefore, **“Jesus, the Son of God,”** took this wonderful name and applied it to Himself in the seven-fold description that our human minds and hearts can comprehend — all recorded in the book of John only:

- (1) **“I am the bread of life,”** John 6:35.
- (2) **“I am the light of the world,”** 8:12.
- (3) **“I am the door,”** 10:7.
- (4) **“I am the good shepherd,”** 10:11.
- (5) **“I am the resurrection, and the life,”** 11:25.
- (6) **“I am the way, the truth, and the life,”** 14:6.
- (7) **“I am the true vine,”** 15:1.

In the face of all this overwhelming evidence, anyone who thinks for one moment that Jesus did not claim to be God is described by John in his epistle in these plain words,

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?” (I John 2:22).

To deny His claim to be the eternal God is to make Him a liar and a blasphemer!

The unbelieving Jews made these accusations against Him; so do multitudes of professing Christians today, unregenerate “**wolves in sheep’s clothing.**” But Spirit-taught, born-again souls know, and are glad to bear testimony before men, angels, and demons, that “**Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**”; for believing this, they “**have life through his name.**” And today, in this lesson, our hearts will be warmed as we consider these seven “**I AM’s**” in their right places in the text; for we hope to scan the sacred pages to place them in their proper setting.

4. Other Passages Found Only in John:

Practically all of the first seventeen chapters are recorded only by John. These include:

- The remarkable conversation between the Lord and Nathanael at the close of chapter one, in which He receives worship, and plainly states that He Himself is Jacob’s Ladder;
- The first purification of the temple, recorded in chapter two — the similar experience told by the other three evangelists occurred near the close of Christ’s public ministry;
- Jesus at the feast of tabernacles, chapters seven and eight;
- His forgiving the sinful woman on that occasion;
- The significant prophecy of Caiaphas, 11:47-57;
- The Greeks’ desire to “**see Jesus,**” and His answer, 12:20-50;
- Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet, 13:2-20;
- His Great High Priestly Prayer, chapter 17; and many details connected with His suffering, death, resurrection, and post-resurrection ministry, 18-21.

We shall not even attempt a discussion of these just here; but a glance at this summary gives us some insight into the fathomless content of the pages before us — found nowhere else in all the Word of God!

SIGNIFICANT OMISSIONS FROM JOHN

As in the Synoptic Gospels, so also in John the Holy Spirit’s omission of certain facts and teachings is highly significant, establishing conclusively His predetermined purpose in each of the four narratives. Let us list a few of the striking omissions from John:

1. There Is No Reference to the Lord’s Genealogy or Birth; for, as God, He has neither beginning nor end!

We have seen that Matthew gives us His legal right to David’s throne through Joseph, His legal father — not His human father, for He had none! We have seen that Luke gives us His natural right to David’s throne through Mary. But John opens his record with the majestic words that proclaim the eternity of Jesus, the Living Word of God.

All John says of the Incarnation is that “**the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth**” (1:14).

Of course, the whole Gospel unfolds the deeper meaning of how the Son of God came to reveal the Father — yea; the Triune God, as plainly stated in 1:18. But the fact remains that there is no reference in John to the appearances of the angels to Mary and Joseph, to the manger or the star, to the shepherds or the wise men, to Herod or the flight into Egypt, to Simeon and Anna. These things tell the story of the Son of David and the Son of Man in His relationship to the earth.

It is John's purpose to show forth the eternal glories of the eternal God!

2. There Is No Detailed Description of the Lord's Baptism by John.

Rather, there is the declaration that He is the “**Lamb of God**” — a title used in the Gospel record only by John. There is the entirely different testimony of John the Baptist to the fact that Jesus is “**the Son of God**.”

In the other Gospels we see the Lord, in condescending grace, identifying Himself with His people. Here we see “**the Lamb**,” of whom the prophets had written — and the Jews knew full well what John meant when he pointed them to “**the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**.” They knew full well the significance of the Passover Lamb; but their unbelieving hearts were hardened.

3. There Is No Reference to the Temptation of Jesus in John.

It would be entirely out of keeping with the purpose of the Holy Spirit to include in John the Lord's temptation in the wilderness; for James tells us plainly,

“**God cannot be tempted with evil**” (James 1:13).

The human authors of the Synoptic Gospels also knew that they were writing of their holy God! And yet they recorded the story of His temptation. Why? Because they were proving that, as a Man, He could not sin; and they were showing our troubled hearts that “**we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin**” (Hebrews 4:15).

They were guided by the same Holy Spirit who inspired John to omit the temptation; for they were presenting different portraits of the same Jesus! Herein is but one of the many wonderful reasons why there are four Gospels!

4. There Is No Record of the Transfiguration of Christ in John.

At first we may wonder why John did not tell of how he and Peter and James saw the glorified Lord on the mountain, talking with Moses and Elijah of His approaching death. Surely that scene presents His uncreated glory and deity! And yet, as we think again, we realize that the chief purpose of that scene was to give the three disciples a little glimpse of the Messiah's coming kingdom on earth; it was a miniature representation of the “**Son of man coming in his kingdom**” (Matthew 16:28).

Since John was telling of heavenly ties, the Holy Spirit led him to omit this remarkable story.

5. There Is No Appointing of the Disciples in John.

The Son of God fills the scene! Besides, the apostles had already been witnessing to Him for some thirty years; there was no need to tell of their appointment!

*6. There Is No Reference in John to the Prayers of the “**Man Christ Jesus.**”*

Prayer is a human experience; and John is portraying Deity! Even in the seventeenth chapter, where He is interceding for His own, He is speaking to His Father as an Equal! There we read that “**he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said . . .**” The use of the word, “**said,**” is significant! Again, in verse 24 He “**said**” to His Father, as an Equal, “**Father, I will . . .**” With the authority that was His, He stated His own will!

The Gethsemane scene is omitted entirely by John; for it tells of the “**strong crying and tears**” of the “**Man, Christ Jesus**”; whereas John is depicting the eternal God. It is significant that, while all four of the evangelists tell of the feeding of the five thousand, John only omits to say that afterwards Jesus prayed! Rather, John alone uses that miracle to introduce the Lord’s discourse upon Himself as the Bread of Life.

6. There Is No Reference to the Coming of the Son of David and Son of Man to an Earthly Kingdom.

There is no Olivet Discourse, outlining the course of this age and the return of the King in glory. Rather, there is the promise of “**many mansions**” in the “**Father’s house,**” and the Lord’s pledge to return to take His own unto “**Himself.**”

*7. There Is No Use of the Words “**Repent**” and “**Forgive**” as in the Synoptics.*

There man is declared guilty, needing to repent and turn to the Saviour and King. In John the sinner is seen to be spiritually dead, needing to be born again; and the new birth is the gift of the Son of God. Only He can give life. As the Son of Man He forgives; as God He bestows everlasting life, not condemning, but regenerating!

8. There Are No Parables in John.

The word translated “**parable**” in John 10:6 is really “*proverb.*”

In our study of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, we saw that the Lord Himself gave us the key to His parables, saying that only the spiritually minded could discern their true meaning; whereas those who would not believe in Him as Lord were blinded to their teaching.

Now in the fourth Gospel He is revealing God, not concealing the “**mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.**”

9. There Is No Reference to Demons in John.

In the Synoptics, where the demons are said to have cried out, bearing witness to His holiness and deity, the Lord always “**suffered them not to speak.**” Why? Because He needed not the testimony of demons!

True, the “**demons believe**” that “**God is,**” “**and tremble**” at the thought of judgment to come. (See James 2:19). They recognized Him as the “**Holy One of God**” during His earthly ministry, and knew His omnipotent power when He cast them out of suffering people. But John is giving the testimony to the deity of Christ which honors Him — that of John the Baptist, of redeemed men and women, of the Son of God Himself. Possibly that is why the Holy Spirit guided him to omit all reference to demons.

Satan is called by the Lord Himself in this fourth Gospel “**a murderer,**” “**a liar,**” and “**the prince of this world.**” Christ used these terms to describe the devil, who had hardened the hearts of His enemies; and to warn His redeemed ones of this enemy of their souls. (See John 8:44; 14:30; 16:11).

10. There Is No Reference to the Ascension in John.

As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus is everywhere!

“**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**” (Romans 11:33).

Only God could have written such a Book!

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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