

REASONS

OF BELIEVE

EVIDENCE JESUS IS GOD'S SON

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, Editor

Reasons to Believe: Evidence Jesus Is God's Son

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Preface

The apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel with clear intention. He wanted his readers to know for sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And more importantly, he wanted them to believe in Jesus so they might have life through His name (John 20:30, 31). John accomplished his goal. His Gospel serves as a convincing testimony to Who Jesus is.

This course will help you understand the Gospel of John. In his book the apostle presents Jesus' seven evidences, known as signs, as well as Jesus' seven *I am* sayings. Together the signs and sayings give a complete picture of Jesus. The Gospel will strengthen your faith in Jesus and challenge you to take your mission from Him seriously. If you are not sure of your salvation, you will be confronted with the clear evidence of Jesus' identity and will be encouraged to believe in Jesus.

John's Gospel is a powerful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Be sensitive to His leading as you study it.

The Case for Christ

▶ Scripture Focus

Overview of John

Theme

The Gospel of John provides a strong case for Jesus' identity and His provision of salvation.

Memory Verses

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30, 31).

GETTING STARTED

The Gospel of John is essentially a how-to book on the gospel message. John, one of Jesus' disciples, wrote his Gospel under the direction of the Holy Spirit so that his readers might know they have eternal life. The Gospel of John is timeless, continuing to serve its purpose and bring about results. It is masterfully written, making it well worth taking the time to understand its message.

1. When was the last time you used a how-to book?

2. Which of your how-to books would you consider timeless?

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Before beginning a study on the Gospel of John, we need to realize that it is more than another telling of Jesus' life on earth. It is a theological biography, meaning John recorded his theological understanding of the Person and work of Jesus. Everything that John included is intended to teach us something about Who Jesus is and why His identity is important for us.

John's Gospel is also a narrative. Jesus is the important person in the story and in the episodes. John's Gospel is not a source of insight about ourselves. For example, the narrative of Jesus' calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee is not about storms in our lives. Rather, this sign shows us something about Jesus.

Author

The evidence that it was the apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John is solid. The writer had to be a Palestinian Jew who observed Christ as part of His closest circle of followers and was later commissioned by Christ as an apostle. Only Peter, James, and John fit those requirements. Peter is named in the Gospel, and James had already been martyred by the time the Gospel was written. That leaves John as the only logical choice.

John was one of the few who witnessed the full range of Christ's actions, including the raising of Jairus's daughter, the Transfiguration, and His prayer in Gethsemane. He had gone to the tomb and had observed that Jesus was raised from the dead. He was with Christ more than any of the other disciples as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26, 27). He was therefore well qualified to write authoritatively on Christ's life.

Purpose 1: Present Evidence

John 20:30 and 31 tell us why, humanly speaking, John decided to write his Gospel. John made three important statements about Jesus and signs in John 20:30. Each of the statements helps us understand John's first purpose for writing his gospel: to present evidence concerning Jesus.

The first statement says that Jesus did many *signs*. John referred to Jesus' miracles as *signs* because the word stresses the functional aspect of a miracle as a discernible indication that draws attention to the significance

of the action. It implies that there is some meaning behind the miracle. It focuses then, not on the miracle only or even primarily, but on the meaning or significance behind it. So the reader should ask, Who is this Jesus Who did the miracles? And what do the miracles reveal about Him?

3. What does the typical person tend to focus on when he reads one of Jesus' miracles?

The second statement says that Jesus did the signs in the presence of His disciples. They served as witnesses to His miracles, making the signs valid.

The third statement says that John did not record all of the miracles that Jesus performed. He wrote later that if all the things Jesus had done were written, the world could not contain the books needed to record them (21:25). John selected seven specific miracles to serve as signs for his readers.

Purpose 2: Encourage Belief

John recorded the seven signs so his readers might believe. So it is necessary to know what *believe* means. The word denotes the orientation of the mind and heart toward something or someone. It is not mere assent to propositions about someone. It is not just an emotion or an emotional feeling. It involves cognitive knowledge, which should lead to commitment.

4. Does your belief in Jesus go beyond mere assent to propositions about Him? If not, why not?

John explained the stages of belief concerning Jesus. The stages involve believing *about* Jesus and then believing *in* Jesus.

5. What is the difference between believing something *about* someone and believing *in* someone?

John wanted his readers to believe two things *about* Jesus: He is the Messiah and He is the Son of God. *Messiah*, which means *anointed*, refers to Jesus as the descendant of David Who would come and restore the kingdom of Israel. He would fulfill the messianic hopes of the Old Testament. The term *Son of God* points to the unique relationship that Jesus has with God, His Father. Jesus is God's only begotten, or unique, Son (3:16). John asserted Jesus' unique relationship to the Father throughout his Gospel.

The stage of belief *about* Jesus leads to confidence in Jesus. But John wanted his readers to move beyond confidence to believe *in* Jesus. This stage involves commitment to and trustful reliance on Jesus. In John's Gospel we do not always find people responding to Jesus with this kind of commitment and reliance. Not everyone who heard Jesus and believed had life-giving belief.

6. Read John 2:23–25. How did Jesus respond to those who superficially believed in His name after they saw Him perform miracles?

7. Read John 8:44. Why would Jesus call superficial believers offspring of the devil?

Initial faith does not always turn out to be saving faith. This study of John will help you understand genuine saving belief *in* Jesus. It will challenge you to make sure your faith in Jesus is genuine.

Purpose 3: Offer Eternal Life

John wanted his readers to believe Jesus is the Son of God so they might have *life*. Life is one of John's key concepts. In his Gospel, *life* characteristically refers to eternal life. Simply put, eternal life comes by trusting in Jesus as a result of the revelation of Who He is and what He has done. John's readers could not receive eternal life by any other means. No personal effort or action could merit eternal life.

Eternal life is resurrection life. It comes after physical death or after

the Rapture for those who are living when Christ returns for His church. It continues without ceasing. Eternal life's quality, however, is just as important as its quantity. Being in God's presence forever in Heaven will make eternal life the best it could be.

8. Read John 17:3. How did Jesus define eternal life?

9. How does Jesus' definition help you put eternal life into its proper perspective?

Signs, believe, and life are key words to understanding the structure of the Gospel of John. In the *signs* we see the revelation of God in Jesus. The signs should produce the response of *believing* with *life* being the result of believing. We must note, however, that the wrong response—rejection—brings an opposite result, death. Throughout the narrative John presented both responses with their corresponding results.

Historical Jewish Sects

Learning the historical background for the Gospel of John will help you better understand Jesus' interaction with certain political groups and institutions. The Judaism of His day was different than the Judaism at the close of the Old Testament. Jesus made it clear that He did not approve of what it had become.

The Pharisees might have come from a group of pious Jews who in the day of Antiochus IV stayed true to the law. If so, they had an admirable beginning. But by the time of Christ, their practice had degenerated to a dead, heartless religion. Their devotion was to themselves, not God. They lorded themselves over the Jews, demanding God's people keep the traditions, called the Mishnah, that they had added to the law of Moses.

The Pharisees saw Jesus as competition. He rejected their traditions and exposed their hypocrisy. John records that the Pharisees eventually sought to kill Jesus so that the Jews would not believe in Him (John 11:47–54). They

were worried a large Jewish following might cause a political disruption that the Romans would have to step in and control. Roman intervention could mean the Pharisees would lose their power. To the Pharisees, power was more important than knowing the truth about God and Christ.

10. How would you expect Jesus to respond to the Pharisees' religious leadership of the Jews?

In demonstration of the power of the gospel, some Pharisees, like Nicodemus, trusted in Jesus for salvation, but most vehemently opposed Jesus throughout His ministry.

John does not mention the Sadducees specifically in his Gospel, yet they were an important part of the political and religious setting of Jesus' day. They were worldly-minded and materialistic aristocrats of Jewish society. And since they didn't leave written records explaining their beliefs, they are known mostly for what their critics said about them. Consequently, we know more about what they denied, such as the supernatural and the resurrection, than we do about what they affirmed (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). Obviously they rejected Christ and His signs and, like the Pharisees, saw Him as a threat. They shared the Pharisees' desire to stamp out Christ and His followers. However, they didn't agree with the Pharisees on much else. For the most part, the two groups did not get along.

Scribes were responsible for making copies of what we now call the Old Testament. They took extreme care in making sure their copies were accurate, even going so far as to count every single letter of a copy to make sure all were right. Since Hebrew letters were also used for numbers, they could add up the numbers represented by the letters to make certain the total was correct after they had finished their copy.

The scribes' meticulous attention to details in the Scriptures meant they knew the law of Moses well. They used their knowledge to try to trap Jesus. John mentioned one such entrapment attempt concerning the appropriate punishment for a woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-6).

11. Read John 8:3-6. Why would the scribes want to entrap Jesus?

Historical Political Groups

The New Testament mentions two Jewish political groups. The first is the Herodians, a Jewish party that supported King Herod. Their jobs were tied to Herod's continued reign. So they had a vested interest in keeping Jesus from gaining followers. They were the ones who questioned Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:16, 17). They, like the scribes and Pharisees, wanted to trap Jesus in His words so they might discredit Him and have reason to destroy Him (Mark 3:6; 12:13). John does not refer to this group specifically in his Gospel, though they certainly played a role in the background.

The publicans were Jews who collected taxes from their fellow Jews on behalf of Rome. At times the Romans allowed them to collect more than they needed to. They pocketed the extra money, making them despised by their countrymen as traitors. Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, was a publican before he trusted in Christ. He became an apostle (Matt. 10:3) and the writer of the Gospel of Matthew.

12. Read Mark 2:13–17. What about Jesus made Him particularly appealing to tax collectors?

Historical Jewish Institutions

The Sanhedrin, a seventy-member council of Jewish leaders, was the Jews' supreme authority of Jesus' day. The council included Sadducees and Pharisees with the high priest as its leader. Rome allowed the Sanhedrin to operate, but they did not give them the power to apply the death penalty. That is why the Sanhedrin went to Pilate to get his permission to crucify Christ (John 18:28–19:16).

13. Read John 19:10, 11. From where did Pilate's authority to kill Jesus come?

Another Jewish institution was the synagogue. Jews in captivity in Babylon near the close of the Old Testament met together for instruction, public worship, and prayer. Their meeting places became known as synagogues. By the time Jesus came onto the scene, most cities with even a small number of Jews had synagogues. Jesus often went to synagogues to teach (18:20). Consequently, Jesus' doctrine was no secret.

Structure

John wrote his Gospel with a definite structure to facilitate his reasons for writing it. Understanding that structure helps us know how the passages within the book relate to one another. The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50) and The Book of Glory (13:1–20:31) are John's two major sections. A prologue (1:1–18) precedes these sections, and an epilogue (21:1–25) follows them.

The prologue serves as an introduction to the book's story and the themes that John developed in the rest of the book. It is a snapshot of the book and states truths that John proved in the remainder of the Gospel.

The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50) contains the seven representative signs that John chose to record. In addition, it includes Jesus' seven *I am* sayings. Both the signs and the sayings support the claim that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

In the Book of Glory, John described Jesus' private time with His disciples (13:1–17:26) and declared Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (18:1–20:31). Jesus prepared His disciples for His death (13:1–16:33) and then prayed for them (17:1–26). Jesus explained the ministry of the Holy Spirit as *paraclete* in their lives and service.

The epilogue contains the account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to the disciples (21:1–14) and His restoration of Peter to leadership among the disciples (21:15–19).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

As you study John's Gospel you should keep in mind that he recorded miracles as signs so his readers might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so they could, therefore, have eternal life. Secondly you should remember that John wrote his Gospel as a story that presents a theological understanding of Jesus' words and works. Lastly you should know that John wrote with a purposeful structure to support his arguments.

