

Jesus IOI INTRODUCTION  
TO THE REAL JESUS

# JOHN

God Became Flesh



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Pacific Press® Publishing Association  
Nampa, Idaho  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
[www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

# The Beginning

A line of novelty products came on the market about twenty years ago: 3-D (three-dimensional) puzzles and pictures. Do you remember them? They came out in the form of books, posters, and other wall art. All I could see was a nice pattern of various colors, something like a paper tapestry. Other people insisted that they were seeing beautiful things, such as mountains, trees, eagles, and fish, in three dimensions. I wanted to see what they saw, but I didn't know how to focus my eyes to enter this other dimension. I wondered whether I needed special glasses.

Then my birthday came along, and the young adults of my church decided to give me one of those pictures as a gift. It was a large framed picture behind glass, ready to hang on the wall. Everyone in the group kept staring at the picture and commenting on the beauty of the scenery: pine trees, a full moon, an eagle's nest, and an adult eagle catching a salmon. As far as I could tell, everyone was making this up—but they were all describing the same scene, so I concluded that obviously I was the one with the problem.

Then someone took the time to teach me how to focus my eyes. They even taught me how to use the glass in front of the picture to learn to focus appropriately. When everyone had gone home, I decided to sit in front of the picture until I could see what they saw. I will never forget what happened next. As I followed the instructions I had been given, my eyes started to perceive a whole other reality within the picture that I had not previously seen. It was as if I had walked into the picture and could now see those things that the others claimed to see. I felt like part of the picture, looking around and seeing beautiful things; I was experiencing a more pro-

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found reality than the flat paper patterns that I had seen before. It was breathtaking!

The Gospel of John was written so that we may discover a whole new reality that exists beyond the one we normally perceive. In a way, this Gospel offers us a set of new glasses—the glasses of faith in Jesus—that are necessary for us to see what we normally can't see with our natural eyes. John proposes that there are two realities: the one we see literally with our physical eyes (often not very pleasant) and the divine reality we see through spiritual glasses. The bridge between the first and the second realities is faith in the person of Jesus, who He is, and what He accomplished. And, John says, when you see the second, more profound reality, you will behold the glory of God and the beauty and assurance of what Jesus has accomplished on your behalf: eternal life.

John introduces Jesus as much more than a prophet from God or a miracle worker. He wants us to see Jesus beyond His humanity. Throughout John's narrative, Jesus reveals Himself more fully through seven signs (not just miracles, but testimonies of who He is) and seven "I AM" statements: the Bread of Life (6:35); the Light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the Door (10:7); the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14); the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6); and the True Vine (15:1).

Get ready for a breathtaking experience: God became flesh! And we are about to enter into the picture—so put on your 3-D glasses and BE AMAZED!

### **The Word was God!**

Unlike Matthew and Luke, John does not narrate details of Jesus' birth. We don't even hear about Mary, Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and the Magi. John's story starts long before the birth at "the beginning." He starts his Gospel with a deliberate reminder of the first words of the Bible in Genesis 1:1, which eventually became the name to the first book of the Bible. "In the beginning was the

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Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1, 2). Therefore, when we step into this 3-D picture, we step into an eternal picture of a pre-existing God. The Word was not created, but was God and was with God since the very beginning of the universe.

John introduces a God who was with God since the beginning but was distinct from God the Father. This is a bold statement with which to begin the Gospel because Judaism was, and is, a monotheistic religion. How could there be another God? Of course, Christianity is also a monotheistic religion that believes in one God manifested in Three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). But this was a foreign concept for the Jewish community.

John’s prologue (1:1–18) uses a literary device called *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is like a narrative sandwich: the text begins and ends in the same way. John’s *inclusio* is that Jesus is God! And he mentions this very important fact both in verse 1 and in verse 18 of his introduction. As a matter of fact, the entire Gospel is an *inclusio* of Jesus’ divinity, as the third and last assertion that Jesus is God is made after His resurrection (John 20:28).

### **Creation, life, and light**

Now that John has deliberately used words that remind the reader of the creation of the world (John 1:1), he naturally continues with Creation language, and even with Creation order. “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (verse 3). The Word of God was the Agent through which everything was created. Genesis tells us that God spoke the world into existence (Genesis 1); He would say and it would be. The Word of God was the active Agent of creation. He Himself was Life (see John 1:4). He didn’t just *give* life, but He *was* Life. And following the order of Creation, John talks about “light” (see Genesis 1:3–5); he says that the Word was life, and that life became “the Light of men” (John 1:4). And just as in Creation, when

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the Light appeared, darkness was exposed (verse 5). That Jesus is the Life and the Light are important premises that John repeats several times throughout the Gospel; they are also two of the seven “I AM” statements of Jesus (John 9:5; 11:25). The dualism of light and darkness, sight and blindness, is also a constant theme in this narrative because the entire Gospel is written to challenge the reader to believe in Jesus and, through the “glasses of faith,” enter into a fuller understanding of reality. God is about to redeem His creation, and the story of redemption starts at “the beginning.”

John goes on to say that Jesus “was the true Light which, . . . enlightens every man” (John 1:9). Every person has the chance to accept or reject the Light. Then we learn that when the Light came home, those at home did not receive Him. What a tragedy! Home is supposed to be your own place, where everybody knows your name. The Word, the Life-Giver, and Light Bearer “was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (verses 10, 11). This is the bad news. But there is also good news.

Some did accept the Light. And to those who received Him by believing in Him, He gave a gift: a new status—children of God. Those who believe in Him are *given* the right to become children of God! Have you ever been rejected by your own family, your own home? God invites you to join the heavenly family. No one can take you away from Him. When you receive the Light, darkness dissipates, and you become a child, not born of passion or the will of a man, but of the will of God. You have a home. And your Father knows your name.

### The new tabernacle

Are you enjoying a 3-D picture yet? Well, keep those glasses of faith on because there is much more to come! The beauty of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is breathtaking!

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Until now we don't really know who the Word is. We just know that the Word was with God in the beginning and that the Word was God. Now we are about to see one of the most amazing mysteries in the 3-D picture of the universe. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (verse 14). Wow! Unbelievable! The eternal God became flesh. The Word became human. This is the mystery that we call the *Incarnation*: God becoming one of us in order to redeem us. So, says John, when you see Jesus, notice the profound reality that the eternal God of Creation is in a human form. God has moved into our neighborhood.

The words used in this verse are of the utmost importance. First, John's choice of the word *flesh* is designed to highlight the fact that the Word did not make just a spiritual appearance but had a real physical body. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Second, the word *dwelt* means that He encamped or, in the Old Testament vernacular, *tabernacled* among us. This is a key word because it derives from the root word *tabernacle*, the sanctuary in the wilderness, the place where God's presence resided with His people. John wants his readers to catch the connection and to understand that the term refers back to the tabernacle that Moses built in the wilderness. Immediately, he uses another word, *glory*, which is also from the tabernacle vocabulary: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34). Now the tabernacle is the flesh, and we see God's glory through Jesus Christ. He is the fullest revelation of the glory of God. Furthermore, His utmost glory is the Cross, where God is revealed most fully. A basic outline of the Gospel of John highlights this fact:

Prologue	1:1–18
Book of signs	1:19–12:50
Book of glory	13:1–20:31
Epilogue	21:1–25

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The central two books or sections in this Gospel highlight *who* Jesus is (through His signs and testimonies) and the realities that were manifested in *His glory* at the Cross. Jesus' passion is repeatedly described as His glorification (John 12:23; 13:31, 32; 17:1, 4).

Now, we no longer just *hear* the Word of God speaking new worlds into existence, but we *see* the Word of God because He walks among us. And what do we see? Oh, says John, wait until I tell you! We see *grace* and *truth*! We see more clearly than before! Grace is mentioned in three sentences in John's prologue. Moses had received a partial revelation of God's grace and truth (see Exodus 34:6). Now, through Jesus, we are *seeing* grace and truth fully realized. John uses the word *truth* twenty-five times in this Gospel; and Jesus will utter one of His seven "I AM" statements claiming to be the Truth: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). When we wear our "faith glasses," we can see clearly that the Truth is the Person of Jesus.

### **Can you see Him now?**

The remainder of John's prologue is devoted to highlighting the supreme excellence of Jesus as a Revealer of God. Yes, God has revealed Himself in the past, but now He has surpassed that revelation because Jesus is the only One who can fully reveal the Father: "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:17, 18).

Moses was a mediator of God's revelation. Jesus is not just the mediator but the embodiment of God. And now we are beginning to see the beautiful scenery in the 3-D picture: grace and truth in the fullest sense. Jesus is the utmost Revealer of God. The *theophanies* or revelations of God in the Old Testament were shadows

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of the Son who fully reveals the Father. One of John's major recurring themes is the contrast between Moses and Christ, especially in places where Jesus is rejected in the name of Moses.

Before we continue our journey through the Gospel of John, let's briefly highlight a couple more things. John emphasizes that God became flesh for a particular purpose—to die. Yes, to die in order to redeem His creation. The “hour” in this Gospel is synonymous with the Cross. Throughout the narrative you may follow the development of this theme as we get closer and closer to the “hour” (see John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

There is so much to discuss about John's portrait of Jesus. In this booklet, we will concentrate on some of the dialogues between Jesus and other characters in the narrative. Their lives were changed through these encounters, and I pray that ours will be also.

At the end of the narrative, the beloved disciple reveals himself as the author of the Gospel (John 21:20–25). He also says that there are so many more things to be said: “There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (verse 25). The 3-D picture of Jesus is too wonderful, too great for words to explain. Its title is “The Word of God Became a Person. Jesus!”

Let's put on our faith glasses and see the glory of God!