

# GOOD NEWS GUIDE

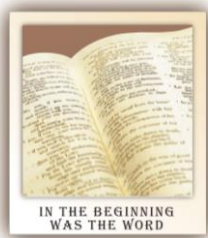
THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

February, 2015

## Lessons from John's Gospel

### Part 1 – Who Is Jesus?

“The Gospel According to John” is the fourth book of the New Testament. While the other three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) focus on the Kingdom of God, John's Gospel focuses on Jesus—who He is, and what He means to us. This Gospel was probably the last of the four to be written. It is thought to be by the Apostle John, brother of James and son of Zebedee.



The Gospel starts off with a bang: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is about Jesus. The text here is calling Jesus “the Word,” which we can take to mean that this is how God expressed himself to us, by becoming a human being—“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). The Word (Jesus) was with God, and actually was God, “in the beginning.” Jesus didn't start to exist when He was born as a baby in Bethlehem; He is one with the Father, He is God, and He has always existed.

Not only that, everything was created by Him, and nothing got created without His doing it, according to verse 3. John wants us to realize right from the start that he is not writing about someone who was merely a man. He's writing about God, who became a man.

The Gospel goes on to tell us how Jesus was introduced to the world at the beginning of His three years of ministry. In fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, a man named John the Baptist (who was also a prophet, by the way) went ahead of Jesus, preaching and proclaiming that He was coming. John called Jesus “the Lamb of God,” which predicted His death as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He also called Him “the Son of God” (verse 34).



You might ask, “How can Jesus be God, and at the same time be God's Son?” Good question. I don't know the answer. I suspect it's one of those things that are “too wonderful” for us to get our minds around. Just think of it this way: God sent Himself into the world, as a human being who was also His Son. People have argued for centuries about this question, and whether our God is three distinct but united “persons” (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) or simply has different ways of expressing Himself to us. Personally I don't worry about it. I know that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all exist; and They are together the one and only true God, who loves me. That's what matters to me.

Jesus being “the Son of God” was important to the Jewish people. They had waited for a long time for their Messiah, their Deliverer or Savior, to appear. John the Baptist was telling them, “This is the one!”

Jesus did many things which others have done, and those things don't tell us that He is God. He collected some disciples who would be trained to carry on His work later, and He performed miracles like turning water into wine and healing people. But other men had also done similar things.

The thing that sets Jesus apart, and we see it most clearly in John's Gospel, is the fact that He proclaims Himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and one with God, right from the beginning. And He does it in a way that leaves no doubt in the minds of His listeners that He is claiming to be God.



Do you remember what God said when He was talking with Moses from the burning bush?

**Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what**

**you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14)**

Over and over again, John's Gospel reports Jesus as saying "I AM" using a Greek word that has the same connotation as God's name, "I AM." The woman at the well in Samaria (Chapter 4) says to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming." Jesus replies, "I AM he."

Here's a list of the "I AM" sayings of Jesus in this Gospel. I hope you'll look them up and read each one in its surrounding context. As you do, remember that Jesus is not only saying what appears in the English words, He is also very pointedly saying, each time, "I AM equal to God." This was understood by the people, and twice they picked up stones and wanted to stone Him for blasphemy, as you will see when you read these passages in John.



- "I AM working."** (5:17)
- "I AM the bread of life."** (6:35)
- "I AM the light of the world."** (8:12)
- "... you will know that I AM he ..."** (8:28)
- "I AM the gate."** (10:9)
- "I AM the good shepherd."** (10:11)
- "I AM the resurrection and the life."** (11:25)
- "I AM the way, the truth, and the life."** (14:6)
- "Before Abraham was, I AM."** (8:58)

There were many other ways in which Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, God's Son, and one with God. In Chapter 3 He explained to Nicodemus why He came into the world, saying, in essence, "I am the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world."

In 5:16-47 Jesus gave a lengthy answer to those who were complaining that He made Himself equal to God. I might summarize His answer in today's terms as "It's true—deal with it." Most of Chapter 6 is Jesus's explanation of His role as the Savior, sent from Heaven by God.

There were some others who recognized that Jesus was who He claimed to be. You may also want to read some of the following passages in their surrounding context. It's interesting to see who believed in Jesus and who didn't.

John the Baptist was probably the first. He called Jesus "the Son of God," and had quite a bit more to say about Him. (3:25-36)

After the incident at the well in Samaria Jesus stayed there and taught for two days. At the end of that time the people said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard

for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (4:42)

After Jesus healed the man who was born blind, he worshipped Jesus (10:38)

Before He raised Lazarus from the dead, Martha said to Jesus, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (11:27)

Even Pilate, who condemned Jesus to death on the cross, seems to have recognized who He was. He had this sign placed on the cross: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." The Jewish authorities protested, but Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." (19:19-22)

And Thomas—good old "doubting Thomas"—came to believe in Him, after he saw the proof that Jesus was alive again. He said, "My Lord and my God." (20:28)

It's kind of interesting that the disciples, who were with Jesus pretty much day and night for three years, apparently didn't "get it" until after He was crucified and then rose from the dead. (See Chapter 14.) Maybe they were just too close to Him. They had seen him as a human being who got hungry, who got tired, who even got angry on occasion. It must have been just too big a leap for them to be able to realize that He really was Immanuel—"God with us."

In summary, John's Gospel tells us that God sent His Son, who is actually one with God (that is, God Himself), into the world as a human being. He knew who He was, and He proclaimed it pointedly and often. The Jewish authorities and many of the people thought He was uttering blasphemy, claiming to be God. And if He hadn't really been God, they would have been right. But they were wrong; Jesus was—and is—God.

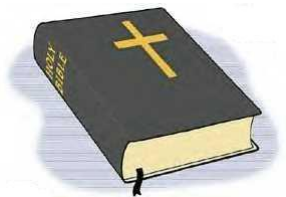
Next month I plan to look at what John's Gospel says about the problem of SIN, and God's solution to the problem. Stay tuned ....

Peace and Joy—

*Brother Roland*

## An Inmate's Questions

### 1. Why are there different versions of the Bible?



This is a good question. The answer is simple, really. The original manuscripts of the Bible were written in ancient Hebrew and Greek, plus a bit of Aramaic. The originals aren't around any more; all we have are copies that were made hundreds of years later. So there are four problems: (1) The old copies don't always agree with each other, so someone has to decide which ones are more accurate; (2) not many people can read those old languages, so we have to have translations; (3) Some things can be said in one language that can't really be said in other languages because there are no words for them; and (4) All languages change over long periods of time, which means that even those who can read the old languages may not always know the exact meaning, and English translations done over 400 years ago used English that is a lot different from ours.



What we have, then, are different Bible versions created by different people at different times for different reasons. There were a few English translations before the King James version, but KJV was the first one done by a large group of scholars using the best texts available. With the development of printing, it quickly became the "Authorized Version." The KJV we have today is essentially the same as it has been since about 1700, and it remained the primary English Bible for Protestants until about 1950. It is still very popular today.

Though the KJV was good, various groups wanted something better. Some wanted updated (modern) language; some wanted informal language that would be easier to understand. Each group has had its reasons for creating a new version, and they are far too numerous to give here. But the names often give clues.

The "Revised Version" of the late 1800s was a revision of the KJV. The "American Standard Version" was a revision of the RV, with changes suggested by the American members of the translation team. In 1950 the "Revised Standard Version" came out—it was an update of the ASV. And so on.

The Living Bible (1971) was a paraphrase—it tried to present the sense of the Bible texts in everyday, understandable English. The Good News Bible (1976) was sort of between a translation and a paraphrase. So you get the idea—different groups, different goals, and different target audiences. That's why we have different Bible versions.

### 2. Where did the King James come from?

Here's a little more detail than I gave above. In the late 1500s the Church of England used a Bible called "The Great Bible." The Puritans found a lot of problems with this Bible, so in 1604 King James called a conference that came up with a plan for a new translation. The 47 scholars did their job, and the Bible was published in 1611. So the KJV translation is over 400 years old. But it did not actually come to be called "The King James Version" until about 1884.

### 3. Where did the NIV come from?

The New International Version project was started after a meeting in 1965 in Palos Heights, Illinois between the Christian Reformed Church, the National Association of Evangelicals, and a group of international scholars. The New York Bible Society was selected to do the translation. There was a core team of 15 translators, and in all about 100 people from six countries and over 20 different denominations worked on the translation. The New Testament was released in 1973 and the full Bible in 1978.

What they were aiming for was a middle ground between a literal (word for word) and a meaning (thought for thought) translation.

(Thanks to Wilson Elliott for the questions. I used the Internet quite a bit in writing the answers.)

**Got a question? It may be the same question that is occurring to someone else. Maybe you'll share it with me so I can take a shot at answering it in the "Good News Guide." That way others can benefit from your asking it. Send it to me:**

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# Jesus in John's Gospel

This puzzle has words and phrases from the Gospel of John that refer to Jesus. Not every word is in all Bible versions. Also, two phrases appear twice in the puzzle. See if you can find them. Enjoy!

## Puzzle:

S S A V I O R O F T H E W O R L D P J N L O B G K J A W I O B  
H D Y I X X K R E P W O T K C G R A G F A D V L G K Z W N D L  
O L D P B S V Z S T R S Y L T E Y T Y S M T H P D O P L Q R O  
A R V E D B U F G Z S M Z H J E O N V Z B M J J J D Y R M A S  
N O B G F B A S Y X T I G K C E F I L F O D A E R B E U O X C  
C W T U A N C R E M D I R M B L R B S J F C R H E S H J L J X  
T E Q S B U O B U J L Q K H S I O C T Z G H Y G U Z L I G H O  
S H Z S Y B M U S E R H A Y C L N Q Z E O K O R L T G R A M U  
N T Z Y B M E J H E O J B L U A F E M M D T R Y D H B F T C A  
I F Y P A T D T I L W B Y X F G M D R X T E V R T E B R E D J  
C O J W T Z O D Y L E D E J J M C V F E C O E O F W H Q O H V  
F R N C M K W O L F H U C Z U O V T N T U H F O I A D C F B I  
Q O K A B P N D F B T C F X J R R S I Y P T R E C Y Z E T T E  
Q I T K M E F A Y M O N K E D F O O T E H E I P W T V A H Y C  
H V Y E O F R C I S T U P F P N N N H E A F G B M H J X E K G  
Z A F F A Y O J B T E O O T X A R S W B W S R E D E O M S J P  
W S G Q L C M N O U F H K U N M D O R Z W I M G I T O N H O S  
L O R D G W H T O X I I M D G O R A I E D A P V N R U L E L E  
D O N L S G E E R S L S T R O L H Z J E H V B Y N U B V E C D  
D U N H L M A M R M S H A G D A R E G K I K B J P T H M P N Y  
L O K S A P V A B I E K D H M P H R J K A M W E U H L S F I E  
A W G S O U E B P L V Y B W P T O J A Q H M X Y G A A Y O Q F  
N O T F E N N Q I D I V A D F O G N I R P S F F O N M L L L E  
I E P M O G O F U W G S K O M W O Y V N Q D K Y N D Q A D C P  
R D O R F B E F X E S V G A M D R P V V R S S Z R T O Q I B K  
Y Z B S O Z M U G B M N T R U E B R E A D F R O M H E A V E N  
Q W M J A P G A L O I K F B S M S A H M L R A V I E F M W A L  
P U H U Z N H H L K D E T B C W F S P F E C O L B L G O G S Z  
M R E H T A F E H T H T I W E N O E I S F P L W I I E O L Q G  
I I A D N O S H T N Z I U X D Q O V L A L P Y P G F W F D P E  
K S T G P U Y J A C H P Z U T U U L N U H E A K A E U I V P H

## Words:

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS	JESUS	PROPHET
BREAD OF LIFE	KING OF THE JEWS	RABBI
BRIDEGROOM	LAMB OF GOD	RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE
CHRIST	LIGHT OF THE WORLD	SAVIOR OF THE WORLD
COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN	LORD	SON OF GOD
GATE OF THE SHEEP FOLD	MAN FROM GALILEE	SON OF MAN
GIVES LIFE TO THE WORLD	MASTER	TEACHER
GOD	MESSIAH	THE LIGHT
GOOD SHEPHERD	OFFSPRING OF DAVID	THE WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE
HOLY ONE OF GOD	ONE WITH THE FATHER	TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN
I AM	ONLY BEGOTTEN SON	WORD