

JESUS

A STUDY ON THE WORDS OF
MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN

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24 LESSONS — LEADER GUIDE



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FOREWORD

The twenty-four lessons selected for this study come from all four Gospels and are arranged in the sequential order of Matthew. The four Gospel writers record about 270 events, miracles, and teachings from Jesus' life, yet aside from Jesus' resurrection, only one of His miracles is common to all four: the feeding of the five thousand. The twenty-four lessons begin with John's bold and clear statement of the deity of Jesus—He is the Word of God, who was with God, and who was God from the beginning. The study ends with Jesus' ascension and His Great Commission to all who would be His disciples.

Familiar events of Jesus' life are included in the twenty-four lessons. These include Jesus' miraculous birth, temptation in the wilderness, the calling of the disciples, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The lessons also include the great themes of Jesus' ministry—His healing ministry, His great sermons and parables, His miracles demonstrating His lordship over His creation, and His teachings about the sacraments and prayer.

Each lesson is a stand-alone study that is not dependent on the previous lessons so that guests and visitors will feel comfortable joining your class in mid-stream. Lessons are designed to be completed in an hour with opening and closing prayers. We encourage participants to join in the opening prayer with whatever prayer requests and thanksgivings they have on their hearts. The closing prayer is a blessing on the class for the week to come.

The leader guide includes extensive notes to help the leader prepare for the class. Many of the examples come from our own personal experience, so the leader can feel comfortable drawing from his or her own experience. You will find there is too much material rather than too little. Summary and application questions are generally at the end of the lesson. You can focus on those if time runs short. Another helpful strategy to facilitate the discussion is to hand out the lessons a week in advance so that class participants can use the study as their devotional during the week.

A twenty-four-week-long Bible study may sound like a long time; it is certainly contrary to modern studies that change the topic every six to twelve weeks. But you will find that the study of Jesus' life and ministry will not grow wearisome. If you do have time constraints, a good survey of Jesus' life could also be done in twelve weeks using Lessons 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 22, and 23. Whichever study you decide to undertake, we pray that God richly blesses you with His peace and abundant blessings.

CHRIST, THE WORD

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

PRAYERS

BACKGROUND

The Holy Spirit guided each Gospel writer to direct his account to a different Christian group with a different point of emphasis:

Matthew wrote to a Jewish community. Also known as Levi, this tax collector was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy, showing He is in the line of David. This first Gospel includes the most references to Old Testament prophecies and the largest number of miracles to demonstrate to Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah.

Mark wrote to Gentiles, most likely Romans. The second Gospel is attributed to John Mark, a close associate of Peter in Rome who probably acted as Peter's secretary. Mark begins with John the Baptist, who fulfilled Old Testament prophecy by calling Israel to repentance to receive their Messiah. Mark is the shortest Gospel, and many scholars believe it was written first.

Luke wrote to Gentiles (Greeks) and places the birth of Jesus in the historical context of the Roman world. Luke was a physician and companion of Paul who traveled with him on many of his missionary journeys recorded in Acts. He carefully investigated the life of Christ from eyewitnesses to write an orderly account of the Gospel to make his benefactor, Theophilus, certain of all the things he had been taught about Jesus. He wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

John begins his Gospel at the moment of creation, giving us a glimpse into

eternity where Jesus dwells in glory with the Father. John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. His Gospel focuses on the deity of Jesus as the Son of God, His role in creating the universe, and His union with God the Father. John provides unique insights in Jesus' Jerusalem ministry and His final hours before the crucifixion.

READ JOHN 1:1–18—THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹² But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

1. The Word, verses 1–3.

a. Why does John refer to Jesus as the Word?

In verses 1–3 and 14, John emphasizes the divinity of Christ, through whom the entire universe was created. John does not try to define God's triune nature; he just states how it applies. God brought forth creation by saying, "Let there be." Christ is that Word

of God in creation. Christ became incarnate as the Word of God to reveal God's will to His people and fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "He [the Lord] may teach us His ways" (Isaiah 2:3).

b. What are the attributes of the Word in verses 1–3?

These verses highlight three characteristics of Christ: His distinction from the Father, His unity and oneness with the Father, and His role as Creator.

In the first three verses, John establishes the divinity of Christ with "In the beginning was the Word" (v. 1) and repeats it to emphasize that Christ is the eternal, divine Word. All creation was made through Him as the Word.

In verse 1, John writes, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." The phrase "the Word was with God" demonstrates that Christ is distinct from God the Father. Although it is difficult to envision how God can be in relationship to Himself, Jesus emphasized His relationship with the Father throughout His ministry. The phrase "the Word was God" illustrates the union and oneness of God. Although the Son is distinct from the Father, He also shares the same nature or essence. All the Father's attributes are possessed by the Son so that Jesus' words are God's words.

In verse 3, we read, "all things were made through Him [the Word]." The Son shared His place with the Father in creation. "Through Him" emphasizes that the Son was the agent or means of creation—"without Him was not any thing made that was made." Christ has dominion over all creation.

In just three short verses, John lays out three beliefs foundational to Christianity—Jesus Christ (the Word) is eternal, He is divine, and He is in union with the Father but also distinct from the Father. Take any one of these beliefs away and the result is another religion. For example, Islam accepts that Jesus was a prophet but not God. Modern Judaism rejects all claims of Jesus and does not consider that God can be in relationship to Himself (Father, Son, and Spirit). Other beliefs teach that Jesus was simply a man of wisdom and an example that all men might aspire to.

2. In addition to John 1:3, discuss how other scriptural references develop the role of God in creation. Refer to Genesis 1:1–3. How did God create the heavens and earth—and light?

God created light (and the entire universe) through His powerful Word. John tells us the Word of God is His Son, Jesus Christ. In the first two verses of the Bible, we see the triune nature of God: God's Spirit, God's Word, and God Almighty.

- a. Read Genesis 1:26. Why does God refer to making man in “Our” image? (See these other plural references: Genesis 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8. See also references to God's council: 1 Kings 22:19–23; Job 15:8; Jeremiah 23:8.)

God made man in His image and refers to Himself as “Us.” Christians interpret this to mean that God is in relationship to Himself—through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comprise the triune God, who is one but at the same time distinct. Genesis 1 is not the only occurrence where God uses a plural pronoun when referring to Himself. Rather than interpreting God's reference to “Us” in the context of the Trinity, Jewish rabbis offer several false interpretations of God's pluralistic speech, such as these examples:

1. God is consulting with His creation (Earth).
2. God is consulting with the heavenly host.
3. God is speaking in the majestic plural (the royal we).

- b. What details of Christ's role in creation does Hebrews 1:1–3 add?

In Hebrews, we read how God created the universe through His Son, who continues to sustain it through the power of His Word. God did not create the universe and then step back to watch it run by rules of physics, chemistry, and biology alone. Christ is active in His creation, sustaining it with love, grace, divine guidance, and transforming power. Since Jesus can sustain the universe by the power of His Word, He can certainly sustain us through any hardship we might face.

3. Referring again to John 1:1–3, how might Jewish and Gentile readers differ in their views of John’s opening, “In the beginning was the Word”?

Jewish readers would recognize that the structure of John’s opening verses are fashioned after Genesis 1—“In the beginning.” Jesus’ claim to be equal to God was the primary reason the Jewish leaders killed Him. John illustrates Jesus’ claim of deity in the Scriptures—a claim they were all familiar with, yet never recognized. John illustrates God’s triune nature without ever defining or explicitly stating it. John removes all doubt in the meaning of his opening words—the Word is divine, He was with God, and was God. The Word is Jesus Christ.

A Gentile reader would simply take the message at face value—the deity John calls “the Word” is Jesus Christ.

4. John 1:4–5, 7–9 refers to life and light in Christ. Life and light are common themes in John. John refers to life forty-seven times and to light twenty-four times. Consider the following references:

- a. What aspects of life are referred to in the following verses?

Genesis 1:26–27

Psalms 139:13–14

Ephesians 2:10

These verses relate God’s creation of man’s physical life. Christ is literally the life-bringer in creation. We were created in His image, through Him, and for Him.

- b. What aspects of life are referred to in John 3:16 and John 6:51?

John 3:16

John 6:51

Nearly all references to life in John relate to eternal life. It doesn't mean our physical life is not important, but it puts our earthly life and work in proper perspective. Christ descended from heaven to reconcile us to God so we might abide with Him eternally. Jesus gave His life so we might have eternal life.

c. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). What does this promise of "abundant life" or "life to the full" mean to you? Jesus promises us abundant life. To some, the promise of abundant life is a gospel of prosperity and wealth. Yet, why would Jesus promise us something for which He showed so little regard during His own life? Abundant life is about relationships—with God, family, friends, and others whom I've never even met. Just as God seeks a relationship with me, I am motivated to seek a deeper relationship with Him in worship and prayer, acknowledging the many blessings He has given to me and my family.

5. What does John mean by describing Jesus as light, the light of men? Refer to the following verses.

a. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

As the light, Jesus illuminates the way to the Father.

b. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

As light, Jesus illuminates the way to righteousness.

c. "The LORD is God, and He has made His light to shine upon us" (Psalm 118:27).

As light, Jesus is the light of God.

6. In John 1:6–8, 15, John the Baptist gives testimony that Jesus is the Son of God, Christ the Lord. What are the other testimonies that bear this truth? See John 5:31–40.

Jesus' claims did not need to be validated by men, but in accordance with Jewish law He pointed out His witnesses. They are listed in John 5:31–40:

1. Jesus' own testimony
 2. John the Baptist's testimony
 3. The testimony of Jesus' work according to His Father's will
 4. Jesus' miracles, which are proof that He is the Messiah
 5. God's own words (at Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration)
 6. Scriptures—the Old Testament Law and Prophets, which point to the coming of the Messiah, fulfilled by Jesus
7. In John 1:10, the world does not recognize Jesus as Creator or Lord. What do those who receive the Word and those who reject the Word have in common?

God loves all men, not wanting any to perish, but wanting everyone to come to repentance (1 Timothy 2:4). God loves both those who reject Jesus and those who receive Jesus. After all, Jesus paid for the sins of all people on the cross.

- a. What “right” do those who receive the Word have?

Those who receive Jesus as Lord gain spiritual rebirth (John 1:12), the right to become children of God—born of God.

- b. How would you summarize the essence of the Gospel message presented in these passages? Compare to John 3:16.

The essence of the Gospel message is simple—believe Christ is the Son of God, who died for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus restores your relationship to God, who places Jesus as the Lord of your life through the Holy Spirit.

- c. What blocks understanding and recognition that Jesus is God Incarnate, life, and light?

Members of other religions cannot accept Jesus as God Incarnate because the concept is contrary to everything they have been taught. Most religions focus on working for salvation rather than accepting the free gift of salvation through Christ by God's grace.

Other people reject Jesus because they lean on their own understanding of God and do not seek to know Him through the truth of the Scriptures. The incarnation of God, the virgin birth, Christ's death as a substitute punishment for their sin, His resurrection from the dead, and spiritual rebirth are concepts that sound foolish to them.

John 3:19–21 says some people are evil and love evil so they cannot love Christ.

8. In John 1:14–18, John introduces another name for Jesus—the “only Son”—as he discusses Jesus in the context of John the Baptist and Moses.

- a. What does Jesus have in common with the prophets?

Prophets are sent from God to accomplish a purpose (e.g., Moses delivered the Israelites from Egypt) or to deliver a message (e.g., John delivered the message of repentance and the coming of the Christ). The message may provide spiritual insight into events occurring in the present or foretell future events.

- b. How is Jesus different from other prophets?

Jesus is the one and only Son—who descended from heaven. God delivered the message of salvation Himself. Jesus is also the one and only Lamb of God, whose death atoned for the sins of mankind; one death for all sin, for all time.

9. What is John's purpose in writing his Gospel account? See John 20:30–31.

John wrote his Gospel so that others would believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that they might have eternal and abundant life in His name.

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING