

The book of John is the best place to come to know the Anointed One who was promised through every page of the Old Testament. John tells his “good news” (gospel) from a slightly different perspective than the others. He begins at the very beginning. Not at His human birth, but at **His pre-eminence even before our history began**. John’s purpose is to show us that Jesus was not only fully human, but He was, and is, fully God as well.

As is true for many Jewish writings, John reveals his purpose at the end of his book. In chapter 20, verse 31, he states: “...*but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*”

To understand the dramatic beginning of this book, it is helpful to recall where the Old Testament ends, and what happens “between the testaments.” The people of Israel had returned to the land after the Babylonian exile, but nothing was the same. The monarchy (time of the kings) of Israel had ended in 606 BC when Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet king and took the first of three waves of captives to Babylon. Just as He revealed to Daniel through visions and dreams, God then brought down the Babylonian Empire, and raised up the Persian Empire. When the Jews returned to Israel, they were not free. They were under Persian domination. They rebuilt the Temple, and the city walls, but in very difficult times, and without all the splendor of the former Temple and Jerusalem. The last prophet, Malachi, reminded the people to get their priorities straight, return from their already backsliding ways, and get right with God. As usual, the promise of the Messiah is prominent, but now we enter what many call the “silent years” between the testaments. The Old Testament closes around 430 years before Jesus comes. Although there was no prophet to Israel in this time (hence the term “silent years”) God was still working His plan. The Persian Empire passed away, and the Greek Empire rose to power. The Greek Empire was conquered and the Roman Empire was raised up. When the New Testament, the new contract, opens, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies was imminent, but most of the Jews who were not watching and observing God’s former promises and the signs of the times, did not know it. In many ways, those days were much like today. Many had given up hope of the Messiah coming, and turned to more legalistic and self-fulfilling expressions of their faith, or gave up faith altogether. *Thousands of years after His first coming, the world is in much the same place. Most have given up hope that Jesus will return, have reinterpreted the scriptures to suit their own lack of truth and faith, or they have given up their former faith completely, living sinful self-involved lives.*



In addition to Gentile world powers changing hands a few times, many other things were happening, like the **Septuagint**, the translation of the scriptures into the common language of Greek (about 275 BC). This allowed the common man to read and study the Hebrew scriptures. The Hebrew language slowly died out after the exile (used only in Temple rituals), and when the Greek Empire flourished, so did the Greek language, eventually becoming the common language of the world, even at the time of the Roman Empire.

Synagogues also originated during the exile, because without a Temple there could be no sacrificial system, and no assembly. The Jews needed this place of assembly, especially in the *diaspora* ("the scattering") and continued worshipping in local synagogues when they returned to Israel. This allowed neighborhoods to have their own place of worship. Even though the Temple was rebuilt by Ezra and Zerubbabel, then completely and elaborately renovated by Herod in this time period (*still under construction when the new Testament opens*), most of the people could not get to Jerusalem to worship there, so the tradition of community synagogues was still practiced at the time of Jesus.

During this time also, we see several other "groups" come to be, such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, and the Essenes. Just like denominations today, these "sects" of Judaism were ripe for internal dissent and disunity. The Sadducees were the aristocrats, and became the "Temple party" (*they governed what happened in and around the Temple – these "parties" were just like today's political parties*). They were relatively few in number, but wielded disproportionate political power and controlled the high priesthood. They rejected all religious writings except Torah, as well as any doctrine (such as the resurrection) they believed was not found in those five books (the Pentateuch, first five books of Moses).

The Pharisees were the "party of the synagogue," and they were known for their reinterpretation of the law. They believed that "righteous" Jews could meet the Law, and thus earn their way to heaven (which, of course, is not possible for anyone). They were comparatively few in number, but Pharisees enjoyed support of the people and influenced popular opinion, if not national policy. They were the only group to survive the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and were the spiritual "fathers" of modern Judaism.

The Essenes were an almost forgotten Jewish sect until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. They were a small, separatist group, growing out of the time of the Maccabees. Like Pharisees, they stressed strict legal observance, but considered the temple priesthood corrupt and rejected much of temple ritual and the sacrificial system. Like most sects or denominations, they believed they were the only true remnant of Judaism. They separated themselves from other Jews and lived in Qumran, devoted to personal purity and preparation for final war between "Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness." The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD pretty much ended this group.

The Old Testament ended with the Jews under the rule of the Persians, yet to be further oppressed by the Greek Empire, and finally even more in bondage under Rome at the time of the Messiah's first coming, and the opening of the New Testament. Many thought He would not come. But He did. Precisely as God planned, and at the very moment He had foreordained.

John was probably the youngest of the first disciples of Jesus, and we know he lived the longest. He wrote the apocalyptic book of Revelation late in the first century. His gospel is different than the others, often not presenting the same information or stories of the other Gospels, and when he does, it is from a different perspective. John's intent is to show that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, but also that He was and is, God Himself. That is the only way He could have paid the price for our sins. As God, He was sinless, able to keep the Law perfectly; as man, he died and shed His blood to atone for our sins. John focuses on presenting the "signs" of the Messiah and the seven "I AM" statements that equated Jesus with God.

John, who knew Jesus well, wanted everyone to know this, and to be saved by this Truth. He was an eyewitness to the most extraordinary events of history. He wrote his Gospel much later than the others. The details of Jesus' human birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension had already been told. John's purpose was to make every reader understand precisely who Jesus was, and who He is today. And then, knowing this, be saved by Him.

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.



- ***“In the beginning ...”*** These few words alone are quite remarkable. This is precisely how the Old Testament begins, and where John chooses to begin his Gospel account. The word for “beginning” is *arche* in Greek, which means the beginning literally, but also the *“extremity, or outermost part, rule, authority and power.”* The book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, also begins this way. John knew this. He starts his gospel the very same way to make a very profound point. Jesus IS God, and He has been since the very beginning...a time we cannot even imagine. He is eternal and has always been.
- **We think in terms of “timelines”** with a beginning, a middle and an ending. We cannot conceive of eternity or an eternal existence. God said He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). That is something we are unable to completely comprehend. John uses the same words that begin the story of man, and his relationship with God. They do NOT begin God's story – He HAS NO beginning or end. John uses these words deliberately to indicate that Jesus has been since the beginning of man's story. He is God and has always been. Always, was, always is, and always will be.
- **Matthew and Luke both present genealogies for Jesus**, but only of his “human” ancestry to show His fulfillment of the Messiah from the promised line of David. Here John immediately makes one of the most profound statements about Jesus, one that takes us back to the very beginning, before humans were created. John is showing the pre-eminence of Jesus. Although John does not identify Jesus in this first statement, he does later. This “individual” is only referenced as “The Word.” This is Jesus' divine genealogy.
- ***“...was the Word...”*** The Greek word used here is “LOGOS,” with an interesting meaning. It is more than just a spoken or written “word.” *Logos* implied all the concepts, ideas, thoughts, the “intelligence,” the embodiment and very nature of a thing or a person. When John spoke of Jesus as the LOGOS, he used the right word. Jesus is the human embodiment of God. He is the visible, tangible expression of God, His very “person” and nature within a human body. This is a radical thought, especially to the Jews. The Gentiles also needed to understand this. Jesus is not only the embodiment, but also the very words of God. Jesus reveals the mind of God to us. He is how God the Spirit, the Father, communicates His nature with us.
- **John also wrote the book of Revelation, where he encountered this LOGOS in His glorified, risen presence.** To further underscore what he has written here, in Revelation John reminds us of His Name as he shows us Jesus returning to earth in chapter 19: ***“He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.”*** (Revelation 19:13) The words found in Revelation 19 are a stunning and breathless account of the return of the Messiah, now glorified. John wants all readers to understand these are one and the same person.

- **“...and the Word was with God...”** To the Jews, this sounded like blasphemy. They were fiercely MONOTHEISTIC – believing in ONE God. Now here is One distinct from the Father, yet one with Him. This statement is really beyond our comprehension, but not beyond our belief. The word “was” in both places does not necessarily mean “has been” but rather “is, and always will be.” It means this was Jesus before He became a human being.
 - **“...and the Word was God...”** There are three distinct statements made in this first verse, all of which are designed to underscore the remarkable truth that Jesus is God. John made sure that was understood by stating it many ways. This individual, not yet revealed, existed from before our time, was with God always, and was in fact, God Himself.
 - **“...He was in the beginning with God.”** John re-stated his ground-breaking premise again. This man, the One we call Jesus, has always been. He is God, He is the very nature and embodiment of God, and as such has always been. He will go on to make this statement even more startling in the next verses.
- **COMMENTARY:** This makes it abundantly clear that He is separate and distinct from God the Father. You cannot identify Him as God the Father because He is *with* God. "But," someone says, "if He is with God, He is not God." The third statement sets us straight, "and the Word was God." This is a clear, emphatic declaration that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. In fact, the Greek is more specific than this, because in the Greek language the important word is placed at the beginning of the sentence and it reads, "God was the Word." That is emphatic; you cannot get it more emphatic than that. Do you want to get rid of the deity of Christ? My friend, you cannot get rid of it. The first three statements in John's Gospel tie the thing down. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Magee)
- John knows the Word, the Logos of God. He knew Him well. In fact, throughout this Gospel John does not refer to himself by name, but implies he is the disciple “that Jesus loved.” They are close, personal friends. John is the one Jesus left His mother in the care of. John was given the incredible vision of the apocalypse. **John knows the Word.** And right from the beginning, and throughout his telling of the Word and His purpose for coming to earth, John presents Jesus in unmistakable ways that indicate His deity. John will show Jesus as the real Anointed One, real God, as he knew Him:
 - the One who expresses God (the Word)
 - God Himself
 - the Giver of eternal life
 - the Bringer and Source of light in a dark world
 - the Giver of grace
 - the separate and unique Son sharing an intimate relationship with His Father
 - the Bearer, the Expression and the Source of truth
 - the Expression of God's glory and fullness
 - **Some cults insert a little word**, which is NOT found in the original Greek, making the statement “and the Word was A god.” This little word has tragic and deadly results. This says that Jesus is a created being, a “god” created by the Father, not one who has been ONE with the Father for eternity. It also says we can attain this godhead status. This idea is a lie, and has spawned many cults that have led some well-intentioned people away from God, not toward Him. The Enemy himself is the author of these lies. Sounds right, but it is NOT right! John clearly intends to imply that the Word IS God, One with the Father from the beginning, throughout eternity.

³*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

- John keeps building on his original statement. He keeps making bigger and bigger claims about this “Word” of God. Now he states that He made all things. The apostle Paul stated the same thing: *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

(Colossians 1:16-17) Once again, the Jews have difficulty with this statement. In their understanding, only the Father is the Creator. This seems, to them, to contradict what they think they know of God.

- John does not yet identify this person he speaks of. He is making incredible claims, and wants everyone to understand right up front exactly WHO this is. **He was with God from the beginning, He IS God, and He made everything.** These two little verses are amazing. They nail down, with complete certainty and without question or interpretative leeway, the very deity of Jesus. No one can write this off. The one John identifies is God Himself, in human form. Without Him, there would be nothing.



⁴*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* ⁵*And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

- Throughout this book, John makes very **interesting use of contrasts**. He sharply focuses on life and death, light and dark, the world's ways and God's way, the Law and Grace, Moses and Jesus. The Old Testament is full of the Law, the New Testament is fulfilled by Grace. Moses was the bringer of the Law, Jesus is the bringer of Grace. The contrast between light and darkness is one of the main themes throughout all of John's writings.
- *“In Him was life,...”* Since the Fall of mankind, all humans are under a death warrant. We are eternally separated from God without His intervention. **John introduces the Word that brings life to all of us.** Not just physical life on this planet, but life eternal in God's presence, as we are restored to Him through the Word of God, the human expression of His nature.
- *“and the life was the light of men....”* John knew the Tenach, the Old Testament, which contains the sacred Jewish scriptures. He is making a bold statement here that should have every Jew remembering Psalm 36:9 – *“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”* Like Matthew, John wants his readers to know that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament promises of the Messiah, so he utilizes many Old Testament scriptures to define the Word of God (the Messiah, Yeshua).
- *“And the light shines in the darkness ...”* This contrast of Light and darkness is one of main themes of John's writings. Since the Fall, the world is “in the dark” and full of darkness. An interesting study of the physical properties of light will reveal some fascinating facts that help us understand Jesus as the Light of the Word. Everything in our world is invisible until light strikes it. Light allows us to see. We cannot see anything in pure darkness.

- **Light will always dispel darkness.** Darkness cannot dispel light. It is physically impossible. Light exposes what is in the dark. Light is always symbolic for truth, knowledge and good (as opposed to evil, which is symbolized by darkness). The purpose of light is to allow us to see clearly, rather than stumble around in the dark. Light dispels the darkness, wherever it exists, and that is its intended purpose. That is also Jesus' purpose. To shine the Light, the Truth, in a dark world and overcome the darkness.
- **COMMENTARY: I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.** (CS Lewis)
- **"...the darkness did not comprehend it."** The Greek word used here for "comprehend" is KATALAMBANO. It can have a dual meaning. It means first to **comprehend** (mental grasping or understanding, but it can also mean to **extinguish** (physical restraint, controlling or conquering, to overcome, putting something "out" like a light). Various translations use either word (comprehend, or extinguish). Although their meanings may be different, the result is the same. The darkness was not able to either understand, or overcome the Light! The darkness of the world, the enemy, failed on both accounts!
- This statement by John the disciple is a simple way of saying that Jesus is the Light that dispels the darkness of this world, but the world preferred to be left in the dark. It did when He came the first time, and it still does.

A LOOK AT THE CREEDS

- John's very clear and dramatic statements meant to confirm the deity of Jesus the Messiah, remind us of the very clear statements made by the early church fathers to outline the faith of believers of Jesus – those we call "Christians." The word "Christian" literally means a follower of the Christ, or the Messiah. Because there were so many false teachings regarding the Messiah, the early Church felt it necessary to clearly state the identity of Jesus in various creeds. Many of us have grown up repeating these creeds in church services. They are based solely on scripture, including those of John in this book. **It is a good exercise for us to review these**, reading them as the early believers did, and using them to remember the Gospel accounts, Old Testament promises and statements about the Messiah, and even confirming and delineating our own faith. These are brief doctrines and statements of the tenets of a Christian.

***NOTE:** In the following statements, the word "catholic" refers not to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ (the meaning of the original word).

The Apostle's Creed

(This is the shortest of the classic "creeds." No one really knows the exact date of origin, or the author. As the name implies, tradition states that each of the twelve apostles wrote one of the 12 main statements here. Because this creed is short, and does not implicitly state the deity of Jesus (though it is implied), other creeds were written later to address this important issue. This is designed as a confession of faith, and is the oldest of such statements. It has been changed slightly over the years, but the original intent is preserved.)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy *catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

During the first 3 centuries of the early church, growing false teachings and various “ideas” about the identity of Jesus threatened the unity and truth of Christianity. When Emperor Constantine gained control over the Roman Empire, he attributed his victory to Jesus, and made Christianity the faith of the empire. However, it was soon evident that this “one faith and one church” (part of his favorite motto) was a bit fractured by theological disputes. Some felt Jesus was a created being which opened the door to already rampant polytheism (many gods), and others pointed out that the scriptures deny this, and Jesus is as much God as God the Father, and together they are ONE God, the God of Israel, and the God of the church. To set this straight once and for all, Constantine called a council in the city of Nicaea in 325 AD. After crafting this creed, which was signed by most church officials, the battles continued, however, and later a second council came together in 381 AD to further refine this statement of faith. Today, most Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations affirm it.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,* I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**The ancient text: one holy catholic and apostolic Church. Remember, anywhere you see the word “catholic” it does not imply the Catholic Church, but the Greek word katholikos, meaning “universal.”)*

The Athanasian Creed

Most people are unfamiliar with this creed, which takes both of the previous creeds even further, focusing also on the concept of the Trinity, attempting to make this concept clear (if that is possible for us humans!). It states the conditions under which anyone can be saved. This creed is named after Athanasius, who became the bishop of Alexandria, and is considered an early church “father.” He played a leading role in the formation of the Nicene Creed in the mid third century AD. This creed has been used by Christian churches since the 6th century AD, though was probably written hundreds of years earlier. It is used less and less frequently today in Christian liturgy.

Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic* faith. Which faith, except everyone keeps whole and undefiled, without doubt he will perish eternally. And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal. As there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensibles but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son is Almighty and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.

For as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge every person by himself to be both God and Lord, so we cannot by the catholic faith say that there are three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created or begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers, One Son, not three Sons, One Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is before or after another, none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He, therefore, that will be saved is compelled thus to think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching his Godhead and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood; Who, although he is God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking the manhood into God; One altogether, not by confusion of substance but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, So God and man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and will give an account of their own works. And they that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith which, except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

While these creeds are helpful to understanding and stating the doctrine and beliefs of followers of Jesus the Christ (Messiah), we think **John stated all of this in the fewest, clearest most impactful words:** ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** (and what follows through verse 14). The Holy Spirit authored these words, which is still the best description of Jesus. I can make this my own creed, merely by adding the words “I believe...” at the start of this passage!



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

He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

(John 1:1-5)

These five verses, five simple statements, are perhaps one of the most profound descriptions of Jesus anywhere in scripture. It simply, yet most inarguably and concretely establishes the pre-eminence of Jesus. He was not just a man. He is God Himself. This is the foundation of the entire Gospel of John, and of our belief as Christians.

