

# JOHN

## THE WORD INCARNATE

Volume 2 (Chapters 11–21)

A 13-LESSON STUDY

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REFORMED EXPOSITORY  
BIBLE STUDY

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and **RICHARD D. PHILLIPS**

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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The quoted material at the end of the boxed quotation on page 112 is from James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 5, *Triumph through Tragedy: John 18–21* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 1654.

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## SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken  
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

## INTRODUCING JOHN

The gospel of John is one of the world's true treasures. It contains many of the sayings that are most memorable and blessed to God's people. The book is so simple that children memorize their first verses from its pages and so profound that dying adults ask to hear it as they pass from this life. It is said that John is a pool safe enough for a child to wade in and deep enough for an elephant to drown in. Martin Luther wrote, "This is the unique, tender, genuine, chief Gospel. . . . Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved."<sup>1</sup>

Although this gospel does not specify its **author**, we can be sure of his identity from both internal and external evidence. The book claims to be written by an eyewitness and disciple of Jesus (21:24). We know from the other gospels that the disciples closest to Jesus were Peter, James, and John. Of these, only John is never named in this gospel—which is hard to explain apart from the author's modesty concerning himself. In his place we are told of a "beloved disciple" who is evidently both the author and the apostle John. The early church affirms this view. Irenaeus, a second-century bishop who knew people who had personally known John, attests that John, "the disciple of the Lord," wrote this gospel in Ephesus, and his view is backed up by every ancient document that addresses the subject.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know the exact **date** when John wrote his book. It is traditionally thought to be the last of the four gospels to be composed. Some

1. Quoted in James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, *The Coming of the Light: John 1–4* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 13.

2. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1, trans. W. H. Rambaut, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 414.

scholars place its writing before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. But the consensus holds that John wrote it no earlier than AD 80 and perhaps as late as the AD 90s.

Although we must surmise the gospel's author, its **main purpose** is clearly stated: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). John is sometimes called the "gospel of belief," because it was written to inspire faith in Jesus and his gospel. Specifically, it tells us that we are to believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" and also that, through faith in him, we receive "life in his name." Given this statement of purpose, we may approach the gospel of John as especially communicating these two precious themes.

The first **theme**—the gospel of John's overwhelming presentation of Jesus as the Son of God—makes it widely recommended to those who are looking for an introduction to the Christian faith. Its opening lines refer to Jesus as "the Word" who in the beginning was "with God" and "was God" (1:1). Then, toward the end of the book, the disciple Thomas believes and falls before Jesus, after his resurrection from the dead, crying, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). In between these two poles, the book presents numerous claims of Jesus's deity. John's prologue in chapter 1 describes Jesus's incarnation in terms of Isaiah 7:14's promise regarding *Immanuel* ("God with us"): "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" (1:14). Joined with John's teaching about Jesus's deity is his equal insistence on the doctrine of the Trinity, since Jesus is "the only God, who is at the Father's side" and "has made him known" (1:18).

After John's prologue comes what scholars refer to as the "Book of Signs" (1–11), which consists largely of Jesus's miracles. These further display his deity. Jesus turns water into wine in John 2; performs miraculous healings in John 4, 5, and 9; feeds more than five thousand people with a few loaves and fish, then walks on water, in John 6; and raises Lazarus from the grave in John 11. His claim to deity brings him into conflict with the religious authorities, which leads him to make even clearer statements regarding his divine nature. For instance, when Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), he deliberately takes God's most sacred self-revelation and applies it to himself (see Ex. 3:14).

John's gospel is known for its seven famous "I am" sayings. Jesus associates his ministry with God's gift of manna to Israel in the desert: "I am the bread of life" (6:35). He sets himself forth as the true source of divine blessing: "I am the light of the world" (9:5). He is "the door" (10:9), "the good shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1). These claims are clear and bold, and by them we learn how Jesus brings God's saving grace to a world that is lost in sin.

Connected to the theme of Jesus's divinity is the idea that he is "the Christ." The Greek word *Christos* is a translation of the Hebrew *Meshuach*: the long-awaited Messiah of God's people. This word means "anointed one" and refers to the three anointed offices that Jesus came to fulfill: prophet, priest, and king.

- Jesus is the true prophetic revelation of God's being and character. By his gracious nature, righteous deeds, and saving words, Jesus reveals God to all the world: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9).
- Jesus also comes as the true King of God's people, in the line of his earthly father, David. When the Roman governor Pontius Pilate claims authority over Jesus, Jesus replies to him, "My kingdom is not of this world" (18:36)—referring to the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus comes as the Priest who cleanses believers from their sins by offering himself as their true atoning sacrifice. The second main portion of John's gospel, known as the "Book of the Passion" (12–21), records the events surrounding Jesus's crucifixion and his glorious resurrection from the grave.

Jesus the Christ fulfills the work of the prophets by revealing God through his own life. He restores kingly rule over God's redeemed people, and he ministers as the true Priest by shedding his own blood, just as John the Baptist predicted (see 1:29).

If the first part of John's purpose is to persuade us that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God," the second part, and second theme, is to show that we receive eternal life through personal faith in Jesus. The most well-known verse in John—and perhaps the whole Bible—eloquently states this gospel truth: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that



whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16). The appeals that the book contains about taking up personal faith in Jesus start with Jesus’s call to his disciples in John 1. After Jesus’s first miracle, we read that “his disciples believed in him” (2:11). Jesus says that “the Son of Man [must] be lifted up [on the cross], that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (3:14–15). God the Father invests Jesus with the authority to save, and so Jesus declares, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment” (5:24). Again and again, John connects personal faith in Jesus to forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

In addition to the themes of Jesus’s deity and our salvation through faith, John includes additional content that is absent from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In particular, the early chapters of his gospel provide more scenes from Jesus’s ministry of evangelism, as the Savior calls disciples to trust and follow him. John provides new information about Jesus’s calling of the disciples and follows it with his nighttime encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus, during which Jesus tells him, “You must be born again” (3:7). Particularly uplifting is Jesus’s saving encounter with an unnamed woman by a well, whom Jesus offers the “living water” of spiritual life (4:10; see also v. 14). When the woman believes, she immediately tells the people of her village about Jesus, and they too believe. Like this woman, readers are motivated and instructed to spread the gospel by Jesus’s command at the book’s conclusion: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (20:21).

Further new material consists of Jesus’s Farewell Discourse in John 13–16, followed by his High Priestly Prayer in John 17. In these chapters, John provides great detail about Jesus’s last meal with his disciples on the night of his arrest. After humbly washing their feet, Jesus discusses at length the provision of the Holy Spirit after Jesus has departed from the world. In John 17, one of the most remarkable and informative chapters of the entire Bible, Jesus prays to the Father for his church as he stands on the brink of surrendering himself to the cross. As we listen to the Son of God praying for us, we stand like Moses on holy ground, filled with astonished adoration as Jesus’s love for our souls is revealed.

As do Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John narrates the details of Jesus’s atoning death and glorious resurrection, but this book again provides a wealth of material that is not found elsewhere. The world, in all its malice,

conducts a false trial to legitimize Jesus’s murder. Pilate, who represents the authority of man’s kingdom, cynically consigns Jesus to death despite his clear innocence. Jesus is presented to the Jewish crowd in a “crown of thorns and [a] purple robe” (19:5)—in mockery of his divine claims—and Pilate affixes a sign to his cross that reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (v. 19). As Jesus dies on the cross for our sin, he cries aloud glorious words of victory—“It is finished” (v. 30)—before giving up his life. After he rises from the grave on the third day, he meets with Mary Magdalene and “doubting” Thomas, among others, to present them with his resurrection body. The book concludes with Jesus’s tender pastoral ministry to Simon Peter, as he graciously gives him the commission “Feed my sheep” (21:17).

Countless readers have discovered the truth about Jesus and his gospel in the pages of John. It is, in fact, Jesus himself whom we meet in this book, through the ministry of God’s Holy Spirit and the words of inspired Scripture. Jesus himself promises you that if you believe in him and read this gospel in faith, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (8:32).

Richard D. Phillips  
 Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series  
 Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Bible Study series  
 Author of *John* (REC)



## LESSON 1

# THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:1–57

### THE BIG PICTURE

As we begin our study of the second half of John’s gospel, we come to a pivotal (and glorious) moment in the public ministry of Jesus Christ: his raising of Lazarus from the dead. This miraculous work (which is unique to John’s gospel) is accompanied by yet another of the “I am” statements that Jesus has been making throughout the book—this one presenting him as humanity’s ultimate hope for resurrection unto eternal life. Jesus brings Lazarus back to life—although he will face death a second time—as a foretaste of the great final resurrection yet to come.

John introduces us to Lazarus at the beginning of the chapter and tells us that he is ill, and Mary and Martha, his sisters, send urgent word to Jesus (11:1–3). Jesus immediately identifies the purpose that God has ordained for Lazarus’s illness—and he chooses to stay where he is for two more days before making the trip to Lazarus’s home in Judea (11:4–6). On the way, his disciples again struggle to understand his explanation of the actions he is taking in the wake of Lazarus’s death (11:7–16). When Martha hears that Jesus is approaching, she goes out to meet him and speaks of the belief that she has in his power (11:17–22). Jesus responds to what she says by describing himself as the “resurrection and the life” and says that those who believe in him have life everlasting (11:23–26). Martha then expresses her faith that Jesus is the “Son of God” (11:27).

Prompted by an ensuing encounter that he has with Mary and by the grief around him, Jesus then displays deep emotion (11:28–37). Yet he steps forward, gives instructions for the stone to be rolled away from the tomb, and commands Lazarus to come out (11:38–44). While this miracle leads many to believe in him (11:45), the chief priests and the Pharisees feel threatened by his popularity and power (11:46–48). With the guidance of Caiaphas, the high priest, they begin to make plans to kill him (11:49–53). The chapter concludes as Jesus retreats to the wilderness and the Jews wonder whether he will dare to show himself in public at the upcoming Passover Feast in Jerusalem (11:54–57).

**Read John 11:1–57.**

### GETTING STARTED

1. Have you ever been to a funeral or memorial service for someone whose mourners demonstrated no hope but only grief and pain? Contrast this with any other services you have attended at which the people around you, as well as the service itself, expressed great hope. What made the difference?
  
2. How often do you think about death? Why is it perhaps good for Christians to intentionally and habitually consider death—as well as the hope we have of being resurrected and experiencing the new heaven and new earth? What keeps you from thinking about these future realities more consistently?

## OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. What does this chapter demonstrate about Jesus’s sovereign and intentional plan? What does he teach his disciples about the purposes that God the Father, and he himself, have for even intense human pain and suffering?
  
4. In what different ways do people respond to Jesus throughout this passage? What is deeply encouraging about some of them—and maddening about others?
  
5. What truths about himself does Jesus teach—and directly demonstrate—by miraculously raising Lazarus from the dead? What effect does studying this chapter have on your understanding of Jesus’s identity and power?

### **Gospel of Belief, pg. 31**

The Gospel of John is sometimes called the Gospel of Belief. And if there is one place above all where this Gospel most powerfully summons us to faith in Jesus Christ, it might be here. Can there be a greater reason to believe on Jesus than his claim to hold the key to the problem of death? Jesus promises life: abundant life, and eternal life.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. What do we learn about Jesus from the description of his relationship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in the opening verses of this chapter (11:1–6)? What does Jesus do after he hears the news about Lazarus’s illness (v. 6)? What reasoning does he give for this course of action, and what does it teach us about his priorities?
  
7. What do the disciples struggle to understand, in 11:7–16, regarding Jesus’s intentions behind what he is doing? How do they demonstrate the faith they still have in Jesus, and their willingness to follow him, even when they are confused?
  
8. What does Martha reveal about her view of Jesus through what she initially says to him (11:17–22)? What does he say to give sharper focus to her hope—and what does Martha do to immediately show that she understands and accepts his teaching (11:23–27)?

### **The Lord’s Loving Timetable, pg. 11**

Jesus’ response to Lazarus’s illness shows not only his perspective on our trials, but also *his plan* for delivering us from trouble. . . . The Lord works in our lives according to his timetable and his purposes. He is loving enough not to do what we want him to do but what we need him to do.

9. What do we learn from 11:28–37 about the heart Jesus has for sufferers? What do the actions he takes and the emotions he displays in this section tell us about him? What encouragement can these verses offer us when we ourselves are suffering?
  
10. What does Jesus do, in 11:38–44, to demonstrate boldly and authoritatively the power he has over death? What details in these verses make it clear to John’s readers that Lazarus was truly, physically dead—and thus that this is a true and miraculous resurrection?
  
11. While many of the Jews go on to believe in Jesus after this miracle (11:45), it also prompts the Jewish leaders to coordinate their plots against his life even more intentionally (11:46–53). What does this remind us about the different responses we should expect to receive when we speak of Jesus, the gospel, and the resurrection? What questions are readers of John’s gospel left with as the chapter concludes (11:54–57)?

**A Voice That Wakes the Dead, pg. 59**

Jesus cried, “Lazarus, come out” (John 11:43), and the man who was dead came back to life. This is the Savior that we need, the saving Lord whom we must trust. He is the Savior whose power conquered death by his resurrection. And on that great day to come, when Christ cries out once more, it will be the voice of our loving Savior that we hear.



## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Read Psalm 16:9–11. What relation do you see between the events of John 11 and these verses? What ultimate hope must David have in view, given his own eventual death and bodily decay; and how does the conversation that Jesus has with Martha point to this hope as well?
13. Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–49. How do we know that the resurrection Paul is describing in those verses is different from the one that Lazarus experiences in our passage from John?

## THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. Question 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism—“What is the chief end of man?”—is answered in this way: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” What does our passage say that Jesus’s “chief end” is, and what actions does it lead him to take? What impact do these actions have on the people around him—and what does this teach us about the difficulties involved in pursuing our chief end?

15. While John 11 demonstrates Jesus's full divinity by showing the authority he has over life and death, it also reveals his full humanity. Jesus is God—he raises a dead man to life. Jesus is a man—he weeps with compassion as he witnesses the grief and pain of those he loves. Why is it important for us to cling to both the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ? What do we lose when we emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other?

### APPLYING THE TEXT

16. How should this passage impact the way that we think about God's hidden and sovereign purposes, even when we're experiencing pain, grief, and suffering? How should we act regarding the will of our God—even when we don't understand it?
17. What are some things you observe about Jesus in this passage that serve to increase your confidence in the prayers that you offer—and why?

18. What does this passage cause you to feel about the resurrection to come? How does it affect your thoughts and feelings about death—either your own death or that of faithful believers you know?

### PRAYER PROMPT

As you close your study of this passage with prayer today, praise God for the hope of resurrection that we have through Jesus—the “resurrection and the life”! Ask him for the faith to believe in Jesus and to cling to him through pain, grief, suffering, and even death. Pray for a humble heart so that you can accept God’s sovereign purposes, even when you do not understand them, because you know that he works for his sovereign glory—and our good—in all things.