

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. AN
OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE
OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE
OF SACRED LITERATURE**

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by Edgar Johnson Goodspeed

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EDGAR JOHNSON GOODSPEED

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FOREWORD TO THE STUDENT

The Gospel of John is perhaps the best loved and most frequently read of any of the gospels. Recent scholarship has thrown much light upon the authorship and purpose of this gospel and the part which it played in the developing thought and life of the early Christians. Investigation, although modifying some current views of this gospel, has added greatly to its value as a Christian document. Viewed in the light of its origin and purpose, it becomes replete with life, not only the life of the Master and his disciples, but with the intellectual and spiritual struggles of the Christians of the hundred years following the death of Jesus.

This course presents the gospel in the light of recent scholarship but simply and for the study of individuals and groups, in the home, church, or the community. It is one of the Outline Bible-Study Courses prepared by the American Institute of Sacred Literature, twelve similar courses being mentioned on a preceding page. This course follows the general method of all the series, giving a daily assignment for reading from the Bible, but requiring no books of reference.

Any person paying fifty cents for this book to a dealer, the publishing agents, the University of Chicago Press, or to the headquarters of the American Institute of Sacred Literature directly or through the leader of a club is considered thereby a member of the Institute and may register his name as such by mail at the headquarters, the University of Chicago, without further charge. Upon application, question sheets containing all the review questions printed in this book, with spaces for written answers, will be sent him. These question sheets may be filled out and returned to the Institute for credit and certificate. Work is not graded. The certificate is given as a recognition of the fact that the work has been done to the best ability of the student, which may vary according to previous preparation and general knowledge of the subject. In applying for question sheets, the printed form contained in this pamphlet may be used.

In the publication of these courses it is first of all assumed that the work is to be done by the student and that the leader of the class is seeking to gather up the results of the student's work rather than to assume the attitude of a teacher. In those groups, however, which are taught in the fashion of a Sunday school or other weekly class, in which no work upon the part of the student can be counted upon, the passages may be read and discussed at the class period. For all groups a special pamphlet of suggestions to leaders is provided in which special topics for discussion are suggested and entertaining features for meetings of the class outlined.

Whether working alone or in a group, see that your name is registered at the headquarters of the Institute and that you are receiving all the privileges to which your membership entitles you.

The Institute is a department of the University of Chicago through which non-resident biblical and religious study courses are conducted.

These courses embrace thorough correspondence work leading to University credit, as well as reading and study courses which require less rigid work.

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INTRODUCTION

The first Christians had no written Gospel. When they first came into the fellowship of the church they learned a short compend of the doings and sayings of Jesus which Paul calls the "tradition" or "traditions" because it was "handed down" from older Christians to those who later came into the churches. Paul gives two quotations from this "tradition" as he knew it (I Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3). Nothing more was needed, for early Christians were more interested in the glorified Christ seated at the right hand of God than in the historical Jesus of Galilee, and they were expecting his speedy return on the clouds of heaven to usher in the messianic régime. No one thought of writing books. The few letters, perhaps twelve in all, which have come down to us from the first thirty-five years of Christian history were each written to serve some immediate and pressing need, not for preservation as books.

In the seventh decade of the first century something occurred to change this. The earliest Gospel was written. This was not simply the reduction to writing of the familiar "tradition," for it does not accord with the two fragments of that tradition which we find in First Corinthians. The earliest Gospel embodies a rival "tradition," differing at important points from that of Paul. How is this to be explained? And above all how came a Gospel to be written at all when men were expecting the speedy end of the age? The ancient explanation was, that upon the death of Peter, Mark, who had served as his interpreter in his preaching among the Greek-speaking congregations of the West, sought to preserve from oblivion the memorabilia of Jesus which he had often heard Peter relate, and so committed them to writing. This idea is clearly reflected in II Pet. 1:15, and in Justin *Dialogue* 106.3, and it is expressly stated in a fragment of Papias preserved in Eusebius *Church History* 3.39.15. It is not improbable that the Gospel of Mark originated in this informal way, and many of its peculiar traits are thus explained.

The Gospel of Mark with all its limitations showed the churches how useful a written Gospel might be, and led to its expansion into the Gospel of Matthew, in which much other material, especially sayings of Jesus, is

combined with the material of Mark. Another effort to improve and supplement Mark was made by Luke, who sought to produce an orderly historical record. These books were much more popular and influential among early Christians than Mark was, probably because these improved forms of it appeared so soon. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written within ten years after the appearance of Mark, and Matthew remained for a long time the favorite Gospel of the early church.

The defects of Mark were largely supplied in these Gospels that were built upon it. But they were not wholly met even in them. The Gospel was still cast in highly Jewish forms, although its public was now mainly gentile. It was not related to contemporary philosophical thought in any way, and the picture these Gospels gave of Jesus was very unlike the Christ of Paul's teaching. Early in the second century a Gospel was composed at Ephesus to supply these wants. It transplanted the Gospel into Greek soil, set it in relation to Stoicism, the leading philosophy of the time, and represented Jesus in a way much nearer to the Pauline picture of him, glorified at God's right hand. Opposition to contemporary Judaism and opposition to the sect of John the Baptist appear as subordinate motives in the new Gospel, and there is besides a strong symbolic element in it which must be taken account of.

A comparison of the Gospel with the Synoptic Gospels shows that the writer is acquainted with them and in a great many instances makes use of materials taken from them, at the same time that he undertakes in other points to supplement and even to correct what they have said. This and the strongly Pauline color of the thought of the Gospel makes it very difficult to accept the testimony of the epilogue (chap. 21) that John or any other intimate personal follower of Jesus wrote the Gospel. On the other hand, there is much to show that valuable historical materials not supplied by the synoptists were used by the writer, and these may have gone back to the hand of John the apostle, or John the disciple, if, as is sometimes supposed, they were different men. But this Gospel is to be viewed less as a historical account of the ministry of Jesus than as the writer's effort to interpret his own profound experience of the religious significance of Jesus for other men of his own world of ideas. His aim is in large part theological, and so he came to be known in the early church as "St. John the Theologian."

* Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic gospels.

The purpose of the Gospel is stated in its closing sentences to be that its readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that they may thus come to have life in his name. Its conception of faith and salvation seems sometimes wholly intellectual (belief that Jesus is the Christ), sometimes wholly mystical (a life of inward union with him). We are to think of it as designed to promote faith in Jesus as the Christ and the source of spiritual life, and to reinterpret the religious significance of Jesus in broader terms which should be more readily intelligible to its own day.

In doing this it sometimes departs widely from the synoptists and even from Paul. They had taught that Jesus must return to complete his messianic work.¹ The new Gospel declares that he finished his work on earth, and that his promised return has already taken place in the coming of the Spirit, the comforter, into the hearts of believers. Matthew and Luke seek to explain his divine nature by the virgin birth. The new Gospel explains it in a loftier way by finding in him the eternal divine Word (Logos) made flesh. Paul had greatly emphasized the death of Jesus. The new Gospel finds his supreme significance in his life, in which the divine life was manifested. This idea, which we call the incarnation, is really central in this Gospel. Not less striking is its emphasis upon the universal character of Christianity: Jesus is not simply the Messiah of the Jews, but, as the divine Logos, is the source of true life for all mankind. It has, moreover, a splendid ideal of the possibilities of Christian development under the influence of the life of God which may be shared through union with Christ. "Its great ideas of revelation, life, love, truth, and freedom, its doctrine of the Spirit as ever guiding the Christian consciousness into larger vision and achievement, and its insistence upon Jesus as the supreme revelation of God and the source of spiritual life have given it unique and permanent religious worth."²

¹ Read Ernest F. Scott, *The Historical and Religious Value of the Fourth Gospel; Modern Religious Problems* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909); Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Story of the New Testament*, chap. xvii (The University of Chicago Press, 1916).

² *The Story of the New Testament*, p. 123. It is the intention of the author to present this course so simply that no reference books will be required. For the benefit of those who wish to make the work more comprehensive, books will be mentioned from time to time.

STUDY I

THE PROLOGUE (JOHN 1:1-18); THE PERIOD OF
BEGINNINGS (1:19-4:54)

First day.—§ 1. *The prologue.* Read John 1:1-18 through and note in it the expression of the great ideas of the Gospel, *incarnation, revelation, regeneration, communication of Life.* Religion has been described as the life of God in the soul of man. Does this throw any light upon these leading ideas?

Second day.—Read John 1:1-2. Cf. Gen. 1:1. Does the evangelist intentionally begin his Gospel with the opening words of Genesis? Is the "Word" the prophetic revelatory word of Jehovah which came to the prophets (Jer. 1:4; Joel 1:1, etc.) or the metaphysical "word" or *Logos* (reason) of Stoic philosophy, or are these identified by the writer, as they were by Philo of Alexandria fifty years before? In any case, what is the meaning of finding in Jesus the embodiment of the Word?

Third day.—Read John 1:3. Compare the idea of Christ in creation in Heb. 1:2 and especially in Col. 1:15-17. Colossians has been called "the connecting link between the Pauline writings and the Fourth Gospel." Why?

Fourth day.—Read John 1:4. The Word was not only the medium of creation, it was the source of life and light for men. Life means in John the divine life, and light means truth, or divine reality. The attainment of this higher life admits one to the light, the divine reality.

Fifth day.—Read John 1:5. The description of the Word as the seat of light is a way of saying that God had always been seeking to reveal himself to men. Light by its very nature tends to show itself. "Involved in God's inmost nature there was the will to shine forth and communicate himself to his creatures" (Scott). What in view of these facts is meant by "The darkness apprehended [i.e., admitted, appropriated] it not"? Sum up for yourself the conception of the *Logos* gathered from those five verses.

Sixth day.—Read John 1:6-8. John the Baptist is introduced as though already known to the reader. What is affirmed of him in these verses? What would this mean for any who still followed John's baptism without having accepted Jesus? Cf. Acts 18:25; 19:3. Does this definite subordination of John to Jesus appear again in John? Cf. 1:20, 27, 29, 33, 36.

Seventh day.—Read John 1:9-11. The identification of Jesus with the light already suggested in vs. 7 is now made more explicit. The evangelist forecasts