

The Gospels

LESSON
FIVE

The Gospel According to John Faculty Forum



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Contents

Question 1:	Why should we be concerned with the Bible’s human authors?.....	1
Question 2:	When was the Gospel of John written?	2
Question 3:	How might the place where John wrote his gospel have influenced its shape and content?	3
Question 4:	Who was John’s original audience?	4
Question 5:	Why did John write his gospel?	5
Question 6:	Why is John’s gospel so different from the other three?.....	5
Question 7:	What did John mean when he called Jesus the “Son of God”?	6
Question 8:	What was so significant about Jesus’ “I am” statements in the Gospel of John?	8
Question 9:	What was the relationship between Jesus and the temple?	9
Question 10:	What might the term “Word of God” have meant to John’s original audience?	12
Question 11:	How might our understanding of Jesus as the Word of God influence our interpretation of John’s gospel?	14
Question 12:	Has the church always affirmed the full divinity of Christ?	15
Question 13:	Why did John refer to Jesus’ miracles as “signs”?	16
Question 14:	In John’s gospel, what is belief?	16
Question 15:	How did John describe eternal life?	17
Question 16:	Why did John connect love for God with obedience to God?.....	18
Question 17:	Does Jesus’ Farewell Discourse apply to all Christians, or was it only intended for the apostles?	20
Question 18:	What was the main point of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer?	21
Question 19:	Why was Jesus so willing to be crucified?	22

The Gospels

Lesson Five: The Gospel According to John

Faculty Forum

With

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Question 1:

Why should we be concerned with the Bible's human authors?

Christian tradition has attributed authorship of the fourth gospel to the apostle John. But does it really matter who wrote it? Evangelicals believe that all Scripture is the inspired Word of God. So, if the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Scriptures, why should we be concerned with the Bible's human authors?

Dr. Brian Vickers

We know that the Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture. We believe that as Christians. But we have to remember that he inspired human authors, and so it's obviously important, that we be aware that the Scripture is inspired, "breathed ... by God," as Paul said. But we have to remember that God doesn't inspire the writers of Scripture in a way that sort of overrides them as individuals, as people. So it's very important, we have to remember, these are human authors and they're using human language, and they're communicating with human beings. And so we need to pay attention to them because they are the messenger, so to speak. You could put it that way. They're God's messengers to us — to the people they're writing to and then also to us. We have to remember, I mean, God accommodates himself to us, you know, in every way. And one of the greatest ways that God has accommodated himself to us is by giving us his Word in words that we can understand. I mean, God's not limited to language. God's not limited to any language at any time. God accommodates himself and speaks to us through human beings, and since he's speaking to us through human beings, we have to take those people seriously and see them as the ones who are most directly communicating to us what God is saying. And so if we kind of skip over or dismiss the human authors of Scripture, in many ways, we're dismissing the divine author of Scripture by ignoring the fact that he, in fact, spoke through human beings.

Dr. David Lamb

As we think about the issue of how the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible, it's actually a lot more complicated than I think we sometimes think. There's a Caravaggio painting from, I guess, it's the seventeenth century that has Matthew sitting there at his easel, and there is an angel basically whispering things into his ear, and at some points in time, guiding his hand. I think that's our perception — that the Holy Spirit spoke directly, maybe through angels, to give an exact transcript of the biblical authors. And I think that certainly could have happened, but I don't think that's probably what happened most of the time. We think about different examples. I think looking at the Gospels is a great example for this, because we've got four gospels. Why do we have four gospels? You would think, why don't we just have one story, the biography of Jesus? But there are four gospels, and each of them are different, and it's one Holy Spirit that was inspiring each of those four authors. So I'm assuming that the character of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John affected how they wrote.

Why does Mark include the cleansing in the temple at the end, whereas in John's gospel, the cleansing of the temple shows up really early? Mark is doing something different than John. Why does John include these long theological speeches and treatises? John is just far more theological, whereas Mark, everything is fast paced; it's actions, it's an action flick — you know, this happens, Jesus heals this person, and immediately something else happens, then Jesus goes and casts out a demon, and then Jesus may give a short little teaching, but we are far less likely to get the long speeches. So we're not 100% certain, but a lot of scholars think that Mark was influenced by Peter. Peter was a fisherman, a kind of a blue-collar guy and was concerned... a very active guy, he was involved. Where John, well, John was young when he was a disciple, but he seems to have more of a theological interest. And to understand what was going on in John's lifetime when John's gospel was written, or later on probably when the book of Revelation was written, John's personality and his temperament influenced how he wrote.

Question 2:**When was the Gospel of John written?**

It's helpful to know when a book of the Bible was written because language and culture tend to vary as history progresses. Moreover, both the Holy Spirit and the apostle John wanted this gospel to be clear and relevant to the circumstances of its original audience. So, it's valuable to ask, when was the Gospel of John written?

Dr. Peter Walker

Mark and Luke would be from the early 60s A.D. Perhaps Matthew is early 70s A.D. What about John's gospel? I think it's very likely that John is also after 70 A.D. There was a scholar, John Robinson, who wanted to argue for the priority of John, that John was the first gospel to be written, and he did a good job to show just how much early material there is in John's gospel. But I think the majority would see the

Fall of Jerusalem has happened by the time John writes his gospel, not least because he makes such a great deal about the fact that Jesus is the new temple. In fact, he's the replacement for the temple, and what's more, we rejoice that Jesus himself is that temple. And so much of the gospel, by the way, takes place in the temple, in the first half of the gospel. So, probably after 70. The early church tradition has the apostle John living to a ripe old age, even into the reign of the Emperor Trajan, who starts his reign in A.D. 96. Well, it doesn't mean to say that John has to write his gospel in the last days before he dies in A.D. 97. He could be writing it at any time between 70 and 95, and I think it's a little bit arbitrary to push it very late just because we know that the apostle John happened to live a long time. So, perhaps in the late 70s or early 80s A.D., John is there reflecting on his original memory of Jesus. That's what gives the gospel such incredible power, because if John was a teenager when he first met Jesus, it's got all the memories of fresh excitement of meeting Jesus back in A.D. 30 or whenever it was. And now he's got maturity at the end of his life, and putting those two together, the youthfulness of knowing Jesus and the maturity of having walked with Jesus for the next 50 years. And I think that's what gives John its two-level kind of reality, it's so simple, and it's so deep. It's so original, and it is so mature. And John's gospel is a late document, but it's not late enough that it's unreliable. It's late and mature because it's in touch, through the apostle John, with the original.

Question 3:

How might the place where John wrote his gospel have influenced its shape and content?

Most scholars believe that John wrote his gospel when he was living in the city of Ephesus. Recognizing that John's own voice can be heard in his gospel alongside the Holy Spirit's voice, how might John's location have influenced what he wrote? How might the place where John wrote his gospel have influenced its shape and content?

Rev. Larry Cockrell

From what I have studied, John was living at the time in Ephesus in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey, and Turkey — well, I would say Ephesus at that time was a very important urban center of the Roman Empire. And when you stop to think about, you know, the area in which he actually wrote the gospel, his audience consisted of Jews as well as Gentiles. And so, recognizing the diversity of the audience he actually had to write to, he took great pains to make certain that when he was using Jewish customs or terms that he could obviously, you know, relate them in a way that Gentiles or non-Jewish readers could understand. In addition to that, he would have to translate a lot of the Aramaic writings into the Greek language for them to actually understand as well. And so it would impact to some degree his ability to communicate, but however, from what research of history has shown, he was pretty effective in making that transition or translation.

Dr. Wai-ye Ng (translation)

Church tradition tells us that John wrote his gospel in Ephesus. If that's the case, then he was in a Gentile environment. This can help us understand why his narrative, style, and use of phrases are more Hellenistic than the other gospels.

**Question 4:
Who was John's original audience?**

Like all Scripture, there's a sense in which the Gospel of John was written for the whole church through all the ages. But John also had a specific original audience in mind when he wrote his gospel. And his purposes for his original audience undoubtedly influenced what he wrote. So, who was John's original audience?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

One of the more controverted subjects in regard to the fourth gospel, or the Gospel of John as it's called, is really, who is the audience of this gospel? On the one end of the spectrum you have scholars who are prepared to say, "Well, this is the gospel for the philosophers, for the Greco-Roman world, for the Gentiles." That's why it starts, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." On the other end of the spectrum are those who say, "No, it looks like the audience is most definitely Jewish Christians." Which is it? It does seem to me that this is a gospel that is written for diaspora Jewish Christians. And so, in fact, they have to have explained to them a lot of the aspects of the story that they would not understand because they have never lived in the Holy Land. For example, in the beginning of John 4, we have this little explanatory comment: "Jews don't share a common cup with the Samaritans." Now a Jew who lived in Judea or Galilee certainly wouldn't need this kind of answer. In fact there are more explanatory parenthetical remarks in the Gospel of John than all the other three gospels put together. So it's clear that the author is writing for an audience that doesn't know an awful lot about what religion in the Holy Land was like in various ways, and yet they know enough about Judaism that they understand what Passover is. They understand some of the major theological terms that a Jew would use. They understand about clean and unclean and *mikvahs* and that sort of stuff. So it does look like what is going on in the fourth gospel is that the author is writing for Jewish Christians. I think probably in Asia Minor. Ephesus is a traditional answer as to where the audience was in this gospel, and that makes very good sense because there you have very Hellenized Jews, Jews that have integrated well with the larger Greco-Roman society. They know something about Judaism. They don't know it anywhere near as well as the Pharisees or Sadducees who lived in the Holy Land would have known. Therefore, there has to be some explanation, but there are also some assumptions about some things that they would be taken for granted as knowing. For example, that the Hebrew Scriptures are the Bible for Jews. And you could cite that as a sacred source, and it would be taken as a word of authority.

Question 5: **Why did John write his gospel?**

One of the most significant factors that influenced the content of the fourth gospel was John's purpose or reason for writing. In fact, John was the only gospel writer who explicitly stated his purpose in his gospel. So, what did he want this book to accomplish? Why did John write his gospel?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, very helpfully John tells us why he's written his gospel. So in the end of John 20, he said that the reason he'd written these things is in order that we may see that Jesus is the Christ, and that we may come to believe in him, and that by believing we may have life in his name. And so he claims in the foregoing to have demonstrated that Jesus is the Christ, and he — particularly through his recording of the signs that point to Jesus's identity and he offers to his readers the opportunity to, in a sense, see Jesus through his eyes. And that as we see Jesus as John saw him, we too may come to believe in him and subsequently to have life in his name as well. So John, very helpfully actually, tells us the reason why he's written is so we might experience what John has already experienced.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

John very clearly expressed his reason for writing his gospel at the end of chapter 20: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." In light of this, I believe that John's goal for his gospel was for people to know Jesus and believe in him. This includes making believers out of those who do not yet believe, and strengthening the faith of those who already believe.

Question 6: **Why is John's gospel so different from the other three?**

Scholars typically set John apart from the other gospels because it shares so little material with them. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because they resemble each other so closely. But John's gospel is distinct in both style and structure. Why is John's gospel so different from the other three?

Dr. Peter Walker

The differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels have caused no end of debate amongst scholars. What's the reason for it? Well, John himself says that he's been selective. He said, look, you could write tomes and reams of material about Jesus, and these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. So we know that he's been selective, and that could explain the reason. Perhaps he's already seen Mark's gospel, knows Mark's gospel, and says, "I don't need to repeat that. I want to give you some more material." So, to see John's gospel as selective and also as deliberately complementary, adding to what we have in the

Synoptics, is one of the key ways to understand the differences. I think after that you can then say, well, John would probably say, I'm wanting to give a story which teaches that Jesus was eternal, and I'm going to tell you a story, which rather than starting on the human side and gradually working up to the eternal, divine nature of Jesus, says let's cut to the quick, and let's tell the story, as it were, knowing the end of the story — Jesus is divine, and he came as genuinely from God. And I think that's governed his selection very much. That's why he begins with talking about Jesus being the eternal Word of God and the Son of God in a very strong sense. That's why at the beginning of John's gospel he sort of reveals all and says straightaway, these are some of the titles of Jesus, and this is who he is. We don't have a sort of gradual learning as we do in the other gospels.

Another thing I think which is important to him is, he's writing for a Jewish audience, perhaps particularly, and wants to help them, and he uses the imagery of the temple, the temple, which meant so much to Jewish people, and he says, look, this is going to be one of the chief ways you are going to understand who Jesus is. The temple in Jesus' day was the place of divine presence, where God was really thought to be present on earth. And what he's trying to do is say, Jesus was the divine presence on earth. He says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." There's that Old Testament imagery of the tabernacle, which became the temple. And I think he's trying to develop that theme quite a bit, to try and help people to see that Jesus really was God's presence on earth. Just like the temple was, so now Jesus is, and I think that explains many of his differences.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, John's gospel obviously looks quite different to Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Synoptic Gospels. John doesn't start with the birth narratives, for example, he goes straight into Jesus's adult life, and John has collected together a number of sayings and "signs," as he calls them, around the number seven. So there are seven "I am" sayings, there are seven signs. And he puts these together to really try and demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we may come to believe as John has come to believe. He has arranged his gospel broadly around Jesus's public ministry so, like the other gospels, the first half of it concentrates more on his public teaching ministry, and the second half, moving towards his death on the cross. But he's less concerned with the chronology and more interested, I think, in making sure that we really understand the identity of the Christ and that we may come to have faith in him as John, the author, has done too.

Question 7:

What did John mean when he called Jesus the "Son of God"?

One of the most prominent themes in the fourth gospel is John's assertion that Jesus is the Son of God. Of course, Jesus is called the "Son of God" throughout the New Testament, where this title is typically synonymous with "Christ" or "Messiah." But

John's gospel uses this title in ways that indicate something very special about the Messiah. What did John mean when he called Jesus the "Son of God"?

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

Jesus had many titles, one being the Son of God. So when John refers to Jesus as the Son of God, he is making direct references to the deity of God, or the deity of Jesus. And we see that during that time frame there was concerns — is Jesus “as a man,” and could he be truly God? So when John references, it was specifically pointing to the deity, that Jesus is the Christ, he is the Messiah, the Son of God. The people of that time would have readily understood that reference and the association with God.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

When John called Jesus “the Son of God,” I believe this had a sacred meaning, and this meaning might even have transcended the traditional Jewish concept of the Messiah. Later in history, the early church appealed to John's gospel to formulate and prove the doctrine of the Trinity. I think they were right to do this.

Dr. Peter Walker

Now the phrase, “Son of God,” actually had been used in the Old Testament to describe ordinary human beings who were special in some way. The king of Israel was known sometimes as the son of God. And John wants us to realize that when he's using the phrase, Son of God, he's actually using it in a distinctive sense. It doesn't mean an ordinary human being; it means someone who's Son of God in an eternal, ontological sense, that's the technical word. And it's because, I think, he wants to rule out misunderstandings of the Son of God in this weaker sense and wants us to be quite clear that he's using Son of God of an eternal being, that before he ever uses the word, Son of God, he introduces instead that Jesus is the Word of God. And he pegs out his description — Jesus is eternal, he's preexistent, he is the source of life — and by the end of his prologue, even though the word “Son of God” hasn't been used, and even the word “Jesus” is only just used at the end of it, we have had it made quite, quite clear that we're dealing with an eternal, preexistent person. So when he then starts using the phrase, “Son of God,” we know what he means.

Dr. Steven Tsoukalas

The key to me is, what he meant by “Son of God” is, the very first verse of John. “In the beginning was the Word ... The Word was with God ... The Word was God.” If I were to paraphrase the three clauses of John 1:1, I would paraphrase this way: “In the beginning was the Word,” that is, when everything was created was created, the preincarnate Christ always was. Clause two: “And the Word was with God.” The Word, the preincarnate Christ always was with the Father. “And the Word was God.” The preincarnate Christ always was in his very nature, his very essence, God. So we have clause 2, two distinct persons. The Word was with, always, the Father, and yet clause 3 of John 1:1 states what the Father was by nature or is by nature, the Word shares that same nature. So you have here the beginnings of Trinitarian theology. You have the distinctness of persons of Jesus and the Father, yet they share the same essence, nature. And verse 3 of John 1 is very important. It talks about all things

coming into being through the Son, or by the Son. The “all things” there came into being. The Greek verb is “*ginomai*,” they “come to be.” What a stark contrast between the past tense of “*eimi*,” which is “I am” in John 1:1. The past tense of “I am” is “he was.” So the verb for Jesus is “I am,” past tense, “he was.” But the verb for the created order in John 1:3, the “all things” is *ginomai*, “to come into existence.” There is a stark contrast between that which is God and that which is the created order.

So what does John mean by Son of God when he applies that to Jesus? Well, in part, he means God the Son. You can reverse the nouns. Son of God means God the Son. He shares the very nature of the Father. And indeed in John 5:18, he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Those are John’s words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Making himself equal with God the Father. So, Son of God in John means, in part, God the Son, equal with God the Father, a distinct person but equal in nature. And, of course, John also writes in 1:14, “The Word became flesh.” There’s that “became” again. His humanity became in a point in time, and he joined this created humanity, full humanity, with his eternal nature as God the Son, so that for John, and indeed for the whole New Testament, and of course for the whole Bible, Jesus is fully God and fully man — fully God, fully human. That’s what the phrase “Son of God” means in the gospel of John.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

What John wanted his audience to understand and know was that Jesus Christ indeed was God, and so he was speaking to the authenticity of our Lord and speaking to his deity. Even in the gospels he would obviously include the words of the Lord where the Lord would even say that he and the Father were one, speaking in terms of their essence and their being. So there, in and of itself, is a declaration of his deity. In addition to that, John would also make statements to the effect that Christ had come from the Father where the Father, you know, resided in heaven, and he came to do the Father’s will obviously by making known the Father to mankind, and then atoning for sin, thereby reconciling, you know, man to his Father. In addition to that, John refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Creator, and to be the Creator, he had to be with the Father in the beginning before he obviously was sent into the world to atone for the sin of the world.

Question 8:

What was so significant about Jesus’ “I am” statements in the Gospel of John?

One way John emphasized Jesus’ unique identity was by quoting Jesus’ “I am” statements. In these statements, Jesus identified himself using metaphors that featured the phrase “I am.” But modern readers often have trouble recognizing this as noteworthy language. Why were these statements special? What was so significant about Jesus’ “I am” statements in the Gospel of John?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Well, there are a variety of things one can say about the “I am” statements in the Gospel of John. And some of them are perfectly straightforward and some of them are much more theologically loaded statements. What’s interesting about this is that most of them that have predicates: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “I am the vine; you are the branches.” “I am the bread of life.” What’s interesting about all of those “I am” sayings plus a predicate is that those are the very things that were said about wisdom in the Old Testament, that God’s wisdom is like bread that you eat that nourishes the soul. It’s like living water that refreshes the person, all of these sorts of things. It’s like a vine that grows and produces fruit. All of these things were said about the wisdom of God and the Word of God in the Old Testament and old Jewish wisdom literature, but now it’s being said about a person. Jesus is the incarnation of the wisdom of God, and so the “I am” sayings are predicating of Jesus what previously was said of the personification of wisdom in early Judaism. But then we have the “I am” sayings that are without predicate: “Before Abraham was, I am.” Now what’s really interesting about that is that in the Greek, “*Ego eime*” is frankly, redundant. The word “*eime*” means, “I am” — the verbal form of “I am”. “*Ego*” means “I”, so you don’t really need “I, I am.” You just need “*eime*” not “*Ego eime*”. So it’s emphatic — “I myself am.” What I think is that he’s stating his preexistence, which is something that’s in fact said in John 1. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.” He was with God in the beginning. Before the creation of everything, the Word of God existed. I think, “Before Abraham was, I am” is a statement about the preexistence of the divine Son of God, and it causes enormous offense on the occasion. Maybe most interestingly is that there are seven “I am” sayings, and in early Judaism seven is the number of perfection. Not only are there seven “I am” sayings, there are seven sign miracles, there are seven discourses that go with the seven “I am” sayings. So what we’re being told here is in the “I am” sayings and in these discourses and in the sign miracles is that God’s perfect revelation of himself has come in Jesus.

Question 9:**What was the relationship between Jesus and the temple?**

John’s gospel records many different times that Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem, and even records that Jesus explicitly identified himself with the temple. Why did John include so many references to the temple? What did it have to do with Jesus’ role as Christ or Messiah? What was the relationship between Jesus and the temple?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in John’s gospel is just how much of it is set in the temple in Jerusalem. And it’s obviously very important for John to convey some kind of connection between Jesus and the temple. I think what’s going on here is that for Jewish people, the temple was the place where they believed that God’s *shekinah* glory had once upon dwelt, and there’s a bit of a dispute as to whether it still dwelt

there at the time of Jesus, but that's what it was really meant to be. And so John portrays Jesus as now being a similar divine presence on earth, just like the temple and then you notice that this goes all through his gospel. He begins in John 1:14 with this phrase, "the Word of God tabernacled," — or "dwelt" — "amongst us." It's the temple word again. Then in John 2 you have Jesus going into the temple and the cleansing of the temple. And in that conversation Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." And John makes a little comment, "He was talking about the temple of his body." What's John doing there? He's saying, just as the temple was, so now Jesus is God's presence, and we don't need the old Jerusalem temple. We now need Jesus; we've been given Jesus, and that's great. And then through the rest of these opening sections of John's gospel, it's uncanny how much relates to the temple still.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The relation of the temple to Jesus is very, very important, and Jesus comes as the fulfillment of the temple. Now, how does he do this? Well, it's very clear that he sees himself as the fulfillment of the temple, John 2. You think of it when he's dealing with the religious leaders. He'll say, "Destroy this temple in three days and I will rebuild it." And they say, well, you know, "How is this possible? How can you build this temple in three days?" And John adds that sort of parentheses there, well, "After his resurrection we understood that he was referring to himself." So, Jesus sees himself as the new temple, as the fulfillment of the temple. It's important to realize that the temple in the Old Testament is really the meeting place between God and his people. You think of that "Holy of Holies" where even though God is all-present, he uniquely dwells with his people. It's the place where sacrifice would take place. It's where the priest would go into the presence representing the people. All of that symbolized God's presence with his people, the means of atonement, the means of provision by which he could be their God and they could be his people. Jesus as the fulfillment of this is the one who in his very person, and in his very work is the one who is the mediator. He is our priest. He is the one who brings God's presence to pass. He is into very self, Emmanuel, God with us. He is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one who brings what it points forward to, to its end. He brings the sacrifices to an end. He now opens up access. You think of the New Testament, the new covenant reality that we have direct access, quite contrast with the Old Testament people of God where they could only, through one priest once a year have access. He is now the one who is the mediator; he gives us access to the Father. Through him, we now can come directly to God, and through him, we then by extension are temples where the Spirit of God dwells with us. We are now in intimate relationship. The barriers are removed. So he is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one to which the temple pointed.

Dr. Greg Perry

In John's gospel, in chapter 2, Jesus talks about his body as the temple of God. And we see that for several reasons. One, it's a particular emphasis in John's gospel to portray Jesus as the fulfillment of all of the Jewish festivals, of these particular symbols that are so important from the Old Testament like the brazen serpent for

example, manna from heaven in chapter 6, the bread of life. So we see John portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of these aspects of Jewish worship and of Israel's Scriptures. But also there's a particular important relationship between Messiah and temple in Jewish thought. And one of the things that the Messiah would do would be to come and to fulfill the function of the temple. As David helped to build the temple, the Son of David would also fulfill the function of the temple. And we would see the restoration of what the enemies of God's people had destroyed, he would fulfill. So, Jesus is saying that the temple's going to be destroyed, that's an act of judgment against God's people, but also it's going to be rebuilt. Not the physical temple, but "my body is going to be raised up." And so that important relationship between temple and Messiah is fulfilled in Jesus. And the power and presence of God with his people is no longer to be understood just in a physical place, but in the physical person of Jesus the Son of God. So these imagery from the Old Testament is so important for understanding John's Christology and we see that in Jesus' reference to his body as the temple.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The temple in the Old Testament was God's special presence among his people. It was lifted; it was raised in the community; it was life in the midst of death; it was the Garden of Eden in the midst of a fallen world. And there's a sense in which, as Jonah learned the hard way, that God is everywhere. He's omnipresent; he can't be avoided. But there's another sense from an Old Testament and a New Testament perspective, that God is specially present in particular places, and the temple was God's special presence on earth; it was the way in which he encountered his people. Again, to use language that's familiar in our tradition: the temple is God's sacramental presence, a physical reality that exhibits God's presence among his people. So, when the New Testament begins to pick up on this theme — in John 1, for example, Jesus "tabernacles" among his people — he is the actual presence in the temple of God, there for his people. It's his salvific presence, his life-giving presence. And then you also have that kind of enigmatic, cryptic statement that Jesus says when he passes by the temple, and he says, "Tear this temple down, and in three days I'll build it up again." And they laughed at Jesus because they knew the second took years to construct under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and subsequent generations, but they didn't know that Jesus was talking about himself. He's the temple. He is God's presence among his people. And that presence among his people is our salvation. It's our redemption. He is God's temple.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

John's gospel indicates that Jesus fulfilled the function of the temple. In the Old Testament, the holy temple was the place where God could be with his people, and where the people of God could worship him and be near to him. So, in John 4, in the discussion about the place of worship, the Jewish people said that the proper place was the temple. But Jesus has now brought this temple into a perfect state. He has become the mediator through whom human beings can approach God. Only by relying on Jesus Christ can we be with God. Jesus died for us and completed our salvation, so that we can receive the true life that he gives. Because of Christ, we are

allowed to be with God and to live in him. In this way, Jesus has replaced or completed the function typified by the Old Testament temple.

Question 10:

What might the term “Word of God” have meant to John’s original audience?

One of the most distinctive aspects of John’s gospel is that it begins by calling Jesus the “Word of God.” The meaning of the Greek term *logos*, which we translate “word,” is debated by theologians. Often, the meaning they attribute to it reflects their understanding of the ethnicity and background of John’s original audience. What might the term “Word of God” have meant to John’s original audience?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

The Gospel of John begins with a prologue, and if we ask, “Why is Jesus called the Word of God?” This comes from the old Jewish wisdom literature, really. What we’re being told in Proverbs 8 and Proverbs 9 and later Jewish wisdom literature, like the Wisdom of Solomon, is that this personified wisdom person was there with God helping in the act of creation. And so what’s happened is that a personification in Proverbs now becomes a person in John 1, and Jesus is called this Word or wisdom of God that was with God in the beginning and took on flesh and dwelt amongst us.

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

“*Logos*” was a very significant and important word, and we can go back to the Greek philosophers, Heraclitus who used the word “*logos*” to mean the reasoning, that which kind of held things together. And then we can talk about the stoics who also used the word “logic.” To the stoics, they knew something was accountable for creation, again, that started all that exists out here. And even for Aristotle, “the *logos*” was that grand intelligence that held the world together. So now, when John says, “In the beginning was the Word,” or in the beginning was the *Logos*, he’s speaking directly to an audience that valued intelligence, that valued knowledge, and to tell them that this knowledge, this intelligence that, you know, created the world and held it together — this which you’re taking about, this *Logos*, is Jesus, that he is the Christ, this person that here walked amongst you. So he was presenting it to a specific audience for a specific purpose, for them to understand in their own intelligence and their own knowledge that this which they were talking about for ages is Jesus the Christ.

Dr. Steven Cowan

John begins his gospel with this very interesting verse: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The word that is translated “Word” there is the Greek word *logos*. And there is a lot of discussion over the background to this term. I believe that there probably are a multifaceted dimension, or dimensions, to John’s use of this term *logos*. There is very likely a connection to earlier Jewish writings, like from the Jewish philosopher Philo, as well

as other intertestamental Jewish writings that connect the term *logos* to the personification of wisdom, in the book of Proverbs, for example, where wisdom is portrayed as a person that speaks and does things. And there may be some connection with the *logos* there. But even beyond that, and maybe even more directly, there is almost certainly a connection of this term “*logos*” to stoic philosophy that was around during the time that John wrote his gospel. You may recall from the book of Acts that the apostle Paul spoke to stoic and epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17. The stoics believed in this concept called “the *logos*.” They actually used that same Greek word. And for the stoics, “the *logos*” was a rational principle, this impersonal principle that governed the universe. It was kind of like a natural law that made things work in an orderly way and helped explain why the flowers grow, and the rain falls, and why rocks go to the ground when you let go of them, and things like that. So “the *logos*” was this rational principle that governed the universe and helped make sense out of the fact that it worked in a regular and orderly way. And I think that at least part of what John is doing there is he’s trying to connect Christ and Jesus to this stoic concept in a very interesting way. And so he begins his gospel by saying, “In the beginning was the *Logos*.” And the Greek readers of this book would have said, “Okay, yeah, I believe that already.” But then John says, “I know you believe that already, but let me tell you something you don’t know — and the *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us.” So I think that is at least part of what John is up to with the use of that term.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, John uses the word “*logos*,” translated “word,” to speak about the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. And there’s been a lot of speculation about why John would use a word that had such a strong association with Greek philosophical thinking. And certainly in Greek philosophy the word *logos* meant reason, and there is a sense in which Jesus is the most reasonable person you could ever expect to meet. But I think it’s also fair to say that the idea of the “word of the Lord” is a very dominant theme in the Old Testament, and Jesus comes among us as God incarnate, God, the Word made flesh, and reveals to us what God is like, both in deed and in action, and therefore, I think that John sees the word *logos* as being very pregnant with meaning, not only for those from a more Gentile background, but also of course, for Jews who had a very strong idea of God as being the Word, and standing by his word and acting through his word.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

The Greek word “*logos*” appears in the prologue of John’s gospel. I believe that John picked this word because of its rich meaning. On one hand, in the Greek context, *logos* caused people to think of the origin of the universe. It’s connected with creation and communication. At the same time, the Old Testament was already speaking of God’s word in the same way as *logos*. So when those familiar with the background of Jewish Scripture saw the word “*logos*,” they naturally would have thought of how God created and maintained the world by his word, and how he brought salvation to people through his word.

Dr. Peter Walker

John's description of Jesus as God's Word in his opening prologue, his opening chapter, is one of the most fascinating things in the gospel. And why does he do it? Well, it's partly because in the Old Testament God's Word was a way in which the writers referred to the way in which God was present with his people. And God was transcendent and distant in one sense, but this God, this God of Israel, was someone who wanted to be close to his people, and he comes close to them by his Word, which he speaks and he becomes knowable. So one of the reasons he's doing it is to say that just as God made himself real in the Old Testament through speaking his word, so he's ... now he's done it through Jesus. Another sense which scholars often talk about is, yes, even the pagan world, "the word" was used as an idea of talking about the rational principle at the heart of the universe. And so, in one sense, John is saying, yes, Jesus is the one in whom the whole world hangs together and finds its coherence; he is its rational principle.

Question 11:

How might our understanding of Jesus as the Word of God influence our interpretation of John's gospel?

In the prologue to his gospel, John called Jesus the "Word" of God four times in just a few short verses. John clearly wanted his readers to have this idea in mind as they read his book. But why? How might our understanding of Jesus as the Word of God influence our interpretation of John's gospel?

Dr. John McKinley

In John's gospel, he introduces the readers to Jesus with a prologue, first 18 verses, where he says, "Jesus is the Word." "The Word was with God." "The Word was God". He's got multiple reasons why he is doing this. It functions for John's purposes to set up this prologue as kind of like a lens — that we're supposed to look through this to see everything Jesus says and does. And John has lots of statements from Jesus. We're supposed to understand even though this is somebody who's going to get killed, even though this is a man, this is actually God. And so, to call Jesus the Word of God is a way of very quickly and in context to the Old Testament, identify Jesus as a divine person, that he is a divine associate; he is fully God himself. John is also in that, saying, "In the beginning was the Word." He is saying that in Jesus you have a new creation taking place. And so the God who was creating in the beginning and who creates by word and Spirit, that God is now bringing about a new creation, and the Word is now here, and he's enacting that in his life. So, with calling Jesus the Word of God, John is also saying he is the Son of God, he is the divine agent, and he is the One who brings life, and then by the time we get to John 3, he is bringing about a new birth, and it's a whole new layout of humanity and creation all contained in that concept of the Word of God by which he creates. Now it's possible that John is also thinking in terms of his Greek audience which of thought of the word, of "the *logos*," as the principal of rationality, or the mind of God, never a person, though. If that is true, John is doing something that never took place in Greek thought, where he is

saying the Word is a person. And he says, “The Word became flesh,” and now this is someone that you have to deal with, and it’s God in our midst, in human reality. John, if he’s doing anything evangelistic, it is just driving to the same point that this is God, you have to deal with it. And that is reaching to John 20:28, where John wants us to have seen Jesus as God, speaking God’s word to us. We can trust it because he is the Word of God. Now you need to bow and make the confession Thomas does, that you are, “My Lord and my God!”

Question 12:

Has the church always affirmed the full divinity of Christ?

Some false religions, like Islam, deny that Jesus is God incarnate. And throughout history various Christian heretics have made similar mistakes. The Jehovah’s Witness cult even uses the prologue of John’s gospel to try to refute the view that Jesus is fully God. But has the church ever fallen into this error? Or has the church always affirmed the full divinity of Christ?

Dr. John Frame

The doctrine of the deity of Christ became very important even during Jesus earthly lifetime. He was called “Lord,” and I believe very often that that word “Lord” was not just a term of general respect, but it recalled the fact that Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, was called Lord as the head of the covenant. And so Jesus was very much considered God by those disciples who were discerning. And of course in John 1:1 we read, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” So at Jesus very incarnation he was God. Right at his birth, he was God. Now in the early church this was generally accepted. There were some like the Ebionites and later on the Arians who did not believe in Jesus’ full deity, but the biggest problem in the early church was the acceptance of his full humanity. There were people who thought that Jesus had not come in the flesh, as John puts it, and that means Jesus did not become a full man, or a true man, and that was the view of the Gnostic sects as we call them. This particular version of it was called Docetism, but it comes from the idea that the body is bad, that the material world is bad and only the spirit world is really worthy of God. And they thought that it would be inappropriate for Jesus to take on a human body, and so there was a lot of argument about the true humanity of Christ. The Docetists, the Gnostics, in the early part of the church, but eventually, of course, those groups were considered heretical and not given the right to participate in the teaching of the church. And so the early church was quite convinced right from the beginning by the teaching of Jesus, by the teaching of the apostles, by the resurrection by which God honors the work of Jesus, that Jesus is fully God as well as fully man.

Question 13:**Why did John refer to Jesus' miracles as "signs"?**

Jesus performed many miracles throughout his earthly ministry. He healed people, fed multitudes, exercised power over creation itself, and even raised the dead. But in John 20:30, John referred to these incredible works not just as "miracles," but as "miraculous signs." Why did John refer to Jesus' miracles as "signs"?

Dr. Dan Doriani

Jesus miracles are called signs in the Gospel of John because they are signs. Signs point beyond themselves and one of the traits of the ministry of Jesus and his miracles is that people sometimes stared at, shall we say, they stared at his finger instead of where his finger was pointing. So Jesus would feed people — fed 5,000, fed 4,000 — and people would say, "We liked that. Would you please make some more bread for us?" And Jesus would say, "I know you liked it. I was trying to get your attention. Please don't stare at the finger. It's pointing somewhere." Apparently one of the tests of intelligence of dogs is this: stupid dogs, when you point, will stare at your finger, and intelligent dogs will follow where the finger goes. Sad truth of the matter is, sometimes dogs are smarter than people. The people stared at Jesus' signs, and he said, "No, no. I'm pointing you to life. I'm pointing you to bread. I'm pointing you to light." Some understood it. Some didn't. But a sign is always something that points beyond itself.

Dr. Wai-ye Ng (translation)

When recording the miracles of Jesus, John's gospel uses the special term "signs." This is difficult to translate clearly into English or Chinese, but those reading the gospel in the original language would know that this term actually appears in the other gospels as well. But it appears far more consistently in John. John writes about Jesus' miracles in ways that are designed to help his readers understand their significance. He's not focusing on the miracles themselves, nor on the power that these miracles reflect, but on the fact that the miracles point to Jesus' divine identity. That's why he uses this term.

Question 14:**In John's gospel, what is belief?**

We can't read much of the Gospel of John without encountering John's emphasis on faith. In fact, one of John's major concerns in his gospel was that his readers believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And because of this, his gospel focuses a lot on belief. But what does faith look like? In John's gospel, what is belief?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Clearly the idea of belief is very important for John's gospel in that he actually says as his own summary of why he's written that he's recorded these things so that we may believe and that by believing have faith in the Son. And belief is essentially trust;

it's confidence that Jesus is who he said he was and that Jesus did what he said he was going to do. And John thinks that by trusting Jesus, by taking him at his word, we will enjoy spiritual life and enjoy all that he promises there, and that belief is not something that is sort of, is an "airy fairy" thing, but it's a very concrete thing. It's actually examining the evidence and putting your confidence in that which is said and that which is done. And that is what John wants his readers to do as a result of his testimony to all that Jesus came and said and did.

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

In the Gospel of John, when he talks about belief and what he's expecting us to believe... First, when we say belief, we're talking about something that we would have confidence in, that we would have assurance in, something that is trustworthy, that I can bank on. So when we talk about, in the Gospels about belief, what John is wanting us to do is to have that trust and that faith and that confidence in Jesus, in Jesus as our Savior, in Jesus as our Lord, and that we can have that confidence that what John says and what Jesus says is true, and that we will have eternal life and our sanctification through the work of Jesus Christ.

Question 15:

How did John describe eternal life?

John wanted his readers to understand that by believing in Jesus, they would have eternal life. Of course, when most people hear the term "eternal life," they tend to think about everlasting life after death. But is that what John meant? How did John describe eternal life?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Eternal life is a concept that John seems to love talking about. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life," life everlasting. And life is not so much a quantity, but is a quality in John's gospel. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it in all its fullness, in all its abundance." So, for sure, the confidence a believer has is that when they die they will spend eternity with God, but John seems to also speak about it as being a quality — life that we can enjoy because we know the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," life of being reborn again, able to live the life that we should do in right relationship with God. So it's something that is a great celebratory note in John's gospel. Eternal life is what Jesus came to give us and it begins even now.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

Eternal life, according to the gospel, is not necessarily defined. It is more or less, I guess, described. And particularly in John 17:3 where Christ states, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." And what you have stated there is, one, an experiential desire to know God,

and then secondly to share in fellowship with the Lord through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. John Frame

Eternal existence is something that both the righteous and the wicked have, both faithful and unfaithful people have, throughout time. The wicked are going to spend their eternal life in judgment and suffering. The righteous will spend their everlasting existence in fellowship with God. But eternal life has a different connotation from eternal existence. Eternal life — “life” is a value term. When Adam was created, God breathed into him the breath of life, which is not only existence. I mean, he had existence as a lifeless body before that, but he entered into a kind of fellowship with God, and life in Scripture is always a value term. Life is the opposite of death. Death is the wages of sin. Life is the gift of God, the grace of God, taking us out of sin and giving us personal relationship with him and friendship. So that’s the eternal life that’s going to continue. It begins here on earth when a person comes to faith in Christ. Jesus says that those who believe in him have everlasting life right now, and so as we enter into our relationship with Jesus as our Lord and as our Savior and as our friend, that is eternal life, and we’re going to see that grow and expand and deepen throughout all the ages of time, and that’s the wonderful promise of the gospel.

Question 16:

Why did John connect love for God with obedience to God?

John’s major concern in his gospel was to convince readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and to encourage them to follow Jesus faithfully. And he made it clear that faithfully following Jesus includes both love for God and obedience to his law. But how are these things related? Why did John connect love for God with obedience to God?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Right at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is obedience. Jesus said, “If you love me you will obey my commandments.” When we see God for who he is, we agree with him, and when he tells us to do something, of course we believe he’s right. At the heart of every sin is questioning the very character of God, assuming we know better than he does about the things in this world.

Dr. J. I. Packer

If a person loves someone else that person will respond to the one whom he or she loves. That person will take note of what it is that the loved one likes and dislikes, and they will make it their business to provide for the other one’s pleasure the things that the loved one likes and to avoid the things that the loved one dislikes and finds painful. It’s just the same in our relationship to the Lord Jesus, our Savior, whose disciples we are, and to his Father from whom come the laws that uh, testify to what can be a source of pleasure to God and what is bound to be a source of displeasure.

And so love to the Father and the Son necessarily entails trying to please them. And you please them by doing what they ask for, and that's obedience to the teaching that they give as to how one lives a holy life. So in the New Testament, Paul says in a number of places that uh, you labor to please God, and that's one of the signs that you love him. And in 1 Thessalonians he tells folk who are already pleasing God, do it more and more because that's the way to advance in love. And that means in godliness, and that means in fellowship with the Father and the Son, which after all, is going to be quite literally our eternal life. It starts here; it goes on forever in glory. But pleasing the Father and the Son is, if I may put it this way, the name of the game from start to finish, except that there isn't any finish. This goes on forever.

Dr. Riad Kassis

I think love to God and obedience to God should come together, because love is not just some kind of emotional feelings, but it is something that should be seen in our actions. So, when I say that I love my wife I should be ready to obey her, and at the same time my wife should be ready to obey me if she loves me. And I think in our relationship with God, it is not enough to say that we love God or we worship him, but it is very significant that we should show this love in our practical daily life, from Monday to Saturday, even on Sunday.

Dr. John Oswalt

One of the problems in the church is a tendency to divide love and obedience. Part of the reason for that is a faulty understanding of love. We have made love a sentimental feeling. I often say, a squishy feeling in the pit of your stomach. But in fact, that's biology, that's not love. The Bible understands love as choosing the best for another at whatever cost to yourself. So then, in many ways love will be in the absence of pleasant feelings. It is instead a choice. And so, for instance, in the letter of 1 John, John very clearly relates belief and love and obedience. So, I am choosing out of an active attachment to God to do what pleases him. I am choosing to serve him, and I think sometimes our images get us into trouble. If we think of God exclusively as King, then we tend to think of obedience as that which is coerced. The King demands it, and if we don't do it, we will be punished. I certainly do not want in any sense to do away with the imagery of King. It's biblical. But I think we need to couple with that image, the image of Father, so that the Father requests that I do something; it's still obedience for me to do it, but I'm doing it out of that active attraction, that active choice to please him, to do what is best for him, and in the long run for myself.

In many ways, these two — love and obedience — are two poles. It's easy if I leave out love to obey simply out of a sense of duty and demand, and when that happens it's very easy for me to say, what's the minimum that I have to do to get by? I sometimes have students like that. "Prof, what's the minimum that I have to do to pass this course?" On the other hand, if we are only motivated by this faulty understanding of love, this sentimental feeling, then there's a tendency to think, oh well, it doesn't really matter what I do. I feel good about God and God feels good about me. And ... tragedy. But if in fact these two are held together, then I am saying, "Oh, God" — again, that student you die for — "I really want to learn this subject. Is

there more work I can do?” It’s an attraction that draws me in, and so I am saying, Oh God, I want to please you; I want to be like you; I want to do what you want because of my choice. By the same token, because I love him, I am then motivated to do the best and not the least.

Dr. Steve Harper

In the Bible there is an interesting connection, between obedience and love. Now we all know that there is some aspects of life where we obey, whether we love a person or not. But, the Bible is not satisfied for us to think of relationship with God that way. The Bible never separates obedience and love. And really, when you get down to it, we don’t either. We are most likely to obey the people that we love. The person that I obey the most in my life is my wife Jeanie, and it is because I love her, more than any other person in the world. So, obedience and love are always connected. We are not forced to obey; we long to obey those that we love. And the word “obedience” itself is fascinating, because it does not mean to go run out and do something. It means to listen. It comes from the Latin word “to listen.” And again, we listen to the people that we love, because we know that they care about us, we know that they have our best interest at heart. When they tell us to do something it is for the right reasons. And so, love and obedience are always working together, because what God wants more than anything else, is not just acts of service, but acts of service born out of love.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

There is in the Bible a very close connection between loving God and obeying God. I think the first thing that we have to clarify is that nearly loving God is not a fulfillment of the command to love God. There can be a duty oriented, obligatory drudgery that was never in mind when the Bible said, “If you love me,” or Christ said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” But if the love is there, if there is this voluntary self-giving, rooted in a delight in God, then the most natural and validating manifestation of that will be a profound, willing and ready obedience because it’s rooted in a desire to be pleasing to this God whom you love and delight in. It’s rooted in the trust that this “God’s way” is as reliable and for your good as his own character. This is why there is this vital link between obedience and love in the Bible.

Question 17:

Does Jesus’ Farewell Discourse apply to all Christians, or was it only intended for the apostles?

John’s gospel includes a conversation that Jesus had with his disciples just before he was arrested and crucified. This conversation is often called Jesus’ “Farewell Discourse.” But neither Jesus nor John explicitly explained whether this discourse was supposed to apply only to the disciples, or if it had the broader church in mind. Does Jesus’ Farewell Discourse apply to all Christians, or was it only intended for the apostles?

Dr. Wai-ye Ng (translation)

In chapters 13–16 of John’s gospel, there is a long section that explains that Jesus will see his disciples again after leaving them, dying, and then rising from the dead. So, some of this material is only applicable to the apostles. But there is quite a bit of additional content that can be applied to Christians today. For example, in chapter 17, Jesus prayed not only for the disciples that followed him at that time, but also for those that would believe in him in the future. So, I believe that when Jesus was giving his farewell discourse, his mind was already on those who would follow him in the future, including today’s Christians.

Dr. James Hamilton

Following the Farewell Discourse, we see Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, and in that prayer, John, who’s writing for the benefit of Christians, he presents Jesus praying not only for his disciples but also for those who will believe on the basis of the disciples’ testimony. And so, when John presents Jesus praying this way, and when John writes this gospel for the benefit of believers and so that people will believe, I think we have good grounds for concluding that the statements that Jesus makes in the Farewell Discourse are not to be limited in application to the apostles. There may be on a case-by-case basis particularly full meanings for the apostles that may have scaled back senses in which they apply for other believers, but God’s word is for all God’s people, and that includes the Farewell Discourse.

Question 18:**What was the main point of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer?**

At the end of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse, John recorded Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, in which Jesus prayed for his disciples, and for everyone that would come to faith through them. What was the main point of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer?

Dr. Steve Harper

When Jesus prays in John 17, it’s an extension and sort of a climax to the upper room discourse. Maybe he prayed in the upper room; maybe he was praying as they walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane. But it’s definitely the bridge between 14, 15, 16 and 18. And I see it as Jesus’ prayerful way of asking the Father to enable those apostles to overcome the world later after he’s raised from the dead. That’s what he says to them, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” And he uses that phrase, uses the term “world,” 19 times in that prayer. So I think the main point of the High Priestly Prayer is it’s the prayerful request to the Father that God will so empower and indwell — John 15, “abide in me and I in you” — will so indwell those apostles that they’ll be able to overcome the world. Now, there are some clues in the prayer of how he hopes that they’ll do that. The first way is we overcome the world by glorifying God instead of glorifying the world. Whenever we live in a way that honors God and pleases God, we’ve overcome the world in one sense of the word. Another way that he prays for them is that they will keep the Word. He talks about how he has given them the Word. He’s been their teacher. He’s been their rabbi. He

has instructed them. Now he's praying that what's gotten into them will now become part of the way that they live. And what's interesting to me in that prayer is that at verse 9 the thing pivots into the apostles. But then when you get to verse 20, it's to those who will believe. So he's not just praying that the original twelve will overcome the world, he's praying that we'll overcome the world, too. And I think that's a great encouragement, that the same power that was available to those original apostles to do that is also available to us.

And as he works his way through that prayer about overcoming the world, he says several neat things, I think. One is if we do that, we'll experience joy. Like Stanley Jones used to say, "For this I was made." There'll just be that inner sense that I'm doing what I was put on the earth to do, and there's great joy in that. He says also that we'll dwell in unity, because when you see other, you know, believers doing that, you find a oneness in that prayer. And he prays for that. "I pray that they may be one, Father, even as we are one." There's a kind of an ecumenism that happens in this experience of living out our faith. We find other believers all around the world who are doing that same thing, and that's a wonderful thing. And then, of course, he prays that we'll live in love. But all of that is to point to, I think, the main idea, and that is that by doing these things, we'll be overcomers, we will overcome the world.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

The main point of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer from what my study has, I guess, revealed to me, is it represents his transition from his earthly ministry to his intercessory ministry. In Hebrews, the writer talks about, obviously Jesus interceding for us, being that he is our High Priestly Prayer. When you stop to look at the High Priestly Prayer, obviously it can be stated that is a summary or a synopsis of the entire, you know, Gospel of John, but when you look at it more closely, we can see that Jesus obviously is praying to the Father to be restored to his former glory. Secondly, he is praying that his disciples would be kept, and thirdly, he is also praying for those who would believe on him through their message. And so you can see the transition that is taking place. Having completed his earthly ministry, he now is preparing to obviously fulfill that role as the intercessor. And we know from Scripture that he ever lives to intercede for us, and he is seated at the Father's right hand as our High Priest, interceding to the Father.

Question 19:

Why was Jesus so willing to be crucified?

After his Farewell Discourse and final prayer, Jesus was arrested. But even though he knew he was going to be crucified, Jesus made no effort to avoid arrest. He allowed himself to be taken, beaten, and executed. Why was Jesus so willing to be crucified?

Rev. Mike Glodo

Why was Jesus so willing to be crucified? Well, John's gospel begins by telling us that the Word, Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, was in the beginning with the Father — that Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, was privy to the divine counsels that Father, Son and Holy Spirit had agreed to redeem fallen humanity. So Jesus had the counsels of heaven. He understood the mission from the divine perspective. He also understood the ultimate outcome, the ultimate victory. That was one reason. We also know that Jesus understood that he was to come to atone for the sins of the world. He understood the purpose of his crucifixion. As John the Baptist declared when he saw Jesus coming, "Behold the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world." And so John's gospel tells us that "God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish" but be saved. So Jesus understood the purpose of his atonement. As part of that, Jesus was the consummate, obedient human being. He says in John's gospel that my food is to do "the will him who sent me." So apart from his own feelings, apart from even the goal of his crucifixion, Jesus was perfectly and fully obedient to the Father.

And then ultimately, I think in John's gospel, you can look to chapter 12. There, Jesus says for the third time, the Son of Man must be lifted up. But there's a unique element added in chapter 12. He says, "When the Son of Man is lifted up, he will draw all men to him." And then he goes on to say in chapter 12 that, "then shall the ruler of this world be cast out." That Jesus, by his crucifixion, disarms Satan. That Jesus, by his crucifixion, broke the powers of this world that oppress, that enslave, that condemn, so that Satan no longer has any authority over us. Hebrews 2 tells us that Jesus destroyed the power of him who has the power of the fear of death, that is, the Devil. Colossians 1 tells us that Jesus put to shame all the authorities and powers. So Jesus, in his crucifixion, is diving into death itself to destroy death from within, because when he arose from the dead, he would signify that the death that permeates this world, not just that holds us in the grave, but that manifests itself in our fears and dysfunctions, in our sins against one another, in our securities, these things have been destroyed. Their power is no more. So that when we look at the cross, we not only see the payment for our sin, but we see the end of the reign of the ruler of this world and the beginning of the reign of the ruler of the world to come.

The Gospel of John is a testimony to the love and faithfulness of God. John himself said that he wrote his gospel so people would believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, they would have life in his name. We have no greater hope than this. And John's gospel is a powerful witness to the truth of our salvation.

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