**WHY ON EARTH GOD? WHY GOD ON EARTH?**

**CRACKING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**Ch. 1A**

Today we crack arguably the best-known, best-read book in the Bible, the world's all-time best-seller. This fourth book of the New Testament has probably been read by more people than any other.

Someone said, *"To know God, you must understand the Bible. To understand the Bible, you must learn about Jesus. To learn about Jesus, you must read the Gospels."*

"Gospel" is Anglo-Saxon for "good news." The Good News is that the God of the universe loves us sinners so much that He has made it possible for us to have a personal relationship with Him.

Since Gutenberg did his first bench press in 1455, six *billion* plus Bibles have been printed in 2,000-plus languages -- an unrivaled feat for a book whose 40-plus authors took over 1,500 years to write.

John is one of Christ’s 12 disciples who followed Him along the dusty trails of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, an area the length of Seattle to Bellingham. Many have doubted that John wrote this book, perhaps ticked that its plainly-stated, central theme is that Jesus Christ is God. 'Til recently many scholars dated it 2nd century.

But the discovery in Egypt of the Rylands Papyrus 52, containing portions of John's 18th chapter, demolished this theory. The John piece was dated at about A.D. 135. Archeologists believe it took years for John's gospel to be hand-copied, circulated, and wind up in Egypt. So scholars peg John as written no later than A.D. 90.

John's four other books (I, II and III John and Revelation) were written *after* his gospel. The other three gospels were written pre- A.D. 70.

The theme of Matthew's gospel is that Jesus is King.

Mark's gospel describes Jesus as Servant.

Luke's gospel introduces us to Jesus, the Son of Man.

John's gospel goes to the bottom line that Jesus is God.

About 25 years old when Jesus invited him to “follow Me,” John became one of the oldest surviving eyewitnesses of Jesus -- and the last living disciple, the only one to die of natural causes. By the end of the 1st century Jesus’ teachings had spread around the Mediterranean, Paul and Peter had been martyred and, as the prophets predicted, Jerusalem had been leveled in A.D. 70 by Roman legions under Titus.

In addition to external testimony to support John's authorship, there are strong internal proofs such as the frequent reference to the author as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The apostle John was among Jesus' three bosom buddies. He was the closest to Jesus. John was a bona fide insider. He sat beside Him at the Last Supper (13:23-25), stood by the cross and was entrusted by Jesus, as He was dying, to care for His mother.

John, Peter and James were Jesus' inner circle. John saw Jesus, touched Him, heard Him speak. Together they walked the hot, dusty roads - conversing, perspiring, experiencing hunger and thirst.

John recorded many of his experiences with his Amigo of 3.5 years, none other than the Creator/God of the universe. Yet John knew Jesus on a human level better than anyone ever has or will. Imagine thinking of your best bud as …. God! How do you say "Hi Jesus" and "my Lord and my God" to the same guy?

John's 21 chapters make it crystal clear that the author was utterly convinced of Jesus' deity. The disciples often asked each other about Jesus' mysterious words and actions. Still, they were willing to die for their belief that He was God.

**Go Ahead, Take Your Best Shot!**

Nothing wrong with asking questions. It's important though where you go for answers. The Bible answers life's two key questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. What does He want from me?

In *Letters from a Skeptic* by Gregory and Edward Boyd, a believing son (formerly a self-admitted prodigal himself) engages in a three-year correspondence with his 70-year-old, agnostic dad. The elder Boyd throws every objection in the book at his son, including questioning the integrity of the Bible. Greg presents a convincing, documented defense, but concludes:

*"The rub of the whole matter, Dad, is that the minor issues which surround the Bible never affect the central content and all-important message of the Bible. I would encourage you to just start reading it. You might want to begin with the Gospels, especially the Book of John. Set aside the issues and just try to hear what the work is saying to you. Allow (God's) Holy Spirit to use the text to drive home to your heart what needs to be heard. The thrust of the entire Bible, Dad, is to bring you into a loving relationship with Jesus. The Bible comes alive to the extent that a person meets Jesus through it."*

**Who's Your Best Friend, John?**

Jesus was the most remarkable person in human history. Call Him Savior or Sham, it's enlightening to spend 21 chapters with the guy who knew Him best.

After His birth in a Bethlehem cow stall, Jesus the Son of God was taken by Joseph and Mary to Egypt to escape the killing fields of King Herod and his son and successor Archelaus. From Egypt they returned to their hometown, Nazareth, 55 miles north of Jerusalem where Jesus grew up learning Joseph's carpentry trade, far from the pomp inside the Beltway of Israel's cap city.

John Gibson writes, *"The great world of the First Century moved on, all unconscious and unconcerned, while its Savior-King was preparing, in the obscurity of His village home Nazareth, for the great work of winning a lost world back to God."*

In the 1st century "Nazarene" meant a crude, despised person. Posted by Pilate above Jesus' thorn-pierced head on the cross was a sign of derision that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:20).

Here's how John and the three other gospel writers describe Jesus:

1. He was born to a virgin.
2. He performed legitimate miracles.
3. He said He was the true Messiah. He was so believable and effective that the Jewish religious leaders targeted Him as a threat to their power and influence.
4. His message was radical. He taught that God didn't just want people to *obey* the 10 Commandments; He wanted their *hearts*!
5. He never sinned, never did or said anything wrong.
6. Many of His contemporaries believed -- and gave their lives to prove it -- that He was the long-awaited Messiah.
7. He was crucified (a form of capital punishment for criminals in the Roman Empire), although He did nothing wrong. When Jesus called Himself "Son of God" (meaning "God's equal"), the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees were furious, charging Him with blasphemy. Roman authorities found Him innocent of the Jews' trumped-up charges.
8. As He'd promised, He came back to life on the third day after being buried in a tomb behind a huge stone door. This was the defining, incontrovertible proof that He was all of who He claimed to be.
9. He ascended back into heaven, a shocking event seen by many.

Jesus was all God, all man, totally sinless. Our sin demanded a *perfect* sacrifice if we're to be restored to a right relationship with God. Jesus was, hands down, the *only perfect Sacrifice*.

In John 3, its key chapter, is the most-quoted of the Bible's 33,173 verses. The Bible's macro-message appears here in micro form, declaring that a one-to-one relationship with God is possible only by accepting the gift of His forgiveness which was purchased by Christ's death on the cross. We receive that gift only by believing, in faith, that it is ours -- not by inheriting it or living clean enough to earn it. Jesus Himself calls this process of believing being "born again."

The most incredible event in history was God's coming to earth in the person of Jesus. God in an earth suit. Let's read John 3:16.

**The Wide Angle View from the "Godyear" Blimp**

If slapping this into a historical context helps, here we go.

63 B.C. Pompey conquers Palestine.

44 B.C. Julius Caesar assassinated

37 B.C. Herod appointed to govern Palestine.

31 B.C. Augustus Caesar becomes ruler of Roman Empire.

 5 B.C. Jesus is born.

A.D. 4 Herod dies.

A.D. 7 Jesus visits temple at age 12.

A.D. 14 Tiberius becomes ruler of Roman Empire.

A.D. 26 Jesus starts His three year "career."

A.D. 27 Jesus chooses 12 disciples.

A.D. 30 Jesus is crucified, resurrects, ascends back into heaven.

**Now About Our Author John……**

John’s dad was a well-off, Ballard-type fisherman named Zebedee married to Salome, a devoted follower of Christ who, some believe, was a sister of Mary, Jesus’ mom. John’s brother James was also one of Jesus’ "devoted dozen."

The no-frills point John makes in his gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah OT prophets foretold. He cites seven of Jesus' "I am" statements and seven of His miracles, or signs, to persuade his reader to walk with Christ. There have been many bogus messiahs, but only Jesus perfectly fulfills each of the 40+ predictions in the OT about His birth, life and death. He's the Son of God. No man can see God the Father, so Jesus came to show us what God's like.

John pulls no punches about the outcome of believing or disbelieving in Jesus. He says God wants to reside in the core of our lives, and that the *only* way to do this -- to be assured of spending eternity with Him in heaven as opposed to in a place the Bible calls hell -- is to *believe* in His Son Jesus.

John lays his purpose for writing on the line in 20:30-31:

*"Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life."*

**The *Other* John: the Baptizer (the Big Dipper)**

Those of us in communications have precious few chances in our careers to deliver a message of true, lasting significance. If only we could announce a new killer app, a new category-killer, or a candidate who'll shape world history for good.

Well, how's this for an assignment? John the Baptist was hand-picked by God Himself to be Jesus' personal advance man on earth! Seven centuries before John's birth the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 40:5) predicted that out of the desert wilderness the glory of the Lord would be revealed for all mankind to see.

Later, four centuries before Christ, the prophet Malachi (Mal. 3:1, 4:5) also predicted one like the ancient prophet Elijah would come prior to God's judgment upon the earth.

Well, in about A.D. 27 along comes this dude emerging from the Judean desert, looking like Central Casting had sent him over to play Elijah. Wearing camel's hair and a leather belt, and eating only bugs and wild honey, his wild-man persona and powerful messages magnetize crowds from all over.

He warns the religious and political elite that Messiah is coming to pronounce judgment on sin, then to set up his kingdom on earth. By announcing that "Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament," John was confronting head-on the hottest issue of his day, the issue that divided the Jews who, trust me, *knew* Messiah was coming. (Mal. 4:2,5)

Fearlessly, John rips into hypocrisy wherever he finds it. Still, after hearing John preach, many believe his message and are baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Even John's birth was bizarre. Zechariah the priest and Elizabeth his wife (cousin of Mary, Jesus' mom) were both very old. And childless. The angel Gabriel (Luke 1:5-80) appears to Zech and says Liz will get pregnant! Further, the kid's name will be John (Hebrew for "God has been gracious"). And his career would be spent as front man for Israel's Messiah. Defying all medical odds, Elizabeth delivers John well into her Medicare years.

In our first glimpse of Jesus as an adult, He shows up at the Jordan, insisting that John baptize Him (Luke 3:21-22). Suddenly a dove rests on Jesus' shoulder, and a clearly audible voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well-pleased." (Mark 1:10-11, Matt. 3:17)

Now some of John's own understudies, and the great audiences he's been drawing, drop John and start following Jesus. Was John bummed? Au contraire. He even says (John 3:29-30) that now he's a fulfilled man, that Jesus must now increase and that he, John, must decrease. John knows that he exists for one reason: to point others to Christ, to be a living signpost. Each of us is a signpost.

John's exit from earth is as odd as his entrance. When King Herod divorces his wife and marries his brother's wife Herodias, John tells him this doesn't thrill God (Matt. 14:3-5, Mark 6:18). New to having people critique him, Herod tosses John in the jug -- but won't harm him because he likes to hear this crazy hippie speak.

In prison John learns (Matt. 11:2-3) that Jesus is performing benign miracles like turning water into wine at a wedding, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, raising the dead. This confuses John who thinks Messiah's job is to lower the boom.

So he sends friends to "card" Jesus, to verify his Messianic passport. Jesus assures John that He is the long-expected King (Matt. 11:4-6, Isa. 35:5-6, 61:1). John just hadn't gotten the message that Jesus was to come the *first* time as the Lamb of God (to be sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the world) -- and a *second* time later to judge the world as King of Kings.

John the Baptist doesn't have the full picture of Christ's ultimate mission. Neither do you and I always comprehend the full scope of God's plans for our lives. Perhaps you think God has failed to prove Himself to you, or that He's let you down.

Jesus concludes his note to John saying, "Happy is the man who never loses faith in Me" (Matt.11:6). In effect, "John, can you trust Me and My plan for your life? Can you put your faith and hope in Me, the way I do things, and in My timing?"

Back at the palace besmirched Queen Herodias doesn't like wearing John's scarlet letter, and seeks revenge. When her daughter, also named Herodias, is honored by Herod at a birthday bash, Daddy gets blotto and offers his daughter anything. The little darling is ordered by Momma to ask for John's head on a tray -- something for a princess who has everything. Is this is what he had in mind when he said, "Jesus must increase, and I must decrease?"

**The Five Slices of John's Gospel**

If you're a CPA-type sequential into outlines, here's how to part the hair of this book:

1. The Son of God comes to earth. 1:1-18
2. The Son of God is presented to the world. 1:19-4:54
3. The Son of God faces opposition. 5:1-12:50
4. The Son of God approaches death. 13-17
5. The Son of God is crucified and resurrected. 18-21

Let's dive into this most popular book in history and see what happens. Millions have done it before us, with profound results.

**Let's read John 1:1-51.**

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Feb. 1, 2000

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