

# Introduction to Gospel of John Class

January 11, 2020

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# How to Read the Bible with Understanding

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Six Guiding Principles

# Ever had a disagreement with another person about the meaning of a Biblical text? Why did it happen?

- Different understanding about the relationship between the Old Testament and New?
- Different understanding about what to “take literally” in the Scriptures (e.g., Matt. 26:26)?
- Different understanding about what words or groups of words mean (e.g., “Son of Man”)?
- Different understanding about texts due to taking them out of context (James 2:24 and Rom. 3:23-24, etc.)
- Different understanding about the purpose of the Scriptures as a whole?



# Bad Readings of Scripture, A Case Study

- Read Luke 4:1–13 and answer the following:
  - What did the Devil “learn” about tempting Jesus, by the time of the third temptation?
  - How are the Devil’s reading of Psalm 91 and Jesus’ reading of Psalm 91 different? (You may want to read Deut 6:16, Exodus 17:1–7, Psalm 95.) Be as specific as possible.
  - If you were correcting the Devil’s false understanding of Psalm 91 based on Jesus’ words, how might you encourage a better reading?

# 6 Principles of Right Interpretation\*

- Stick with the plain and obvious meaning of a text
- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Pay attention to the context
- Rather than highlight “contradictions” in the Scriptures, we endeavor to note the depth of God’s Word with an emphasis on the rule of faith (cf. Matthew 10:34 and John 14:27)
- The entire Scriptures should be understood in light of God’s redeeming activity in Jesus Christ.
- We must properly divide “Law” and “Gospel” in interpreting the Scriptures.

\*Lane Burgland, *Reading the Bible with Understanding*, 1998

# Helpful Approaches for Understanding the Gospel according to St. John

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# Gospel of John's Recurring Motif of Misunderstanding

- Misunderstandings of Jesus and who He is occur throughout this Gospel
- Incorrect understandings of Jesus “teach” the reader correct understandings of His person
- Example, regarding a symbolic image: John 4:10–15 (living water) in light of John 7:37–39
- Example, regarding a symbolic action: John 12:5–7; John 13:6–9

# Gospel of John's Irony

- Definition of irony:
  - Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, page 31: “An ironic passage is one where on the surface level something appears to be true, but in reality the opposite is true.”
- The effect of irony in the text often “works” because the reader knows more about Jesus than the people in the narrative do



# Irony, continued

- Different kinds of irony
  - Dramatic irony: Reader or “audience” of the gospel is aware of something before people in the story know of it (example: Joseph’s brothers, in Genesis 42-45)
  - Situational irony: What occurs when the exact opposite of what we might expect happens (John 1:10-13)
- Outcome of irony in the Gospel of John
  - Reader or audience of the narrative is “in the know” about something, together with Jesus, that nobody else in the narrative knows or expects (dramatic irony)
  - Two separate worlds, the worlds of “outsiders” in the narrative who follow Jesus and insiders who do not—the opposite of what we might expect—are created (situational irony)
  - The grace of God (and God’s wisdom, which is unlike human “wisdom”) is revealed!

## Irony, continued (example)

- Read John 18:28 – 19:22
- According to this text, would you say that Jesus is a king?
- According to what you have read in this text (consider situational and dramatic irony) is Jesus *Your* king? Why do you say so?



# Gospel's Use of Symbols to Teach Who God Is...Who We Are

- This is how the ancients of Jesus' day taught "theology"
- See Psalm 42:1..."As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." What two symbols do you see here? What do they say about God? About the writer/humanity?



# Symbols, continued

- “A symbol is an image, an action, or a person that is understood to have transcendent significance.” (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*). It has both meaning “from above” and “from below” (John 3:12).
- During our time together, we will seek to understand the Word of God through John’s Gospel using 7 symbols: the Word, the Bridegroom, the Giver of Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Passover Lamb

ANATOMY  
OF THE  
FOURTH GOSPEL



A STUDY IN LITERARY DESIGN

R. ALAN CUI PEPPER

Helpful for  
understanding  
irony and  
literary motifs  
In the Gospel of  
John



For  
symbols in  
the Gospel of  
John

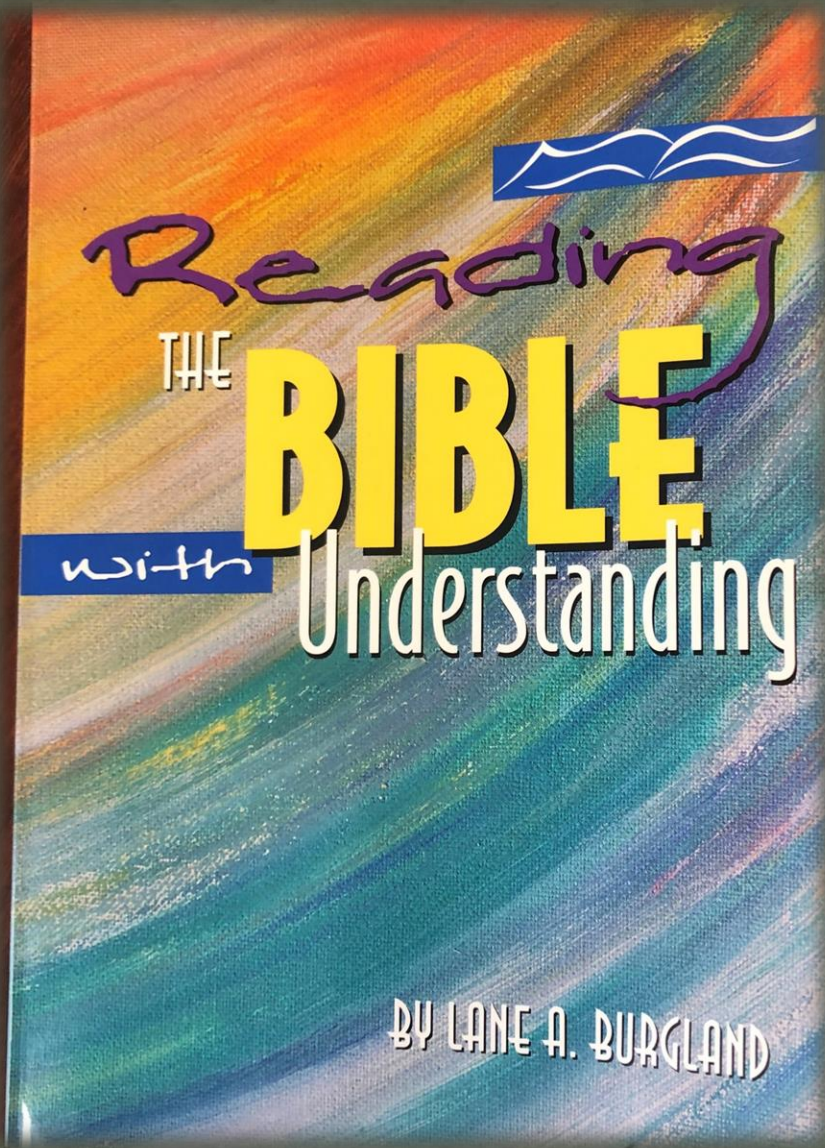
# Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel



Meaning,  
Mystery,  
Community

SECOND EDITION





For  
interpreting  
the Scriptures



GUIDEPOSTS PRESENTS



THE  
GOSPEL  
OF JOHN

Word for Word based on the Good News Bible™  
translation of the American Bible Society

Our “reading” of the text of John’s Gospel

# Session 1: The Word

## John 1:1–18

