# A HARMONY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS — CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*The Gospel of John Begins: John 1–3 and the High Priestly Prayer of John 17 Woven Into the Narrative*

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### Preface: The Fourth Gospel Joins the Harmony


The preceding sixteen chapters harmonized the three Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — from their opening genealogies and birth narratives through the resurrection and the Great Commission. With chapter seventeen, the Gospel of John enters the harmony.

John's Gospel stands apart from the Synoptics in almost every dimension. Where the Synoptics open with genealogy, infancy, and the ministry of John the Baptist, John opens with a philosophical and theological prologue of unparalleled depth: *"In the beginning was the Word."* Where the Synoptics record primarily the Galilean ministry, John's narrative centers on Jerusalem and on a series of extended theological discourses — conversations with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the crowds in the synagogue at Capernaum, the religious authorities in the Temple — that have no Synoptic parallel. Where the Synoptics record the institution of the Lord's Supper at the Last Supper, John records instead the Farewell Discourse of John 14–17 — five chapters of Jesus's most intimate teaching to his disciples on the night of his arrest.

Chapter seventeen of this harmony presents two things: first, the opening of John's Gospel (John 1:1–51 and John 3:1–21), which establishes the theological foundations that undergird everything that has preceded it in the Synoptic narrative; and second, John 17 in full — the High Priestly Prayer — which was prayed on the same night that the Synoptic Gethsemane narrative of chapter fifteen covered, immediately before the departure to the garden.

Each section is identified by its source in brackets: **[John]** throughout, since this chapter draws entirely from the Fourth Gospel.

The translation throughout is the **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)**, a public domain text of high scholarly accuracy.

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## Part Sixteen: The Fourth Gospel — Prologue, Witness, and the Prayer

### Section 186 — The Prologue: In the Beginning Was the Word [John 1:1–18]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.

There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.

There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.

John beareth witness of him, and crieth, saying, This was he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me: for he was before me.

For of his fulness we all received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

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### Section 187 — John the Baptist's Testimony [John 1:19–34]

And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No.

They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet.

And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?

John answered them, saying, I baptize in water: in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.

These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is become before me: for he was before me.

And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing in water.

And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit.

And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

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## Section 188 — The First Disciples [John 1:35–51]

Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? And they said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher), where abidest thou? He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore and saw where he abode; and they abode with him that day: it was about the tenth hour.

One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ). He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter).

On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow me.

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

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## Section 189 — Nicodemus: You Must Be Born Again [John 3:1–21]

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?

And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him.

He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.

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## Section 190 — The High Priestly Prayer: Glorify Thy Son [John 17:1–5]

These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life.

And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.

I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do.

And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

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## Section 191 — The High Priestly Prayer: For the Disciples [John 17:6–19]

I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them to me; and they have kept thy word.

Now they know that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are from thee: for the words which thou gavest me I have given unto them; and they received them, and knew of a truth that I came forth from thee, and they believed that thou didst send me.

I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me; for they are thine: and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine: and I am glorified in them.

And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are.

While I was with them, I kept them in thy name which thou hast given me: and I guarded them, and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves.

I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth.

As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world.

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

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### Section 192 — The High Priestly Prayer: For All Who Will Believe [John 17:20–26]

Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me.

And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me.

Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, the world knew thee not, but I knew thee; and these knew that thou didst send me; and I made known unto them thy name, and will make it known; that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them.

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## Appendix: Notes on Chapter Seventeen

### On the Gospel of John and the Synoptics

John's Gospel presents the single greatest challenge and the single greatest enrichment to any harmony of the Gospels. It was written last among the four canonical Gospels — most scholars date it to the 90s C.E., several decades after the Synoptics — and its author demonstrably knew at least some Synoptic material while deliberately choosing to supplement rather than repeat it. John omits the birth narrative, the Galilean parables, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord's Supper. He includes instead extended theological discourses, the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the man born blind, the washing of the disciples' feet, and five chapters of Farewell Discourse including the High Priestly Prayer.

The early church father Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 C.E.) described John as having written "a spiritual gospel" after the others had already recorded "the bodily facts." This ancient characterization captures something genuinely true: John's Gospel operates at a different register from the Synoptics, interpreting rather than merely narrating, making explicit the theological content that the Synoptics often present in action without commentary.

### On the Prologue

The Prologue of John (Section 186) is the most theologically concentrated passage in the entire New Testament. Its opening words — *"In the beginning was the Word"* (*En archē ēn ho Logos*) — deliberately echo the opening of Genesis (*"In the beginning God created"*) and establish from

the first sentence that what follows is the story of a new creation. The *Logos* (Word) is presented as pre-existent, co-equal with God, and the agent of all creation — a claim that goes beyond anything in the Synoptic Gospels.

The term *Logos* is drawn simultaneously from two traditions. In the Hebrew tradition, the *Word* (*dabar*) of God is the active divine self-expression by which God creates (Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made") and through which the prophets speak. In the Greek philosophical tradition — particularly Stoic and Platonic philosophy — the *Logos* is the rational principle that orders the universe, the divine reason immanent in all things. John's prologue addresses both audiences simultaneously, claiming that the Jewish God's creative Word and the Greek philosopher's cosmic Reason are the same person, and that he has become flesh in history.

The pivot of the entire prologue is verse 14: *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."* The Greek *eskenōsen* — "dwelt" or "tabernacled" — echoes the imagery of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the portable tent-sanctuary where God dwelt in the midst of Israel during the Exodus. The Word-made-flesh is the new Tabernacle: the place where heaven and earth meet, where God's glory dwells among his people.

## On "Behold the Lamb of God"

John the Baptist's proclamation in John 1:29 — *"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"* — introduces an interpretive framework for the crucifixion that is not explicit in the Synoptics. The "Lamb of God" language draws on multiple Old Testament backgrounds simultaneously: the Passover lamb (Exodus 12), whose blood on the doorposts protected Israel from the angel of death; the daily Temple burnt offering lambs; and most powerfully, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7, who "is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." John places this proclamation at the opening of the Gospel — before the ministry has begun — as the interpretive lens through which everything that follows is to be read.

## On Nicodemus

The conversation with Nicodemus (Section 189) is the first of John's extended theological dialogues. Nicodemus — a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a teacher of Israel — comes to Jesus by night. The timing is significant: night in John's Gospel carries theological weight (Judas goes out "and it was night," John 13:30). Nicodemus comes at the boundary of darkness and light, curious but cautious.

Jesus's response bypasses his opening compliment entirely and goes immediately to the radical condition: *"Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* The Greek *anōthen* means both "again" and "from above" — a deliberate double meaning that Nicodemus hears in only one register ("again," physically) while Jesus means primarily the other ("from above," spiritually). The dialogue that follows is driven by this misunderstanding, which Jesus uses to introduce the concept of Spirit-birth.

The conversation culminates in John 3:16 — arguably the most quoted verse in the New Testament: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."* The verse functions as a summary of

the entire Gospel's theology: divine initiative (God gave), the scope of that love (the world, not merely Israel), the means (the giving of the Son), the condition (believing on him), and the outcome (eternal life, not perishing). The Nicodemus dialogue then extends this to the themes of judgment, light, and darkness that run through the entire Fourth Gospel.

## On the High Priestly Prayer

John 17 (Sections 190–192) is unique in all of ancient literature. It is a prayer — the longest single prayer recorded in the Gospels — spoken by Jesus to the Father on the night of his arrest, in the presence of his disciples, at the end of the Farewell Discourse. It is called the "High Priestly Prayer" by the theologian David Chytraeus (1530–1600), who noted its priestly character: Jesus intercedes for himself, for his disciples, and for all future believers, much as the High Priest on the Day of Atonement entered the Holy of Holies to intercede for Israel. The parallel is not incidental; John has structured the entire Passion narrative as a priestly sacrifice, and John 17 is its liturgical apex.

The prayer divides into three movements, each corresponding to a section of this harmony.

**For himself** (Section 190, verses 1–5): Jesus prays that the Father glorify him — not for his own sake but so that the Son may glorify the Father. The definition of eternal life given here — *"that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ"* — is the most compact statement of Johannine soteriology in the Gospel. Salvation is relational knowledge, not merely information about God. And the pre-existent glory Jesus prays to receive back — *"the glory which I had with thee before the world was"* — is the most explicit statement of pre-existence in the Gospel tradition.

**For the disciples** (Section 191, verses 6–19): Jesus prays for those who have been given to him — those who kept his word, believed his teaching, and will be left in the world when he goes to the Father. The prayer has three petitions: keep them in thy name (preservation); keep them from the evil one (protection); sanctify them in the truth (consecration). The phrase *"thy word is truth"* is among the most concentrated affirmations of scriptural authority in the New Testament. The disciples are to be sanctified — set apart, made holy — through the truth of God's word, even as Jesus consecrates himself for their sake.

**For all who will believe** (Section 192, verses 20–26): The prayer's horizon expands from the eleven in the room to all future believers — across every century, culture, and generation — who will come to faith through the apostolic witness. The central petition is unity: *"that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us."* The unity prayed for is not uniformity of organization or doctrine in a narrow sense but the relational unity of mutual indwelling — the same *perichorēsis* (mutual interpenetration) that characterizes the relationship of the Father and the Son, extended by grace to the entire community of believers.

The prayer closes with the final disclosure: *"I made known unto them thy name, and will make it known; that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them."* The name of God — which in Hebrew thought is not merely a label but the disclosure of God's character and presence — has been made known through Jesus. The love that the Father has for the Son is the

love that flows into and through the community of believers. The prayer ends not with petition but with promise: *"I in them."*

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