

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Background

John came from a well-to-do fishing family, with a home in Capernaum (Mk. 1:20, 21; Mt. 4:21-23). John was one of the twelve original disciples selected by Jesus (Lk. 5:10, 11; 6:14). With Peter and James, John was a member of Jesus' inner circle of three which shared several special experiences with Jesus (Mt. 17:1; 26:37; Mk. 5:37; 14:33; Lk. 8:51). In Gal. 2:6-10 he is called a pillar of the Jerusalem church. Most commentators believed that John is the "disciple whom Jesus loved," modestly mentioned in Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; and 21:7, 2-24.

Insights into John's personality come from three sources: incidents reported in the Gospels, John's later Biblical writings, and traditions preserved by the early church. According to tradition, John outlived the other disciples and died near the turn of the century. His Gospel and other books were written near the end of the first century AD. A very early tradition, reported by writers who knew people who were taught by John, says that John settled in Ephesus. He was briefly exiled to the Isle of Patmos, where he probably wrote Revelation, but returned to Ephesus and died of old age. Irenaeus reports, that, when John became too weak to walk, he was carried to church meetings. There he whispered, again and again, "Little children, love one another."

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

The probable range for this work, which according to tradition, was written in Ephesus, is 70-90 BC.

This Gospel clearly states its purpose: "these [miraculous signs] 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" (20:31 NIV). John wrote his Gospel to supplement the already-written three Synoptic Gospels. He indicated that he was selective in his choice of material (20:30). He picked certain signs to prove that Jesus was worthy of faith. Whereas Matthew clearly wrote for a Jewish audience and Mark and Luke seem to have had the Gentile world (Roman and Greek) in mind, John's Gospel appears to be directed toward a universal audience. John wanted to convince his Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah and his Gentile readers that Jesus is the Son of God. He wrote not so much to present new information as to confront his readers with the necessity of making a choice so that they might gain eternal life.

(above material taken from 30 Days to Understanding the Bible by Max Anders)

Logos

A Greek term commonly meaning “word,” “explanation,” “discourse,” “book,” or “saying.” In the OT Septuagint, *logos* usually represents the Hebrew *dabar*, which can indicate a word or event. *Dabar* is often used of God’s speech and is closely identified with His person. As a technical term in Greek philosophy, *logos* indicates the rational principle of pattern which gives the universe its structure. When used as a theological term in the NT, *logos* served as a bridge for the Jewish concept of Wisdom in Proverbs into a Hellenistic culture.

In Jn. 1:1-18 “the Word [*logos*]” is identified as being God and being with God from the beginning. The *logos* is the Creator, through whom all things were made. Yet the *logos* “became flesh and lived for awhile among us,” and while “no one has ever seen God,...God the only [Son], who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (1:14, 18).

This linkage of creation and God’s revelation of himself is significant. John claims that in the historic person of Jesus Christ, the Creator-God became a man. Through the life and death of Jesus the *logos*, God’s grace and truth have been revealed. In creation and incarnation, Jesus unveils God to humanity, being both the Messenger and the Message (Word). These concepts are beautifully expressed in the first chapter of Hebrews:

In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

(Heb. 1:2, 3)

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

The Gospel of John

The last written and most theological of the four Gospels. The fourth Gospel early won recognition as the “spiritual gospel for its clear presentation of Jesus as the Son of God.” Unlike the other three, this Gospel is not structured chronologically. Instead the author reports miracles and discourses in which Christ confronted his listeners with a clear claim to be God in the flesh. A key word in John is “witness.” John reports historical events which witness to Christ’s deity. He states his purpose clearly: “These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life through his name” (20:31).

Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote their Gospels within several decades of Jesus’ death and resurrection about 30 AD. Each writer shaped his account of Jesus’ life for a particular first-century audience.

John's Gospel was probably written in the 90's. Tradition, language study, and the many references to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" all indicate that John the apostle wrote this book.

John writes as a witness to Jesus. Again and again the reader is confronted with claims that demand a verdict. John draws contrasts between life and death, faith and unbelief, and the reader is urged to choose.

Distinctive Features

- While the other Gospels focus on brief sayings or stories told by Jesus, John recounts lengthy sermons. These take up 342 of the 877 verses in his book. The major discourses in John are:
 1. On the new birth (3:1-21)
 2. On the water of life (4:4-26)
 3. On resurrection and life (5:19-47)
 4. On the bread of life (6:26-59)
 5. On Jesus' deity (8:12-59)
 6. On the good shepherd (10:1-21)
 7. On Jesus' deity (10:22-38)
 8. On Jesus' role (12:20-50)
 9. On Jesus' departure (13:31-14:31)
 10. On union with Jesus (15:1-16:33)
 11. On Jesus' glorification (17:1-26)

- John reports unmistakable claims of Jesus' deity. Among these are seven "I am" statements. The phrase "I am" reflects the distinctive personal name of Israel's God, Yahweh, the "I AM" of Ex. 3:13-15.
 1. I am the bread of life (6:35)
 2. I am the light of the world (8:12)
 3. I am the gate [door] for the sheep (10:7)
 4. I am the good shepherd (10:11)
 5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
 6. I am the way, truth, and life (14:6)
 7. I am the vine (15:1)

John demonstrates that Jesus unmistakably presented himself to Israel as the Son of God. Jesus' listeners understood this as a claim of equality with God (5:18). Jesus affirmed his deity by identifying himself with the OT's "I AM" [Yahweh] (8:58). He claimed to exist with the Father "before the world began" (17:5), and stated, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). Similar claims are reported in the other Gospels (Mt. 26:63-65; Mk. 14:61, 62), but John shows that this theme was woven through all Jesus' teaching about himself.

Special Features

John's use of the phrase "the Jews" is distinctive. In most cases this phrase does not include all the Jewish people, but indicates those religious leaders who opposed Jesus.

Jesus' upper room discourse (Jn. 13-16) is of special interest. In private conversation, the Lord prepares his disciples for his departure. This passage shows us how the gift of the Holy Spirit, the choice of obedience, and the privilege of prayer can enrich the lives of all Christians in every age.

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

Why did John write it?

He tells us himself—"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (20:30, 31). So we are not just dealing with a biography here. It is more like a carefully prepared Gospel tract. He tells us that he has specially selected the evidence. He includes only seven of Jesus' miracles, and he usually follows them up with discourses which give us the inner meaning of what Jesus was doing. John brings forward his witnesses one by one, and the reader must make some decision about Jesus Christ by the end. This is why, although he probably wrote it first of all for non-Jews (he explains many of the Jewish terms and customs), it has led so many to faith in Christ ever since.

An Early Addition

In John's Gospel we have one of the most telling stories about Jesus' compassion for a sinner, that of the woman taken in adultery (7:53-8:11). Strange to say, it does not form part of the oldest manuscripts, and it does not always appear at this point. Most are agreed, however, that it was an actual incident in Jesus' life which was remembered, written up and added to the Gospel at a very early date.

(above material taken from Opening up God's Word: The Compact Survey of the Bible by John Balchin)

Details

While the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke have many similarities (they're called the "synoptic Gospels," meaning they take a common view), the book of John stands alone. The fourth Gospel downplays Jesus' parables (none are recorded) and miracles (only seven are featured). Instead, John provides more extensive treatments of Jesus' reasons for coming to earth ("I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," 10:10); His intimate relationship with God the Father ("I and my Father are one," 10:30); and His own feelings toward the job He had come to do ("Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou has given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him," 17:1-2). John also gives special emphasis to Jesus' patient treatment of the disciples Thomas, who doubted the resurrection (20:24-29), and Peter, who denied the Lord (21:15-23).

Unique and Unusual

Jesus' very first miracle. His changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana, is recorded only John's Gospel (2:1-12). So is His raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44), His healing of a nobleman's son (4:46-54). John is also the only Gospel to mention Nicodemus, who heard Jesus' teaching that "ye must be born again" (3:7).

John: A Reading and Study Guide

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
	I. Jesus' Ministry	
1	Jesus is introduced as the Word-become-flesh. John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God.	Word Incarnation
2	Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Then, he drives merchants from the temple.	Miracle
3	Jesus tells Nicodemus every man must be "born again." John the Baptist affirms that Jesus is the Son of God.	Born Again Son of God
4	Jesus teaches the Samaritan "woman at the well." Many Samaritans believe. He heals an official's son.	Samaritan Healing
5	Jesus heals on the Sabbath. He announces the gift of eternal life through belief in the Son.	Life Belief Faith
6	Jesus feeds 5,000 on five loaves and two fishes. He presents himself to the crowds as the Bread of Life.	Bread Disciple
7	Jesus teaches at the Feast of Tabernacles. He stimulates debate as to whether or not he is the Messiah.	Christ Messiah
8	Jesus forgives a woman taken in adultery. He presents himself as God, and his opponents as Satan's children.	Father Devil
9	Jesus heals a man born blind. The Pharisees' refusal to accept the evidence demonstrates their blindness.	Pharisee Blind

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
10	Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd. Those who do not believe try to stone him.	Shepherd
11	Lazarus dies. Jesus announces himself as the “resurrection and life” to Mary and Martha, and raises Lazarus.	Resurrection Death
12	Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem yet predicts his death. His opponents still will not believe.	
II. Jesus in the Upper Room		
13	Jesus washes his disciples’ feet to teach servanthood and predicts Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial.	Servant Peter
14	Jesus presents himself as the way to the Father and promises his disciples the Holy Spirit.	Holy Spirit Obey
15	Jesus presents himself as the vine, believers as branches. The Spirit will aid believers though the world hates them.	Vine World
16	Jesus explains more of the work of the Holy Spirit. He promises that God will answer his disciples’ prayers.	Convict Prayer
17	Jesus prays for his disciples and all believers.	Unity
III. Jesus’ Arrest and Execution		
18	Jesus is arrested. Peter denies Jesus. Jesus is tried before the high priest and Pilate.	Pilate
19	Jesus is sentenced to crucifixion and dies on the cross	Crucifixion
20	Jesus’ tomb is empty. Jesus appears to Mary of Magdala, to his disciples, and to doubting Thomas.	Resurrection Doubt
21	Jesus meets his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. He reinstates Peter. John concludes his testimony about Jesus.	

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