



The Gospel of John - Introduction

Author and Title

The title says that the Gospel was written by John, and other evidence identifies this as John the son of Zebedee. The internal evidence clearly indicates that the author was: an apostle; one of the 12 disciples; and most significantly John the son of Zebedee. The external evidence from the church fathers supports this identification, such as Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2.

Date and Place of Writing

The most likely date of writing is the period between AD70, the date of the destruction of the temple, and AD100, the end of John's lifetime, but there is not enough evidence to be much more precise. A date subsequent to AD70 is suggested, among other things, by the references in 6:1 and 21:1 to the Sea of Tiberias, a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the 1st Century, the reference in 21:19 to Peter's martyrdom, probably AD64-66, and the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after AD70. The testimony of the early church also favours a date after AD70. Thus Clement of Alexandria stated, 'Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain, (i.e. in the other canonical Gospels), composed a spiritual Gospel', which is cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7.

The most likely place of writing is Ephesus in the Roman Province of Asia, modern-day Turkey, which was one of the most important urban centres of the Roman Empire at the time (Irenæus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.1). However, the readership envisioned by John's Gospel transcends any one historical setting.

Theme

The theme of John's Gospel is that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God. By believing in Jesus, people can have eternal life: <<***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name***>> (John 20:30-31).

Purpose

The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, a Palestinian Jew and a member of Jesus' inner apostolic circle during his earthly ministry. John's original audience consisted of both Jews and Gentiles living in the larger Greco-Roman world in Ephesus and beyond toward the close of the 1st Century AD. He frequently explains Jewish customs and Palestinian geography, translating Aramaic terms into Greek, thus showing awareness of non-Jewish readers. He also presents Jesus as the Word become flesh against the backdrop of Greek thought that included Stoicism and early Gnosticism. But John also shows awareness of Jewish readers as he demonstrates Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, the fulfilment of many OT themes, and the Son of God who was sent by God the Father to reveal the only true God and to provide redemption for humanity.

The purpose statement in 20:30-31 makes it appear that John wrote with an evangelistic intent. However, his depth of teaching shows that he wanted readers not only to come to initial saving faith in Jesus but also to grow into a rich, well-informed faith. John's central contention is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God, and that by believing in him people may have eternal life. To this end, he marshals the evidence of several selected messianic signs performed by Jesus and of a series of witnesses to Jesus, including the Scriptures, John the Baptist, Jesus himself, God the Father, Jesus' works, the Spirit, and John himself. It is also likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and centre of worship for God's people, a concept that would be especially forceful if the date of composition, as seems likely, was subsequent to AD70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

History of Salvation Summary

Jesus comes as God in the flesh (1:14), the revealer of the Father (14:9), and the messianic King (1:41, 1:49, 4:25, and 6:15). He fulfils the OT and its symbols, especially its promises of everlasting salvation. The ultimate fulfilment comes with his crucifixion and resurrection.

Writing Style

The main genre is Gospel, which combines three ingredients: what Jesus did; what Jesus said, both discourse and dialogue; and people's responses to Jesus. Within this format the usual Gospel subgenres are found: calling stories, recognition stories, witness stories, conflict stories, encounter stories, miracle stories, discourses, proverbs or sayings, passion stories, resurrection stories, and post-resurrection appearances.

Balancing the narrative richness are expanded discourses by Jesus. The Gospel of John also frequently employs symbolism, especially with reference to Christ, who is portrayed by images such as light, bread, water and a shepherd. As an extension of this, the first half of the book is built around seven great 'signs' that Jesus performed as proof of his messianic identity. Then, in a further intricacy, John often links a 'sign' or other great symbol with a corresponding statement made by Jesus in the form of either a conversation or full-fledged discourse. For example, Jesus feeds the 5,000 (6:1-13), which is followed a few verses later by Jesus' discourse on being the bread of life (6:25-40).

Literary motifs include:

1. Statements that are misunderstood, in which Jesus makes a pronouncement, a bystander expresses an unduly literal understanding of Jesus' words, and Jesus explains the true, spiritual meaning of his original statement. The nine instances are: 3:3-8, 4:10-15, 4:31-38, 6:47-58, 7:33-36, 8:21-30, 8:31-47, 8:56-58, and 11:11-15.
2. Events or statements that occur in threes, e.g. the three denials of Jesus by Peter and three utterances from the Cross; the statements that occur in sevens, including seven great signs and seven 'I AM' statements by Jesus.
3. Heightened contrasts scattered throughout the book, e.g. light vs. darkness, life vs. death, the fleeting vs. the eternal, disease vs. health, and love vs. hate.

The Setting of John

The events of the Gospel of John take place in Palestine, incorporated into the Roman Empire in 63BC Appointed by the Romans as king over the Jews in 37BC, Herod the Great ruled until his death in 4BC. The Romans divided his kingdom among his descendants. The predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis, or 'Ten Cities', was a loose confederation of semiautonomous cities administered by the Roman legate of Syria.



Outline

- I. Prologue: The Word Became Flesh (1:1-18)
- II. The Signs of the Messiah (1:19-12:50)
 - a. John the Baptist's witness and the first week of Jesus' ministry (1:19-2:12)
 - i. The Testimony of John the Baptist (1:19-28)
 - ii. The Lamb of God (1:29-34)
 - iii. Jesus Calls His Disciples (1:35-51)
 1. The First Disciples of Jesus (1:35-42)
 2. Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael (1:43-51)
 - iv. The Wedding at Cana (2:1-12)
 - b. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, Judæa, Samaria, and to Gentiles (2:13-4:54)
 - i. Jesus Cleanses the Temple (2:13-25)
 - ii. Nicodemus Visits Jesus (3:1-21)
 - iii. Jesus and John the Baptist (3:22-30)
 - iv. The One Who Comes from Heaven (3:31-36)
 - v. Jesus and the Woman of Samaria (4:1-42)
 - vi. Jesus Returns to Galilee (4:43-45)
 - vii. Jesus Heals an Official's Son (4:46-54)
 - c. Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs (5:1-10:42)
 - i. A Sabbath Controversy (5:1-47)
 1. Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (5:1-18)
 2. The Authority of the Son (5:19-29)
 3. Witnesses to Jesus (5:30-47)
 - ii. Feeding the Five Thousand (6:1-15)
 - iii. Jesus Walks on the Water (6:16-21)
 - iv. The Bread from Heaven (6:22-59)
 - v. The Words of Eternal Life (6:60-71)
 - vi. Controversy at the Festival (7:1-52)
 1. The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers (7:1-9)
 2. Jesus at the Festival of Booths (7:10-24)
 3. Is This the Christ? (7:25-31)
 4. Officers Are Sent to Arrest Jesus (7:32-36)

- 5. Rivers of Living Water (7:37-39)
 - 6. Division among the People (7:40-44)
 - 7. The Unbelief of Those in Authority (7:45-52)
 - vii. The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53-8:11)
 - viii. A Confrontation with the Jewish People (8:12-59)
 - 1. Jesus the Light of the World (8:12-20)
 - 2. Jesus Foretells His Death (8:21-30)
 - 3. True Disciples (8:31-38)
 - 4. Jesus and Abraham (8:39-59)
 - ix. Jesus Heals a Blind Man (9:1-41)
 - 1. A Man Born Blind Receives Sight (9:1-12)
 - 2. The Pharisees Investigate the Healing (9:13-34)
 - 3. Spiritual Blindness (9:35-41)
 - x. Jesus the Good Shepherd (10:1-21)
 - xi. Jesus Is Rejected by the Jews (10:22-42)
 - d. The final Passover: the ultimate sign and the aftermath (11:1-12:19)
 - i. The Miracle of Lazarus (11:1-44)
 - 1. The Death of Lazarus (11:1-16)
 - 2. Jesus the Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
 - 3. Jesus Weeps (11:28-37)
 - 4. Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life (11:38-44)
 - ii. The Plot to Kill Jesus (11:45-57)
 - iii. Mary Anoints Jesus (12:1-8)
 - iv. The Plot to Kill Lazarus (12:9-11)
 - v. Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19)
 - e. The approaching Gentiles and the Messiah's rejection by the Jews (12:20-50)
 - i. Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus (12:20-26)
 - ii. Jesus Speaks about His Death (12:27-36a)
 - iii. The Unbelief of the People (12:36b-43)
 - iv. Summary of Jesus' Teaching (12:44-50)
- III. The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (13:1-20:31)
 - a. The cleansing and instruction of the new messianic community and Jesus' final prayer (13:1-17:26)
 - i. The Last Supper (13:1-14:31)

1. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet (13:1-20)
 2. Jesus Foretells His Betrayal (13:21-30)
 3. The New Commandment (13:31-35)
 4. Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial (13:36-38)
 5. Jesus the Way to the Father (14:1-14)
 6. The Promise of the Holy Spirit (14:15-31)
 - ii. Final Teaching of the Disciples (15:1-17:26)
 1. Jesus the True Vine (15:1-17)
 2. The World's Hatred (15:18-16:4a)
 3. The Work of the Spirit (16:4b-15)
 4. Sorrow Will Turn into Joy (16:16-24)
 5. Peace for the Disciples (16:25-33)
 6. Jesus Prays for His Disciples (17:1-26)
 - b. Jesus' arrest, trials, death, and burial (18:1-19:42)
 - i. The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (18:1-11)
 - ii. Jesus before the High Priest (18:12-14)
 - iii. Peter Denies Jesus (18:15-18)
 - iv. The High Priest Questions Jesus (18:19-24)
 - v. Peter Denies Jesus Again (18:25-27)
 - vi. Jesus before Pilate (18:28-38a)
 - vii. Jesus Sentenced to Death (18:38b-19:16a)
 - viii. The Crucifixion of Jesus (19:16b-30)
 - ix. Jesus' Side Is Pierced (19:31-37)
 - x. The Burial of Jesus (19:38-42)
 - c. Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and sending of his disciples (20:1-29)
 - i. The Resurrection of Jesus (20:1-10)
 - ii. Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)
 - iii. Jesus Appears to the Disciples (20:19-23)
 - iv. Jesus and Thomas (20:24-29)
 - d. The Purpose of This Book (20:30-31)
- IV. Epilogue: The Roles of Peter and of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved (21:1-25)
- a. Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples (21:1-14)
 - b. Jesus and Peter (21:15-19)
 - c. Jesus and the Beloved Disciple (21:20-25)

Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>References</u>
1. Jesus is God.	1:1-2; 1:18; 5:17-18; 8:58-59; 10:30-33; 20:28.
2. Jesus existed before the creation of the world.	1:1-2; 8:58; 17:5; 17:24.
3. Jesus has supernatural knowledge.	1:48; 2:4; 2:19; 2:23-25; 3:14; 4:17-18; 6:51; 6:70; 8:28; 9:3; 10:15; 10:17-18; 11:4; 11:14; 12:24; 12:32; 13:10-11; 13:38; 21:18-19.
4. Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.	1:36; 1:41; 1:49; 3:18; 4:25; 4:29; 5:25; 7:26-27; 7:31; 7:41-42; 9:22; 10:24; 10:36; 11:4; 11:27; 12:34; 19:7; 20:30-31.
5. Jesus is the 'I AM'.	4:26; 6:20; 6:35; 6:48; 6:51; 8:12; 8:18; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 9:5; 10:7; 10:9; 10:11; 10:14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5-6.
6. Jesus, the sent Son, reflects the sender.	3:17; 3:35-36; 5:19-26; 6:40; 8:35-36; 14:13; 17:1.
7. Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish festivals and institutions, including the temple.	1:29; 1:36; 2:14-22; 4:23-24; 8:12; 9:5; 19:14.
8. Jesus is the giver of eternal life.	1:4; 3:15-16; 3:36; 4:14; 4:36; 5:24; 5:26; 5:39-40; 6:27; 6:33; 6:35; 6:40; 6:47-48; 6:51; 6:53-54; 6:68; 8:12; 10:10; 10:25; 10:28; 11:25; 12:25; 12:50; 14:6; 17:2-3; 20:31.
9. The signs of Jesus show that he is the Messiah.	2:1-11; 2:13-22; 4:46-54; 5:1-15; 6:1-15; 9:1-41; 11:1-44.
10. The witnesses to Jesus testify that he is the Messiah.	1:7-8; 1:15; 1:19; 1:32-34; 3:11; 3:32-33; 4:39; 5:31-39; 8:14; 8:18; 10:25; 15:26-27; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24.
11. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work of revelation and redemption.	14:17-18; 14:23; 14:26; 15:26; 20:21-22.
12. Jesus' death is the basis of salvation.	1:29; 3:14-15; 6:51-58; 10:15; 11:50-52; 12:24; 15:13.
13. God is sovereign in salvation.	3:21; 5:21; 6:37-45; 6:64-65; 10:16; 10:26-30; 15:16; 17:2; 17:6; 17:9.

14. Salvation is obtained through believing in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. 1:12; 3:15-16; 5:24; 6:29; 6:35; 8:24; 11:25-27; 11:42; 12:44; 17:8; 17:21; 20:31.
15. Believers can experience the benefits of salvation already in the here and now, during this present evil age. 3:18; 3:36; 4:23; 5:24; 6:39-40; 10:10; 10:26-29; 11:25-26.
16. Believers are called to continue Jesus' mission. 4:38; 15:16; 17:18; 20:21-22.