



# Introduction to John's Gospel

## What, who, when, and why?

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### **What is John's gospel?**

John's gospel is one of the four 'gospels' in the Bible (alongside Matthew, Mark and Luke) which tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

### **Who wrote it?**

John, one of Jesus' closest followers and friends. Almost certainly this is the same John who wrote three letters in the New Testament (1, 2, and 3 John) and the book of Revelation.

From the ESV study Bible:

*The title says that the Gospel was written by John, and other evidence identifies this John as the son of Zebedee. The internal evidence indicates that the author was (1) an apostle ([1:14](#); cf. [2:11](#); [19:35](#)), (2) one of the 12 disciples ("the disciple whom Jesus loved"; [13:23](#); [19:26](#); [20:2](#); [21:20](#); cf. [21:24-25](#)), and, still more specifically, (3) John the son of Zebedee (note the association of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" with Peter in [13:23-24](#); [18:15-16](#); [20:2-9](#); [21:2-23](#); cf. [Luke 22:8](#); [Acts 1:13](#); [3:1-4:37](#); [8:14-25](#); [Gal. 2:9](#)). The external evidence from the church fathers supports this identification (e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* [3.1.2](#)).*

### **When?**

Again, from the ESV study Bible:

*The most likely date of writing is the period between A.D. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and A.D. 100 (the end of John's lifetime), but there is not enough evidence to be much more precise. A date subsequent to A.D. 70 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 between A.D. 64 and 66), and the lack of reference to the Sadducees (who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after A.D. 70). The testimony of the early church also favors a date*

*after A.D. 70. Thus Clement of Alexandria stated, "Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain [in the other canonical Gospels] ... composed a spiritual gospel" (cited in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.14.7).*

### **Why?**

John is one of the books in the Bible which tells us very clearly why it was written. John says, in 20.30-31:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

From these verses we've taken our summary tagline for the series:

***'So that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and find life.'***

There are three interconnected themes in John's gospel: *evidence* (or 'testimony'), *belief* (or unbelief) and *life*. In v30-31 John says that he's recorded the *evidence* (the 'signs'), that you may *believe*...and that by believing you may have *life*. Note that 'believing' is believing something specific about Jesus; that he is the *Christ* (a title which means 'God's appointed King') and the *Son of God*. John has put his gospel together to teach us who Jesus of Nazareth is. He wants us to see that he is both *the Christ* - and in him are fulfilled all of God's promises and plans - and the *Son of God*; in Jesus of Nazareth the glory of God the Father has been shown.

So, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God means that we have *life* in his name. The goal of this great gospel is that people find life, true life, in Jesus. John has much to say about what this 'eternal life' really is.

We will see that John repeatedly weaves these three themes of evidence, belief, and life together throughout his gospel.

## **What's the structure of John's gospel?**

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John arranged his gospel very deliberately - in all he considers only about 21 days in Jesus' life. We can see five clear sections to the gospel:

1. *Prologue (1.1-18)*: raises the identity of Jesus; the eternal Word distinct yet united with the Father, who has taken on flesh as a particular man, in a particular place and time; the tabernacle glory of God appeared in the flesh as Jesus. It raises the division between unbelief and belief, as well as the privilege of the life Jesus was bringing with him (1.10-12).

2. *First half (1.19-10.42)* – *Jesus reveals the Father's glory through Word and deed, in the world.* Straight after the prologue, seven titles for Jesus follow in quick succession (lamb of God, King of Israel, etc) in the rest of chapter 1. Several 'I AM' statements appear (see below). There is a repeated pattern of a sign followed by belief or unbelief. These 'signs' are creation miracles (showing Jesus to be the Son of God), happening against the backdrop of 'loaded' Jewish settings or people (showing Jesus to be the Christ), such as: wedding and wine, temple, rabbi, Jacob's well; sabbath, passover, feast of tabernacles, feast of hannukah (the feast of dedication). Throughout this section John will remark things such as 'and many believed in him there', or that there was 'division'; i.e., he traces belief and unbelief in response to the revealing of the Father's glory in his Son.

3. *Transition (11.1-12.50)*- this section records the chain of events which stem from the raising of Lazarus, leading to the death of Jesus. Lazarus receives life through Jesus, but it results in Jesus going to the cross. Unbelief of the Jewish leaders leads to threats upon Jesus' life, and thus his crucifixion comes into view. Thus this middle section is a kind of 'hinge' which brings Jesus' self-giving love into view.

4. *Second half (13.1-20.31)* – *Jesus reveals the Father's glory, through self-giving love, to his disciples.* Now the 'hour' of Jesus' suffering and death is clearly in view, and Jesus' focus is on his disciples (rather than on a wider public ministry) and preparing them for his imminent death. It leads to the climactic revelation of who Jesus is in his death and resurrection: he is the Christ whose kingdom is not of this world; and he is the Son of God who reveals the glory of the self-giving love of the Father. Through his gospel, John leads us to higher and higher views of Jesus until, after his resurrection, Thomas exclaims, 'my Lord and my God!'

5. *Epilogue (21.1-25)* - the final chapter is a picture of the pattern of discipleship to the risen Lord Jesus. It is a picture of 'life'; everyday life redeemed and restored to fellowship with the Father and the Son.

An even simpler way to put it is this: In many ways the *first* half of the gospel (chapters 1-12) expounds 1.10-11, the unbelief and rejection of the creator who was now 'in the world'; and 1.12 is expounded in the *second* half of the gospel (chapters 13-21), i.e., for those who did believe in him, how they come to be children of God. The second half's focus is

primarily the privileges of fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit; in other words, what 'life in his name' means.

We might also say that the 'person of Jesus' is in particular view in the first half of the gospel, and the 'work of Jesus' is in particular view in the second half.

### *Seven 'signs'*

Within this overall breakdown, John has structured his gospel around seven 'signs'. The number seven is of huge significance in the Bible, as a symbol of completeness and perfection. He lists the first two for us; the turning of water into wine ([chapter 2](#)), and healing a sick boy ([chapter 4](#)). After that, he stops pointing them out to us, in the expectation that the reader will pay attention to follow along. It is clear that the resurrection is the glorious climactic seventh 'sign', and the one which is the substance all the others pointed to. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth signs are thus likely healing a paralysed man ([chapter 5](#)), feeding the 5,000 ([chapter 6](#)), healing a blind man ([chapter 9](#)) and raising Lazarus ([chapter 11](#)). Note that all these 'signs' are creation miracles; we are to note the Son of God present and working within his creation.

### *Seven 'I AMs'*

In addition, John places **seven 'I AM' statements** within his gospel, along with **seven more 'I AM' statements**. All 14 thus form the picture of who Jesus of Nazareth is - the Christ, the Son of God. In the Biblical storyline, 'I AM' is a hugely important term, since it is God's own name for himself (cf [Exodus 3.14](#)).

Jesus says, I AM...the bread of life ([6.35](#)); the light of the world ([8.12](#)); the gate for the sheep ([10.7](#)); the good shepherd ([10.11](#)); the resurrection and the life ([11.25](#)); the way, the truth and the life ([14.6](#)); and the true vine ([15.1](#)). The seven other 'I AM' statements occur at 4.26; 6.20; 8.24; 8.28; 8.58; 13.19; and 18.5. Note that the final 'I AM' statement (in 18.5) occurs at the very point of his arrest; thus the moment of Jesus' total self-giving love (in being taken to his death) is the final revelation of the glory of the Son of God.

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## John's gospel broken down by sermon passage

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*This is the breakdown of passages which we intend to use in the coming weeks at Grace Church Gateshead:*

- 1.1-18
- 1.19-51
- 2.1-12
- 2.13-25
- 3.1-21
- 3.22-36
- 4.1-42
- 4.43-54
- 5.1-29
- 5.30-47
- 6.1-21
- 6.22-59
- 6.60-71
- 7.1-31
- 7.32-52
- 7.53-8.11
- 8.12-30
- 8.31-59
- 9.1-41
- 10.1-21
- 10.22-42

- 11.1-27
- 11.28-57
- 12.1-19
- 12.20-36a
- 12.36b-50
- 13.1-30
- 13.31-14.14
- 14.15-31
- 15.1-17
- 15.18-16.15
- 16.16-33
- 17.1-19
- 17.20-26
- 18.1-27
- 18.28-19.16a
- 19.16b-30
- 19.31-42
- 20.1-18
- 20.19-31
- 21.1-25

