**Gospel of John Overview**

**Purpose:**

John’s purpose in writing the gospel is made clear in John 20:30-31, “*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

In the above verses we see that the purpose of John is two-fold. Firstly, it was written that we would believe. Secondly, it was written that our life would be changed through Christ. These are the central themes of the book.

John chose seven specific miracles to record (turning water to wine 2:1-11, healing the royal official’s son 4:46-54, healing the invalid at Bethesda 5:1-9, the feeding of the 5,000 6:1-14, walking on the sea 6:15-21, sight restored 9:1-41, raising of Lazarus 11:1-44), six of which are unique to the book of John. These miracles are also meant to show that Jesus is the Messiah, not merely to heal or acts of mercy. John chose to include them specifically in order that people would believe Jesus is the Christ. He also includes statements of Jesus attached specifically to many of these miracles. For example that Jesus is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, and the Resurrection and the Life. Other statements include the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Vine, the Good Shepherd, and the Door of the sheep. Therefore John’s purpose is not to write a biography of the life of Christ. It is to show the world that He is the Messiah so that the ones reading his book would believe.

The other three gospel are called the “synoptic” gospel because they are written in similar structure and record most of the same information. John is the exception. Over 90% of the material found in the book of John is unique! Some have used this fact to try to discredit John. However, even John said that the volume of information to select from was so great that if he wrote down all of it the world couldn’t hold all of the books. John 21:25, “*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.”*Again, John’s purpose was not exactly the same as the other writers. Luke wanted to give an orderly account (much like a biography) to Theophillus. Matthew wanted to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions regarding the Messiah. John also seems to be the most theological and profound thinker of the disciples. He tends to record more of Jesus’ private than public teaching and attempts to make it more clear who Jesus is as a person. While the common person can read and understand the Gospel of John, a scholar can study it for years and never fully master all the implications and nuances.

In the book of John he uses the verb “believe” about one hundred times and never uses the noun. This shows that John viewed believing as an active demonstration of faith and not merely an intellectual assertion.

From beginning to end John focuses on the issue of faith. He includes the testimony of many people who had faith in Jesus. In addition he places a high emphasis on a number of signs that Jesus performed. These signs were meant to invoke faith in the people that witnessed them and John wanted them to do the same for his audience. His goal wasn’t the mere growth of knowledge; he wanted a decision of faith to accept Jesus as the Son of God, Savior of the world.

**Authorship:**

JOHN, GOSPEL OF

Author. Internal evidence that the author is “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” who also leaned on His breast at supper (John 21:20, cf. 21:7), and that this is the apostle John, is supported by numerous lines of evidence. (1) He was a contemporary of the events described. The writer was known to the high priest and entered the high priest’s residence in company with Jesus (18:15). He alone narrates the fact that it was the high priest’s servant whose ear Peter cut off (18:10). He deals with questions about the period before the destruction of Jerusalem and not with controversies of the second century when Gnostic and Ebionite defections were active (cf. 6:15; 11:47-50). Numerous other details point to the contemporary scene. (2) He was a Jew of Palestine. He shows acquaintance with Heb., as is shown by the book’s opening words (cf. Gen 1:1). Three times he quotes from the Heb. (12:40; 13:18; 19:37). He knows intimately the Hebrew festivals, that of Passover (21:13,23; 6:4; 13:1; 18:28), the Feast of Booths (7:2; Tabernacles, KJV), and the Feast of Dedication (10:22). Jewish customs and habits of thought are familiar to him, such as questions of purification (3:25; 11:55), marriage customs, especially the way of arranging waterpots (2:1-10); Jewish burial customs (11:38,44; 19:31,40). He shows firsthand knowledge of Palestine, that there is a descent from Cana to the Sea of Galilee (2:12) and that Jacob’s well is deep (4:11). He is familiar with such places as Ephraim (11:54), Aenon (3:23), Mt. Gerizim (4:20), Jerusalem and the Kidron (18:1), Bethesda and Siloam (5:2; 9:7), and Golgotha (19:17; etc.). (3) He was John, the beloved apostle. This is a general deduction sustained from the above facts. He indicates the hours of events recounted (1:39; 4:6,52; 19:14). He reports quotations of Philip (6:7; 14:8), Thomas (11:16; 14:5), Judas (14:22), and Andrew (6:8-9). He leaned on Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper (13:23-25) and was numbered among the three, Peter, James, and John. Moreover, Peter is distinguished from the author by name, as in 1:41-42; 13:6,8, and James had suffered martyrdom long before the writing of the gospel (Acts 12:2). He characteristically introduces himself (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). These general facts make it difficult to escape the conclusion that John the apostle wrote the fourth gospel.

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Above are some of the evidences that John wrote the Gospel of John. Also In John 21:20, 24 the writer of this book is identified as the “disciple whom Jesus loved”. This disciple was evidently one of the inner circle (Peter, James, and John). The “disciple whom Jesus loved” is distinguished in the gospel from Peter, and James was likely martyred by the time the book was written. By comparing the book of John with the synoptics it seems clear the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is the apostle John. In any case the church has uniformly accepted the apostle John as the author of the gospel of John. Polycarp was a close disciple of John and Iraneus apparently heard from Polycarp that John was indeed the author of this book. While naming John the Baptist 20 times he never includes “the Baptist”. There would be no need to since he didn’t need to distinguish [John the Baptist](https://studyandobey.com/character-studies/john-the-baptist-character-study/) from himself since he was writing in the third person. Once again, there seems little compelling reason to reject the church’s testimony and the internal witness in Scripture for modern interpretations.

Before becoming Jesus’ disciple, John was a fisherman, a partner of Simon Peter. Therefore he was likely uneducated and untrained. Near the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry John was chosen as his disciple. Before that time he had been a disciple of John. From then on he formed part of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. He knew Jesus probably better than any other disciple. It was John that Jesus asked to take care of his family when he died on the cross. John also had a huge influence on the early church. He actively preached the gospel in Jerusalem. Of the twelve apostles, he was the only one (according to tradition) that wasn’t martyred, dying in exile on the island of Patmos. In addition to the gospel of John, he also wrote 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation.

**Date:**

John lived to a ripe old age. Late in his life he was based in Ephesus. It is almost universally agreed that the book of John was written in the late first century AD, probably in the late 80’s or early 90’s. This would place John’s writings as the last of the New Testament canon to be completed. The early church was already well established. As John was probably one of the last of the church leader’s eyewitness’ to Jesus’ life alive he likely was motivated to preserve (see 1 John 1:1-3).

**Audience:**

John doesn’t name the recipients of this book as he does his most of his other books. If it was a specific person or church it seems probable that he would name them as he did in 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. More likely is that he intended the gospel to be spread and circulated among Asia Minor so that his eyewitness account of Jesus would be preserved. John stated the goal of his book to be for the recipients to believe in Jesus and have eternal life (John 20:31). Therefore he at least expected many non-believers to read the gospel or hear it through a local church. Beyond these things it is difficult to surmise much more about the audience.

**Themes:**

One cannot read the gospel of John without being struck by the theme of love. It is one that John mentions over and over again (also in 1 John). John recognized that Jesus called his disciples to be different. He didn’t want them to teach as the Pharisees taught; he wanted them to exercise love from the heart. Jesus gave himself as the example of love (John 15:13). He also expected his disciples to show their love for him by obeying what he commanded. The gospel of John is a great place for me to turn to if I am struggling in my love and it is also a good resource to use to share with others who have similar struggles.

Eternal life is another topic John discusses somewhat extensively (John 5:24, John 6:40,47, John 10:28, John 17:2-3). He often contrasts this with eternal judgment or condemnation. This is an offshoot of the topic of faith. Unless one has faith in Jesus as the Son of God he cannot receive this eternal life. John wanted people to look at life with an eternal perspective. Many verses from the book can be shared with those who are materialistic or think death is the end.

And of course the most important topic is “who is Jesus.” [John includes seven statements of Jesus called the “I am” statements](https://studyandobey.com/who-is-jesus-seven-i-am-statements-john/). In these Jesus claims to be God and shows how that relates to us (John 6:48, John 8:12, John 10:7, John 10:11, John 11:25, John 14:6, John 15:5). These “I am” statements use the emphatic work in Greek for “I” and definitely point to the fact that Jesus was identifying Himself as God, who said “I AM who I AM” to Moses years before. In John 8:58 Jesus also said, “*Before Abraham was born, I am.”*

**Observations:**

Many of the words used in John are full of symbolism like “light, darkness, bread, water, etc.”

There are no parables in the book of John.

It highlights the sharp debates and disagreements the Pharisees had with Jesus more than the other gospels do. This relates to the purpose of showing Jesus as the Messiah. Most of the Pharisees did not accept it even though there was compelling reasons to do so.