

Introduction to John

NIV Study Bible

AUTHOR

The author is the apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23 [see note there]; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24). He was prominent in the early church but is not mentioned by name in this Gospel—which would be natural if he wrote it, but hard to explain otherwise. The author knew Jewish life well, as seen from references to popular Messianic speculations (see, e.g., 1:21 and note; 7:40–42), to the hostility between Jews and Samaritans (see 4:9 and note), and to Jewish customs, such as the duty of circumcision on the eighth day taking precedence over the prohibition of working on the Sabbath (see note on 7:22). He knew the geography of the Holy Land, locating Bethany about 15 stadia (about two miles) from Jerusalem (11:18) and mentioning Cana, a village not referred to in any earlier writing known to us (2:1 [see note there]; 21:2). The Gospel of John has many touches that appear to reflect the recollections of an eyewitness—such as the house at Bethany being filled with the fragrance of the broken perfume jar (see 12:3 and note). Early writers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian say that John wrote this Gospel, and all other evidence agrees (see Introduction to 1 John: Author).

DATE

In general, two views of the dating of this Gospel have been advocated:

1. The traditional view places it toward the end of the first century, c. a.d. 85 or later (see Introduction to 1 John: Date).
2. More recently, some interpreters have suggested an earlier date, perhaps as early as the 50s and no later than 70.

The first view may be supported by reference to the statement of Clement of Alexandria (died between 211 and 216) that John wrote to supplement the accounts found in the other Gospels (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14.7), and thus his Gospel is later than the first three. It has also been argued that the seemingly more developed theology of the fourth Gospel indicates that it originated later.

The second view has found favor because it has been felt more recently that John wrote independently of the other Gospels (see essay and chart, p. 1943). This does not contradict the statement of Clement referred to above. Also, those who hold this view point out that developed theology does not necessarily argue for a late origin. The theology of Romans (written c. 57) is every bit as developed as that in John. Further, the statement in 5:2 that there “is” (rather than “was”) a pool “near the Sheep Gate” may suggest a time before 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed. Others, however, observe that John elsewhere sometimes used the present tense when speaking of the past.

PURPOSE AND EMPHASES

John’s Gospel is rather different from the other three. Whether or not he knew them (or any one of them) continues to be debated. In any event, his witness to Jesus goes its own way, highlighting matters that in the other Gospels remain implicit and underdeveloped. The literary style of this witness of Jesus is also unique among the Gospels; here focus is on the “signs” of Jesus’ identity and mission and on lengthy, theologically rich discourses.

John begins with the profound announcement that Jesus is the “in the beginning” creative Word of God who had become embodied (incarnated) as a human being to be the light of life for the world. After this comes the proclamation that this Jesus is the Son of God sent from the Father to finish the Father’s work in the world (see 4:34 and note). God’s own glory is made visible in him (“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” 14:9), and what he does glorifies the Father. In him the full grace and truth of God has shown itself. Strikingly, a series of “I am” claims on Jesus’ lips echoes God’s naming of himself in Ex 3:14, further strengthening the link between the Father and the Son (see 6:35; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7,9,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5).

Jesus’ words to Nicodemus nicely summarize this Gospel’s central theme: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (3:16). Although a variety of motivations for the composition of John’s Gospel have been posited by interpreters (such as to supplement the other Gospels, to combat some form of heresy, to oppose the continuing followers of John the Baptist), the author himself states his main purpose clearly in 20:31: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

For the main emphases of the book see notes
on 1:4,7,9,14,19,49; 2:4,11; 3:27; 4:34; 6:35; 13:1—17:26; 13:31; 17:1–2,5; 20:31.

OUTLINE

- Prologue: The Word Became Flesh (1:1–18)
- The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry (1:19–51)
 - John the Baptist’s Testimony about Jesus (1:19–34)
 - John’s Disciples Follow Jesus (1:35–42)
 - Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael (1:43–51)
- Jesus’ Public Ministry: Signs and Discourses (chs. 2–11)
 - Changing Water into Wine (2:1–11)
 - Cleansing the Temple (2:12–25)
 - Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (3:1–21)
 - John the Baptist’s Final Testimony about Jesus (3:22–36)
 - Jesus and the Samaritans (4:1–42)
 - Healing of the Official’s Son (4:43–54)
 - Jesus’ Visit to Jerusalem at an Annual Feast (ch. 5)
 - Feeding the 5,000 and Jesus’ Claim to Be the Bread of Life (ch. 6)
 - Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles and Disputes over Who He Is (chs. 7–8)
 - Healing of the Man Born Blind (ch. 9)
 - Jesus is the Good Shepherd (10:1–21)
 - Conflict at the Feast of Dedication over Jesus’ Identity (10:22–42)
 - The Raising of Lazarus (ch. 11)
- The Passion Week (chs. 12–19)
 - The Anointing of Jesus’ Feet (12:1–11)
 - Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem as King (12:12–19)
 - Jesus Predicts His Death (12:20–36)

- Belief and Unbelief among the Jews (12:37–50)
- Jesus' Farewell Discourses and Prayer (chs. 13–17)
 - At the Last Supper (chs. 13–14)
 - Jesus washes the disciples' feet (13:1–17)
 - Jesus predicts his betrayal (13:18–30)
 - Jesus predicts Peter's denial (13:31–38)
 - Jesus comforts his disciples (14:1–4)
 - Jesus is the way to the Father (14:5–14)
 - Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (14:15–30)
 - On the way to Gethsemane (chs. 15–16)
 - The vine and the branches (15:1–17)
 - The world hates the disciples (15:18–25)
 - The work of the Holy Spirit (15:26—16:15)
 - The disciples' grief will turn to joy (16:16–33)
 - Jesus' prayer (ch. 17)
 - For himself—that he be glorified (17:1–5)
 - For his disciples (17:6–19)
 - For all believers (17:20–26)
- Jesus' Betrayal and Arrest (18:1–11)
- Jesus' Trials before Jewish and Roman Officials (18:12–40)
- Jesus' Crucifixion (19:1–27)
- Jesus' Death and Burial (19:28–42)
- Jesus' Resurrection (20:1–29)
- Statement of the Gospel's Purpose (20:30–31)
- Epilogue: Jesus' Recommissioning of the Disciples (ch. 21)

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