

The Gospel of John

Background:

1. Tradition and biblical scholarship attribute the writing of the Gospel of John to the Apostle John. Who was this John?

- We get an interesting look at John in the four gospels that give us insight in to who he was.
- John was the younger of the two sons of Zebedee, a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, and Salome, who was part of the group of women who followed Jesus, even to the cross, and brought spices to anoint Him after His burial only to find an empty tomb.
- They resided in Bethsaida, the same home town as Peter and Andrew.
- John and his brother James were called to follow Jesus while they were fishermen like their father, and together they were known as the “sons of Thunder.” (Mk 3:17)
- John was chosen as one of the Twelve Apostles (Mt 10:2)
- James, John and Peter made up the inner circle that accompanied Jesus on specific occasions such as to the Mt of Transfiguration. That lets us know John witnessed up close and personal the ministry of Jesus.
- In fact, John was called the Beloved Disciple or the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn 13:23; 20:2).
- And it is to this John, that while dying on the cross, Jesus looks out and says, “Woman behold your son.” And looked at the disciple [whom He loved] and said, “behold your mother” (John 19:25-27)

2. Why did John write this gospel?

There are a number of reasons.

According to the *New Spirit Filled Life Application Bible*, “John wrote to provide the Christians of the province of Asia (now in Asia Minor) with a fuller

understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. More specifically he wrote to lead his readers to a settled faith on the basis of the words and works of Jesus, with the result that they ‘May have life in His name.’ (20:31).”

Some commentators note that there are a number of explanations provided by John in this gospel that would have been very familiar to Jews of the first century, and therefore they surmise that John’s audience was Gentile. Also, because the book is thought to have been written in the late 1st century, the target audience would have been Gentile as by then there would have been a split between Jews and Christian.

3. From where did John write his Gospel and why might that be significant

From Ephesus—It is believed after the events in Acts where John is seen with Peter in the first part of Acts and after Paul, Aquilla and Priscilla left Ephesus that John led a community of Christian believers there in Ephesus, known as the Johannine Community. Much of what the Holy Spirit inspired John to write was both about the life of Jesus and we get a little glimpse perhaps into how that life and message would have been heard in the first century in the community John led.

4. How does John’s gospel relate to the other 3 gospels, namely Matthew, Mark and Luke?

Similarities:

- The other three gospels are known as synoptic gospels because they provide the same or similar view of Jesus, and they follow a similar chronological approach.
- The synoptic gospels provide similar biographies of Jesus
- Certain stories are found in all four gospels such as
 - 1. Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4:12, Mark 1:14, Luke 4:14-15, John 4:1-3)
 - 2. Jesus Feeds Five Thousand (Matthew 14:21, Mark 6:44, Luke 9:14-16, John 6:10-11)
 - 3. Jesus’ Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9-11), Mark 11:8-11, Luke 19:36-38, John 12:12-13)

- 4. Jesus Foretells of a Betrayer in the Midst (Matthew 26:21, Mark 14:18, Luke 22:21, John 13:21)
- 5. Peter Denies Jesus (Matthew 26:69-74, Mark 14:66-71, Luke 22:55-62, John 18:15-18)
- 6. Pilate Pronounces Sentence Upon Jesus (Matthew 27:24-26, Mark 15:15, Luke 23:24, John 19:13-16)
- 7. Jesus is Crucified (Matthew 27:35-37, Mark 15:25-26, Luke 23:37-38, John 19:18-19)
- 8. Jesus Dies (Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:37, Luke 23:46, John 19:30)
- 9. Jesus Is Buried in a Tomb (Matthew 27:59-61, Mark 15:46-47, Luke 23:53, John 19:39-42)
- 10. The Women Who Followed Jesus went to the Tomb and Found the Stone Rolled Away (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:1, John 20:1)

Adapted from : <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/10-events-seen-in-all-4-gospels/>

Differences:

- The time period—John covers a time period covering three Passovers, that would have been three years, leading up to his crucifixion
- John doesn't give a genealogy as Matthew and Mark but gives the prologue that makes a bold claim—"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth!" (John 1:1, 14, 15). That premise, that statement, that beginning is a radical departure from the other two gospel writers that focused on Jesus' earthly lineage. John cuts to the chase and makes a declaration that Jesus, the Word, is God made known in flesh!
- The other gospel writers tended to give a chronological sequence of events. Not John, John tells The story of Jesus using major topics.
- The other gospel writers share the parables of Jesus, John shares what we call the discourses of Jesus—these lengthy conversations that Jesus held and from which we gain great truth.

- The other Gospel writers share quite a few of Jesus's miracles, John uses 7 strategically placed miracles that he says were signs or signposts of Jesus' divinity and power.
- And John is intent on presenting the identity of Jesus using the "I Am" Statements.

5. As we begin to study John, help us to understand how John is structured so we get a better feel for what to expect and even look for.

Different bible studies organize the book differently. Here's what we have found to be helpful and will guide our study; There are really 4 parts to John

1. The prologue is John 1:1-18
 - a. John deals with the theological implications of His first coming
 - b. He shows Jesus' preexistent state with God, His deity and essence,
 - c. John shows His incarnation
2. The rest of Chapter 1 – chapter 12 cover the public ministry of Jesus
3. Chapter 13-22 relate to the private ministry of Jesus
4. The Epilogue is found in Chapter 21, verses 24 and 25.

5. What are the key themes we should look for as we study and interpret John?

- Believe. According to *the New Spirit Filled Life Bible*, the theme of John is "Knowing God by Believing in Jesus Christ." So, we would expect belief or believing to be a big theme. In fact, the miracles or signs that John writes about are to lead the reader to believe. The discourses are aimed at bringing the person Jesus is in conversation with to belief in Him as Messiah and Lord.
- Bear Witness. Bear Witness to the truth of who Jesus is. We'll see that time and again about people who come to bear witness to who Jesus is.
- Life. Jesus has come to provide eternal life, and abundant life. In Him is life and in Him we have life.

- Light. Jesus is the light that brings truth into the world and in his discourses, he identifies as light but he also comes to bring us into the light
- The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit figures prominently in the Gospel of John from being born again by the Spirit, to the promise that the Spirit would be a well living water in Believers, to the promise of the Comforter, to Jesus breathing upon the Apostles to receive the Spirit. John reminds us of both the promise and provision of the Holy Spirit in our own lives now.

Closing thoughts

6. Why do you often encourage new believers to read through John?

As a person begins his or her walk with Christ, they need to get to know the Lord. The aim of John's gospel is that we may know Jesus and believe in Him. We want new believers, really all believers, to know and believe in Jesus the Christ. A good practice for all believers is to read through all the Gospels, but particularly John, on a regular basis to continue to strengthen their faith as they prayerfully read, learn about and become familiar with the works and words of Jesus.

Sources

Study Bible

The New Spirit Filled Life Bible, New King James Version

Exegetical Commentaries

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Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John A Commentary, Volumes 1 and 2*, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003.

Craig S. Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993.

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