



John

John's Gospel is the most reflective and theological of all the gospels. It begins with a beautiful poem on the Word made flesh and continues throughout the book interweaving stories about Jesus with deep theological reflections on his importance. The stories about Jesus often focus around his miracles (which John's Gospel calls Signs) and from there spill onwards into discussions or discourses about the nature of Jesus and what he had come to do. Various themes run through the Gospel of John, much more clearly than in the other gospels' themes, such as good vs evil, light vs darkness, Jesus coming to earth from heaven sent by God and, underpinning everything else – love.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 2 hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-51; 2.1-25;
 6.1-71; 19.17-21.25



Anything tricky?

There are a couple of tricky elements of John

- John's order and dating are different than the other gospels (e.g. the cleansing of the Temple takes place at the start not the end of Jesus' ministry and his crucifixion takes place a day earlier). You might want to ask yourself why this might be as you read.
- The discourses of John (the long discussions throughout the Gospel, but especially in chapters 3, 4, 6 and 14-17) can feel circular and confusing. The best thing to do is go with the flow and allow them to wash over you, then you might notice that they take up residence within you!



Genre

Gospel – accounts that tell the story of the life of Jesus Christ and the good news he came to bring



Inspiring quotes

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

(John 1.1)

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John 1.14)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

(John 3.16)

³¹ “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

(John 8.31-32)

And many more!



About the Author

The Gospel itself identifies its author as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21.20-25), but does not go on to say who this disciple was. Christian tradition identifies him as John son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles. Other possible identities for the beloved disciple include Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, John Mark, Jesus’ brother James or an unknown disciple of Jesus. No one really knows who the beloved disciple was – the way in which John’s Gospel was written suggests that this was deliberate.

It is also worth noting that the Gospel seems to have evolved over time. The prologue (1.1-18) and epilogue (chapter 21), as well as various sections in the middle of the Gospel, suggest that the final Gospel emerged over time. Some

have suggested that this means it wasn’t written by one person but by a community of people inspired by the ideas of their leader (who was possibly John). Look out for the uneven joins as you read – there are quite a lot of them!

What do we know about him?

If the author is John the apostle, then he was the brother of James, called by Jesus to follow him early in his ministry. He is often thought to be the beloved disciple of John’s Gospel (see introduction to John’s Gospel for more on this). If he was, then Jesus handed over care for his mother to him on the cross. Christian tradition states that he took her to live in Ephesus, where he lived to a ripe old age (around 100).



About the times

Although some scholars have argued for a very early date for John (around ad 40), the vast majority date it towards the end of the first century (around ad 90) which would allow time for the extensive reflective tone of the Gospel.

What were people feeling?

The ad 90s were a time of persecution for the Christian community. This caused them to seek identity over and against the world in which they lived. You can see hints of this in the Gospel itself.



What kind of Book is it?

It’s a Gospel – a story about the life of Jesus with the intended aim of persuading its readers of who he was.

As we’ve already noticed John’s Gospel is a different kind of gospel – it is much more reflective than that rest, spending time exploring the question of who Jesus really was.



How is it structured?

1.1-18	The prologue	7.1-52	Who is Jesus?
1.19-51	The call of the first disciples	7.53-8.11	The woman caught in adultery
2.1-12	The wedding at Cana	8.12-59	The light of the world
2.13-25	Jesus cleanses the Temple	9.1-41	Healing of the man born blind
3.1-21	Jesus and Nicodemus	10.1-42	The Good Shepherd
3.22-36	Jesus and John the Baptist	11.1-57	Jesus, the resurrection and the life
4.1-42	Jesus and the Samaritan woman	12.1-8	Mary anoints Jesus
4.43-54	Healing of the official’s son	12.9-50	Jesus goes to Jerusalem
5.1-47	Healing of the man at Beth-zatha	13.1-17.26	The Last Supper and last discourse
6.1-71	Feeding of the 5,000 and discourse about bread	18.1-19.42	Jesus’ arrest, trials and crucifixion
		20.1-21.25	The accounts of Jesus’ resurrection



Look out for...

Some people feel uncomfortable with the way 'the Jews' are referred to in John's Gospel. As you read through it look out not only for the description of 'the Jews' but descriptions of individual Jews too (remembering that Jesus was also a Jew). Ask yourself what John meant by the group title 'the Jews' in contrast to the individuals you encounter.

John's is a Gospel of great contrasts – light and darkness, up and down, good and evil etc... Notice these themes as you read and ask why they were so important in John's Gospel.

People often discuss whether Jesus was more human or more divine in John's Gospel. See what you think!



What could this mean for me?

John 20.31 says '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'. In John's Gospel what might persuade you of this?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
 - Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
 - What did you think the book was about?
 - The prologue is one of the most famous parts of John's Gospel but what do you think it is for? Why was it included?
 - Discuss the Jesus you encountered in John's Gospel, do you think he was similar or different to the Jesus you see in Matthew, Mark and Luke?
 - John's Gospel has more resurrection accounts than any other gospel – why do you think the resurrection was so important for John?
- [You might also like to discuss who you think the beloved disciple was]
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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