

# An Introduction to the Gospel of John

## The Author

Although the authorship of the fourth gospel is anonymous, there exists a preponderance of evidence, both external and internal, which points to the apostle John as its writer.

John is a familiar figure in the New Testament. His name is mentioned almost twice as many times in it as those of the other three writers of the gospels combined (35 times). A son of Zebedee, along with his brother James he was chosen by Jesus to serve as an apostle (Matthew 4:21). Prior to following Jesus he had been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-40) and a fisherman (Matthew 4:21).

John was a member of the special inner circle of three disciples, Peter and James being the other two, who were with Jesus at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), on the the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). In spite of having been called one of the "*sons of thunder*" because of his angry outburst (Mark 3:17), his association with Jesus transforms him into a gentle disciple of love. In fact, he refers to himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24). Present at Calvary, Jesus entrusts his mother to him (John 19:25-27).

In addition to the fourth gospel, John also wrote three epistles which bear his name and the book of Revelation. The only apostle to die of natural causes, tradition states that he was banished to the island of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian. Nerva, who succeeded Domitian, allowed John to return to Ephesus about 96 A.D. He stayed at Ephesus until he died sometime during the reign of Trojan (98-117 A.D.).

## The Message of the Book

The gospel of John was written to generate and reinforce belief in Jesus as the Christ so that his readers might gain life. This purpose is clearly seen in John 20:30-31 which states, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Three key words which reveal his purpose are seen in this passage. They are "signs," "believe" and "life."

## Some Exclusive Things in the Book

John was the most selective of all the writers of the gospels. Over ninety percent of his content is exclusive to his book. Since he had such a distinct purpose, he was very selective in what he included in his writing. He was not seeking to produce an exhaustive biography of Jesus. Instead, he recorded only those miracles, sermons and interviews which suited his purpose.

**Parables.** To illustrate how selective he was, even though the teaching of Jesus was full of them, John did not record a single one of them.

**Miracles.** Of the seven miracles John uses, five of them are unique to his gospel— the turning of the water into wine (2:2-11), the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:46-54), the healing of the impotent man (5:1-15), the healing of the blind man (9:1-41) and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).

**Sermons or topical discourses.** The new birth (3:1-13), the water of life (4:6-29), the defense of His deity (5:19-47), the bread of life (6:22-71), the light of the world (8:12-59), the good shepherd (10:1-30) and the discourse in the upper room (13:1-17:26).

### **Special Considerations in the Book**

John places great emphasis upon the deity of Jesus through the claims Jesus made about Himself. Included in the many claims Jesus made to be “the bread of life” (6:35), “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “the resurrection and life” (11:25), “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6) and “the true vine” (15:1), is the claim that “Before Abraham was, I AM” (8:58) by which the Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be God.

The book of John in the original Greek language is the easiest to read of all four gospels. That is because it is written in a very simple style. Though written in a simple style, it contains truths of great depth and complexity.

Much of the narrative of the book centers around the visits that Jesus made to Jerusalem for various festivals—the first Passover (2:23), an unnamed feast (5:1), the Feast of the Tabernacles (7:2), the Feast of Dedication (10:22) and the last Passover (13:1).