

### **Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)**

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिंदी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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### **John**

John wrote his gospel to inspire Christian faith. He had a close relationship with Jesus and provides personal insight about the Lord. John called himself "the disciple Jesus loved." His gospel is now the church's "beloved gospel."

In it, we meet Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, Lazarus, and "doubting" Thomas. John shares many of Jesus's memorable sayings, longest speeches, and profound miracles. Through this gospel, we encounter God directly.

## Setting

In the late first century AD, a small group of Christians lived in ancient Ephesus. They learned about Jesus and stories of his life from the apostle Paul. Later, the apostle John moved to Ephesus and shared his memories of Jesus's life and work. In his later years, John wrote these memories down, giving his followers and us the fourth gospel.

John wanted his followers to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" ([John 20:31](#)). He knew they had not seen Jesus's many signs and miracles like he had ([20:29](#)). John's authority and deep experience with Jesus are evident in every story he told. As someone who witnessed Jesus's life, John had "heard ... seen ... and touched ... the Word of life" ([John 19:35](#); see [1 John 1:1-4](#)). He was a valuable source of many stories unique to his gospel.

The Christians of Ephesus shared stories about Jesus. They soon debated with local Jewish rabbis in the synagogue. Rabbis were Jewish religious teachers with authority. The synagogue was the local place of Jewish worship.

These were some of their questions:

- Was Jesus really the Son of God?
- How could he be the Christ?
- Could Christians be right in calling themselves "children of Abraham?"
- Could anyone prove that God actually sent Jesus?

Guided by the Holy Spirit, John was brilliant in leading his Christian audience through these debates.

Tensions increased. As small churches began to appear beside Jewish synagogues, many Jews chose to follow Christ. This led to conflict. Opposition against Christians was certain.

John supported the churches during times of persecution and struggle. When it seemed that the young churches could not survive against the powerful synagogue community, John gave bold testimony about Jesus Christ.

Later, false teachers caused division inside the church. Again, John strengthened the believers. Through letters of encouragement and warning

(see [1](#), [2](#), and [3 John](#)), John became both a pastor and teacher for the churches in Asia Minor.

John's writing is as loved today as it was in the early years of the church. Few books of the Bible have shaped Christian life and thought like John's profound and dynamic gospel. John combines intimate expression with deep insight to create a portrait of Christ that satisfies.

## Summary

John divided his gospel into two main sections: [chapters 1-12](#) and [chapters 13-21](#). The first section, often called “The Book of Signs,” describes Jesus’s public ministry as he reveals himself to the Jewish world. The second section, often called “The Book of Glory,” contains Jesus’s private words to his disciples and details his death and resurrection.

### *Chapters 1-12*

The opening of John’s Gospel ([1:1-18](#)) introduces Jesus as God’s Word who came into the world. Jesus was baptized and called his first followers ([1:19-51](#)).

Then, a series of remarkable events shows Jesus revealing himself to the Jews ([chapters 2-4](#)):

- At a wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine.
- In Jerusalem, he used a whip to drive out corruption and business from the temple in Jerusalem.
- He discussed the meaning of spiritual birth with a Jewish rabbi named Nicodemus.
- At a well in Samaria, he met a woman with a complicated history of marriage. He offered her “living water,” which no human well can provide.

In each event, Jesus revealed his identity.

In [chapters 5-10](#), Jesus appears at several Jewish festivals. He uses ancient practices and symbols from the Old Testament to show who he is to God’s people. On the Sabbath day, Jesus healed a man who could not walk. At Passover, he gave bread to five thousand people. During the Feast of Booths, which used symbols of light, Jesus healed a blind man and showed that he is the light of the world (meaning he brings truth, guidance, and life to all people).

John’s message is clear: Jesus came to complete what God had promised through Judaism since Old Testament times.

Then Jesus started to prepare for his death and resurrection. John describes Jesus’s arrival in Bethany, a town just east of Jerusalem ([chapter 11](#)).

His friend Lazarus had died, and Jesus resurrected him. After this remarkable event, Jesus made his final public appeal for the world to trust in him and his mission ([chapter 12](#)).

### *Chapters 13-21*

John focuses on Jesus’s death and resurrection. He reminds his audience that the cross is not a desperate symbol but one of glory. Jesus was returning to the Father and needed to prepare his disciples for his departure from this life. At his final Passover meal, Jesus shared what was most important to him with his disciples ([chapters 13-17](#)).

He spoke openly about his death and return to the Father. He reassured them that he would not abandon them. He promised to return and turn their grief into joy. He also promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Jesus prayed for them.

After this Passover meal, Jesus led his followers east of the city and across a valley to an olive grove called “Gethsemane” ([chapter 18](#)). Judas, who had agreed to betray Jesus, soon appeared with many Roman soldiers and temple guards. After his arrest, Jesus stood before the Jewish high council (Sanhedrin) for questioning. First Annas and then by Caiaphas, the high priest, accused him.

By morning, the Jewish leaders took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. He asked questions about Jesus’s identity. Pilate, finally persuaded by the Jewish leaders, decided to have Jesus crucified ([chapters 19](#)).

The high point of John’s Gospel is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead ([chapter 20](#)). This event starts a series of dramatic stories where Jesus appeared to his disciples and encourages them. He gave them the Holy Spirit and tasks them with representing him to the world.

Jesus then gave his disciples their instructions ([chapter 21](#)). He reminded them of his power ([verses 1-14](#)). He restored Peter, who had denied him three times ([verses 15-17](#)). He instructed Peter to follow him in his mission ([verses 18-19](#)).

## Author and Date

Like the other gospels, John does not plainly state its author. However, the mysterious "beloved disciple" offers important hints (see [13:23](#); [19:26-27](#); [20:2-10](#); [21:7](#), [20-24](#)). The Gospel of John must relate to this person because John identifies him as the main source of the personal witness for this record of Jesus's life story ([19:35](#); [21:20-24](#)).

### *Beloved Disciple*

Who was this beloved disciple? Starting in AD 125, early church leaders wrote that he was the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. John was living in Ephesus when he wrote this gospel (see, for example, Eusebius, *Church History* 3.23). John was one of the twelve apostles. Along with his brother James and friend Peter, John was part of Jesus's inner circle of disciples (see, for example, [Matthew 26:36-37](#); [Mark 5:37](#); [9:2](#)). The Gospel of John reflects this close perspective. Most scholars believe John finished writing his gospel around AD 90.

## Recipients

John probably wrote his gospel for Jewish Christians in Ephesus, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean region. These Christians were between Jewish and Greek cultures, and their understanding of Judaism might have started to weaken.

John's Gospel shows his knowledge of Palestine and Judaism. But he thought his audience did not know some details of Jesus's world. For example, he explained that *rabbi* is a Hebrew word meaning “teacher” ([1:38](#)). He provided another name for the Sea of Galilee ([6:1](#)).

At the same time, John believed his audience knew Jewish traditions, concepts, and feasts. They were probably also familiar with the basic story in Mark's Gospel. For instance, John mentions John the Baptist's imprisonment without telling the full story ([3:24](#)).

## Meaning and Message

### *Revelation and Redemption*

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" ([1:5](#)). God's spiritual light is in the world, Christ shows us the Father ([14:9](#)). In Christ, we see God's glory in a human. Even though Jesus encountered abuse, trial, and crucifixion, his light remains.

Jesus reveals who God is to redeem or release people from slavery to sin: "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men" ([1:4](#)). Those who accept Christ's revelation and redemption (salvation) with faith will gain eternal life.

### *Worship and the Spirit*

Worship must happen "in spirit and in truth" ([4:24](#)). This means the Spirit of God empowers and guides it. Nicodemus needed to be born of "water and the Spirit" to enter the kingdom of God ([3:5](#)). In Galilee, after feeding 5,000 men, Jesus told the crowd that "living bread" is available in his body, which would become a sacrifice. He instructed them to consume his body and blood, referring to the Lord's Supper ([6:51-59](#)). However, worship focused only on the individual elements without the Spirit of God is useless (see [6:63](#)).

### *Jesus Christ*

John wrote about Jesus's descriptions of his nature, origin, and relationship with the Father. Jesus confirmed his unity with the Father ([10:30](#); [14:9-10](#)). He also shared a purpose ([5:17](#); [8:42](#)). Yet, he emphasized their personal distinction ([14:28](#); [17:1-5](#)). Jesus used the title "I am," which God used for himself in the Old Testament, to affirm his own divinity (see [8:58](#); [18:4-5](#); [Exodus 3:13-14](#)).

### *The Holy Spirit*

John's Gospel emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a key part of Jesus's human experience and our lives (chapters [4](#), [7](#); chapters [3](#), [14](#), and [16](#)). The Spirit's power to transform is a sign of what a true disciple is.

### *The Mission of the Church*

God sent Jesus into the world to show his glory and share the gospel of salvation ([8:18](#)). After Jesus went back to heaven, the Spirit continued this mission ([16:5-11](#)). The Spirit filled the church and

gave Christians the power to perform Jesus's mission in the world ([20:20-23](#); [Matthew 28:18-20](#); [Acts 1:7-8](#)).

### *The End Times*

Early Christians expected Christ to return, and John confirms this expectation. Meanwhile, Christians can feel Jesus's presence through the Holy Spirit. Jesus's promise of the Spirit's arrival mirrors the language of his second coming (see [14:15-26](#)). In an important way, Jesus is already with us. Through the Spirit, we continue to anticipate Christ's personal return at the end of history.