

## JOHN

### Introduction

Author. John, "the apostle whom Jesus loved" identifies himself in a roundabout sort of way (13:23; 21:7, 20, 24). The writer was evidently an eyewitness (4:1-2) of much of his subject--such as the house at Bethany being filled with the fragrance of perfume (12:3). He knew the geography (11:18) and customs (4:9) of Israel. The early church fathers agree that the apostle John, the son of Zebedee was the author.

Date. The date of the gospel is probably late, around 85 or 90 A. D.

Structure. The structure of the gospel is very difficult to reduce to an outline. So many variegated themes of faith, Messiahship, deity, and sign miracles surface and resurface that one comprehensive scheme is almost impossible to determine. Many topics invite the reader to form an outline around them such as the seven sign miracles, the I AM statements or the feasts, but upon closer inspection none can account for the whole book.

The prologue is a cohesive unit of theological commentary which is set off from the rest of the text with its narrative style. John uses the prologue to pre-inform the reader of the pertinent points about the Messiah and his reception which the rest of the book will develop in story form.

The next, and only, universally recognized division is the transition which occurs at chapter twelve. There John concludes his work thus far with a theological commentary (12:37-41), and notes that the hour of glorification (the turning point of the Gospel) has come (12:23). In addition, from this point on, Jesus only instructs his Twelve privately rather than having any interaction with the crowds.

Occasion. John states the purpose of his writing more clearly than most authors. His goal was that *you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (20:31). The emphases of his writing are thus to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, that He was in fact deity and that the reader, being persuaded of these facts, might have eternal life.

Message Statement. *Jesus, the prophet greater than Moses, the Messiah, who is God, is worthy of our complete trust.*

### Argument

- 1A PROLOGUE: JESUS AS THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF MEN 1:1-18  
John makes effective use of his opening words to "pre-inform" his audience about the person and work of Jesus. Throughout the rest of the book John records episodes of individuals who meet Jesus, come to some kind of understanding of who he is and then make a decision about him. Some of the players in the stories come to the

correct conclusions and some to incorrect, but the reader, who has the benefit of the introductory prologue, can correctly interpret the events of Jesus' life and thus come to his own decision of faith. The prologue simply helps set the tone so that the purpose of the book *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (20:31) may be realized.

The prologue speaks of the deity of Jesus, the witness of John, the mixed reception which he received by the world and his revelation of the father. In much of this material, Jesus is compared with Moses and found to be the complement. The comparison is not so much of contrast as of completion and fulfillment. Jesus is the greater prophet of which Moses spoke (Deut 18:15).

1B His Deity 1:1-5  
John's opening words are clearly cast in the form of the opening words of Genesis. Based upon the explicit comparison with Moses at the end of this introduction and upon other implicit and explicit comparisons throughout the book, it may be that John consciously opens here in the words of Moses to make a statement. Just as a great amount of revelation (light in the Johannine metaphor) came through Moses, so also now, a great amount of revelation is coming through Jesus. Not only is Jesus going to bring more revelation in much the same way that Moses did, but he is also going to complete, fulfill and answer the revelation which Moses began. Thus, the opening words draw our attention to the work of Moses.

After stating the equality between Jesus and God (a point over which the Jews constantly stumble in the book, 5:18; 10:33), John moves on to state his creatorship in verse three. After reproducing the words of the introduction to the creation account from Genesis, John adds the detail that it was the second person through whom all the creative work was accomplished. He is also introduced as life and light. Through the revelation of Jesus (light) men come to have life. Unfortunately the darkness in men due to sin caused them to misunderstand that light (1:5).

2B His Witness 1:6-9  
John utilizes the concept of witnesses a great deal in the book. Moses is now a witness to Jesus as is the Father and the Spirit. The one, however, whose primary role was that of witness to Jesus, was John the Baptizer. John's origin from God and his identity of being a mere witness to the light rather than the light itself become significant when the Jews question whether John is "the prophet" (Deuteronomy 18:15) later in the chapter (1:21).

3B His Reception by the World 1:10-13  
The sad part of the gospel is that it was not received by all. As John presents the story of Jesus this fact becomes lucidly clear. Over and over again as the message is presented, the reaction is mixed. Some believe and some do not. The goal of this work, however, is belief and John makes clear that those who do believe then become children of God.

4B His Revelation of the Father 1:14-18  
In this section John seems to capitalize on the comparison between Moses and Jesus. He does so at first implicitly and then explicitly in verse seventeen. In 1:14 he mentions that Jesus came and "tabernacled" (ἐσκηνώσεν) among us, alluding to God's dwelling in Moses' tabernacle in the wilderness. John also mentions seeing his glory (1:14) as of course Moses did (Exodus 33:18). Finally, the direct comparison is made that, . . . *the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (1:17). Again, the point is not to contrast but to demonstrate completion. As judgment came through the law (5:45<sup>1</sup>) the solution to judgment, life, comes through Jesus. Jesus is not contrary to Moses but the fulfillment of all that the law lacked. In the rest of the gospel Moses is seen not at all as an adversary, but as a witness to Jesus.

1B **CHRIST BRINGS LIFE AND LIGHT INTO THE WORLD** 1:19--12:50  
This section presents Jesus' offer of himself to the nation and their reaction to him. The only coherent structure which is even remotely suggested by the text divides the section into two basic parts as designated in this outline. He first records the presentation of Jesus to Israel and the basically positive reaction to him (1-4) and then the presentation of Jesus with hostile reactions (5-12).

1B Jesus Reveals Himself as the Christ with Positive Reactions 1:19--4:54  
John seems to give positive reactions to the Messiah first to further confirm in the mind of the reader the

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<sup>1</sup>Notice the statement of Jesus about the function of the law, "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set."

person and message of Jesus. After these first four chapters (including the theology of the prologue and the testimonies of chapters two through four) the reader would find it nearly impossible to come to any other conclusion than that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

- 1C Jesus' disciples believe in Him 1:19--2:11  
 Jesus' first disciples were originally loyal to John. With John's testimony and the message and miracles of Jesus, they were persuaded to follow the bridegroom rather than his friend. As Jesus performs his first miracle for the exclusive benefit of his disciples (2:9) John notes that they believe in him. Since they had already proclaimed their trust that he was the Messiah (1:45, 49), this would seem to be a confirmation of their faith.

As Philip informs Nathaniel about Jesus he identifies him as *the one Moses wrote about in the Law* which is undoubtedly a reference to the greater prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15. It is interesting, then, that in the first miracle Jesus seems to build upon one of the miracles of Moses, but in a more positive way. As Moses turned water in stone pots into blood (Exodus 7:20), now Jesus turns water into sweet wine. As mentioned before in the prologue, Jesus came to fulfill what Moses had begun. While the law brought judgment (a necessary prerequisite to salvation) Jesus brought the solution to judgment, life. While Moses' miracle was one of judgment, Jesus' was one of life. This in no way speaks in a pejorative way of the contribution of Moses. The law is necessary and righteous as it points out sin. It simply, by itself, does not provide the answer to sin.

- 2C Others believe in Him 2:12--4:54  
 Besides the twelve which put their trust in him, many others, when presented with the same claims, make the right choice of faith. The first group of people who believe are some attending a Passover feast. John notes that their faith was aroused because of the signs. Although much debate exists about the sufficiency of such faith, it is the persuasion of this writer based upon such passages as 8:31-47 that John sometimes uses the word for believe (πιστεωω, 8:35-47) so as to suggest that there is a belief which is insufficient for salvation. John does note that Jesus did not entrust himself to these people (2:24-25).

Nicodemus is attracted because of the signs as well (3:2) but at this point in the gospel does not make a positive affirmation of faith. At least he is not negative in his evaluation. Jesus once again compares himself with Moses by referring to the lifted up snake in the desert (3:14-16). As Moses lifted up a snake in the desert which gave temporal life, so also Jesus will be lifted up which will result in eternal life. Thus, he is the prophet greater than Moses.

After Nicodemus, certain Samaritans not only accept Jesus as the Messiah but invite him to spend more time with him as well. Their belief is a model for the reader. The woman realizes that he is a prophet (4:19) and the Messiah (4:42) and the townspeople believe not only on the testimony of others but also because of Jesus' own words, a sure foundation for belief (4:42).

The royal official is also a paradigm of belief. As Jesus castigates the people of Galilee with the words *Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe* (4:48), the royal official takes Jesus at his word (4:50) and sees his son live. As he observes the sign (of his son's restoration) his faith is confirmed (4:53).

- 2B Jesus Reveals Himself as the Christ with Hostile Reactions 5:1--12:50  
 The major difference between this section and the former is that at this point John begins recording the hostile reactions of the crowd. The material here covers the rest of the ministry of Jesus up until the passion week.

- 1C From the healing of the lame man 5:1-47  
 The response from the man who is healed and from the Jews is negative. Jesus responds to this man that he ought to stop sinning (5:14), and Jesus accuses the others of not believing Moses (5:47). The Jews were concerned about two points in particular here: Jesus' working on the Sabbath and making himself equal with God (5:18). Jesus responds with a discourse on his equality with the Father (5:19-30) and then reviews the various testimonies about him (5:31-47). These testimonies include John, the Father, the Scriptures and finally, Moses.

- 2C From the feeding of the five thousand 6:1-15  
 John notes in the background of this miracle that the Passover feast was near (6:4), thus the people's minds would naturally be upon the Exodus and the person of Moses who delivered the people. With

that in mind the people interpret Jesus' feeding the people with both bread and meat as a miracle at least as good as manna from heaven and began to say *Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world* (6:14). Thus, they recognized Jesus to be greater than Moses and desired to make him their King. This response was a superficial one, however, and Jesus withdrew from them.

- 3C From the walking on water 6:16-24  
Along with the previous miracle, this one as well, reminds the people that Jesus is the greater prophet. Although Moses parted the waters, Jesus simply walked on top of them. This feat excited the fascination of the crowds (6:25).
- 4C From the discourse on bread: many disciples depart 6:25-71  
The grumbling of the people in this section suggests the grumbling of the people during the ministry of Moses. In direct comparison with Moses the people beg for more food from heaven. Rather than capitulate to their selfish desires Jesus teaches that he is real bread from heaven. Stumbling at this teaching, *many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him* (6:66). In the midst of this departure a few remained (6:67-69), although even then Jesus recognized that one of them would betray him. The reactions to Jesus were indeed mixed.
- 5C From Jesus' teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles 7:1--8:59  
At this feast Jesus taught that for the one who believed in him *streams of living water will flow from within him* (7:38). While Moses had given water from the rock, Jesus would produce water from within each man. Many then concluded again *Surely this man is the prophet* (7:40).

Because of the unbelief of the leadership that Jesus is the prophet greater than Moses (7:45-52) they attempt to trap him into contradicting Moses with the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11). By citing the requirement laid down by Moses that the witnesses against the accused be objective, Jesus causes the crowd to scatter. He does not condemn the woman (that will be his mission at his second coming), he exhorts her to sin no more. Thus Jesus, shows himself to be in agreement with Moses and yet merciful as well.

The Jews then reject Jesus as the light of the world (8:12-20) and as one greater than Abraham (8:31-59). Jesus' harsh words of rejection in this latter section are curiously spoken to *the Jews who had believed him* (8:31). Soon into their discussion Jesus reveals their true hearts, *If you were Abraham's children . . . then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me . . . . You belong to your father, the devil . . . .*" (8:39-40, 44). At the conclusion of this discussion the Jews attempted to stone Jesus (8:59).

- 6C From Jesus' healing of a blind man 9:1-41  
Unlike Jesus' former healing of a lame man, this man evidently comes to faith in Jesus (9:35-38). In keeping with the theme of the greater Moses, John records the testimony of the Pharisees to be disciples of Moses (9:28) but to have no loyalty to Jesus (9:29). Jesus clearly states their blindness and their guilt (9:41).
- 7C From Jesus' teaching as the Good Shepherd 10:1-42  
Characteristic of this gospel, John records here the absolutely mixed reactions of the crowds: "Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to Him?' But others said, 'These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (10:20-21). Later in this section although the Jews try to stone Jesus twice (10:22-39), many in the transjordan do believe (10:42).
- 8C From the raising of Lazarus 11:1-57  
This was the only miracle performed by Jesus in which he deliberately heightened the effects. Upon hearing the news Jesus waited two more days so that the resurrection of Lazarus would be an undisputable testimony to him. More than any other miracle, because of the timing, location and nature of it, the leadership took offense at this sign and determined to kill Jesus for it. John records the words of Caiaphas here *it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish* (11:50).
- 9C From the passion week 12:1-36  
Jesus' popularity at his triumphal entry was a source of jealousy for the leadership. Jesus then predicted his death. Throughout the book John has heightened the suspense of Jesus impending death with the words "but his hour had not yet come" (7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). Now, for the first time,

Jesus states that *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified* (12:23). A voice from heaven confirms Jesus' person and mission in the midst of his rejection.

- 10C The summary 12:37-50  
Like the prologue, John includes here a theological commentary. This time it concerns the unbelief of Israel. His quotations from Isaiah confirm that this generation, like so many before it, have been judicially blinded because of their unbelief. Jesus' final words to the crowd summarize his presentation. He, like Moses speaks only what he has been told from on high (12:49). Unlike Moses, and greater than Moses, Jesus perfectly reflects the glory of the father (12:45). Again, unlike Moses, Jesus did not come to condemn but to save (12:47) Judgment will wait until the last day (12:48). Indeed, this Jesus is The prophet, the one greater than Moses.
- 1C CHRIST GIVES A SELF SACRIFICE WHICH ISSUES IN LIFE 13:1--20:31  
The last section concerns the night of the Passover, the crucifixion and the resurrection. Thus, it is the culmination of Jesus' ministry and the making of the sacrifice which issued in life for all.
- 1B The Preparation of the Twelve for his Death and Their Service Afterward 13:1--17:26  
John records here much unique material which was given in the upper room and afterwards. He begins by teaching them about the humility and selflessness which is required of true servanthood. In the teaching about servanthood Jesus mentions that one will betray him (13:1-17). This leads to his pointing out of Judas (13:18-30). It could be that Judas receives much ink in this gospel because he portrays so clearly the incredible ability of the Jewish people to reject the claims of the Gospel.
- Jesus then reinforces his oneness with the Father (14:1-14) and assures the disciples that the Spirit will come to teach and comfort them (14:15-31). Obedience to and abiding in the Son will be essential as the disciples prepare for persecution (15:1--16:4) as Jesus lays the foundation for the giving and inspiration of the New Testament writings (16:5-13). Finally, Jesus' high priestly prayer for himself, his disciples and for all believers is recorded in chapter seventeen.
- 2B The Trial and Crucifixion 18:1--19:42  
John is careful to record the three denials of Peter as well as the three declarations of innocence by Pilate. Unique to this gospel are the accounts of Jesus' care for his mother while on the cross and his cries of thirst and finality (19:28, 30). The final stage of Nicodemus' faith is recorded in this section as he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of Jesus. His progression of faith may be traced from chapters three to seven to nineteen.
- 3B The Resurrection 20:1-31  
The resurrection is the final sign which authenticates Jesus. John mentions the appearances of Jesus to Mary and the Twelve and then uses His appearance to Thomas as a foil for his purpose statement. Thomas' faith which was based upon the sign is commended and yet the faith which is most noble and perhaps most stable is the kind which is not based upon tangible evidence but only upon the word of God (21:29). With this John concludes *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (20:31).
- 1D EPILOGUE 21:1-25  
This final section is thought by many to be merely an appendix. However, if John is consistent with his theme of producing faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, then perhaps this final section would relate to that theme. It appears to this writer that Peter's self-confidence (so emphasized by John in the threefold record of his denials) which is really the antithesis of faith in God finds its answer here. To Jesus' threefold question of love and loyalty Peter is never able to give a confident answer. He seems to have come to the point where he no longer has confidence in himself and is finally able to have full confidence in God. This seems to be a final lesson in faith. John then writes, perhaps to dispel the rumor of his immortality, that Jesus did not promise that John would not die (21:23).

