

SPRING / SUMMER 2023



YOUR GUIDE TO  
**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**  
THE NEW CREATION BEGINS



FIVE POINTS BAPTIST  
TREASURING JESUS TOGETHER

# Introducing John's Gospel

John's Gospel is one of the most beloved books of the Bible by Christians from all over the world. And understandably so! In this Gospel we see God's heart for a world that is in rebellion against Him (John 1:10-12; 3:16; 7:7; 15:18-19; 16:33), Jesus's power as the Son of God (John 2:1-22; 4:46-54; 5:1-47; 6:1-21; 9:1-7; 11:1-44; 20:1-18), His gentleness as the Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:1-18), and His mission as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 19:31-37). In it we also hear the unapologetic call for all who read these words to put their faith in Christ and receive life in His name (John 20:30-31).

The guide you hold in your hands is intended to aid you in your study of this amazing book. In it we will talk about issues pertaining to authorship, date, structure, motifs, and themes. We will also outline the preaching schedule so that you can prepare your heart each Sunday and we've included a list recommended resources to help you if you would like to dive deeper. We are praying that our time in John's Gospel this year would help us to treasure Jesus even more as we see Him in these pages.

## Authorship

The testimony of early church history points to the apostle John (i.e. the "John" who belonged to the original twelve disciples) as the author.

- **Polycarp** (died 156 A.D.): A close friend to John who ascribed this Gospel to him.<sup>1</sup>
- **Theophilus of Antioch:** Ascribed this Gospel to the apostle John around 181 A.D.
- **Clement of Alexandria & Tertullian:** Both lived in the 2nd century A.D. and likewise credit John the apostle with authorship.
- **Eusebius:** He lived from the 3rd to 4th century A.D. and examined each book of the canon for authorship and authority. He never doubts John's authorship.
- It should also be noted that intimate settings like the Last Supper (John 13:1-20) could only be remembered so well by one who was there.

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<sup>1</sup> This is relayed to us through Irenaeus, who was a friend of Polycarp.

## Date

A date roughly anywhere between 50-90 A.D. is possible. Most scholars tend to lean toward the latter end (after the Temple's destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D.), but a case can also be made for an earlier date.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, it is probably safest to say that the Gospel was composed by John sometime in the mid to late first century A.D.

## Purpose

John gives us his purpose statement in John 20:30-31:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written **so that** you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*

Many take John's primary purpose to be evangelistic in nature. Among those who do, there is debate as to whether this was evangelism to primarily a Gentile or Jewish audience. Others will argue that John's purpose was more bound up with strengthening the church by reminding them of Jesus.

But does it really have to be either/or? It seems probable that John may have had both purposes in mind. Knowing that unbelievers sometimes came to see early church gatherings for themselves (1 Corinthians 14:23-25), John undoubtedly hoped that they would be compelled to place their faith in Christ. Yet one theme in John is that genuine faith is one that endures (see "Themes" below for more info). Thus, his gospel can also be seen as a challenge to the church to continue in her faith in Christ, despite opposition and persecution. We might say then that *John's purpose was to evangelize non-believers and encourage believers to continue in their faith.*

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<sup>2</sup> Note the present tense description of the pool by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem in John 5:2: "There **is** in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate..." The way this is written makes it seem like the Temple was still standing when John wrote his Gospel. If that be the case, this would push the dating of his Gospel to sometime before 70 A.D. (the year that the Romans destroyed the Temple). Scholars preferring a later date will describe this as a "historical present" verb (i.e. John writes as if events in the past were happening in the present).

## Motifs

### Light / Darkness

We see the first occurrence of this motif in 1:4-5. Christ is described as the Light that overcomes the darkness. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus says that Light has come into the world, but men love the darkness because because their deeds are evil (3:1-21). At the Feast of Tabernacles in John 8:12, Jesus describes Himself as the Light of the world. This is followed by the miracle of healing the blind man (9:1-7). As the narrative progresses, one gets the sense of the atmosphere becoming darker as Jesus's arrest draws near (11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46-47). Night has officially fallen when the soldiers come to apprehend Him (13:30). His resurrection takes place on the first day in the early morning and He appears to His disciples later that day (20:1-23). In John's Gospel, "Light" refers to Christ. The condition of those who have trusted in Him is that they are brought out of darkness.<sup>3</sup>

### Water

Water is another motif that occurs regularly. In John 2:1-11, we have the miracle of Jesus turning the water that was used for external purification into wine. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him that one must be born of water and the Spirit (3:5). In 3:25 there is an argument among John's disciples and a certain Jew about water purification. This is followed immediately by Jesus offering the Samaritan woman living water. There is a healing at a pool in 5:1-17, followed by Jesus walking on water in 6:16-21. Jesus makes another offering of living water at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:37-39). Jesus washes His disciples' feet in 13:1-20. And after the soldier pierced His side, John alone mentions that water and blood flowed out (19:34).

### Witness

Throughout John's Gospel we see people bearing testimony about Jesus. The initial and preeminent witness is John the Baptist (1:6-8, 19-34). Following his witness, a couple of his disciples spend time with Jesus and then go and bear witness about Him to others as well (1:35-51). The Samaritan woman goes and bears witness after her conversation with Him at the well (4:28-30).

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<sup>3</sup> Credit for this section goes to: Craig Koester, *Symbolism In The Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2003).

Jesus's own works (or "signs") also bear witness about Him, as well as the writings of Moses (5:30-47). The Father is also a witness for Jesus, certifying that Jesus is His Son (8:17-18; 12:27-30).

The blind man who was healed by Jesus offers his testimony in 9:25 and the soldier who pierced Jesus's side also bore witness to what he saw (19:25). And we are told at the very end that it was the disciple who witnessed all these things who wrote this Gospel (21:24). These various witnesses seem to work together in an effort to incite faith in the reader.



## Time

There are multiple references to time throughout John's Gospel. Frequently used is the term "hour". At various points it indicates the time at which something happened: (1) It was about the 10th hour when two of John's disciples begin following Jesus (1:39). (2) It was about the sixth hour when Jesus rested by the well in Samaria (4:6). (3) Jesus healed the royal official's son at the seventh hour (4:52). (4) It was about the sixth hour when Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified (19:14). There is also a very particular hour that the whole Gospel is moving toward: the hour of Jesus's crucifixion. In 2:4 Jesus has to remind His mother that His hour had not yet come. The same can be said of His brothers in 7:1-8. As Jesus's crucifixion draws near, He proclaims: *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour."* This motif demonstrates God's sovereign plan to save a people for Himself through the work of His Son. Even though evil people wrongfully sought to put Him to death, God's sovereign purposes were still worked out (cf. Genesis 50:20).

## Themes

The motifs above all work together to develop John's primary themes. You can think of themes as sort of the "big ideas" that the author wants you to come away with. Here are some of the main ones that we will revisit time and again in our sermon series.

### 1. Jesus's Divinity

As soon as the Gospel opens, John begins with asserting that Jesus is truly God (1:1-3). This theme continues throughout the Gospel and is seen through Jesus's works and His own self-attestation. In John 5:1-17, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath.

When the religious authorities question Him about this, He likens His work with the Father's. Verse 18 tells us why they began persecuting Him at this point: He was making Himself equal with God. Following this episode, Jesus then makes a series of "I am" statements:

- I am the the bread of life... (6:35)
- I am the Light of the world... (8:12)
- **Before Abraham was... I am... (8:58)**
- I am the Door of the sheep... (10:7)
- I am the Good Shepherd... (10:14)
- I am the resurrection and the life... (11:25)
- I am the way, the truth, and the life... (14:6)
- I am the true vine... (15:1)

Scholars have frequently noted that these "I am" statements are a strong echo of Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, 'I Am who I am'". Thus, these are all different ways that Jesus attests Himself to be God. Perhaps the pinnacle of the *I am* statements is in 8:58, where Jesus simply designates Himself as *I am* and asserts that He existed before Abraham was even born! At this point in the narrative, the religious leaders' opposition to Him is strongly galvanized. They won't rest until He has been executed. The Gospel's clearest attestation of Jesus's divinity comes with Thomas's high confession of who Jesus is when he sees the resurrected Christ for the first time: "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). One of John's goals in this Gospel is for the reader to understand that just as the Father is God, so also the Son is God.

## 2. New Creation

John's Gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning..." This echoes the same opening words from Genesis 1:1. The point? John wants us to understand Jesus's work in light of creation. Specifically, just as Jesus was involved in the original creation (1:3), so He is also bringing about a new creation. And this makes sense in light of the Gospel's flow (see *Structure* below for more info). In His ministry, Jesus describes Himself as working in the same manner as the Father (5:17). And at the cross, He exclaims that His work is finished (19:30). Jesus was crucified on the last day of the week (Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath; 19:31). This puts His resurrection on the first day of the week (Sunday), signaling that through His death and resurrection, the new creation has now begun.

When He sees His disciples for the first time, we are told that He “breathed” on them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. The word for “breathe” is *emphüsaō*. It is the same Greek word used to describe God breathing life into Adam in Genesis 2:7. The point being made here is that Jesus is now creating a new humanity who receive new life in Him by being given the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection a new creation has begun, one that will eventually culminate in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1).

### **3. New Exodus**

This new creation will take place through a new exodus. Toward the beginning of the Old Testament storyline, we are told of how God rescued His people from Egyptian captivity around 1444 B.C. (the Book of Exodus). He brought them out and made them His covenant people and then gave them a land where they could enjoy His presence through the Tabernacle. But these blessings also came with the responsibility for them to continue to live holy lives before Him. If they didn’t, God told them what would happen: they would be exiled off the land (Leviticus 18:24-30). Well, toward the end of the Old Testament storyline, this is exactly what happened. God’s people began to give themselves over to flagrant idolatry and sexual immorality. They were also exploiting and treating cruelly the least among them: the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner (These are the charges that become prominent in the Prophetic literature). In 722 B.C. Israel is taken captive by the Assyrians and in 586 B.C. Judah is taken captive by the Babylonians.

But not all hope is lost. Exile would not be the end of the story for God’s people. God promised that one day He would bring about a new exodus, where He would bring His people out of captivity again. In Isaiah 40:3 we read, “A voice cries, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” In context, this refers to God coming to bring His people out of captivity. John (whose ministry took place in the desert, by the way) tells a delegation from Jerusalem that he is the voice preparing the way for the coming of Christ (1:23), whom he will go on to describe as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”, evoking the image of the Paschal lamb in the Jewish passover (1:29). The rest of the Gospel will continue to develop this theme and show how Jesus has come to bring about a new exodus — delivering people from their bondage to sin (8:34).

#### **4. Genuine Discipleship**

Not all who claim to be Jesus's disciples have genuine faith. And John's Gospel aims to make this point clear. We are told early on in chapter 2 that many in Jerusalem believed in Jesus, yet He doesn't seem too impressed: "But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people" (John 2:24). Later on, in chapter 6, Jesus had a huge crowd of "disciples" who began following Him after He miraculously fed the 5,000. But when He began to give them "difficult" teaching, we are told in verse 66: "After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him." Jesus then turns to the Twelve and asks if they too are going to abandon Him. And Peter's response in verses 68-69 prove to be the cry of all genuine disciples: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Throughout John's Gospel, genuine disciples have faith in Christ that develops beyond what their eyes can see in Jesus's signs. That is to say, disciples are shown by their continued adherence to Jesus's teaching.

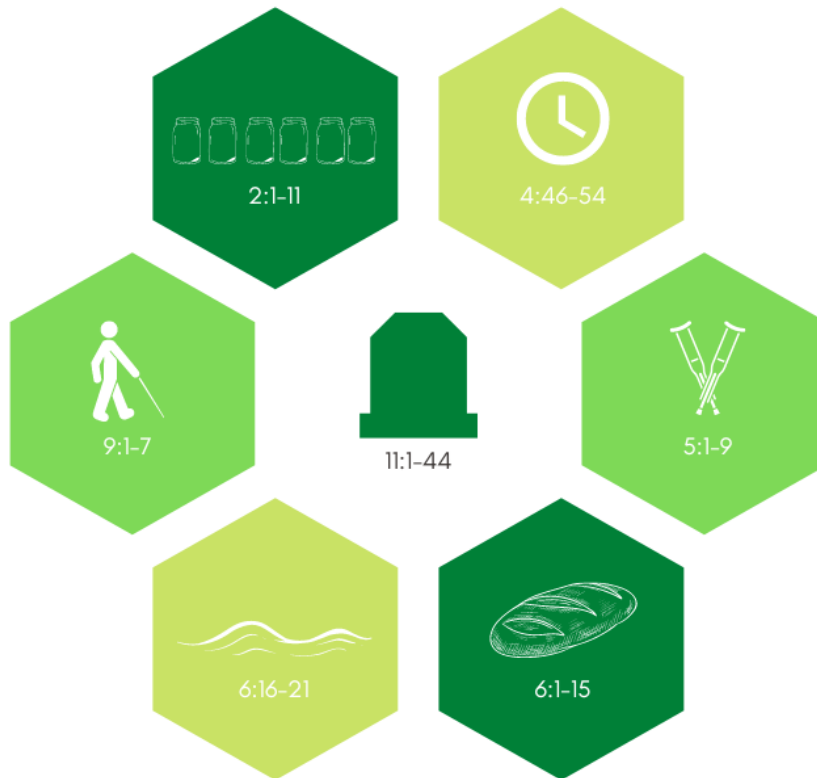
## **Structure**

### **Broad Outline**

- I. Prologue (1:1-18)
- II. Public Ministry (1:19-10:42)
  - A. Public Acceptance (2:1-4:54)
  - B. Rising Rejection (5:1-7:53)
  - C. Outright Opposition (8:12-10:42)
- III. Transition (11:1-12:50)
- IV. Moving Toward The Cross & Resurrection (13:1-20:31)
  - A. The Lord's Supper (13:1-30)
  - B. Farewell Discourse, Part 1 (13:31-14:31)
  - C. Farewell Discourse, Part 2 (15:1-16:33)
  - D. High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26)
  - E. Trial & Crucifixion (18:1-19:42)
  - F. Resurrection (20:1-31)
- V. Epilogue (21:1-25)



## The 7 Signs In John:

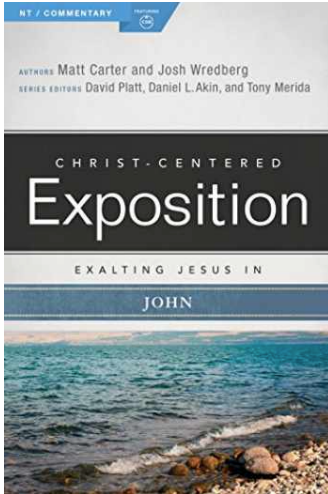


John's Gospel revolves around 7 key signs, seen in the graphic above:

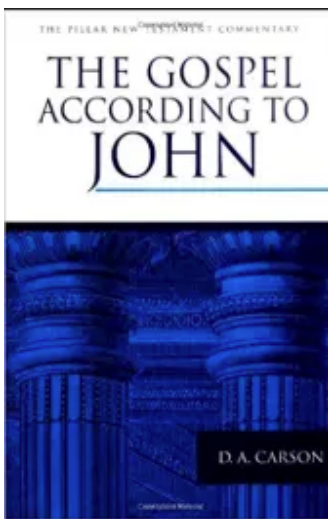
1. Turning the water into wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing of the royal official's son (4:46-54)
3. Healing of the lame man (5:1-9)
4. Feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15)
5. Walking on water (6:16-21)
6. Restoring the blind man's sight (9:1-7)

Each one of these contribute to the main themes. Jesus, who is fully God, is ushering in a new creation by means of a new exodus. Each of these signs bears witness to this truth.

## Recommended Resources



This resource is a great tool that will introduce you to the content of the Gospel of John without getting overly technical. And as the series title suggests, the goal of this commentary is to show how the whole of the Gospel is centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This is also a great resource for small group Bible study discussion or one-to-one discipleship.



For those who would like to dive a bit deeper, this commentary from the Pillar series is outstanding. Written by one of Evangelicalism's most celebrated scholars, Carson writes with the mind of an intellect & the heart of a pastor. This commentary is highly recommended for preparation in teaching John's Gospel in formal group settings.