

Chapter Summary: John

"The Jewish leaders... announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue."

A generation after Jesus lived on earth, His followers continued to face threats like this one recorded in the Gospel of John. And this is one key reason why the book was written. For Jews living throughout the Roman Empire, the local synagogue gave them an ongoing connection to their ancient story and people. Expulsion from the synagogue meant being cut off from the community that had embodied God's covenant people for centuries.

But John's Gospel assures followers of Jesus that they have not been excluded from God's Story. Jesus embodies the deepest meaning and ultimate fulfillment of Israel's most vital symbols, festivals, and practices. The Gospel's opening line ("In the beginning") echoes the opening words of Genesis, revealing that John is telling a story of new creation. God's ongoing work to restore His world through Abraham's family finds its continuity in the work of Jesus the Messiah.

John's Gospel reads very differently from the other three, being less a narrative biography and more a portrait of Jesus drawn against the backdrop of Israel's history. Its purpose is to invite readers, both ancient and present, to be confident in their belief that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God."

The author of the book (traditionally considered to be the apostle John, though he doesn't identify himself by name) tells the story of Jesus' life in two major parts.

The first part has seven sections. Each relates what happened when Jesus took a journey and explores His identity in light of a key element from Israel's story. The centerpiece of this part of the book is the fourth section; the other six sections are paired with one another thematically from the outside in, as shown below.

- A. Jesus in light of the new creation (John 1 – 2:12).
- B. Jesus in relation to the Temple (John 2:13 – 4).
- C. Jesus in light of the Sabbath and in conflict with Jewish religious leaders (John 5).
- D. Jesus as the new Moses against the backdrop of the Exodus (John 6).
- C. Jesus in light of the Festival of Shelters and in conflict with Jewish religious leaders (John 7 – 10:21).
- B. Jesus in relation to the Temple dedication festival (John 10:22 – 42).
- A. Jesus in light of the resurrection (John 11–12).

Near the end of each section, the author describes how people did or did not believe in Jesus after everything they had seen and heard.

A recurring theme in the Gospel of John is the number seven. For Jews, this number indicates a consummate work of God and recalls the completeness represented by the seven days of creation. Often called the "Book of Signs", this first part of the Gospel details how Jesus performed seven mighty "signs" that "revealed His glory." The Gospel also contains seven discourses, which are longer speeches in which Jesus unveils more about who He is. Finally, we find Jesus presenting seven "I am" statements in the Gospel. These statements draw on a rich stock of imagery from the Old Testament, including the bread of life, the good shepherd, the gate, and the vine.

The second part of the book (John 13-20) essentially tells the story of Jesus' final days. It begins with His last Passover meal with the disciples followed by a long presentation of His instructions to them. Jesus speaks of the meaning of His death as a battle against "the ruler of this world." And He prays to the Father for the unity of His followers, which will enable the world to believe their message about Jesus after He departs. Jesus then enters into His "glory" through His obedient death, which is why this part of the Gospel is often called the "Book of Glory."

Before its brief epilogue, the Gospel closes by telling of Jesus' resurrection on Sunday morning, the first day of the week. With Jesus, the life and peace of God's new creation truly has broken into this world.