

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## JOHN

### THEME

#### Author and Title

The title says that the Gospel was written by John, and other evidence identifies this John as the son of Zebedee. The internal evidence indicates that the author was (1) an apostle ([1:14](#); cf. [2:11](#); [19:35](#)), (2) one of the 12 disciples (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”; [13:23](#); [19:26](#); [20:2](#); [21:20](#); cf. [21:24–25](#)), and, still more specifically, (3) John the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” with Peter in [13:23–24](#); [18:15–16](#); [20:2–9](#); [21:2–23](#); cf. [Luke 22:8](#); [Acts 1:13](#); [3:1–4:37](#); [8:14–25](#); [Gal. 2:9](#)). The external evidence from the church fathers supports this identification (e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2).

#### Date and Place of Writing

The most likely date of writing is the period between A.D. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and A.D. 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), but there is not enough evidence to be much more precise. A date subsequent to A.D. 70 is suggested, among other things, by the references in [6:1](#) and [21:1](#) to the Sea of Tiberias (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the 1st century), the reference in [21:19](#) to Peter’s martyrdom (probably between A.D. 64 and 66), and the lack of reference to the Sadducees (who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after A.D. 70). The testimony of the early church also favors a date after A.D. 70. Thus Clement of Alexandria stated, “Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain [in the other canonical Gospels] ... composed a spiritual gospel” (cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7).

The most likely place of writing is Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), which was one of the most important urban centers of the Roman Empire at the time (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2; cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.1). However, the readership envisioned by John’s Gospel transcends any one historical setting.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Theme

The theme of John's Gospel is that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God. By believing in Jesus, people can have eternal life (cf. [20:30-31](#)).

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

2

The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, a Palestinian Jew and a member of Jesus' inner apostolic circle during his earthly ministry. John's original audience consisted of both Jews and Gentiles living in the larger Greco-Roman world in Ephesus and beyond toward the close of the first century A.D. He frequently explains Jewish customs and Palestinian geography and translates Aramaic terms into Greek (see note on [1:38](#)), thus showing awareness of non-Jewish readers. He also presents Jesus as the Word become flesh against the backdrop of Greek thought that included Stoicism and early Gnosticism. But John also shows awareness of Jewish readers as he demonstrates Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of many OT themes, and the Son of God who was sent by God the Father to reveal the only true God and to provide redemption for humanity.

The purpose statement in [20:30-31](#) makes it appear that John wrote with an evangelistic intent. However, his depth of teaching shows that he wanted readers not only to come to initial saving faith in Jesus but also to grow into a rich, well-informed faith. John's central contention is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God, and that by believing in him people may have eternal life. To this end, he marshals the evidence of several selected messianic signs performed by Jesus and of a series of witnesses to Jesus—including the Scriptures, John the Baptist, Jesus himself, God the Father, Jesus' works, the Spirit, and John himself. It is also likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God's people, a concept that would be especially forceful if the date of composition (as seems likely) was subsequent to A.D. 70 (the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple).

## Key Themes

1. Jesus is God.	<a href="#">1:1-2, 18; 5:17-18; 8:58-59; 10:30-33; 20:28</a>
2. Jesus existed before the creation of the world.	<a href="#">1:1-2; 8:58; 17:5, 24</a>
3. Jesus has supernatural knowledge.	<a href="#">1:48; 2:4, 19, 23-25; 3:14; 4:17-18; 6:51, 70; 8:28; 9:3; 10:15, 17-18; 11:4, 14;</a>

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

	<a href="#">12:24, 32; 13:10–11, 38; 21:18–19</a>
4. Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.	<a href="#">1:36, 41, 49; 3:18; 4:25, 29; 5:25; 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42; 9:22; 10:24, 36; 11:4, 27; 12:34; 19:7; 20:30–31</a>
5. Jesus is the “I am.”	<a href="#">4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 (cf. Ex. 3:14–15; Isa. 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6)</a>
6. Jesus, the sent Son, reflects the sender.	<a href="#">3:17, 35–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1</a>
7. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish festivals and institutions (including the temple).	<a href="#">1:29, 36; 2:14–22, esp. v. 21; 4:23–24; 8:12; 9:5; 19:14</a>
8. Jesus is the giver of eternal life.	<a href="#">1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 25, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2–3; 20:31</a>
9. The signs of Jesus show that he is the Messiah (cf. also Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, above).	<a href="#">2:1–11, 13–22; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 9:1–41; 11:1–44</a>
10. The witnesses to Jesus testify that he is the Messiah.	<a href="#">1:7–8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:11, 32–33; 4:39; 5:31–39; 8:14, 18; 10:25; 15:26–27; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24</a>
11. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work of revelation and redemption.	<a href="#">14:17–18, 23, 26; 15:26; 20:21–22</a>
12. Jesus’ death is the basis of salvation.	<a href="#">1:29; 3:14–15; 6:51–58; 10:15; 11:50–52; 12:24; 15:13</a>

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

13. God is sovereign in salvation.	<a href="#">3:21</a> ; <a href="#">5:21</a> ; <a href="#">6:37–45</a> , <a href="#">64–65</a> ; <a href="#">10:16</a> , <a href="#">26–30</a> ; <a href="#">15:16</a> ; <a href="#">17:2</a> , <a href="#">6</a> , <a href="#">9</a>
14. Salvation is obtained through believing in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.	<a href="#">1:12</a> ; <a href="#">3:15</a> , <a href="#">16</a> ; <a href="#">5:24</a> ; <a href="#">6:29</a> , <a href="#">35</a> ; <a href="#">8:24</a> ; <a href="#">11:25–27</a> , <a href="#">42</a> ; <a href="#">12:44</a> ; <a href="#">17:8</a> , <a href="#">21</a> ; <a href="#">20:31</a>
15. Believers can experience the benefits of salvation already in the here and now, during this present evil age.	<a href="#">3:18</a> , <a href="#">36</a> ; <a href="#">4:23</a> ; <a href="#">5:24</a> ; <a href="#">6:39–40</a> ; <a href="#">10:10</a> , <a href="#">26–29</a> ; <a href="#">11:25–26</a>
16. Believers are called to continue Jesus’ mission (cf. also Jesus as the sent Son, above).	<a href="#">4:38</a> ; <a href="#">15:16</a> ; <a href="#">17:18</a> ; <a href="#">20:21–22</a>

## History of Salvation Summary

Jesus comes as God in the flesh ([1:14](#)), the revealer of the Father ([14:9](#)), and the messianic King ([1:41](#), [49](#); [4:25](#); [6:15](#)). He fulfills the OT and its symbols, especially its promises of everlasting salvation. The ultimate fulfillment comes with his crucifixion and resurrection. (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the [Overview of the Bible](#).)

## Literary Features

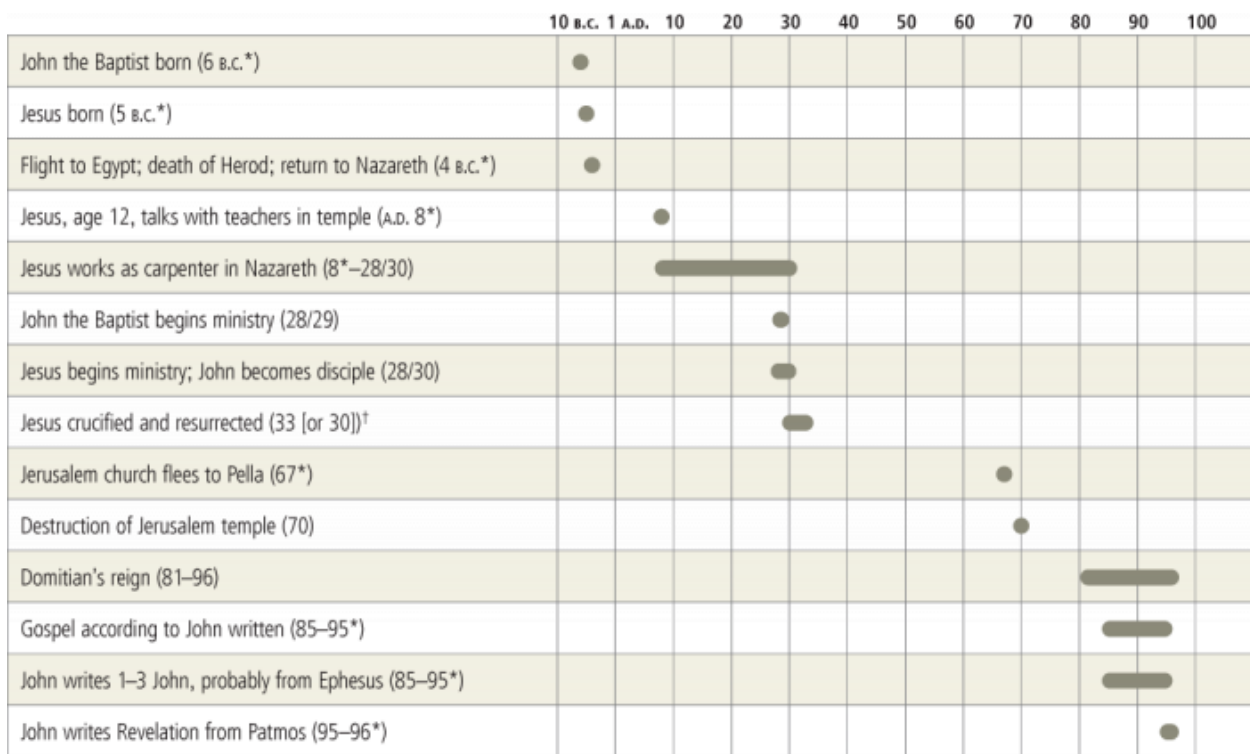
The main genre is gospel, which combines three ingredients—what Jesus did, what Jesus said (discourse and dialogue), and people’s responses to Jesus. Within this format the usual gospel subgenres are found: calling stories, recognition stories, witness stories, conflict stories, encounter stories, miracle stories, discourses, proverbs or sayings, passion stories, resurrection stories, and post-resurrection appearances.

Balancing the narrative richness are expanded discourses by Jesus. The Gospel of John also frequently employs symbolism, especially with reference to Christ, who is portrayed by images such as light, bread, water, and a shepherd. As an extension of this, the first half of the book is built around seven great “signs” that Jesus performed as proof of his messianic identity (see [2:1–11](#); [4:46–54](#); [5:1–15](#); [6:5–13](#); [6:16–21](#); [9:1–7](#); [11:1–44](#)). Then, in a further intricacy, John often links a “sign” or other great symbol with a corresponding statement made by Jesus in the form of either a conversation or full-fledged discourse. For example, Jesus feeds 5,000 ([6:1–13](#)), which is followed a few verses later by Jesus’ discourse on being the bread of life ([6:25–40](#)).

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Literary motifs include: (1) statements that are misunderstood — in which Jesus makes a pronouncement, a bystander expresses an unduly literal understanding of Jesus’ words, and Jesus explains the true, spiritual meaning of his original statement (nine instances: [3:3–8](#); [4:10–15](#); [4:31–38](#); [6:47–58](#); [7:33–36](#); [8:21–30](#); [8:31–47](#); [8:56–58](#); [11:11–15](#)), (2) events or statements that occur in threes (e.g., three denials of Jesus; three utterances from the cross) and statements that occur in sevens (including seven great signs and seven “I am” statements by Jesus; see notes on [2:11](#); [6:35](#)), and (3) heightened contrasts scattered throughout the book (e.g., light vs. darkness; life vs. death; the fleeting vs. the eternal; disease vs. health; love vs. hate).

## Timeline



\* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

## The Setting of John

The events of the Gospel of John take place in Palestine, incorporated into the Roman Empire in 63 B.C. Appointed by the Romans as king over the Jews in 37 B.C., Herod the Great ruled until his death in 4 B.C. The Romans divided his kingdom among his descendants. The predominantly Gentile region of the Decapolis, or “Ten Cities,” was a loose confederation of semiautonomous cities administered by the Roman legate of Syria.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics



## Outline

- I. Prologue: The Incarnate Word ([1:1-18](#))
- II. The Signs of the Messiah ([1:19-12:50](#))
  - A. John the Baptist's witness and the first week of Jesus' ministry ([1:19-2:11](#))

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- B. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to Gentiles ([2:12–4:54](#))
  - C. Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs ([5:1–10:42](#))
  - D. The final Passover: the ultimate sign and the aftermath ([11:1–12:19](#))
  - E. The approaching Gentiles and the Messiah's rejection by the Jews ([12:20–50](#))
- III. The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative ([13:1–20:31](#))
- A. The cleansing and instruction of the new messianic community and Jesus' final prayer ([13:1–17:26](#))
  - B. Jesus' arrest, trials, death, and burial ([18:1–19:42](#))
  - C. Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and sending of his disciples ([20:1–29](#))
  - D. Purpose statement: Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God ([20:30–31](#))
- IV. Epilogue: The Roles of Peter and of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved ([21:1–25](#))<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2015-2018). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.