

INVITATION TO JOHN

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. This is how the author of the book of John explains his purpose in telling Jesus' story, making the issue of belief central. The author doesn't identify himself by name; he simply describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. But we can still recognize who wrote this book, since the different occurrences of this phrase show that this disciple was one of those closest to Jesus. We know the phrase doesn't refer to Peter, since he's named separately. From the stories of Jesus that others have recorded, we can see that this disciple could only have been John. So the book's traditional title correctly identifies its author. John may have described himself anonymously out of humility, to show that he had come to understand everything about himself in light of his relationship with Jesus. In the beginning ... John opens his book with a poetic prologue that mirrors the first words of the Bible. This shows his readers that he's going to tell the story of Jesus as a story of new creation. His intention is confirmed by many other features of the book. John's prologue describes a light shining in the darkness, as at the first creation. The book of Genesis reveals that the first creation was completed in six days, followed by a seventh day of rest. For the Jews the number seven came to represent completeness and wholeness, a finished work of God revealing his purpose for the world. John uses the number seven in multiple ways to structure his book, showing that the finished work of Jesus reveals God's plan to renew his creation and bring us the gift of life. After his prologue, John tells the story of Jesus in two main parts: : The first part (pp. 1819–1839) describes his public ministry. : The second part (pp. 1839–1850) narrates the end of Jesus' life, recording the private instructions he

gave to those who believed in him, and then depicts his death and resurrection. The book ends with an epilogue that was likely added to correct the misunderstanding that John wouldn't die until Jesus returned. The action in the first part takes place in seven sections. Most of these sections describe trips that Jesus made to Judea and back, usually to attend one of the religious festivals that were celebrated in Jerusalem. The first section places Jesus in Judea and provides a model of the structure of the rest of the book. It relates how John the Baptist testified on three successive days that Jesus was the Messiah, and then how, on the fourth day, Jesus called some of his first followers. Three days later, on the seventh day, Jesus did his first miraculous sign, and his disciples believed in him. In the next section Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. This pattern of "seven, then the Passover" can be seen in the book as a whole. There are seven sections in the first part, then the entire second part is devoted to the Passover weekend on which Jesus gave his life for the world. Each of these seven sections closes with a report on how different groups of people responded to Jesus—either in faith or in unbelief. In the first part of the book, a total of seven powerful signs are also related. These signs point to Jesus' identity as the one whom God has sent. (They don't correspond exactly with the section divisions, but they help mark them off.) At the end of this part of the book, John marvels, Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. Near the conclusion of the whole book, John invites the reader to respond differently: Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe... John also records seven instances when Jesus reveals his identity through the phrase I am. Earlier in the Bible's drama God had revealed himself by this name to the people of Israel. God had

chosen Israel to bring blessing and life to the rest of the world. These seven phrases run throughout the book, tying its parts together and connecting Jesus closely to Israel's history. Jesus explains that he is the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life; and the true vine. These show us that Jesus embodies the deepest meaning and truest fulfillment of Israel's story. As Jesus does miraculous signs and participates in religious festivals, his identity is disclosed symbolically. It's then interpreted as he teaches and answers questions. He feeds five thousand people by multiplying several loaves of bread, for example, and he then explains to the crowd that he's the true bread from heaven. The Festival of Tabernacles recalled how, when the Jews were living in the desert, God provided water for them and went ahead of them as a pillar of fire to light the way. Jesus calls out at this feast, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink, and he declares, I am the light of the world. The way John closes his book confirms that the power of a new creation has broken into this world. On the sixth day of the first creation God made the first man, Adam. On the sixth day of Jesus' last week, the Roman governor Pilate announces Jesus with the words, Here is the man! The book of Genesis records that after creating the heavens and the earth, God rested on the seventh day. John records that Jesus is dead and resting in the grave on the Sabbath, the seventh day. Then in the story of how Jesus was powerfully raised from the dead, John notes twice that this took place on the first day of the week. So John has taken us from in the beginning to a new beginning. Jesus the Messiah has defeated sin and death, the great enemies of God's good creation. Jesus has been raised to a new life. John invites his readers to find this new resurrection life themselves by believing in Jesus.