

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A. Authorship

1. Notes

- a. The writer did not identify himself in the text of the *Gospel of John*. None of the Gospel evangelists identified themselves as the writers.
- b. Edwin Blum, *An author may indirectly reveal himself within the writing, or his work may be well known in tradition as coming from him.*
- c. Most identify the writer of the *Gospel of John* as John, one of the disciples of Jesus. That conclusion is based on strong internal and external evidence.
- d. Merrill Tenney, *To a certain extent each of the Gospels reflects the personality of its author, but in none of them is there a more distinctive individuality manifested than in John.*

2. Internal evidence

- a. The disciple Jesus loved, Leon Morris, *This disciple is never named, but the Gospel itself seems to indicate that he was John the Apostle ... at the Last Supper the Beloved Disciple "was reclining next to him (lit. 'in Jesus' bosom')"* and, when Jesus predicted the betrayal, in response to a suggestion from Peter it was this man of whom John says, *"Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'"*
- b. The disciple John at the cross
 - 1) As Jesus hung on the cross, Jesus called John to care for His mother, John 19:26-27, *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*
 - 2) Leon Morris, *Since he is the only male follower of Jesus said to have been at the cross, he may well be the witness who saw the water and blood that came out of Jesus' side (19:34-35).*
- c. John saw Jesus glorified
 - 1) The writer of the *Gospel of John* claimed in John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - 2) John was an eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration, along with Peter and James. Peter could not have written this Gospel based on John 21:20-24 and James died too early to have written this book.
- d. According to B.F. Westcott the evidence from the Gospel indicates that it was written by a Palestinian Jew, an eyewitness, by the disciple whom Jesus loved, by John the son of Zebedee.

3. External evidence

- a. Grant Osborne, *... the best sources for who wrote the four Gospels would be the church fathers. The earliest of them personally knew Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, so their witness regarding authorship has to carry a great deal of authority.*
- b. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (ca. A.D. 130-200) wrote that he heard Polycarp (ca. A.D. 69-155), a disciple of John declare, *John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, had himself published a Gospel during his residence in Ephesus in Asia.*
- c. Other church fathers supported John as the writer of the Gospel, including Theophilus of Antioch (died ca. A.D. 184), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150-215), Tertullian of Carthage (ca. A.D. 155-220) and Tatian. (ca. A.D. 120-180).
- d. Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260-339) noted that Matthew and John wrote the Gospels that bear their names.
- e. Leon Morris, *Some archaeological evidence should be mentioned. There is first the fact that in the catacombs the raising of Lazarus appears on some quite early murals. H. P. V. Nunn speaks of one such in the Capella Graeca in the catacomb of Priscilla, which, he says, is early second century. There is also a representation of the Eucharist with the baskets connected with the miracle of the loaves and fishes on the table that is thought to show that John 6 is in mind. Nunn points out that the crypt of the Acilii Glabriones, "one of the most aristocratic families in Rome, some of the members of which were Christians in the first century," is quite close to this. He concludes: "This is quite sound archaeological evidence that long before the middle of the second century some of the most characteristic teaching of the Fourth Gospel was well known in Rome, so well known that the most noble members of the Roman Church used representations of it to express their most cherished hopes and to decorate their tombs."*

B. Place and date of writing

1. Place

- a. Thomas Constable, *Antioch of Syria and Alexandria in Egypt have been suggested as sites of composition, but they do not have as good support as Ephesus does ... During the first century, that city was one of the largest centers of Christian activity in the Gentile world.*
- b. Grant Osborne, *The best option by far (and the traditional one) stems from the testimonies of Irenaeus in the second century (Against Heresies 3.1.2) and Eusebius in the fourth (Ecclesiastical History 3.1.1) that John wrote during his ministry in Ephesus. That fits the book of Revelation as well (and his letters) and provides the most likely place of writing.*
- c. Edwin Blum, *The external tradition is strong that John came to Ephesus after Paul had founded the church and that he labored in that city for many years (cf. Eusebius The Ecclesiastical History 3. 24. 1). Supporting this tradition is the evidence of Revelation 1:9–11. When John was in exile on Patmos, an island off the coast of Asia Minor, he wrote to seven Asian churches, the first of which was Ephesus. That the Fourth Gospel was originally published at Ephesus is a good probability.*

2. Date

- a. Grant Osborne, *The earliest possible date for the writing of this Gospel is probably the late 60s, if the author knew of the Gospels of Mark and possibly Matthew, as most suppose today ... Arguments for an early date stem from the absence of any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, and arguments for a late date stem from the phrase “expelled from the synagogue” in 9:22; 12:42; 16:2, and the Jewish decision to do so in AD 85.*
- b. Thomas Constable, *Many scholars believe that John wrote his Gospel between A.D. 85 and 95, or close to A.D. 100. Early church tradition was that John wrote it when he was an older man. Moreover, even the early Christians regarded this as the fourth Gospel ... It seems impossible to identify the precise date of writing, as evidenced by the difference of opinion that exists between excellent scholars. However, a date sometime between A.D. 65 and 95 is probable. I favor a date in the 90s.*
- c. Edwin Blum, *Archeological finds supporting the authenticity of the text of John (e.g., John 4:11; 5:2–3), word studies (e.g., synchronotai, 4:9), manuscript discoveries (e.g., P52), and the Dead Sea Scrolls have given powerful support to an early dating for John ... An early date is possible. But this Gospel has been known in the church as the “Fourth” one, and the early church fathers believed that it was written when John was an old man. Therefore a date between 85 and 95 is best. John 21:18, 23 require the passing of some time, with Peter becoming old and John outliving him.*
- d. James Montgomery Boice, *... major factor in a reassessment of the dating and historical accuracy of John’s Gospel has been the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These were uncovered in 1947 and the years immediately following, but the impact of their discovery is continuing even now as the scrolls are being unrolled, assembled, translated, and published ... Before the scrolls were discovered, scholars evaluated the differences between John and the synoptic Gospels in a way that was highly unfavorable to John. For instance, they noticed the unique language of John’s Gospel, with its contrasts between light and darkness, life and death, the world below and the world above, and so on. They noticed that the contrasts were generally lacking in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. “Well,” they said, “it is obvious that the first three Gospels are Jewish and reflect a Jewish setting. But it is also obvious that John’s work is not. John’s Gospel must come from a Greek setting ... Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These revealed a whole world of nonconformist Judaism that had simply not been known to scholars previously. The home of the scrolls was Qumran, not far from Jerusalem, in the very area where John placed the earliest events of Christ’s ministry. And what was most significant, the literature revealed the same use of the so-called Greek terms (logos, light, darkness, life, death) that are found in John’s Gospel and actually provided a far closer parallel to them.*

C. Characteristic features

1. James Montgomery Boice, *Because of their similarities, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels; the three look at the life of Christ from similar viewpoints and employ similar and, at times, even identical language. John stands apart.* Boice notes what is not in the Gospel of John, *no mention of his baptism, the institution of the Lord’s Supper is not included, no ascension, no parables.* Also, Boice notes what is in John and not in the Synoptics, *the early ministry of Jesus in Judea, that the duration of Jesus’ ministry being three years and not one, the changing of water into wine, the encounter with Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus discourses with His disciples during the final week in Jerusalem.*
2. Edwin Blum, *John does not include Jesus’ genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, casting out of demons, parables, transfiguration, instituting of the Lord’s Supper, His agony in Gethesemane, or His Ascension. John’s presentation of Jesus stresses His ministry in Jerusalem, the feasts of the Jewish nation, Jesus’ contacts with individuals in private conversations (e.g., chaps. 3–4; 18:28–19:16), and His ministry to His disciples (chaps. 13–17).*

3. According to Edwin Blum, about 93 percent of the material in John's Gospel does not appear in the Synoptics.3. Thomas Constable, *Compared to the Synoptics, which present Jesus as a historical figure, as John did, John also stressed the deity of Jesus strongly.*
4. Darrell Bock, ... *the Synoptics viewing Jesus from earth up, and John viewing Jesus from heaven down.*
5. B. F. Westcott, ... *it is undeniable that the discourses of the Lord which are peculiar to St John's Gospel are, for the most part, very brief summaries of elaborate discussions and expositions in relation to central topics of faith.*
6. William Barclay, *Its [John's Gospel] aim is, not to give us what Jesus said like a newspaper report, but to give us what Jesus meant.*

D. Key themes in the Gospel of John

1. Jesus's seven *signs* in the Gospel of John
 - a. Changing water into wine in Cana (2:1–11)
 - b. Healing an official's son in Capernaum (4:46–54)
 - c. Healing an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1–18)
 - d. Feeding the 5,000 near the Sea of Galilee (6:5–14)
 - e. Walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee (6:16–21)
 - f. Healing a blind man in Jerusalem (9:1–7)
 - g. Raising dead Lazarus in Bethany (11:1–45)
2. Jesus' seven *I am*'s in the Gospel of John
 - a. *I am the Bread of Life* (6:35)
 - b. *I am the Light of the world* (8:12)
 - c. *I am the Gate for the sheep* (10:7; cf. v. 9)
 - d. *I am the Good Shepherd* (10:11, 14)
 - e. *I am the Resurrection and the Life* (11:25)
 - f. *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life* (14:6)
 - g. *I am the true Vine* (15:1; cf. v. 5)

E. John's purpose for writing the Gospel

1. The verses concerning the purpose of John are recorded at the end of the Gospel, John 20:30-31, *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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.*
2. Leon Morris, ... *due consideration ought to be given to the fact that John tells us in so many words why he wrote: "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). There seems to be no reason for ignoring this express statement. John says plainly that he is out to show Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. And he does this not in order to give his readers some interesting new information but in order that he may bring them to a place of faith and accordingly to new life in Christ's name. Not only does John tell us this in set terms, but close examination shows that this is, in fact, what he has done.*2. Thomas Constable, *Though most students of this Gospel have concluded that John's purpose in writing was primarily evangelistic, some have felt that it was primarily for the growth of believers ... Because of John's general purposes, it seems best to conclude that the original readers were primarily Gentile Christians and Gentile unbelievers.*
3. Merrill Tenney, *By the use of personal reminiscences interpreted in the light of a long life of devotion to Christ and by numerous episodes that generally had not been used in the Gospel tradition, whether written or oral, John created a new and different approach to understanding Jesus' person.*
4. James Montgomery Boice, *There are always people who will say that faith is something that must be entirely divorced from evidence. But that is not stated in the Bible. Faith is believing in something or someone on the basis of evidence and then acting upon it. In this case, John has provided evidence for the full deity of Jesus so that readers, whether in his age or ours, might believe it and commit their lives to Jesus as their Savior.*
5. Warren Wiersbe, ... *there is one major theme that runs throughout John's Gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal life (John 20:31).*

F. Preliminary outline of the Gospel of John

1. Prologue (1:1-18)
2. The beginning of Jesus' ministry (1:19-51)
3. Jesus' public ministry (2:1-12:50)
4. Jesus' private ministry (13:1-17:26)
5. The passion of Christ (18:1-19:42)
6. The resurrection of Christ (20:1-29)
7. The purpose of the Gospel of John (20:30-31)
8. Epilogue (21:1-25)