

NAME

The name "John" means "Jehovah has been gracious." The author does not identify himself until the end of the book (21:20,24), where he states that he is "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (13:23; 20:2), that is, John the Apostle, probably the most intimate earthly friend of Jesus.

AUTHOR

The author of the Gospel is the Apostle John, the disciple "*whom Jesus loved*" (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24). He was prominent in the early church but is not mentioned by name in this Gospel - which would be natural if he wrote it, but hard to explain otherwise. Indeed, note that when the author mentions John the Baptist he refers to him as "John" feeling no need to distinguish between the two Johns.

NASB - Introduction to John:

The author knew Jewish life well, as seen from reference to popular Messianic speculations (e.g. 1:20,21; 7:40,42), to the hostility between Jews and Samaritans (4:9), and to Jewish customs, such as the duty of circumcision on the eighth day taking precedence over the prohibition of working on the Sabbath (7:22). He knew the geography of Palestine, locating Bethany about 15 stadia (about 2 miles) from Jerusalem (11:18) and mentioning Cana, a village not referred to in any earlier writing known to us (2:1; 21:2). The Gospel of John has many touches that were obviously based on the recollections of an eyewitness - such as the house at Bethany being filled with the fragrance of the broken perfume jar (12:3).

From the evidence found in the Gospels, we may learn several things about the author (for more on John see Class Notes: 1 John - AUTHOR). He was a Jew; He was an eyewitness of what he relates; He was an apostle; He was one of the three most prominent apostles; He was a son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21) and probably a disciple of John the Baptist (as well as a relative) (Luke 1:36); His mother seems to have been Salome (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40) who may have been a sister of Mary, mother of Jesus (compare John 19:25) in which case John would have been a cousin of Jesus and about the same age (childhood friends?); Jesus named him "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) which may indicated that he had a violent temper (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:54); He was a businessman of some means (partner in a business that had employed servants) (Mark 1:16-20); He had a house in Jerusalem; He was a personal acquaintance of the high priest; He wrote three other epistles and the Revelation; He outlived all the other apostles and is thought to have died about 100 A.D.

Early writers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, as well as church tradition regarding the book say that John wrote this Gospel, and all other evidence agrees. Only in recent years have modern scholars (the same crowd who deny the Virgin Birth, Jesus' deity, miracles, futuristic prophecy, Jesus' bodily resurrection) question the authorship of John the Apostle. Otherwise there is not controversy regarding authorship.

Style:

John wrote in a very simple style. Of the four Gospels, this book is the easiest to read in the original Greek. In accord with John's writing style, vocabulary, and eastern perspective this Gospel differs from the others. It is well suited for his audience in Asia Minor.

Mitchell:

It is both profound and simple, and has several characteristics of style.

1. Simplicity: 1) The sentences are short and connected by co-ordinate conjunctions. 2) There are but a few direct quotations, and but few dependent sentences, and most of them show the sequence of things either as a cause or a purpose
2. Sameness: This arises from the method of treating each step in the narrative as if isolated and separate from all the rest rather than merging it into the complete whole.
3. Repetition: It seems that the author often repeats words, but in such a way that does not connote monotony so much as emphasis. By way of example: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (1:1)
4. Parallelism: Statements expressing the same or similar truths are common: *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you..."* (14:27).
5. Contrasts: The author seems to delight in comparing and contrasting opposites: Light and darkness, truth and falsehood, good and evil, life and death, God and Satan.

DATE

Mitchell:

Prevailing tradition contends that John's latter years were spent at Ephesus, where he carried on a ministry of preaching, teaching, and writing. Finally he was exiled to Patmos in the reign of Emperor Domitian (Revelation 1:9). Because the fourth Gospel seems to suppose a knowledge of the three synoptic Gospels it is usually considered to have been written between 80 and 90 A.D.

Some critics have previously insisted on a much later date even into the second century based on the theological development of the Gospel, but the Qumran literature and the discovery of Egyptian fragments of the Gospel, which have been dated from the first half of the second century, have pretty well caused all to concede that it is a first century production.

The discovery of Rylands fragment of John 18:31-33,37,38, by C.H. Roberts about 1935, shows that this Gospel had been incorporated in a papyrus Manuscript not later than 135 A.D. (note: the Rylands fragment is housed at the John Rylands University Library at the University of Manchester, England (UOM). John Rylands (1801-1888) was a philanthropist and a Congregationalist with Baptist leanings. His third wife Eirqueta Augustina Ryland founded the library. The UOM's Centre for Biblical Studies has an exchange program with Trinity Western University, BC which is a EFCA school) It must, therefore, originally have been written at some time prior to the date of the manuscript into which it was copied.

Dating the Gospel at around 85 A.D. may be supported by reference to the statement of Clement of Alexandria that John wrote to supplement the accounts found in the other Gospels (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 6.14.7), and thus his Gospel is later than the first three.

It has also been argued that the seemingly more developed theology of the fourth Gospel indicates a later date of origin. Some have placed the origin of the Gospel in the 50's and not later than 70 A.D. This view has found favor because it has been felt more recently that John wrote independently of the other Gospels. Those who hold this view point out that a developed theology does not necessarily argue for a late origin. The theology of Romans (c. 57 A.D.) is every bit as developed as that in John.

NASB - Introduction to John:

Further the statement in 5:2 that there *"is"* (rather than *"was"*) a pool *"by the sheep gate"* may

suggest a time before 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed. Others, however, observe that John elsewhere sometimes used the present tense when speaking of the past.

Crucial to discussion of dating the Gospel is that, having been written well prior to 100 A.D., it was read by men only one generation (at the most) removed from the contemporaries of Jesus. Thus it could have been verified or contested by those who had authentic information concerning Him. As such it stands as a reliable witness to the life of our Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ.

THEME

Halley (page 44): *“Jesus the Son of God”*

Many of the episodes of the Gospel seem to lack direct chronological or logical connection with each other. However, they show a remarkable unity built on the singular purpose of convincing the reader that Jesus was Divine in His origin, powers, and goal. John’s choice of material is calculated to lead to this precise conclusion.

It is significant that John’s term to describe the miracles of Jesus (“signs”) emphasizes the spiritual meaning. All seven of the recorded miracles were “signs” to demonstrate the spiritual truth that *“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”* Just as the miracles produced belief (another key word in John) on the part of those who witnessed them, so John trusted that the record of those miracles, sermons, and interviews would likewise create faith on the part of the readers of His Gospel and lead them to life (another key word in John) in Jesus the Christ.

Mitchell:

To phrase it theologically, John presents the doctrine of the hypostatic union. Jesus Christ is both undiminished deity and true humanity in one Person forever. John shows that Jesus possessed Divine titles and attributes; he makes it plain that God cannot be more, cannot promise more, and cannot do more than Jesus Christ was, promised, or did. Hence, since Jesus Christ is the God-Man, it is imperative that we accept Him as our personal Savior.

Key Word (Nelson’s): Believe - The fourth gospel has the clearest statement of purpose in the Bible: *“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.”* (John 20:31). John selected the signs he used for the specific purpose of creating intellectual (*“that you may believe”*) and spiritual (*“that believing you may have life”*) conviction about the Son of God.

Key Verses (Nelson’s):

“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:11-13)

“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.” (John 20:30,31)

Key Chapter: 3 - John 3:16 is without doubt the most quoted and preached verse in all of Scripture. Captured in it is the gospel in its clearest and simplest form: that salvation is a gift of God and is obtainable only through belief.

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1-18
The Divine nature of the Word, the manifestation of the Word as the World's Savior
- II. The Testimony of His Great Public Ministry 1:9-12:50
He is revealed, recognized, antagonized, honored
- III. The Testimony of His Private Ministry With His Disciples 13-17
He teaches, comforts, and prays for His disciples
- IV. The Testimony of His Passion 18,19
His betrayal, the Jewish trial, the Roman trial, His death and burial
- V. The Testimony of His Resurrection and Manifestation 20,21
His resurrection, manifestation, and instruction to His disciples

RECIPIENTS

Mitchell:

The differences between John and the Synoptics are such that the compelling inference is that it was written under drastically different circumstances. If it were written (as most scholars now suppose) at the end of the first century: 1) the Gospel had by then been preached in almost all parts of the Roman Empire; 2) Christianity was no longer considered a Jewish sect, attached to the synagogue; 3) Jerusalem had been overthrown and the Temple destroyed; 4) no doubt Christianity was (possibly had been) sorely persecuted; 5) all the rest of the New Testament except Revelation had been written; 6) no doubt some had arisen who disputed the deity of Jesus; and 7) hence instead of presenting Jesus as the true Messiah for Israel, or the Might Worker to the Romans, or the Ideal Man in whom the Greeks would revel, John wrote concerning the Eternal, Incarnate Word in whom all men might be united.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Halley (page 621):

The special emphasis of John is the deity of Jesus. It begins with Jesus' pre-existence and focuses on the unity between Jesus and God, His Father. This Gospel consists mainly of Jesus' discourses and conversations - it presents what Jesus said rather than what He did.

(note contrast to Mark's Gospel).

Mitchell:

The Gospel of John contains many unique and interesting characteristics. Some of the most outstanding:

1. Christ as the Son of God: The deity of Christ is stressed as in no other Gospel. The author outlines in detail his claim that Jesus is the Son of God. There are six lines of testimony to Christ's deity: 1) John the Baptist; 2) Jesus' work; 3) Jesus' claims (I am's); 4) Scriptures; 5) Father; and 6) Holy Spirit.
2. Evangelistic Purpose: This is admittedly a propaganda book (cf. 20:30,31). Evangelism is in the other Gospels, but not with the force and clarity we find here. It has been called "the

Gospel of belief.”

3. Personal Interviews: John skillfully depicts the contacts of Jesus with those around Him. As people came face to face with Christ, they either accepted or rejected His person.
4. Preponderance of Feasts: If one were to subtract from this Gospel those miracles and teachings and other works performed in connection with the feasts, we would only have a few fragments left.
5. Unique Omissions: John significantly omits the following: birth, genealogy, youth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, and ascension. For deity these things have no significance. There are no parables in John (e.g., 10:6, literally “proverb”).
6. Unique Additions: John alone reports Christ’s Judean ministry. Five of the seven miracles included are unique to John. Jesus’ prayer for His disciples in John 17.

RESOURCES

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As general resources I’ve relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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