

The Gospel of John

Authorship:

The Apostle John is usually credited with the authorship of the fourth Gospel. First of all, the author had to have been an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). He would have also had a decent familiarity with Palestine before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and would have been familiar with the Jewish way of life. John does fit the description, but it is not exclusive to him. Early traditions help to identify the author as John. Irenaeus, a disciple of John's disciple Polycarp, is of the earliest extant sources to associate John with the fourth Gospel (*Against Heresies* 3.1 c. 180).

John and James, accompanied by their father Zebedee, were preparing their nets in a boat when Jesus called them (Matt 4:18-22). Jesus often took Peter, James, and John aside defining them as an inner circle of disciples (13:23-24; 20:2-10; 21:2, 7, 20ff.). John also refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

Date

In general, two views of the dating of this Gospel have been advocated:

1. The traditional view places it toward the end of the first century, c. a.d. 85 or later.
2. Some have suggested an earlier date, perhaps as early as the 50s and no later than 70.

The first view is supported by reference to the statement of Clement of Alexandria (c. 210) 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 that it originated later.

The second view has found favor because it has been felt more recently that John wrote independently of the other Gospels. This does not contradict the statement of Clement referred to above. Also, those who hold this view point out that developed theology does not necessarily argue for a late origin. The theology of Romans (written c. 57) is every bit as developed as that in John. Further, the statement in 5:2 that there "is" (rather than "was") a pool "near the Sheep Gate" may suggest a time before 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed. Others, however, observe that John elsewhere sometimes used the present tense when speaking of the past.

Purpose

John 20:30–31 (ESV)

³⁰ 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.

John's Gospel is rather different from the other three. His focus is on the "signs" of Jesus' identity and mission and on lengthy, theologically rich discourses.

The "I AM" Statements of Jesus in John

Exodus 3:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

- In John, Jesus completes the statement that was given to Moses by God Almighty back in Exodus 3!
 - When someone says, "I am...," it reveals something about their identity. About the core of their being. About what is most important to them or about them. So, when Jesus says, "I am...," we should pay close attention. He's pulling back the curtain on his glorious character. He's telling us something profoundly important – something we don't want to miss.
 - All of these statements speak to Jesus' saving relationship with the world.
1. **John 6:35 (ESV)** - **I am** the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
 2. **John 8:12 (ESV)** - **I am** the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.
 3. **John 10:9 (ESV)** - **I am** the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.
 4. **John 10:11 (ESV)** - **I am** the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
 5. **John 11:25–26 (ESV)** - **I am** the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.
 6. **John 14:6 (ESV)** - **I am** the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
 7. **John 15:1 (ESV)** - **I am** the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Extra Credit

8. **John 8:58 (ESV)** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I am**."
9. **John 18:4–5 (ESV)** - Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "**I am he**." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

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Teacher’s Notes

Eyewitness

John 1:14 (ESV)

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.

John 19:35 (ESV)

³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.

John 21:24 (ESV)

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Call of John

Matthew 4:18–22 (ESV)

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Inner Circle

John 13:23–24 (ESV)

²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

John 20:2–10 (ESV)

² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

John 21:2 (ESV)

² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.

John 21:7 (ESV)

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

John 21:20ff (ESV)

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" ²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" ²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Disciple that Jesus Loved

John 13:23 (ESV)

²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side,

John 20:2 (ESV)

² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

John 21:7 (ESV)

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

John 21:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"

Against Heresies (Book III, Chapter 1)

The apostles did not commence to preach the Gospel, or to place anything on record until they were endowed with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. They preached one God alone, Maker of heaven and earth.

1. We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed perfect knowledge, as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

2. These have all declared to us that there is one God, Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the law and the prophets; and one Christ the Son of God. If any one do not agree to these truths, he despises the companions of the Lord; nay more, he despises Christ Himself the Lord; yea, he despises the Father also, and stands self-condemned, resisting and opposing his own salvation, as is the case with all heretics.¹

¹ Translated by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103301.htm>>.

Church History (Book VI)

Chapter 14. The Scriptures mentioned by Him.

1. To sum up briefly, he has given in the Hypotyposes abridged accounts of all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books, — I refer to Jude and the other Catholic epistles, and Barnabas and the so-called Apocalypse of Peter.
2. He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts.
3. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name.
4. Farther on he says: But now, as the blessed presbyter said, since the Lord being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, as sent to the Gentiles, on account of his modesty did not subscribe himself an apostle of the Hebrews, through respect for the Lord, and because being a herald and apostle of the Gentiles he wrote to the Hebrews out of his superabundance.
5. Again, in the same books, Clement gives the tradition of the earliest presbyters, as to the order of the Gospels, in the following manner:
6. The Gospels containing the genealogies, he says, were written first. The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it.
7. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it. But, last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel. This is the account of Clement.
8. Again the above-mentioned Alexander, in a certain letter to Origen, refers to Clement, and at the same time to Pantænus, as being among his familiar acquaintances. He writes as follows:
For this, as you know, was the will of God, that the ancestral friendship existing between us should remain unshaken; nay, rather should be warmer and stronger.
9. For we know well those blessed fathers who have trodden the way before us, with whom we shall soon be; Pantænus, the truly blessed man and master, and the holy Clement, my master and benefactor, and if there is any other like them, through whom I became acquainted with you, the best in everything, my master and brother.

10. So much for these matters. But Adamantius, — for this also was a name of Origen — when Zephyrinus was bishop of Rome, visited Rome, desiring, as he himself somewhere says, to see the most ancient church of Rome.

11. After a short stay there he returned to Alexandria. And he performed the duties of catechetical instruction there with great zeal; Demetrius, who was bishop there at that time, urging and even entreating him to work diligently for the benefit of the brethren.²

² Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250106.htm>>.