

Gospel of John - Introduction taken from Commentaries listed in Bibliography

Authorship

It is not currently fashionable to believe that John the Disciple wrote the Gospel of John. This has very little to do with evidence or research and much more to do with the general mindset and philosophies of the current scholars. Basically, if you want to sound intellectual and contemporary and one of the crowd, then you don't believe that John wrote the Gospel.

There is no new research that suggests the John did not write this Gospel. There are those who have tried to look for literary layers or evidence of different authors and editing of the text, but their findings do not agree with one another.

The same typical four or five arguments against the traditional authorship presented today are the same ones that were debated and successfully handled in the older commentaries, in *The Fundamentals* from 1911, and even by Westcott in the 1880's.

The arguments against the authorship of John are:

1. It's so different from the other Gospels that it must've been written by somebody who didn't know much of the original story and wasn't there.
2. John was too stupid and uneducated to have written a complicated Gospel such as this.
3. It must've been written after John's time because the ideas and terms presented are too complex or too late to have been around in his lifetime.
4. John couldn't have written the Gospel because he would've been too modest to use the term "the disciple Jesus loved" in describing himself.
5. John is the fiery son of thunder, not the peaceful and loving author of this Gospel.
6. John was from Galilee, not Judea, and wouldn't have talked so much about the events in Judea and Jerusalem and ignored the ministry in Galilee that the other Gospels cover.

Who might have written the Gospel?

1. The Apostle John
2. some other beloved but unnamed Apostle.
3. The Elder John, presumed to be a different person from the Apostle
4. the disciples of John, either during his lifetime or after his death with either him guiding them in what to write or in their collecting and remembering his sermons

Who must have written the Gospel or at the very least, provided the bulk of the material for it?

1. an eye witness or a liar;
2. familiar with territory;
3. had read some of the other Gospels but didn't use them as a source;
- if he wasn't aware of them and their beginning Jesus' ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist, there wouldn't have been much need to point out that the earliest ministry of Jesus and the baptizing by his disciples took place before John had been put in prison (3:24)
4. had a Jewish background with a good understanding of the Old Testament;

usually spoke Aramaic but had a good knowledge of Greek;
had exposure to ideas outside of traditional Judaism such as those found in the Dead
Sea Scrolls and in Greek philosophy;
was writing to people of both Jewish and Greek backgrounds;
was sufficiently known to his audience that he had no need to identify or to authenticate
himself;
was one of the twelve apostles at the last supper;
was not Peter but was closely identified with him;
was one of the seven people who went fishing at the end of the book;
was not James, the brother of John.

Date

The Gospel may have been written anytime after the first Gospels were written until the
death of John somewhere around 98 AD.
Probably around 80-85.

Place

Probably Ephesus

Purpose of the Book

“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.”
- The verb translated here as may believe can also be translated as to continue believ-
ing or keep on believing, making the book both an evangelistic tool and a tool of en-
couragement and faith-building.

16 Characteristics of John in no Particular Order

1. action - always moving, going somewhere

2. no parables but long discourses

The other Gospels record much of Jesus' public teaching and state that he didn't teach
except through use of parables. John's Gospel records very little public teaching but in-
stead dwells mainly on conversations and debates, both public and private.

3. organized carefully

there will be a miracle or sign that demonstrates some aspect of Jesus' claims or minis-
try and also shows his superiority over some Greek god
later events and speeches will amplify and explain the meaning behind the miracle

4. concerned with testimony
seven testimonies

1. Jesus' testimony of himself
2. God's testimony of him
3. the Spirit's testimony
4. Moses' testimony and the law

5. testimony of his works
6. testimony of John the Baptist
7. testimony of followers

5. concerned with glory
taking glory back from Greek gods

Aesculapius - god of healing, symbol was a serpent on a staff.
Jesus brings true healing by being lifted up just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

Dionysius - god of fertility and wine, changed water into wine
At a wedding feast, Jesus changed water into 180 gallons of wine.

Demeter - god of grain and bread
Jesus multiplied loaves and fed 5000

Apollo - god of light
Jesus is the true light

6. making Jesus seem different from Greek teachers and leaders
an ideal Greek teacher would grow in popularity and be understood by his followers
Jesus' popularity decreases until he is isolated to a few disciples and then alone and finally abandoned on the cross.

He is also always misunderstood by the people he's in conversation with and those who do understand the message reject it.

Even his own disciples are often said to not have understood what he meant or what something signified until after the resurrection.

7. concerned with different groups of people
- Jewish converts and would-be converts - why not to go back to old ways
 - Greek and Hellenized Jews (Jewish words translated)
 - followers of John Baptist - Jesus is greater than John

gives words, circumstances and events more than one meaning.

- describing Thursday and Friday as Passover and the Passover Feast
- Passover was followed by Feast of Unleavened bread that went on for several days.
- it was common to refer to entire time as the Passover just as we tell what we did during several weeks of December and define all the different events as what we did "at Christmas"

John also was vague on referring to time of Passover because he wanted to emphasize his point of Jesus being the Passover lamb

8. seeming conflict with Synoptics can usually if not always be resolved by keeping these characteristics in mind.
- difference in time of crucifixion is easily explained by the general way they kept track of time

9. difficult to tell where words of Jesus end and exposition of John begins
ancient biographies and histories had different ideas of proper way to quote someone
and to relate their story than we do today.
leaving out major portions of a person's story to emphasize what you considered the im-
portant parts was acceptable and expected,
as was loosely paraphrasing what a person said and quoting long speeches that re-
flected the meaning of what the person said if not their actual words

10. Gospel reflects fifty or more years (depending on your dating preference) of John's
preaching and reflecting on events.
much of the book reads like a series of sermons
and is a good book to have read out loud since it sounds like a sermon and much of the
material was probably first heard that way by its original audience.

11. was also concerned with controversies of his own day and interpreted events with
that in mind.

a. early Gnostic ideas

- light and darkness

- Jesus wasn't really a fleshly human

b. conflict between synagogue and church

- this is no meek and retiring Jesus - he debates and forcefully engages the opposition

c. surviving cult of John the Baptist

- the Baptist is presented in a positive light but always in a secondary position to Jesus

- The Baptist is quoted as knowing and accepting this position.

d. rumor that he wouldn't die

12. idea of the logos

- Herodotus wrote about logos hundreds of years ago. His classic illustration was that
everything was changing and you never set foot in the same river twice because it
was always flowing and changing and would have different water each time you
stepped in it. What keeps all this change and flow from breaking down into total
chaos was the logos, the wisdom built into nature and the universe that kept every-
thing together.

One of the goals of Greek philosophy was to understand this logos or wisdom that kept
everything together, so by adapting the logos to describe Jesus, John was taking a
common idea and kicking it up a notch, telling his Greek and Hellenistic audience
that what they'd worshipped and sought after in ignorance had come to earth in the
form of a God-man and could be known and experienced.

This isn't unique to John. Paul used the same approach when he talked about the
statue to the unknown god in Athens and when the author of Hebrews talked about
the symbolism of the temple and sacrifices and priesthood and when throughout the
NT the authors talked about the fulfillment of prophecy and the law and psalms.

They took their culture and its ideas and beliefs and showed how Jesus was the truth that they'd been unknowingly looking for all their lives. That's not changing the message or compromising the message, that's making the message relevant for your audience and making it universal. Our culture doesn't make the Gospel relevant; the Gospel makes the culture relevant as it is revealed as the ultimate truth that the culture has been longing for and seeking after.

13. wanted to show both that Jesus was God and in contrast with the later Gnostic Gospels such as Gospel of Judas and Thomas and other spurious gospels wanted to show that Jesus was fully human.

Despite what we hear today from people wanting to rewrite contemporary Christianity by rewriting its early history - the difference between our Gospels and the rejected ones is never that our Gospels portrayed him as God while the rejected ones portrayed him as just a man or a wise teacher.

The rejected gospels always portray him as God or a god but deny that he was truly and fully human. John in gospels and epistles clearly has this heretical teaching in mind and rejects it.

14. There are no seams or layers in John but there are two signs of later editing:

“we know that his testimony is true”

woman caught in act of adultery

evidences that this story is not original to gospel:

1. is only part of the current gospel that's not in the earliest manuscripts

2. when it starts showing up it's found in different places in the John manuscripts and when the four gospels are collected it's sometimes found in different places in Luke.

3. it doesn't sound like the rest of the gospel.

4. it's the only place in John where the opposition is identified as the scribes and the Pharisees.

5. it interrupts the discussions and events in the temple in John 7 and John 8:12 that are connected by taking place at the same occasion.

15. John has little interest in maintaining chronology and is much more interested in arranging material thematically like a systematic theology.

16. one thing in common with Synoptics is theme of “one greater than”

Jesus is presented as one greater than:

John the Baptist (3:26-27; 5:33-36)

Jacob's ladder (1:50)

Jacob (4:12)

Abraham (8:53)

the disciples (13:16; 15:20)

Moses (1:17) (Mt. 12:41)

the temple (2:14-21) (Mt. 12:6)

the Sabbath (5:9-16; 7:22-23; 9:14-16)

Jonah (Mt. 12:41)

Solomon (Mt. 12:42)

One Possible View of the Organization of John 1:1-12:50 - based on Morris (NICNT)

Prologue - sets the stage for the rest of the book and is a summary of the book

John the Baptist proclaims that something new is coming

John Presents Seven Signs as Proof that Jesus is Messiah and God

1. New Way is Greater than the Old

Sign #1

Jesus changes water into wine in Jewish ceremonial water containers

- demonstrates superiority of new ways over old Judaism
- demonstrates Jesus' superiority of Greek god of wine

Sub-Sign #1a

Jesus cleanses the temple

Explanation and Misunderstanding of the Signs

visit of Nicodemus who is a teacher of the law (old way) who can't understand being born again (new way)

Further Explanation of the Signs

John the Baptist decreasing as Jesus increases

Final Explanation of Elaboration of the Signs

the woman at the well

- 1) Jesus offers her himself as living water that is superior to water offered by well of Jacob (Israel)
- 2) Jesus tells her that old ways of worship that are dependent on places such as temple is being replaced by worship in spirit and in truth
- 3) Jesus reveals himself to her as the Messiah

2. Jesus presents proof of his authority, mission and Godhood

Sign #2 - Healing of the Nobleman's son

Sign #3 - Healing the crippled man on the Sabbath

Explanation and Misunderstanding of the Signs

Jewish leaders criticize him for working on Sabbath and this time don't misunderstand as much as they reject the implications of the signs that Jesus is equal with God

Further Explanation and Elaboration

Jesus offers witnesses that he is telling the truth

3. Jesus is the Bread of Life

Sign #4 - Feeding the 5000

Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes and feeds 5000+ crowd

Jesus is greater than Moses

Jesus is greater than Demeter

Sign #5 - Walking on the Water

Jesus is greater than Baal, god of the sea and storm and wind

Jesus has overcome world

Explanation and Misunderstanding

Jesus and crowd debate bread versus bread of life

Crowd misunderstands spiritual nature of discussion and leaves in disgust after conversation about eating flesh and drinking blood

Elaboration

Peter declares that Jesus alone has the words of life

Further explanation and Misunderstanding

Jesus goes to Jerusalem for Festival of Booths
his own brothers don't believe in him

Crowd debates whether or not he could be Messiah

Jesus presents self as living water

More debate and argument

4. The Light of the World

Explanation and Misunderstanding or Rejection

Jesus proclaims himself as the light of the world and that whoever follows him will walk in light, not darkness.

Jewish leaders question his credentials again.

Jesus proclaims himself as one who can set them free from sin

Jewish leaders misunderstand and deny being in slavery in a political sense

More argument between Jesus and Jewish leaders culminates in him proclaiming to be God and to having known Abraham.

This they understand clearly but reject and try to kill him.

Sign #6

Jesus proves his claims of being the light of the world, setting people free and being God by healing blind man.

brings light to the blind man, sets him free from his bondage physically just as he's offered to do spiritual, and does something that only God can do.

Further Explanation and Misunderstanding or Rejection

Pharisees and blind man debate what has happened and what it says about Jesus.

They reject his testimony and excommunicate him, proclaiming him born in utter sin.

Further Explanation

Jesus accepts the worship of the blind man and explains to Pharisees that their guilt remains because they claim to have sight but are actually blind.

5. The Good Shepherd

Explanation and Misunderstanding or Rejection

Jesus proclaims that he is the good shepherd and his sheep recognize his voice and follow him.

Jesus proclaims that he is the door of the sheep whereby the sheep are saved and kept safe from thieves and robbers.

Jesus proclaims that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Some of crowd believes him, others proclaim him insane.

Jewish leaders demand an announcement from Jesus on whether or not he is the Christ.

He tells them that he and his works have told them but that they didn't recognize it because they aren't part of his sheep.

Explanation and Misunderstanding

Lazarus falls sick, Jesus tarries and then announces they're going to wake him.

Disciples misunderstand that he means that Lazarus is dead

Mary and Martha underestimate Jesus and misunderstand that he intends to raise Lazarus

Sign #7 - Raising of Lazarus

Jesus states that this is done to help disciples and the people watching might believe

Final Misunderstanding and Rejection

Jewish leaders respond to this miracle by wanting to arrest and kill Jesus and also wanting to kill Lazarus

Jesus makes triumphant entry into Jerusalem, is acclaimed by the fickle people, sought after by some Greeks and proclaims his death as God speaks from heaven.

The people hear the voice but misunderstand and think that it was thunder and still refuse to believe as was predicted in Isaiah.

Even those who believed in him were afraid to say to publicly.

Jesus makes one final appeal and offers himself as way to eternal life, but in a demonstration of how he has become increasingly isolated, alone and misunderstood, there is no record of any reply, either good or bad, and the next chapter moves ahead to the upper room after the Passover meal or last supper.

The “I Am”s of Jesus

Exodus 3:13-14

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (ASV)

John the Baptist repeatedly uses this in the negative as he responds to the Pharisees' questions about his identity with “I am not.”

John 6:51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven

John 8:12

I am the light of the world

John 10:7

I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd

John 11:25

I am the resurrection, and the life

John 15:1

I am the true vine

Psalms 22:6

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people