



## SESSION 1 | INTRODUCTION

### WHO WROTE THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

- The Biblical Testimony: *no author is mentioned by name.*
  - John 21:20-24 gives the clear answer as to authorship: it was written by **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. Unfortunately, that disciple is never mentioned by name.
  - How is the word *disciple* used in John?
    - The Greek word is used 81 times in John.
    - It is used of two followers of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35).
    - It is used at the wedding of Cana, before the 12 apostles were designated (Jn. 2:2, 11, 12).
      - This could have been used in retrospect of the 12 (as possibly in 2:22), but could also be used more generally of any followers of Jesus.
    - John 4:1 provides the greatest evidence that the word is used by John in a *general* not specific sense.
    - Four times, the Gospel refers to “the twelve” to designate the apostles (Jn. 6:67, 70, 71, 20:24).
  - What do we specifically know about this disciple?
    - The reference to the beloved disciple occurs five times in the Gospel.
    - This disciple was at the last supper and asked who the betrayer was – John 13:23-26.
    - This disciple is given care of Jesus’ mother – John 19:26.
    - This disciple was with Simon Peter on Resurrection day - John 20:2-5.
    - The disciple was fishing with seven others and was the first to recognize Jesus as the Lord – John 21:7 (in connection with Jn. 21:2).
    - The disciple was with Peter on the seashore in Galilee after the resurrection – John 21:20.
  - Conclusion: *whoever this disciple is was clearly in the inner circle, was loved, and was eyewitness to many of the events of Jesus’ ministry, but the exact identity cannot be narrowed down with absolute certainty.*
- The historical testimony:
  - Historical testimony proves nothing except that an idea has long-standing roots. Such ideas cannot be summarily discarded without merit, but must be quickly discarded with merit.
  - The early Christian writings identify the author as John, exclusively.<sup>1</sup>
    - **Irenaeus**, writing at about AD 200, says that the Beloved Disciple was John, the disciple of Jesus, and that John originated the Gospel at Ephesus.

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<sup>1</sup> The five bullet points of this list are quoted from <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-the-gospel-of-john>, accessed January 8, 2020. The points have not been verified nor is the site endorsed. The information is given for research purposes.

- Irenaeus even writes that when he himself was young, he knew another teacher, **Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna (c. AD 69–155), who claimed to have been tutored by John.
  - The church historian **Eusebius** (c. AD 300) records this John/Polycarp/Irenaeus connection in the same way.
  - Further, **Polycrates**, Bishop of Ephesus (AD 189–198), refers to John’s association with the Gospel in his letter to Victor the Bishop of Rome.
  - It is also confirmed by **Clement of Alexandria** (c. AD 200) and the **Latin Muratorian Canon** (AD 180–200).
- Some modern testimony:
  - The contesting against John’s authorship did not come in earnest before the arguments of textual criticism in the 1800s.
  - Of all the arguments, the argument for Lazarus has probably been most prevalent.
    - The references to the beloved disciple do not appear until the Passover.
    - There is no reverence to a beloved disciple in other gospels.
    - John uses his identity in the book of Revelation with no hesitancy, and he was called a “son of thunder,” neither of which affirms the obscurity of the authorship by the author himself.
    - The mother of Zebedee’s children was mentioned as at the cross (Mat. 27:56) but John was not specifically mentioned. It is odd to mention the mother was there but not mention John, who is unarguably more important than the mother. (Note that John is only assumed to be there by John 19:26).
    - There is plenty of room to assume that others were with Jesus during the last supper, and thus the beloved disciple doesn’t have to be one of the twelve. For example, Jesus says that the betrayer is **one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish** (Matt. 14:20).
    - In a different light, there is evidence that the twelve had the last supper, at which the bread and wine became the elements of the modern Lord’s Supper, and **after supper** (Jn 13:2) others came in, at which time Jesus washed feet and spoke of betrayal. If the author came in later, this would explain why John’s Gospel doesn’t speak of the bread and the wine.
    - John 18:13-16 indicates that the **other disciple** (v. 16) was **known to the high priest**. Yet in Acts 4:13 the high priest makes a *conclusion* that Peter and John **had been with Jesus**. This makes it hard to believe that the **other disciple** of John 18 is John. (Note: this does not necessarily conclude Lazarus, only that the **other disciple** is not John). Note that in John 12:10 the chief priest wanted to put Lazarus to death.
    - In John 11:3 Lazarus is called **he whom thou lovest**. Also see John 11:19, 33, and 36.
    - Conclusion of the Lazarus arguments:
      - Most are arguments from silence (much like the arguments for John).
      - The arguments are compelling enough to conclude that *we do not know who wrote the Gospel of John*. Lazarus is a possibility, John is a possibility, or an unknown disciple is a possibility.
      - There is no doctrine of which I am aware that rests on authorship.
- My approach to the Gospel: I will refer to *the author* rather than to “John” or “Lazarus.”

Next week: When was the Gospel of John written? What is the purpose of the gospel of John?