

Publishing history of the gospel of john



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The Gospel of John is among the four gospels in the bible. The gospel has an anonymous author with the authorship being related to the three Johannine epistles. The analysis of manuscripts shows that the Gospel of John was among the most influential texts in the early church. There are large papyrus fragments of manuscripts that underscore the importance of the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John features texts that focus on numerous topics ranging from the analysis of the church to answering theological questions. The Gospel of John has significant contributions on various theological matters. The essays in the Gospel of John are thought-provoking and have high relevance to the Christian life. While the reader may not necessarily agree with the ideas presented in the book, its impact on the Christian life cannot be ignored. Scholars admit that the aim of the Gospel of John was to ensure that it brought together all theologians in a conversation revolving around the biblical texts. The Gospel of John noted the disciple whom Jesus loved as a principle origin of its traditions. The Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of various events that took place in the life of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

The authorship of the Gospel of John has been debated by scholars since the second century. There is sight evidence regarding the scholar. However, there are some scholars who believe that the Gospel developed from a Johannine circle that was possibly working in Ephesus by the end of the first century[1]. Some scholars argue that the authorship of the book was associated with John the Apostle so as to assert the authority of the text. Others hold that the book was not authored by an eye-witness. Third, they hold that the author freely adopted the synoptic tradition in writing the book.

The discourses in the Gospel of John have been found to express the words of the evangelist as opposed to the words of Jesus. Therefore, there are those scholars that have argued that the Gospel does not add any value to the Synoptic Gospels, hence does not supplement the other three Gospels. Traditionally, the Gospel has been ascribed to have been authored by John the Evangelist, and many scholars have agreed with that[2]. Also, mainstream Christianity associates John, the son of Zebedee with the authorship of the Gospel of John. Modern experts consider the authorship of the Gospel of John to be an unknown eyewitness. They hold that the eyewitness may have lived in the early second century. However, apologetic Christian scholars still hold a conservative view on the authorship of the Gospel. They ascribe it to the authorship of John the Apostle.

The text itself is not clear on who specifically authored it. John 20: 21-25 contains autobiographical information that indirectly hits on the authorship of the text. The use of the pronoun “ I” is taken by scholars to mean that the disciple whom Jesus loved and the disciple mentioned in verse 24 is one and the same person[3]. The disciple has also been referred to as the beloved disciple in verse 20. Conservative scholars also use internal and external evidence to point to the authorship of Apostle John. They hold that the fourth Gospel provides clues on its authorship that are concealed in the enigmatic figure of the ‘ Beloved Disciple’ that has been used severally in the text. The title ‘ Beloved Disciple” appears in five different passages. In John 13: 23, the text states that the disciple who was loved by Jesus was resting next to him. In John 19: 26, the text states that Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom He loved[4]. In another passage, John 20: 2, the passage says that a

woman came running to Jesus who was with Simon Peter and the other Disciple whom He loved. Further, in John 21: 7 the text states that the disciple whom Jesus loved was speaking to Peter. Lastly, in John 20: 20, the passage says that people saw the disciple that Jesus loved following Him[5]. Further, the text notes that the Beloved Disciple of Jesus was testifying to the things that Jesus had done, as he wrote them down. The beloved Disciple of Jesus must have been connected to the origin of the Gospel of John in some way. Also, he may have recorded an eye-witness record of the life of Jesus.

The Gospel of John does not explicitly state that the text was authored by John. The author only refers to himself as the one that Jesus loved[6]. From the synoptic Gospels, it is clear that Jesus had three among the twelve disciples who were very close to him. The three were John, James, and Peter. First, the Gospel of John could not have been authored by Peter because the one who refers to himself as the Beloved Disciple of Jesus communicated with Peter. This took place during the last supper. This disciple also raced Peter to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. Also, this beloved disciple is mentioned to have walked alongside Jesus and Peter on the shores of Galilee after Jesus had already resurrected. Therefore, the Gospel of John must have been authored by someone else other than Peter.

Further, the person who authored the Gospel of John could not have been James because he was martyred many years before the text was written[7]. Since the author must have been someone who shared a close relationship with Jesus, and it is clear that it was neither James nor Peter, then that person must have been John. It also appears probable that it was John

because he also had an acquaintance with the high priest. It could have been his relationship with the high priest that gained him access to the courtyard, where Jesus was being tried[8]. The eyewitness who wrote the Gospel, and the same disciple whom Jesus loved stood by him during his crucifixion. The same disciple is also recorded to have walked with Jesus after his resurrection. This was the same disciple who wrote a Gospel that bore his name.

If indeed John wrote the Gospel of John, why then did he not identify himself directly by his name as opposed to referring to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus also loved other disciples. However, John used this name to show the reader that he shared a special relationship with Jesus[9]. John was not just a disciple, his relationship with Jesus was deep. As an eye-witness, he wanted to affirm the trustworthiness of the testimony he was giving in the text. Readers will believe him because he was the Beloved Disciple of Jesus. Based on his personal relationship with Jesus, he was the one best qualified to explain the message of Jesus to the readers. The Gospel of John gives a preeminence to the Beloved Disciple of Jesus[10]. Other than being Jesus' most loved disciple, he was also the first one to follow Jesus, he sat closest to Jesus during the Last Supper and even followed Jesus when he went to be tried. He was the only one who went to the cross before the death of Jesus, and he was commanded to take care of the mother of Jesus. He became the first person to believe in the risen Christ and the first one to recognize the appearance of Jesus at Galilee. In all these instances, he was the first among all the other disciples. He refrained from naming himself so that he did not appear boastful to the readers. It can be interpreted that the

act of not identifying himself directly was an act of humility. He retained some aspect of humility by not making a direct revelation of his identity. He left the readers speculating on his authorship. He wanted the readers to speculate on his association in writing the text and believe in its validity.

In the history of the early church, it is clear that John wrote the Gospel of John. Several of the fathers were convicted in John's authorship in the Gospel[11]. Around 200 AD, Irenaeus said that the Gospel of John had been published by John the disciple of the Lord. By the time, John was living in Ephesus which is in Asia. Polycarp, who was a disciple of Jesus, had disclosed this information to Irenaeus[12]. Papias is also cited to have been a witness to the fact that John authored the Gospel of John. Since the time of Irenaeus the early church has held on to the tradition that while John was living in Ephesus, he wrote the Gospel of John. The tradition has remained like that until in the recent times when it has been challenged. The eyewitness account that is given by John gives the text the authenticity and the readers' solid ground for believing in the testimony of Jesus as narrated by his most Beloved Disciple.

One of the main questions surrounding the authorship of the Gospel of John is its setting. To analyze the setting of the book, one must take a look at the earliest accounts of church history. Eusebius is among the earliest church historians. His account of around 325 gives insights into the composition of the fourth gospel. Irenaeus states that John who is closely linked with the Gospel lived in Ephesus[13]. Polycrates who was the bishop of Ephesus also states that John lived in Ephesus. Moratorium Canon states that John wrote the Gospel of John after some disciples requested him to do so. The

Muratorian Canon also states that John was requested to write the Gospel by some of the elders of the church[14]. The elders and disciples were living with him in Ephesus. Clement of Alexandria confirmed that John compiled the Gospel of John at the request of some disciples and the elders of the church. John's friends pressured him to write the Gospel, and he drew his inspiration from the Holy Spirit when compiling the book. Scholars often conclude that the men that urged John to write the holy Gospel were the ones who during the conclusion of the Gospel became witnesses of the authentic nature of John's narrative[15]. In John 21: 24, the Gospel of John denotes that some elders of Ephesus gave out their testimony that John's testimony was genuine and authentic. The final composition of the Gospel of John could have taken place between the year's AD 80 and the AD 100[16]. However, the earliest works of John could have started in the year AD 70, and the initial draft of the Gospel could have taken place at the same time.

Irenaeus details that John could have produced the Gospel in multiple copies with the aim of distributing them. The aim of John was to ensure that he distributed the Gospel to various churches. In the Irenaeus, a Greek word that implies a kind of publication appears signifying that the Gospel could have been published with the aim of being distributed. There is a high possibility that many parts of the Gospel were first uttered by John orally[17]. The parts could have been uttered in the process of John preaching in the early church. In the early church, Christians mainly relied upon catechism to unearth the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Oral transmissions and catechisms played a unique role in ensuring that Christians acquired Christian teachings. The written Gospels came into place later and were used

to clarify and affirm certain Christian traditions. John composed vignettes that he used to put down his sermons into writing. The essays each comprised of an eyewitness account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John comprises the teachings of God as God's expression to Christians. Jesus had been sent to explain the word of God to men. Later on, John expanded on the teachings of Jesus Christ and created a series of teachings directed to the church.

The Gospel of John is not presented as a narrative of historical occurrences but rather but rather spiritual instructions that are directed towards the believers[18]. The homily that is contained in the Gospel of John is relevant to the Christians of all times. The intention of the author is, however, clear to produce a document that can be used by Christians to guide their faith. However, the Gospel of John also contains an analysis of various historical occurrences with the aim of ensuring that Christians gain a more in-depth analysis of what happened and the relevance of the events to their Christian faith. In the early Christian church, it was a common practice for authors to dictate their words to the scribes and have them read over the manuscripts as they make additional corrections. Additionally, it was a common practice for books to be distributed in many copies. Many books were published in the form of a papyrus roll[19]. After the 1st century, a papyrus codex was introduced. The papyrus codex contained books folded pages that were stitched together. There is a high possibility that the Gospel of John was published as a papyrus codex. Studies indicate that John or the Johannine community made use of professional scribes to make the Gospel of John's

publication. However, John would also have relied on the church community to make the publication.

John may have published an initial edition of the Gospel of John and then published another edition with an appended chapter. Chapter 20 of the Gospel of John provides a conclusion and informs the writer why the book was written[20]. On the other hand, Chapter 20 is an additional chapter. It is therefore likely that John published Chapter 21 after writing the rest of the chapters. There is evidence that the Gospel of John was in circulation while containing only twenty chapters at first. The early papyrus manuscripts had just twenty chapters of the Gospel of John. As a result, the evidence points out to the fact that the Gospel of John could have been in circulation without the epilogue which forms chapter 21.

The Gospel of John was produced in multiple copies and circulated to the Johannine community. The Gospel of John spread to churches in Asia Minor and beyond. Evidence indicates that the Gospel of John spread as an independent book that was not attached to other Gospels. At the end of the 3rd century, all gospels began to be compiled as one book. In the second century, the Gospel of John was widely regarded as the work of John. The gospel was popular especially among the people who belonged to the Orthodox Church. The Gospel of John was also famous among the Egyptians. Several papyri portions that have the Gospel of John have been recovered from Egypt. The Gospel of John has a universal appeal, and this made it enjoy wide acceptance in many places. John was accepted by both the Gentiles and the Jews[21]. He also failed to take sides during the controversies that surrounded the Jews and Gentiles community. Both the <https://assignbuster.com/publishing-history-of-the-gospel-of-john/>

Jews and Gentiles who read the Gospel of John were able to establish a connection to the Old Testament.

John's purpose in writing the Gospel of John was to provide insights into the teachings of Jesus Christ. Early Christians required eyewitnesses to reaffirm the events that took place during the life of Jesus Christ. The written accounts were mainly used to confirm what Christians learned orally.

However, John also managed to reach out to an audience that was not in his original plan. While the Gospel of John was written as a narrative, the aim was to ensure that the Christians continued to believe in Jesus Christ[22]. The Gospel of John was written with individuals who had faith in Jesus but needed to have their faith reaffirmed. An analysis of the Gospel of John reveals that the book was written to strengthen the faith of Christians.

Overall, the geographical and historical accuracy of the Gospel of John confirms the authorship of John. Studies related to history and archeology have proven that John wrote the text. These include the pool of Siloam, the Samaritans, and even the details found about Jerusalem itself. The descriptions that John gives shows that he knew Jerusalem before it was destroyed. His reporting accuracy is also evident as he gives an accurate account of the feelings, words and miraculous deeds of Jesus. Evidence points that John, the son of Zebedee, Authored the Gospel of John. However, there still exists objections from scholars who are not convinced on the authorship of John.

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[3]Ibid

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