

## **An Assessment of the Recent Debates on the Authorship of John's Gospel**

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### **Abstract**

*Recent observations have shown that regular many Christians (even ordinary Church goers) have their favourite scripture quotations of the New Testament in the Gospel of John. John's Gospel is well known and oft-quoted texts as: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life", "Jesus wept," among others. Far beyond these observations, the cardinality of this book to the whole Canon of the New Testament cannot be discarded; however, modern and recent scholarship engagement of John's gospel brings the authorship issue into limelight.*

Keywords: Gospel, Jesus Christ, John and New Testament.

### **Introduction**

John's Gospel is generally regarded as the last of the four canonical Gospels to be written.<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship has called into question the belief that Apostle John is the author of the Gospel attributed to him. It is instructive that this Gospel does not identify its author as John. Meanwhile, questions surrounding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel which critical scholars of generations past thought were settled have recently gained keen attention of scholars in the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Ramsey, *John* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 17.

recent time. In view of this, there is an increasing tendency by critics to abandon earlier conclusions and traditions that the writer utilized synoptic materials and that the book was sub-apostolic in date designed for Greek-thinking people and that John's theology reflects a long period of development. However, this research calls attention to re-entrench past and current trends in regard to the issue at hand as well as analyse the varying reasons for different opinions in order to establish a viable stance.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Gospels are the four canonized books of the New Testament which explicitly presents the life and ministry account of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> The Book of John is often considered as a standing unique testimony in this sphere, though different from the Synoptics.<sup>3</sup> However, the research notes that what constitutes the problem of this discourse has to do with the fact that the book does not emphatically name its

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<sup>2</sup>Keith F. Nickle, *The Synoptic Gospels* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>3</sup> John's Gospel differs from the Synoptic Gospels in several ways. It covers a different time span than the others; it locates much of Jesus' ministry in Judaea; and it portrays Jesus discoursing at length on theological matters. The major difference, however, lies in John's overall purpose. The author of John's Gospel tells us that he has chosen not to record many of the symbolic acts of Jesus and has instead included certain episodes in order that his readers may understand and share in the mystical union of Christ's church, that they "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*" (20:30); it is noteworthy that this motive pervades the narrative, as do a kind of mystic symbolism and repeated emphasis on the incarnation. The author continually adds interpretative comments of his own to clarify Jesus' motives (Jn 6:1-15), which appears in all four Gospels, John's version is explained as symbolic of a deeper spiritual truth ("I am the bread of life..."). Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus openly presents himself as the divine Son of God. Therefore, the author of John's Gospel does not merely narrate a series of events but singles out details that support an ordered theological interpretation of those events. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *The Gospel According to John*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-According-to-John> (Accessed on 14th August, 2019).

author;<sup>4</sup> meanwhile, the author of the book is indicated as “the Beloved Disciple” or better still “the Disciple Jesus loved” (John 21:20, 23-24) and a close companion of Peter.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that part of the controversy in this sphere is entangled with the fact that there are different Johns in the New Testament.

Far beyond that, several scholars in the contemporary time see Church tradition regarding the authorship as being probable.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars claim that the gospel was not in fact written by one of Christ’s immediate followers, but by a Christian of later date; if this is the case, the force of the historical evidence would be weakened thus making it easier to deny the Gospel’s claims. If the Gospel were written about the end of the first century and if John the Apostle did indeed survive till then, it might be thought to make little difference to the accuracy of the narrative, whether it was written by him personally or by one who was his contemporary. Although the Apostle is somewhat perceived to have had a large part in providing the material of this Gospel, it is still denied by many modern scholars that he actually wrote it. Critics argued and even denied the Johannine authorship not only on historical ground but also on doctrinal grounds. Here, the research sees the need to examine men with the name of ‘John’ mentioned in the New Testament.

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<sup>4</sup> This issue is common to the Synoptics; and this has brought about serious arguments and controversies in New Testament scholarship as it concerns the stance of the Church Father and Traditions in this sphere. Although, the standpoint of the Church tradition have been there for years, the research posits that the opinions of critics have brought about the need to re-asses these claims and views.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45.

## **Plausible and Argued Characters: “The Beloved Disciple”**

On this note, the research sees the need to explore several appearance of the character John in the New Testament which might have an indirect or direct bearing with the discourse in question.

**John the Baptist** (John 1:6, 15, 19, 26, 29): obviously, John the Baptist is not be the author of this book because he was beheaded by Herod long before the events mentioned in the Gospel of John were completed (Mk. 6:24-29).<sup>7</sup>

**Thomas:** some critics argued that Thomas is the disciple; on a contrary, the disciple is described as a witness to the empty tomb and believed (20.8-9), contrary to Thomas who refuses to 'believe' until he sees Jesus in person (20.24-25).<sup>8</sup>

**An ideal Christian disciple:** some scholars have suggested that the so called 'beloved disciple' is an idealized literary figure; the ideal Christian disciple.<sup>9</sup> To a degree this is true, because of the played character-role of faithful and intimate knowledge of Jesus. But this hardly excludes the possibility of a genuine historical person.<sup>10</sup>

**John the father of Peter** (Jn 1:42) is not mentioned in any connection which might suggest that he was the author.

**John Mark** (Acts 12:12). Although several scholars argued that it is more logical to assert that he is the author of the second Gospel (Mark's Gospel); Parker suggested John Mark as the beloved disciples; Acts of the Apostles indicate that

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<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, Chicago, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> *Who Wrote the Gospel of John?* <sup>9</sup>  
<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-the-gospel-of-john>  
(Accessed on 16th August 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Edmond.

John Mark was very young and a late-comer as a disciple.<sup>11</sup> J. Colson suggested that “John” was a priest in Jerusalem, explaining the alleged priestly mentality in the fourth gospel. Besides, the Beloved Disciple was certainly one of the twelve apostles (13:23), and John Mark was not; this seems to eliminate John Mark as a possibility.<sup>12</sup>

**John of the Sanhedrin** (Acts 4:5-6): The only reference in Scripture to this man presents him as an enemy of Christianity, and the presentation of John is anything but antagonistic to the cause of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

**John, son of Zebedee** (Matthew 4:21; John 21:20-25): John was the brother of James (Matthew 17:1), and the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19-20).<sup>14</sup> John was part of three men who made up the inner circle of companions of Jesus (Mark 5:37; 14:33).<sup>15</sup> Although disputed by many critics, many scholars as well as Church tradition strongly posits that he is the most likely candidate for authorship.<sup>16</sup> This informs the significant attention of the research as it concerns the apostolic authorship of John as well as the certainty of being a primary or secondary means.

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<sup>11</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*. Vol. 36 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Gaebelein, Frank Ely, J. D. Douglas, and Merrill Tenney. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary : John - Acts: with the New international version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, and Max E. Anders. *Holman New Testament Commentary: John* (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Reference, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Paula Fredriksen, "What you see is what you Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus," *Theology Today* 52, no. 1 (1995), 75-97.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> William. Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

**Lazarus:** Since John 11:3 and 11:36 specifically indicates that Jesus “loved” him.<sup>17</sup> The fact that the ‘Beloved Disciple’ texts occur after Lazarus is introduced in chapter 11 makes the argument here seem likely,<sup>18</sup> but this solution is unlikely; because Lazarus’s name is mentioned in chapters 11–12 but then left shrouded in subsequent accounts.<sup>19</sup> Also, Lazarus was not mentioned in one of the lists of people present at the ascension of Jesus and those staying together in the upper room after the ascension.<sup>20</sup>

**Mary Magdalene:** The Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary identify her as the disciple whom Jesus loved, a connection that has been analysed by Esther de Boer and

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<sup>17</sup> Filson, Sanders, Vernard Eller, Rudolf Steiner, and Ben Witherington suggest Lazarus since the Gospel presents it that Jesus loves him; even to the point that he raised him from the dead. Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>18</sup> A handful of scholars have suggested the Beloved Disciple as Lazarus. Ben Witherington III makes perhaps the strongest case, but some of his arguments depend on a close corroboration between the fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, which is not what the present question is allowing. The Beloved Disciple is specifically portrayed as the first to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead (20.8-9). This could possibly be because, internal to the narrative, the Beloved Disciple himself had been raised from the dead. The final bit of narration in the Gospel is 21.15-23. After having just been told he will die for Jesus' sake (21.18-19), Peter asks Jesus what would become of the Beloved Disciple (21.20-21). Peter's question and Jesus' response are mistakenly understood by the rest of the group as meaning the Beloved Disciple 'was not to die'; the narrator goes out of his way to stamp out this misconception. But we must ask, why was Peter prompted to ask about the Beloved Disciple's fate after having just learned his own fate involved martyrdom? Why did the other disciples seem to think Jesus' answer meant the Beloved Disciple would never die? This could possibly be because, internal to the narrative, the Beloved Disciple had been raised from the dead once, and the other disciples considered that he would not die again. Internal Evidence of the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel. <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/8108/internal-evidence-of-authorship-of-the-fourth-gospel> (Accessed on 15th August, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Beth Moore, and McCleskey. Dale, *The Beloved Disciple: Following John to the Heart of Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> K stenberger, Andreas and Clinton E. Arnold. *John: Zondervan illustrated Bible backgrounds commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

made notorious in the fictional *The Da Vinci Code*.<sup>21</sup> R. Schnackenburg suggested that “John” was an otherwise unknown resident of Jerusalem who was in Jesus' circle of friends.<sup>22</sup>

### **Arguments for Apostle John as ‘the Beloved Disciple’**

There are several arguments within the book for John the apostle’s authorship; this is what many scholars call the internal evidence in support of Apostle John authorship claims.

1. Evidence suggests that the author was a Jew, because of his knowledge of current Jewish opinions such as Messianic expectations (1:21, 4:25, 6:14, 7:40, 12:34), attitude towards women (4:27), importance of religious schools (7:15), and hostility of Jews and Samaritans (4:9). He is also very familiar with Jewish observances and customs, such as the ceremonial pollution of entering a gentile court (18:28), customs at a marriage feast (2:1-10) and customs of burial (11:17-44).<sup>23</sup> The vocabulary, the sentence structure, symmetry and numerical symbolism, expression and arrangement of thoughts are essentially Hebrew.
2. The author was almost certainly a Jew of Palestine, based upon his impressive local knowledge of the geography of Jerusalem and the surrounding area (1:28, 3:23, 5:2, 9:7, 10:22, 11:18, 18:1, and 19:13). The author also is not

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<sup>21</sup> Esther de Boer, Essay in Marvin Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary* (San-Francisco: Harper, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), 919.

<sup>23</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Biblical Commentary: *John*. Vol. 36 2nd ed (Nashville, Tenny: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

dependent on the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day).<sup>24</sup>

3. The author of the book of John was an eyewitness of the events he describes. His descriptions of persons like Nicodemus (3:1, 7:50, 19:39); Lazarus (9:1, 12:1); Simon, father of Judas Iscariot (6:71, 12:4, 13:2, 26) are extremely precise. He lists details of time, including specific mention of the hour at which events occurred (1:40, 4:6, 4:52, 19:14, 13:30). He also lists details of number and details of manner or circumstance (barley loaves - 6:9; fragrance - 12:3; palm branches -12:13; seamless tunic -19:23).
4. In view of the following internal explicated authorship evidences, the author of the Gospel of John was said to be an Apostle by the following observations:
  - a. The scope of John's descriptions of Jesus' ministry from the call of the first disciple to the appearances after the resurrection.
  - b. He is acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of the disciples at critical moments (2:11, 17, 22; 4:27, 6:19, 60; 12:16, 13:22, 28, 21:12).
  - c. He recalls words spoken among themselves (4:33, 16:17, 20:25, 21:3, 5).
  - d. He is familiar with the places to which they withdrew alone (11:54, 18:1-2, 20:19).
  - e. He is acquainted with imperfect or erroneous impressions they received initially (11:13, 12:16, 13:28, 20:9, 21:4).
  - f. He stood very near the Lord:

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<sup>24</sup> The research observes that unlike other books in the New Testament, nowhere does a quotation of the Old Testament in John agree with the Septuagint translation over the Hebrew text.



- i. He knew the Lord's emotions (11:33, 13:21).
  - ii. He knew the grounds of the Lord's actions (2:24, 4:1, 5:6, 6:15, 7:1, 6:19).
  - iii. He knew the mind of the Lord in many cases (6:6, 6:61, 6:64, 13:1, 3; 13:11).
5. The author of the Fourth Gospel was the Apostle John.
- a. John 21:24 assigns authorship to the apostle whom Jesus loved.
  - b. This disciple is mentioned by this title twice in the passion narrative (13:23, 19:26) and twice afterwards (21:7, 21:20).
  - c. He is known to the high-priest (18:15), an opportunity that John and his family may have had as a prominent family as well as possible supplier of fish to Jerusalem and the high priest.
  - d. He stands in close relationship with Peter (13:24, 20:2, 21:7).
  - e. From the list in 21:2 of those present, this disciple must have been one of the sons of Zebedee, or one of the two other unnamed disciples present.
  - f. The synoptic gospels present Peter, James and John as standing in a special relationship to Jesus. Peter is eliminated (20:21), James was martyred very early (Acts 12:2); this leaves John.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010).

## The Claims of the Church Fathers

The testimony of early Church leaders was that John the Apostle was the author of the Gospel of John.<sup>26</sup>

**Irenaeus** (c. A.D. 130–200), an early church father wrote: *John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia* (*Haer.* 3.1.1; quoted in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 5.8.4).<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus also writes (in a letter to a friend, Florinus) of hearing Polycarp (d. 155) recount his interaction with - John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what were the things concerning the Lord which he had heard from them, and of which he took notes not on paper but in my heart (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.20.6–7; 4.14.3–5). We have, then, in Irenaeus a man who claims to have traditions from John whom Irenaeus assumes to be the apostle John, the son of Zebedee mediated through Polycarp.<sup>28</sup>

**St. Justin** of Ephesus (martyred ca 155AD): “*Since it is written of Him in the Memoirs of the Apostles that he is the son of God, and since we call Him Son, we have understood that before all creatures He proceeded from the Father by His will and power...and that He became Man by the Virgin...*” (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew).<sup>29</sup> The earliest known reference to the Fourth Gospel is from Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165), who wrote, “Christ indeed said, ‘Unless you are born again you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ It is evident to all that those who have once been born cannot re-enter their mothers’ wombs. This is almost certainly a quotation from John 3:3-5, and while Justin Martyr never attributed his

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<sup>26</sup> This is what many scholars refer to as the ‘external evidence’ concerning the authorship of John.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Schaff, *Comment by Philip Schaff on 2.25.8 from The Early Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmann’s Publishing, 2001), 539.

<sup>28</sup> Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 369.

<sup>29</sup> *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Volume I* (Hendrickson Publications, 1995).

quotations to John or any other Gospel author, he did refer to the Gospels as the *“memoirs of the apostles.”*<sup>30</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** (scholar theologian and catechist) c. AD150-211/216: *“John, last of all, seeing that the plain facts had been clearly set forth in the Gospels, and being urged by his acquaintances, composed a spiritual Gospel under the divine inspiration of the Spirit.”*<sup>31</sup>

**St. Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch** (c. 185AD): *“This is what the Holy Scriptures teach us, as do all the inspired men, one of whom, John, says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...’ To Autolycus by Theophilus, the 7<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Antioch, Syria, the faith community of St. Paul which was founded by St. Peter and where he served as bishop before he left for Rome circa 42AD. St. Theophilus records that he is the 6<sup>th</sup> successor of Peter at the church at Antioch.*<sup>32</sup>

**Muratorian Fragment** (c.155/200AD) the oldest surviving list of canonical books: *“The fourth Gospel is by John, one of the disciples. When his fellow disciples and bishops were urging him, he said, ‘Fast with me for three days beginning today, and whatever will have been revealed to us, let us recount it with each other.’ On that very night it was revealed to the Apostle Andrew that all the things they had recalled to mind John should write them all in his own name.”*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Brooke Foss. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*. Vol. 1. (John Murray, 1908).

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *History of the Church*, Bk.6, ch. 14.

<sup>32</sup> The first attribution of the Fourth Gospel to John is from Theophilus of Antioch (A.D. 181), but before this the Fourth Gospel was quoted as authoritative by Tatian, Athenagoras, Polycarp and Papias. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford : Oxford Press), 177.

<sup>33</sup> *Church History (Ecclesial History)*, Eusebius, (Hendrickson Publications, 1995).

**Tertullian** (c. 155-240A.D) lawyer and Catholic Apologist: *“The same authority of the apostolic Churches will defend the other Gospels, which we possess through them and because of their using them. I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew, while that issued by Mark may be affirmed to be Peter’s, whose interpreter Mark was. And the digest by Luke men are accustomed to ascribe to Paul.”*<sup>34</sup>

**Origen** (c. 185- 253A.D): Great theologian and prolific writer of the early Church. His literary productivity was tremendous. Bishop Eusebius dedicated his Church history to Origen and compiled a list of his works that has not survived. St. Jerome knew of some two thousand of Origen’s works in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century but Epiphany Bishop of Salamis gave the count at six thousand. Sadly only fragments of his works survive, including fragments of his commentary on the Gospel of St. John, one of the oldest surviving New Testament commentaries.<sup>35</sup> His Commentaries on John comprised originally at least 32 books written ca. 226-232AD. Only eight survive and these are in the original Greek. Origen surely deserves the title “the greatest scholar of Christian antiquity.”

Origen’s testimony in favor of St. John the Apostle as author of the fourth Gospel:

“Matthew first made a noise on the sacerdotal trumpet in his own Gospel. Mark also, and Luke and John played upon their own sacerdotal trumpets; John says in the Gospel, ‘No one has at any time seen God,’ clearly declaring to all who are able to understand that there is no nature to which God is visible...As to the four Gospels, which alone are indisputable in the Church of God under heaven, I learned from tradition

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<sup>34</sup> *Against Marcion*, Bk 4, ch 5.1 ca AD207.

<sup>35</sup> *Ante-Nicene Church Fathers, volumes I, II, and III*, (Hendrickson Publications, 1995).

that the first to have been written was that of Matthew, who was formerly a tax-collector, but later an Apostle of Jesus Christ. It was prepared for those who were converted from Judaism to the faith, and was written in Hebrew letters.<sup>36</sup> The second was that of Mark, who composed it under Peter's guidance the third, the Gospel which was praised by Paul, was that of Luke, written for gentile converts. Last of all, there is that of John."

The seeming abundance of testimony of the Apostolic Fathers (disciples of the Apostles) and their successors down through Christian antiquity and the internal evidence of the fourth Gospel itself, all support evidence in favor of St. John the Apostle as the Holy Spirit inspired writer of the fourth Gospel.<sup>37</sup> It is for these reasons that the Catholic Church has always held that the fourth Gospel is the Gospel according to St. John.

### **Exploring the Stance of Modern Critics**

If John, the Apostle is widely accepted by Church fathers as the author of the fourth Gospel; why then is John the Apostle's authorship often debated and rejected in modern critical scholarship? Some modern critic claims that the fourth Gospel does not agree with the synoptic accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).<sup>38</sup> The most often quoted argument against St. John's authorship is that so much of the synoptic Gospel portrait of Jesus is missing from the fourth Gospel account and what is included is very different. In fact, many modern

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<sup>36</sup> Kenneth D. Whitehead, *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: The Early church Was the Catholic Church* (Illinois: Ignatius Press, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John; Volume one* (Peabody, MA Hendrickson Publishers, , 2003), 91.

<sup>38</sup> Beth Moore, and McCleskey. Dale, *The beloved disciple: following John to the heart of Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003).

scholars alleged that an Apostle close to Jesus could not have written this very different Gospel account.<sup>39</sup>

This argument does not address the fact that John may have had good theological and literary reasons for omitting what was covered in the other Gospels. More so, the inspired writer of this Gospel seems to be addressing these differences when he records in John 20:30,31 *“There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.”* *“There was much else that Jesus did; if it were written down in detail, I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that would be written”* (John 21:25). To simply put, the fourth Gospel does not claim to record all that Jesus said or did.

In the same vein, some modern critics argued that this Gospel’s themes of love and unity could not have been produced by one of the Apostles to whom Jesus gave the name “Sons of Thunder” in Mark 3:17. This argument posits that James and his brother John were wrathful, emotional, and ambitious men who wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans (Luke 9:54) and desired to secure a place of honour at Jesus’ right hand in His coming kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). Succinctly, this argument offers only a one-dimensional view at the sons of Zebedee; surely decades of suffering for Christ and years of growing in faith and understanding yielded a much more mature man of Christian faith.

The research notes that the contrast between the nature of John and what he allegedly pens down is not enough to discredit his probability; he basically shows and portray Jesus as who He is; not minding his own person. Also, it is logical to think that by the time the fourth Gospel was written John, the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Bishop of Ephesus, was no longer the impetuous youth described in the synoptic Gospels.

One of the most popular argument against Johannine authorship about years ago was that the author of the fourth Gospel must have been a Hellenistic (Greek culture) Israelite of the Diaspora (living outside Israel/Judea) or a Greek gentile convert to Judaism and/or Christianity because the language and concepts of the fourth Gospel were simple not found in Jewish literature of the 1st century AD but instead reflected Greek thought and language. Scholars with this view pointed out that terms and concepts peculiar to the fourth Gospel like the divine “*Logos*”, the contrast between “light and darkness”, etc. were strictly Greek cultural expressions. But the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 proved that the theology of the fourth Gospel was part of the first century AD Jewish community view.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, some scholars opined that John the Apostle, a poor fisherman from Galilee, was too uneducated and unsophisticated to have written the fourth Gospel which is theologically and classy. However, there is no evidence in Sacred Scripture that John was poor. Nevertheless, have quite a good idea of the scale of John’s family’s fishing operation on the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother James along with their father, Zebedee, were partners in the fishing business with the brothers Peter and Andrew (Lk 5:7). They owned several boats and had hired helpers (Mk 1:20). They were free to start and stop work when it suited them (Jn 21:1-3 and Lk 5:11). They

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<sup>40</sup> The Scrolls not only contained copies of all the Old Testament texts with the exception of the Book of Esther (many in multiple copies) but also commentaries on Old Testament books and documents of the Community at Qumran where the scrolls were found. These sectarian documents expressed the same language and concepts that scholars had previously thought was unique to the fourth Gospel. The similarities are so striking that today many scholars believe there was a connection between John the Apostle and the religious Community at Qumran near to where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

were also able to leave their business for a period of three years to follow Jesus and yet were able to return to the Galilee at the end of three years to boats they still owned (Jn 21:1-3). Therefore, indications reveal that the financial strength of John's family is above average; this inherently gives chance for engaging or embarking in several projects independently (part of which can include John's writings).<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Acts 4:13 is usually cited as proof that John and Peter lacked education.<sup>42</sup> More so, the people of Jerusalem and the more sophisticated Greek-culture Jews of the Diaspora generally regarded themselves as superior to the people from the Galilee, but what is really meant by this passage from Acts is that the members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish law court which was composed of Biblical scholars trained in the Law and Temple priests, were amazed at the eloquence of Peter's defence when he and John were brought before them and charged with false teaching. The statement "uneducated laymen", '*am-ha'aretz*,' is more literally translated "common men."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the passage does not indicate

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<sup>41</sup> Fish was a food staple of the ancient world; *Bread and fish, with the addition of olive-oil and wine, formed in ancient times the most substantial parts of the diet of the people, rich and poor. In those days, the Roman authorities hired fishermen on the Galilee to provide fish, salted, pickled and dried, to be exported to Rome and other Roman cities. The contracts required the fisherman to provide a set number of fish and anything they caught beyond the limit was extra income. The size and quality of Peter's house, excavated at Capernaum, confirms the impression that these were men of means who controlled their own lives. It is larger than most of the other houses excavated there and is located directly across from the local Synagogue, a prestigious location.*

<sup>42</sup> Hebrew children were required to memorize the first five books of Torah before they were twelve years old. Young students were also required to discuss these texts and write them. There is good reason to believe John and James were not exempt from this requirement.

<sup>43</sup> Considering the fact that Peter and the others Apostles had not received a formal theological education that prepared one to become a member of the hereditary ministerial priesthood nor were they formally trained scribes or rabbis, the members of the court were impressed with Peter's fearless defence.



that the Apostles lacked education, only that the members of the court were astonished at the eloquence of their defence.<sup>44</sup>

### **Date of Authorship**

Here, the research notes that the date of authorship is also important to the subject matter. Most scholars date the book between 65 AD and 100 AD. In 1934, a fragment of John 18 was found, which has been dated at 125 AD. Since no one believes this fragment is actually part of the original autograph and since it came from Egypt, it is generally conceded that it would take several decades for the Gospel of John to be circulated, copied, carried to Egypt (and end up buried there). This requires a date for John's Gospel in the first century. Some argue for a date before 70 AD, since there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> However, tradition holds that this was the last of the gospels written, and while he did not borrow from the synoptics, it does seem that he was knowledgeable of them, particularly Luke. Therefore, most scholars today believe that John wrote his gospel c.80-90 AD from Ephesus.

### **Research Observations**

The research notes that some critics argued that the author of John's Gospel cannot be John the son of Zebedee because of the initial mention in John 21:2. Thus, the research opines

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<sup>44</sup> But even if John was under-educated, this does not preclude the reasonable use of a scribe. An assistant of this nature (known as an "amanuensis") was commonplace at this point in history. Paul repeatedly used a scribe to help him as he dictated his letters to the Church. Tertius helped Paul write the letter to the Romans (Romans 16:22), and Paul admitted using a scribe to help him with 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:21). If John wrote his Gospel and letters in a similar manner, it is reasonable to infer his use of a scribe. If this was the case, the degree of Greek sophistication would be attributed to the scribe rather than to John. When skeptics point to differences in the form of Greek seen in some of John's writings (when compared with one another), they most certainly are ignoring the use of an "amanuensis".

<sup>45</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010).

that this basis of argument opens the John's apostolic authorship up in the sense that the beloved disciple seems obviously logical to think it is one of the mentioned disciples (seven of them) in 21:1-2. The research employ an elimination method; obviously not Simon Peter, Thomas, or Nathanael, so it must have been either one of the sons of Zebedee (but not James, who was martyred early) or one of the two other disciples not mentioned by name. In view of this, the research opines that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" can be understood as an expression of authorial modesty, similar to the word "I suppose" in the last verse of the Gospel (21:25). Therefore, the author's practice of talking about himself in the third person singular or first-person plural is in keeping with first-century historio-graphical practice.<sup>46</sup>

The language of the Gospel and its well-developed theology suggest that the author may have lived later than John and based his writing on John's teachings and testimonies. Moreover, the facts that several episodes in the life of Jesus are recounted out of sequence with the Synoptics and that the final chapter appears to be a later addition suggest that the text may be a composite. The Gospel's place and date of composition are also uncertain; many scholars suggest that it was written at Ephesus, in Asia Minor, c. A.D.100 for the purpose of communicating the truths about Christ to Christians of Hellenistic background, though minority suggests an even later date. Although, this Gospel may have been later also because it was written to a smaller group within the Johannine community, and was not circulated widely until a later date; yet, claims for authorship much later than 100 have been called into question due to Rylands

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<sup>46</sup> P. J. Williams et al. 'I Suppose' (oimi): The Conclusion of John's Gospel in Its Literary and Historical Context," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting* (Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans, 2004), 72-88.

Library Papyrus P52, a fragment of the gospel found in Egypt that was probably written around A.D 125.<sup>47</sup>

On this note, the research posits that the strongest evidence in favour of Apostle John as the author “the beloved disciple” is the testimony of the early Church Fathers. These men, without apparent exception, see a person named John as the author of the fourth Gospel. The testimony of Irenaeus appears especially strong as he identifies the author of the fourth Gospel as a disciple of the Lord, who leaned on His breast and whose name is John. Meanwhile, from John 21, the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ breast is “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

### **Conclusion**

The issue of authorship is cardinal when as it concerns Biblical texts. In view of this, the research concludes that the subject of discussion is a sensitive and contemporary issue; which has lingered for several centuries; it is an ongoing debate which ravages the scene of modern New Testament studies. However, the research observes that the opinion of scholars in this sphere is not hundred percent congruent. In other words, scholar’s stance varies in this regard; nevertheless, the patristic tradition remains the frontier, even in this contemporary time. The research concludes that, though the authorship of this Gospel is controversial; John the son of Zebedee seems most plausible, the fact that he wrote it personally is somewhat daunting; however, it is logical to think that his disciples (which served as scribes) compiled John’s verbal witnesses and testimonies.

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<sup>47</sup> Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d).

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