



## 20a. John the Theologian

*El Greco, "Apostle St John the Evangelist," 1610-14*

"Having events and teachings not contained elsewhere, the gospel of John makes a unique and important contribution to our understanding of the person and work of Jesus, who is portrayed in consistently divine terms . . . Pregnant with theological insights, it is perhaps the most deeply thoughtful Gospel account. Filled with dialogues and scenes that draw in the reader, this Gospel is also the most symbolic and is able to teach at many levels, root the believer more firmly in his or her faith, and touch even those who do not yet accept Christ." (Holzapfel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 126)

## Appeal of the Fourth Gospel

- **Unique material not found in the Synoptics**
  - Events and teachings not recorded elsewhere (e.g. raising of Lazarus)
  - Accurate details of Palestinian geography and customs
  - **Discourses (such as chs. 14–17) specific to believers**
- **Theological insights**
  - Jesus is a **majestic and divine figure**—John's testimony and account of him is indeed the study of godhood
    - Cf. ". . . that **Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God**" (Title Page, Book of Mormon)
    - Also, ". . . **I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.**" (3 Nephi 11:14)
  - *This is the Jesus whom we love and worship!*
- **Moving dialogues and scenes**
  - Christ and Nicodemus, Samaritan woman at the well, Mary and John at the foot of the cross
- **Symbolism**
  - Christ as the Light of the World, Fountain of Living Waters, Bread of Life, True Vine
  - **John 19:34–35: Blood and Water from the spearpoint's thrust**

## Some Contrasts Between the Synoptics and John

- | <u>Synoptics</u>   | <u>John</u>  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Jesus' ministry chiefly in Galilee</li> <li>■ Emphasis on the Kingdom of God</li> <li>■ Jesus son of David, Son of Man</li> <li>■ Jesus' sayings usually short</li> <li>■ Little commentary by evangelists</li> <li>■ Only one Passover mentioned, temple cleansing at the end of ministry</li> <li>■ Jesus' human side acknowledged</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More coverage of Christ's <b>Judean ministry</b></li> <li>■ Emphasis on the person of Jesus               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <b>Jesus the Son of God, the Incarnate Word</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>■ More long discourses</li> <li>■ Frequent commentary and expansion by John</li> <li>■ Three Passovers mentioned, temple cleansing at the beginning of the ministry</li> <li>■ <b>Johannine Jesus knows all beforehand, is in full-control</b></li> </ul> |

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## Authorship, Internal Evidence

What does the text itself tell us about who wrote John?

- **Direct: "The disciple whom Jesus loved"**
  - This disciple is mentioned by this title twice in the passion narrative (13:23, 19:26) and twice afterwards (21:7, 21:20)
    - Probably is also the figure referred to as "the other disciple" in other passages
  - Seems to have first been a **disciple of John the Baptist** (1:35-40)
  - He is known to the high-priest (18:15)
  - Suggestions include John the apostle, Lazarus (11:3, 36; also 12:2), an unknown early disciple, or even Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany (although the gender of the pronouns does not support this)
- **Indirect**
  - The author of the Fourth Gospel was a Jew from the Holy Land
    - Knowledge of Jewish terms and customs
    - Detailed knowledge of Palestinian geography
  - **The author was an eyewitness of the events described**

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## Authorship, External Evidence

### What do others tell us about who wrote John?

- Postapostolic references
  - “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*.” (Clement *ap.* Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.7)
  - The author of the Fourth Gospel was **John, the Lord’s disciple**; the Gospel was published at Ephesus, and John remained at Ephesus until the time of Trajan (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2.22.5, 3.3.4)
- Latter-day revelation confirms the identification
  - 1 Nephi 14:18-27; Ether 4:16; D&C 7; D&C 77:1-15; D&C 88:141

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## John the Beloved

- **John the Beloved = the Apostle John**
  - He stands in close relationship with Peter (13:24, 20:2, 21:7).
  - 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.
    - The Synoptics present Peter, James and John as standing in a special relationship to Jesus. Peter is eliminated (see 20:21), James was martyred very early (Acts 12:2); **this leaves John**
- **Why anonymous?**
  - Though a historical figure, the Beloved Disciple also serves as a “type” of the ideal disciple
    - *We can, and should, and identify with the disciple who leaned on the Savior’s breast at the Last Supper and we can have as sure a testimony of Christ’s Atonement as the disciple that stood at the foot of the cross*
  - Mary also is anonymous!
    - Always “the mother of Jesus”
- **Dating John’s Gospel: still open**
  - Usual dating **A.D. 80-110** (based on postapostolic suggestions and scholarly reconstructions)
  - **Before A.D. 70** (no mention of the destruction of the temple, porticos at the Pool of Bethesda described as still standing)
  - **Even Earlier**: does not know the Synoptics, could be contemporary with Mark (or earlier)

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# Gospel Sources: John

Early Disciples and Witnesses      **Jesus Christ**      Family Members

<i>Kérygma</i>	Sayings	Hymns <small>(including canticles)</small>	<b>REVELATION</b> <small>(See John 14:26; Galatians 1:12)</small>
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Gospel of Mark
Gospel of Matthew
Gospel of Luke

↓  
**Gospel of John**

- The Beloved Disciple, identified as the apostle John, was a witness of Jesus' mission
  - John began his testimony by including the *Logos* Hymn (1:1–18), perhaps originally composed by John the Baptist and accepted by early Christians as an important Christological statement
  - Aided by the Comforter, John recalled miracles and discourses of Jesus, using them to support his own testimony in the form of an apostolic *kérygma*.

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# Audience

- Christians who desire a greater understanding of who Christ is
  - “[John wrote] to members of the Church who already had basic information about the Lord. His primary purpose was to *emphasize the divine nature of Jesus as the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh*.” (Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Gospels,” 683)
  - “This is a Gospel designed to root the believer deeper in his faith . . . (Brown, *AB* 29, lxxviii)
- Asides and explanations, however, sometimes suggest that some readers might not know all the details and background
  - A minority of scholars note that the deeply theological, almost philosophical presentations of John might have appealed to educated pagan readers
- Stated purpose
  - “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*.” (John 20:30–31)
- No reason not to suggest a universal audience—believers and non-believers, contemporary and future
  - John no doubt wrote to his immediate contemporaries but, knowing his revelatory career, may well have had us in mind
    - Cf. Book of Mormon authors . . .

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## Compositional Theory and the “Johannine Community”

- A scholarly construct *proposing* that a particular group of Christians identified with the Beloved Disciple developed during the first century A.D.
  - the so-called “**Johannine Community**”
  - Proponents of the Johannine Community see a multi-stage development
    - The gospel was written or edited in stages
      - John 21:23-25 clearly written by someone other than the Beloved Disciple
      - Did later editing obscure his identity?
- Textual History and Transmission
  - The Beloved Disciple was the leader of the community; his ideas were preserved, written, and expanded upon by a “Johannine School”
    - Beloved Disciple (**BD, source**) > Fourth Evangelist (**FE, original author**) > the Elder (author of I and II John) > Final Redactor (**editor**)
  - Compare to the Book of Mormon
    - Amulek preaches to the Zoramites > missionary companion Alma records Amulek’s sermon in his records > Mormon abridges Alma’s record > Joseph Smith translates
    - **Difference:** We know each stage of the Book of Mormon’s development and transmission, and prophets are involved in every stage
  - **Perhaps some later editing, but no reason not to identify the Beloved Disciple (the source) with the Evangelist (the original author)!**

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## Johannine Christology

- Person of Jesus
  - **Divine Word**
    - As stirringly described in the gospel’s opening hymn (John 1:1–18), the premortal Jesus was the divine “Word” (*logos*)
      - Jesus’ divinity is projected even beyond the divine conception and miraculous birth
    - Directly and frequently describes himself as God’s son
    - Frequently associated with the OT Jehovah, especially through “I Am” statements
  - **Incarnate Word**
    - The Word “becomes flesh”
    - **The Johannine Jesus knows all things, speaks truth in a divine way, cannot be killed but voluntarily lays down his life**
- Work of Jesus
  - **Bear witness of the Truth**
    - “. . . To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37)
  - Save all given to him by the Father, losing none
  - **Lay down his life for his friends**
  - **Give life, both physical and spiritual (eternal)**
    - “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25)

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## Two Noted Stylistic Features

- **Poetic format**
  - Prologue (John 1:1–18) and John 17 can be divided into poetic strophes or stanzas
  - Johannine discourses are semipoetic
    - Not parallelism (as in OT) or rhyme, but rhythm
      - Lines of the same length, each constituting a clause
    - This signals divine speech: *deity speaks differently than prosaic human communication*
- **Misunderstanding**
  - Interlocutors with Christ misunderstand his teachings
    - Demonstrates the need for spiritual understanding
    - *Allows Christ to clarify and deepen his teaching*

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## Structure

- **Prologue** (the *Logos* Hymn; 1:1–18)
- **The Book of Signs** (1:19–12:50)
  - Initial Days of the Divine Revelation (1:19–2:11)
  - First to Second Cana Miracle (2:1–4:54, overlaps with initial days)
  - Jewish Feasts and Their Replacements by Christ (5:1–10:42)
  - Raising of Lazarus and its aftermath (11:1–12:50)
- **The Book of Glory** (Passion and Resurrection Narratives; 13:1–20:31)
- **Epilogue** (21:1–25)

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## The *Logos* Hymn of the Prologue

- A poetic introduction in the form of a **hymn**
  - Poetic sections separated by prose asides or explanations
- Focuses on Jesus as **the Word** (Greek *logos*)
  - Semantically rich in Greek, it means “word, expression, rational thought,” etc.
  - Just as words are the way people communicate with each other, **Jesus is the way that the Father communicates and interacts with his children**, linking the divine mind with the human
- In several poetic statements, the hymn establishes the following points:
  - **The preincarnate Word was divine**
  - **The Word** is the source of **Light and Life**
  - **The Light of the World was not accepted by his own**
  - **The Word makes those who accept him sons of God**
  - **The Word become flesh and his glory was seen in witnesses**
    - *Prose asides stress that first among these witnesses was John the Baptist*