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The Gospel of John

Any reader who has worked carefully through Matthew, Mark, and Luke is immediately struck by how different a Gospel John is. Much that is central to all three Synoptics is entirely absent in John: Jesus's baptism, the calling of the Twelve, the exorcisms, the transfiguration, the parables, and the institution of the Lord's Supper. John has numerous lengthy discourses of Jesus, but none of them matches any found in the Synoptics. Equally distinctive are the miracles of water turned into wine and the reawakening of Lazarus, an account of Jesus's early ministry in Judea and Galilee, his regular visits to Jerusalem, and the lengthy Farewell Discourse on the night before his crucifixion. As our survey of John's distinctive themes will demonstrate later in this chapter, there are equally prominent theological differences. There are also the same kind of apparent discrepancies with parallel passages in the Synoptics as periodically emerge among the Synoptics themselves. To top it all off, John's narrative demonstrates a uniform style, whether or not he is "quoting" Jesus, which differs considerably from the language of Christ that characterizes Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[1]

On the other hand, there is some overlap between John and the Synoptics: considerable attention to the ministry of John the Baptist, the feeding of the five thousand and walking on the water, Sabbath controversies with Jewish leaders (particularly related to healing the lame and giving sight to the blind), Jesus's friendship with Mary and Martha, and numerous

[1] For a helpful chart of a large number of these differences, categorized under seven headings ("the beginnings of the respective gospels," "style and language," "chronology and order of events," "inclusions of events/portrayals of Jesus," "deviations/differences in portrayal," "the miracles of Jesus," and "significant theological differences"), see Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 98–99.

events surrounding Jesus's passion. While the actual teachings of Jesus in John rarely repeat those of the Synoptics, the themes often dovetail closely: humility needed to enter the kingdom, an abundant harvest awaiting Christ's laborers, the dishonor a prophet receives in his or her homeland, judgment against unbelievers according to their works, the revelation of the Father through the Son to those the Father has granted him, Jesus as the Good Shepherd, true discipleship as servanthood, guidance through the Spirit for ministry and proclamation, predicted future opposition for the disciples from the world, and authority to forgive or retain sins within the church.[2] Indeed, if one peruses a synopsis of the Gospels (printing parallel passages in parallel columns) that includes John, almost every distinctive passage in John finds at least short conceptual counterparts in one or a handful of much shorter Synoptic sayings somewhere, and sometimes more should have been printed.[3]

Historicity

Can John be taken seriously as a historically trustworthy account of the life of Jesus in light of this combination of similarities and differences from the Synoptics? Most modern scholars have thought not.[4] However, the issue is not so clear-cut. We will look at a selection of the most famous "discrepancies" within specific passages as we survey the life of Christ in the next section of this book. But several general comments are in order here.[5] First, one of the reasons John seems so different is because *Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so similar* to each

[2] For these and other similarities and differences, complete with all the appropriate chapter and verse references, see Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 197–203 (see chap. 5, n. 35).

[3] For a detailed analysis of six of John's longest discourses of Jesus, examining them for both verbal and conceptual parallels with the Synoptics, see Philipp Bartholomä, *The Johannine Discourses and the Teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics* (Tübingen: Francke, 2012). Cf. Peter W. Ensor's observation that "90 percent of Jesus' Johannine vocabulary either also occurs in his Synoptic speech, or, failing to occur there, also fails to occur in the Johannine literature outside dominical [Jesus's] speech (a fact which weighs against that vocabulary being particularly Johannine)." Ensor, "Johannine Sayings of Jesus and the Question of Authenticity," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 20.

[4] For a scathing, skeptical perspective, see Maurice J. Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996). For an irenic, centrist approach, cf. D. Moody Smith, *The Fourth Gospel in Four Dimensions: Judaism and Jesus, the Gospels and Scripture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

[5] Cf. also Paul N. Anderson, "Why the Gospel of John Is Fundamental to Jesus Research," in *The Gospel of John in Historical Inquiry*, ed. James H. Charlesworth with Jolyon G. R. Pruszinski (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 7–46.

other. Actually, it is the latter observation that should at first glance be the more surprising and significant. It is precisely the similarities among the Synoptics that lead to conclusions about literary dependence. It is arguable, on the other hand, that John is largely independent of the Synoptics, at least in terms of direct literary borrowing, and that this accounts for the diverse selection of details. Although clearly a hyperbole, John 21:25 nevertheless encapsulates an important truth: Jesus did so many things that, had four writers all written of him independently, their Gospels might all have produced books as different from each other as John is from the Synoptics.

Second, even though the Fourth Gospel may be for the most part *literarily* independent of the Synoptics, it is hard to imagine its author being ignorant of the core kerygma (the "proclamation" or foundational Christian message) that they share. He was almost certainly aware of the most common information widely reported about Jesus and could well have consciously chosen not to repeat most of it.[6] In a number of places, John refers to events from Jesus's life so briefly that one must assume he knew his audience would have previous knowledge about them, the kind on which the Synoptics wax eloquent (e.g., the imprisonment of John the Baptist [John 3:24], the trial before Caiaphas [18:24, 28a], and the reference to the "Twelve" [John 6:67–71]). Conversely, we have seen a variety of theological and geographical motives for the outlines of the Synoptics. So, it is conceivable that *Matthew, Mark, and Luke could have wanted to omit information* about Jesus (however precious it may seem to us) that did not fit their particular agendas (e.g., all of Jesus's visits to Jerusalem before his last Passover, which would account for their omission of the resurrection of Lazarus).

Third, a reverse kind of *interlocking* discloses numerous places where John explains something likely to have been puzzling to those familiar only with the Synoptic kerygma, suggesting closer points of contact between the two basic narratives than many acknowledge. For example, why did Jesus in Mark 14:49 refer to the numerous times he has taught in the temple courts without being arrested when in the Synoptics this final Passover of his adult ministry is the *only* time he has been portrayed teaching there? John's accounts of multiple trips to

[6] An assumption now virtually proven by Richard Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for All Christians*, ed. Bauckham, 147–71. James Barker believes he can show John's use of Matthean redaction at several junctures as well. See Barker, *John's Use of Matthew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). Wendy E. S. North argues that John knew all of the Synoptics, identifying places where he appears to reuse one of them in the same ways that he reuses his own material or Old Testament texts or imagery. North, *What John Knew and What John Wrote: A Study in John and the Synoptics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020).

Jerusalem over roughly a three-year period supply the answer. Why does the Sanhedrin in the Synoptics have to pass Jesus over to Pilate rather than just executing him themselves under their own laws (Mark 15:1–3 pars.)? Only John answers the question: in most instances, Rome had taken away their right to administer the death penalty (John 18:31). Numerous similar examples of this phenomenon could be cited.[7] Indeed, what John Robinson first called the "new look" on John way back in the late 1950s[8] has grown to such an extent that a significant number of John's unique passages or motifs are now seen by many scholars as having historically accurate details, at least in part, both because of details in the Synoptics they further illuminate and because they "cohere" with the generally accepted authentic core of the traditions about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[9]

Fourth, at least some of the differences between John and the Synoptics can be explained on the basis of the *different audiences* within the Gospels' narratives. Only John chooses to record Jesus's "Farewell Discourse" (chaps. 13–17). The very intimate concerns Jesus shared with his disciples on his last night would understandably differ considerably from his more public teaching elsewhere. The same is true for Jesus's teaching in Jerusalem at festival times, which occupies much of John 5–11. Unique concerns and styles of speaking would naturally emerge when Jesus explained the significance of his ministry vis-à-vis the sacred institutions of Israel to its authorities in the midst of its holy city. All the more so would this be the case as John wrote to a community at the end of the first century with the unique twin dangers of a hostile local Jewish leadership and emerging Gnosticism (see pp. 48–52). Numerous episodes or details from Christ's life would prove particularly important in this context that were not as crucial earlier in other settings.

Fifth, historical trustworthiness in the ancient world was not defined by the degrees of scientific precision or exact quotation that our modern society relishes. (And even we often accept as accurate a report of the "gist" of what someone has said.) We should freely admit that John wrote his entire Gospel in *his distinctive style*, paraphrasing, excerpting, and interpreting

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[7] See esp. Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 40–63. Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 52–55.

[8] John A. T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," *TU* 73 (1959): 338–50. For Robinson, this culminated in his posthumously published work, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (London: SCM, 1985; Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone, 1987).

[9] Nicely summarized in Paul N. Anderson, *Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, 154–73. Cf. also James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus as Mirrored in John: The Genius in the New Testament* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 19–60.

Jesus's words in his own language to bring out what he believed were their full and true significance. John's unique emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit as an interpreter of Jesus's words no doubt explains much of the freedom he felt to do this (14:26; 15:26; 16:12–13).[10] Various scholars have plausibly seen the lengthier discourses in John, at least in part, as the product of several decades of early Christian reflection, preaching, and application of Jesus's authentic words to the needs of the emerging "Johannine community."[11] A disproportionate number of times these core teachings, even if they are not full-fledged narratives, at least *resemble* the Synoptic parables, one of the parts of the Synoptic tradition most widely acknowledged to go back to Jesus himself.[12] In other cases, they involve what might be called "riddles"—another category of cryptic sayings.[13] Indeed, John's genre in places resembles Hellenistic "drama" more than straightforward historical reporting,[14] yet both genres may be effectively used to describe the story of someone's life and faithfully convey its significance.[15] Already in the late second century, Clement of Alexandria explained John's distinctives with these words: "Last of all John, perceiving that the bodily [or external] facts had been set forth in the [other] Gospels, at the instance of his disciples and the inspiration of the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel" (cited in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7).

Sixth, at the same time, there are some features of John's Gospel that actually make it *more like Greco-Roman historiography of the day* than the Synoptics. Richard Bauckham includes in this category the notably greater number of references to geography and topography, chronology, and reliance on eyewitness testimony; the far more plentiful narrative asides explaining potentially puzzling data to the work's readers; and the typically longer and more frequent discourses and dialogues.[16]

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[10] Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 14–16.

[11] See esp. throughout Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants: 1972; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

[12] C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963), 366–87. Cf. also Ruben Zimmermann, "Are There Parables in John? It Is Time to Revisit the Question," *JSHJ* 9 (2011): 243–76.

[13] Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000).

[14] See esp. Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

[15] See esp. Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield, UK: SAP, 1997).

[16] Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 93–112. For archaeology, see esp. Charlesworth, *Jesus as Mirrored in John*, 164–209.

Seventh, although John writes in a fairly uniform style throughout his Gospel—even when Jesus is speaking—there are at least *145 words used only by Jesus* that appear nowhere in John's narrative sections.[17] And even when John's and Jesus's styles seem to merge, it is not impossible that John picked up some of his characteristic vocabulary from Jesus himself. Because of its similarities to otherwise distinctively Johannine language, a Q passage that discloses many marks of authenticity (Matt 11:25–27; Luke 10:21–22) has often been called the "Johannine thunderbolt" hurled into the middle of the Synoptic tradition. In these verses, Jesus praises God for revealing himself not to the wise but to "little children" to whom he was pleased to make himself known. Matthew 11:27 concludes, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."[18] To the extent that "Jesus the Sage" emerges as a dominant picture of Christ in both the Synoptics and John,[19] this text could account for a number of John's distinctive emphases—on Jesus as the one sent from God to reveal God's purposes to the world—and nevertheless still reflect historical tradition.

Eighth, as D. A. Carson has stressed, there are more than two dozen places in John where *misunderstandings occur that can be remedied only with the passage of time.* The most famous, no doubt, is the inability of Jesus's audience to understand his claim about the destruction and resurrection of the temple in 2:19. Only his disciples ever understood this claim as referring to the temple of Jesus's body, and then only after his resurrection (2:22). The metaphorical significance of the entire Bread of Life discourse was largely lost on its audience (6:41–42, 52, 60), as much of his farewell speech was even on his disciples (14:5, 8, 22; 16:17–18). Some who had apparently come to believe in him at the Feast of Tabernacles end up condemning him as he continues to challenge them with his heavenly origin and preexistence (8:31–59). These and other similar examples demonstrate that John was not rewriting his Gospel solely from the perspective of insights attained by the time he wrote but was remaining faithful to the understanding (or lack thereof) held by the various people in Jesus's audiences during his earthly ministry.[20]

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[17] H. R. Reynolds, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), cxxiii–cxxv.

[18] On the pervasive influence of the language and concepts of this passage in John, see John W. Pryor, "The Great Thanksgiving and the Fourth Gospel," *BZ* 35 (1991): 157–79.

[19] As stressed by Witherington, *Jesus the Sage* (see chap. 2, n. 62); cf. his *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: WJKP, 1995).

[20] See further D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *TynB* 33 (1982): 59–91.

Ninth, and closely related, *many of the details in John accurately fit pre-70 Judaism better than post-70 states of affairs* and are therefore not likely to have been made up at the end of the first century with no factual basis. With the destruction of the temple, all of the festival celebrations in Jerusalem that John stresses would have no longer been possible. Even more telling is the wide array of titles used of Jesus, especially early in John's Gospel, that sound particularly lofty from the vantage point of later Christian theologizing but which, in fact, in Jesus's day were often mere synonyms for a Davidic, nationalistic, militaristic king. These include Son of Man, Son of God, King of Israel, Christ, and especially the prophet like Moses.[21]

Tenth, several of John's longer sermons unique to his Gospel show signs of *Jewish midrash*—the homiletical development of Old Testament texts—characteristic of the rabbis of the day (see esp. John 6:26–59)[22] but not of early Christian preaching (whether later in the New Testament or after it). Others contain core sections that clearly parallel the Synoptics but also demonstrate signs of careful construction and parallelism not easily susceptible to source-critical dissection. So the most reasonable assumption is that they were creations of Jesus in their current forms from the outset (see esp. the detailed *chiasms* in 5:19–30 and chaps. 14–16).[23] While admittedly this form of discourse differs in style from much of the Synoptic material, it is still easier to believe that it stems from the Jewish Jesus than from the Hellenistic milieu in which the Fourth Gospel was written (see p. 277).

Eleventh, John actually contains *more details of time and place* in the course of Jesus's ministry than do the Synoptics. It is only from John that we are able to determine that Jesus's ministry spanned approximately a three-year period. It is only John who preserves a careful chronological sequence of virtually all the details he narrates. Several studies have demonstrated how John's references to geography and topography prove remarkably accurate, particularly in and around Jerusalem. Archaeologists have identified and excavated the probable sites of such locations as the pools of Bethesda (5:2) and Siloam (9:11) and the "Stone Pavement" of Pilate's judgment seat (*Gabbatha*—19:13).[24] This accuracy of detail is all the

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[21] See esp. Richard Bauckham, "Messianism according to the Gospel of John," in Lierman, *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, 34–68; repr. in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 207–38.

[22] Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

[23] Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 113; Wayne Brouwer, *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiastic Reading* (Atlanta: Scholars, 2001).

[24] The most detailed accumulation of indirect evidence for John's reliability in matters of chronology, geography, and historical verisimilitude is Robinson, *Priority of John*, 123–295.

more impressive since it appears incidentally. In other words, John does not seem to be trying to supply us with information that will enable us to reconstruct a detailed life of Christ. He is concerned to show Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish festivals (see p. 267), and so he stresses how Jesus went to Jerusalem at various feast times and narrates what he did there.

Twelfth, John is *contextualizing the gospel* for an audience living under quite different circumstances than the communities to which Matthew, Mark, or Luke wrote. This would naturally affect both the style and contents of his writing. "Kingdom of God/heaven," so central to the Synoptics, appears a scant three times in John, but "eternal life" occurs seventeen times. Yet Matt 19:16, 23–24 shows that the Synoptic Jesus understood the two expressions, at least in some contexts, as interchangeable.[25] The much more Greco-Roman audience of John's Gospel would have understood living forever much more readily than participating in the Jewish theocracy—the backdrop for God's kingly reign on earth. Contextualization could account for some of John's otherwise surprising omissions, too. Ancient rabbis told quite literally hundreds of parables that have been preserved in their literature, while there is not a single close parallel in all known Greco-Roman literature of antiquity (with *Aesop's Fables* being the only even partially similar form).[26] Exorcisms took on magical characteristics in the Hellenistic world, absent from much of Judaism.[27] So the omission of these two forms of Jesus's teaching and miracle working may likewise be explained by cultural differences.

Thirteenth, we must *avoid overestimating the differences*. It is often said, for example, that only John's Jesus actually claims to be divine. Yet Jesus's characteristic claims in John (the "I am" sayings) regularly invoke metaphorical language ("I am the gate," "I am the bread of life," etc.) that would not have been as transparent in its original setting as it is to us. John 8:25; 10:25; and 16:29 all remind us that the disciples did not think Jesus was speaking plainly to them until the last night of his life, and even then they misunderstood him! On the other hand, implicit claims scattered throughout the Synoptics suggest there, too, that Jesus was indicating his oneness with God (see pp. 634–38).

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[25] Even when it is not, the concept of Jesus's kingly authority remains pervasive in John. See esp. Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John's Eternal King* (Boston: Brill, 2012).

[26] See further Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables: Rabbinic Parables from the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

[27] Eric Plumer, "The Absence of Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel," *Bib* 78 (1997): 350–68. André van Oudtshoorn thinks instead that John wants to concentrate all attention on the cross as the place where the devil was conquered. Van Oudtshoorn, "Where Have All the Demons Gone? The Role and Place of the Devil in the Gospel of John," *Neot* 51 (2017): 65–82.

Finally, in light of the central role of *such themes as "witness" and "truth"* (cf., e.g., 1:7–8, 19; 2:25; 3:11, 32–33; 5:31–40; 8:13–18; 15:26; 19:35; 21:24), it is difficult to imagine John dealing so creatively with the traditions he inherited as to actually distort them in ways that were mostly unfaithful to the spirit of Jesus. Indeed, the entire Gospel outline is built around the theme of testimony, as we will see in our next section, as if John were a legal witness for the veracity of his narrative. Sometimes the religious meaning that people attach to certain historical events does not require their careful narration, but sometimes it does. If the Christian claim that God acted uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth in the ways John claims he did is to stand, then a narrative faithful to the events is a necessity. Even if it is still a minority viewpoint, what F. F. Bruce wrote over forty years ago remains cogent:

> John presents the trial and execution of Jesus, as he presents everything else in his record, in such a way as to enforce his theological *Leitmotiv*: Jesus is the incarnate Word, in whom the glory of God is revealed. But the events which he presents in this way, and pre-eminently in the events of the passion, are real, historical events. It could not be otherwise, for the Word became flesh—the revelation became history.[28]

The "John, Jesus and History Seminar" of the Society of Biblical Literature has produced three significant anthologies of essays, with three more planned, that give reasons for confidence in John's historical trustworthiness at numerous points in most of the major episodes of the Fourth Gospel. Contributors vary considerably in the extent of their confidence, but overall the volumes clearly represent a new day in how a large swath of Johannine scholars looks at the Gospel which for so long has been seen as virtually worthless for understanding the historical Jesus.[29]

Structure

Like Mark, John falls into two "halves," one stressing Jesus's mighty deeds (chaps. 1–11) and one reflecting the events leading up to and including his death and resurrection (chaps. 12–21). The first eighteen verses reflect theologically on Jesus's preexistence with God as the

[28] F. F. Bruce, "The Trial of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield, UK: JSOT, 1980; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 18.

[29] Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History*, 3 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars, 2007–16).

logos ("Word") who becomes incarnate, and thus this text functions as a prologue to the entire Gospel. Because 20:31 reads like a closing, many scholars have viewed chapter 21 as a later appendix added to a previous draft of the Gospel. More likely it is a deliberately designed conclusion to bring closure to certain issues raised in the opening chapter. For example, in chapter 1 we learn of the disciples' first calling (vv. 35–51); in chapter 21 we read of their reinstatement and further commissioning (vv. 15–23).[30] John 20:31 also makes the purpose of the Gospel clear: to promote belief in Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God. This statement, coupled with the recurring theme of "witness" or "testimony," makes plausible an outline that understands all of John's information as witnessing to the truth of the gospel so that people might believe it. A. E. Harvey has likened John's structure to the form of prophetic "lawsuit" (Heb. *ribh*) in the Old Testament, in which Scripture calls its readers to render a verdict on the evidence provided for them about God's dealings with his people (e.g., Ps 50; Isa 1:2–3; 3:13–15; Jer 2:4–13; Hos 4:1–3; Mic 6:1–5).[31]

Within the first half of the Gospel, chapters 2–11 are dominated by seven miracles (John calls them "signs") and seven major discourses of Jesus.[32] Several pairs of signs and discourses are clearly related. For example, the feeding of the five thousand (6:1–15) leads into the Bread of Life Discourse (6:25–71). Healing the man born blind (9:1–41) illustrates Jesus's claim to be the Light of the World (7:1–8:59). But not all can be matched so neatly. More noteworthy are the structural indicators that suggest chaps. 2–4 and 5–10 are each to be taken as a unit. Chapters 2–4 begin and end with miracles in Cana, the only two explicitly enumerated "signs" of Jesus in this Gospel ("first," 2:11; "second," 4:54). All of the stories in these three chapters

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[30] On the unity of chap. 21 with the rest of the Gospel, see Paul S. Minear, "The Original Functions of John 21," *JBL* 102 (1983): 85–98; Edward W. Klink III, *John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 890–94.

[31] A. E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977). Cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000); and Per Jarle Bekken, *The Lawsuit Motif in John's Gospel from New Perspectives: Jesus Christ, Crucified Criminal and Emperor of the World* (Boston: Brill, 2015).

[32] Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), uses these as the organizing motifs for subdividing these chapters of John's Gospel, while interspersing other subdivisions as well. One could in fact outline all of John 2–11 in terms of these seven signs and discourses and material related to them: Sign 1: Water into Wine (2:1–11); Discourse 1: Born Again (2:12–3:36); Discourse 2: Living Water (4:1–42); Sign 2: The Official's Son (4:43–54); Sign 3: Healing the Paralyzed Man (5:1–15); Discourse 3: Imitating the Father (5:16–47); Sign 4: Feeding the Five Thousand (6:1–15); Sign 5: Walking on the Water (6:16–24); Discourse 4: Bread of Life (6:25–71); Discourse 5: Light of the World (7:1–8:59); Sign 6: The Man Born Blind (9:1–41); Discourse 6: The Good Shepherd (10:1–21); Discourse 7: Oneness with the Father (10:22–42); Sign 7: Raising Lazarus (11:1–57).

illustrate the newness of Jesus's ministry over against the Jewish religion of his contemporaries. Chronologically, all of these events seem to precede Jesus's great Galilean ministry. Chapters 5–10 for the most part describe what Jesus did at festival times in Jerusalem, punctuating what we know from the Synoptics as a primary ministry in Galilee. Here John takes pains to stress Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish festivals—Passover, Tabernacles, and the "Dedication" (Hanukkah). Even the one main pair of events in this section not from Jesus's ministry in Jerusalem—the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water—is explicitly said to take place at Passover time. These events in turn lead to Jesus's sermon about the Bread of Life, which ties in closely with the symbolism of bread at Passover (chap. 6). Chapter 11 ties in with the rest of John's first main section by narrating Jesus's greatest miracle to date.

Chapters 12–21 also contain two major central portions. After the introduction in chap. 12 to the events that will culminate in Christ's death, chaps. 13–17 narrate what took place on the night of Jesus's betrayal and primarily comprise Jesus's Farewell Discourse to his disciples. Chapters 18–20 then recount the arrest, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection, containing the most extensive overlap with the Synoptics of any multiple-chapter section in John. Chapter 21 forms the conclusion. Putting this all together leads to a probable outline along the following lines:[33]

I. Introductory Testimony (1:1–51)
   A. Prologue (1:1–18)
   B. The Testimony of John and the First Disciples (1:19–51)
II. The Testimony of Signs and Discourses (2:1–11:57)
   A. Jesus and Jewish Institutions (2:1–4:54)
      1. Water into Wine—A New Joy (2:1–11)
      2. Temple Cleansing—A New Temple (2:12–25)
      3. Jesus, Nicodemus, and the Baptist—A New Birth (3:1–36)
      4. Jesus, the Samaritan Woman, and the Official's Son—A New Universalism (4:1–54)

[33] Cf. esp. Gerald L. Borchert, *John*, 2 vols. (Nashville: B&H, 1996–2002). Because the death and resurrection of Lazarus (chap. 11) also foreshadows Jesus's own death and resurrection, a few commentators place the break between the two main halves of John after chap. 10. Because chap. 12 still contains key deeds and Jesus's reflection on them, many scholars place the break after chap. 12. A compromise occasionally adopted is to set off chaps. 11–12 by themselves (or just one of those two chapters) as a transitional section. The division after 11, however, seems to be the best; 12:1 marks a clear shift in time and place. No more miracles ensue, and all events from here on lead inexorably to the cross. However, I am in a tiny minority in opting for the division here.

B. Jesus and Jewish Festivals (5:1–10:42)
   1. Healing the Paralyzed Man and Imitating the Father (5:1–47)
   2. The True Passover: The Bread of Life (6:1–71)
   3. The True Tabernacles: Living Water and Light of the World (7:1–9:41)
   4. The Good Shepherd and Oneness with the Father (10:1–42)

C. Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life (11:1–57)

III. The Testimony of Death and Resurrection (12:1–20:31)

A. Actions in Preparation for Death (12:1–50)
   1. Anointing in Bethany (12:1–11)
   2. Entry into Jerusalem (12:12–50)

B. Teaching in Preparation for Death (13:1–17:26)
   1. Servant Ministry vs. Betrayal (13:1–30)
   2. Farewell Discourse (13:31–16:33)
   3. High Priestly Prayer (17:1–26)

C. Events Surrounding the Death Itself (18:1–20:31)
   1. Arrest, Trials, and Crucifixion (18:1–19:42)
   2. Resurrection (20:1–29)
   3. Purpose of the Gospel (20:30–31)

IV. Concluding Testimony (21:1–25)

A. The Reinstatement of the Disciples (21:1–23)

B. Epilogue (21:24–25)

Theology

In the same way as we have seen in each of the Synoptics, Jesus fulfills Scripture in the Fourth Gospel also. John 5:39–40 plays a central role here, when Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." The most striking forms of fulfillment are no doubt Jesus's claims in conjunction with the various Jewish festivals; in each case he fulfills a central element of their meaning, whether of the weekly Sabbath or the annual feasts of Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication.[34] He likewise brings to completion the meaning of the temple to such an extent that he can refer to his own

[34] See esp. Gerry Wheaton, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

body as the temple (2:19–22).[35] John's Christology, however, is far broader and wide-ranging than this.

Views of Jesus

Because John is otherwise so different from the Synoptics, it is significant that the two main titles used for Jesus in this Gospel's purpose statement (John 20:31) are identical to those used in Mark's headline verse (Mark 1:1)—the Christ and the Son of God. But "Son" for John is even more clearly identified with a heavenly figure than in the Synoptics. John 3:31–36 is a key Christological passage that sums up important Johannine themes: "The one who comes from above is above all. . . . For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life."[36]

Four other emphases are considerably distinctive within Johannine Christology:

Logos. Only John calls Jesus "the Word" (Gk. *logos*), particularly in his prologue (1:1–18). The background of this term has been endlessly debated—was it Stoic, Philonic, Mandaean, Targumic, or something else? The expression was widely used in a variety of ancient Hellenistic and Jewish sources. In Stoic pantheism, it could refer to the animating life force or "world soul" that permeated all the universe, while in the Hebrew Scriptures it could refer to God's spoken word. In the targums (see pp. 57–58), the Aramaic equivalent *memra* was often substituted for names of God, especially in Genesis 1. What all these and other uses have in common is that the *logos* was a widely used term to refer to the way God or the gods revealed themselves and communicated with humankind. John may well be exploiting this diverse background to stress that Jesus is the way in which the true, living God reveals himself and communicates with his people.[37] The revelation of true knowledge remains a key function of the Johannine Redeemer.

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[35] See esp. Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006).

[36] The Father-Son language "is the dominant, controlling metaphor used for Jesus's relationship with God" in the Johannine writings. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 379.

[37] See Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 73–141. Phillips concludes, "Logos could be, for various readers, 'the first principle', 'the Word of God', 'the Church's traditional teaching', 'divine reason', 'the second God', 'the emanation from

John 1:14 is a crucial verse in this context: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The *logos* is no mere vision or phantom; he became incarnate as a genuine human being. Although John is better known for his emphasis on Christ's deity, the doctrine of the *logos* who became *sarx* ("flesh") is also an important reminder of his full humanity, a theme which John also reinforces throughout his Gospel.[38]

Lamb of God. John is the only New Testament writer to call Jesus the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36; and twenty-seven times in Revelation). John the Baptist links this expression with Jesus's role in taking away the sin of the world (1:29). Undoubtedly, part of the background for the image is the sacrificial lamb of the Jewish Passover. But the victorious, conquering Lamb of Revelation suggests that John may also draw on the motif in Second Temple Judaism of a sheep or ram who represents a messianic warrior and deliverer of God's people from their enemies.[39]

Wisdom and Agent. Even more so than in Matthew, numerous parallels emerge between John's portrait of Jesus and personified "Wisdom" in Jewish sapiential literature. In intertestamental works like the Wisdom of Solomon or the Wisdom of Sirach, we find close parallels to the following emphases of John regarding Jesus: coming into the world to enlighten those who had eyes to see (1:9), being written about by Moses and the prophets (1:45; 5:46), being known by Abraham (8:56), and having a glory that Isaiah saw (12:41). Wisdom, like Jesus, was also said to come to and go from heaven, supply God's people with bread to eat, and bring the dead to life. In addition, she regularly spoke in lengthy discourses.[40] Also prominent in John is the picture of Jesus as the one whom God, his heavenly Father, has sent (e.g., 3:17, 28, 34; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30; et al.). This language draws on the Hebrew concept of the *shaliach*, a messenger or "sent one" who acts as an agent for his master. Often the agent acts on behalf of the master in ways that begin to blur the distinction between the two.[41]

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the Pleroma', 'Wisdom', 'Torah', 'the Memra of God'. . . . The author of the Prologue could be making a claim that logos is a universal concept and so refers to them all" (139).

[38] See esp. Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Incarnate Word: Perspectives on Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993).

[39] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 24–25. Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: WJKP, 2015), 47, opts for a combination of all the major viewpoints.

[40] For these and numerous other parallels, see Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 18–27.

[41] This would have been the key point disputed by non-Christian Jews. See esp. James F. McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 77–78.

God. The above three sections all prepare the reader for this fourth one. Although no text in John ever has Jesus explicitly declare, "I am God," John does make claims for Jesus that imply his deity. In the prologue, the *logos* was "with God" and "was God" (1:1). Seven times Jesus makes "I am" statements that describe his exalted nature and reflect wildly arrogant claims if, in fact, he is not in some sense divine. Thus, he calls himself "the bread of life" (6:35), "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5), "the gate for the sheep" (10:7), "the good shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way and the truth and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1). He claims to be one with the Father in a sense that the Jews interpret as blasphemy—too close an equation with God (10:30–33). After the resurrection, Thomas touches Christ's scars and cries out in worship, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28)[42]

One must be careful not to make either too little or too much of these claims. Many writers find all this "high" Christology so lofty as to be incompatible with the Synoptics. Yet Matthew and Luke describe Christ's virginal conception, and there are clear hints of Jesus's deity scattered around the Synoptics: Jesus claims to forgive sins with divine authority (Mark 2:5 pars.), accepts worship (Matt 14:33), and announces that people's final destiny before God will be based on their response to him (Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8–10). He applies further metaphors to himself that in the Old Testament are often reserved for Yahweh (Lord of the harvest, shepherd, sower, vineyard owner, bridegroom, rock, etc.).[43] A few critics, on the other hand, stress that none of the "I am" sayings in John reflects an unambiguously divine self-consciousness on Jesus's part, not susceptible to "subordinationist" interpretations.[44] But the cumulative effect of these metaphors remains too powerful for us to content ourselves with a picture of Jesus as merely an emissary or spokesperson for God. At the same time, none of

[42] For a detailed exegesis of John 1:1, 18; and 20:28 in the context of a thorough study of "God" as a Christological title, see Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 51–129.

[43] See further Philip B. Payne, "Jesus' Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *TJ* 2 (1981): 3–23. Cf. also Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 46–79, on "the transcendence of Christ" in the Synoptics.

[44] See esp. Robinson, *Priority of John*, 34–97. On the possibility of their development out of similar pre-Synoptic metaphors, as accurate claims of Jesus written up in Johannine idiom, see Paul N. Anderson, "The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective," *JSHJ* 9 (2011): 139–206.

these sayings nor any of the other major strands of Johannine Christology needs to be seen as outside the bounds of developing Jewish Messianism, given all its pre-70 AD diversity.[45]

Other Distinctive Themes

Realized Eschatology. Whereas the Synoptics stress a future hope and the return of Christ, John defines eternal life and death as beginning now in this age, based on men's and women's responses to Jesus. John 3:18 is representative: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Or compare 5:24: "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" (cf. also 3:36; 9:39; 12:31). Yet this latter passage reminds us also that the future hope is not entirely absent from John, as it goes on immediately to describe the time of the coming resurrection of both the just and the unjust (5:25–29; cf. also 6:39–40; 12:25, 48; 14:3, 28). Whereas "kingdom" texts dominate the Synoptics, they are rare in John. But it is arguable that John uses "eternal life" with the same present and future dimensions as the kingdom to contextualize the Gospel as it moves out of a Jewish into a more Hellenistic context.[46]

Miracles as Signs and Their Relation to Faith. In the Synoptic Gospels, whenever someone asks for a "sign" (Gk. *sēmeion*), Jesus uniformly refuses to give one (e.g., Matt 12:38–39; 16:1–4 pars.). In John, however, "signs" function positively as reason to believe in Jesus (e.g., John 2:11; 4:53–54),[47] although John's Jesus never performs a miracle "on demand" merely to satisfy a skeptic, either. A second set of texts in John takes a more critical view of signs. In Cana Jesus seems to speak with exasperation when he laments that "unless you people see signs and wonders . . . you will never believe" (4:48). Although Jesus praises Thomas's belief based on firsthand evidence, he goes on to add, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29). Robert Kysar helpfully proposes that we understand three stages in

[45] See esp. the anthology of essays in Benjamin Reynolds and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism: Royal, Prophetic, and Divine Messiahs* (Boston: Brill, 2018); Ruben A. Bühner, *Messianic High Christology: New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021). On the "I-am" sayings in particular, cf. Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 120–48.

[46] John T. Carroll, "Present and Future in Fourth Gospel 'Eschatology,'" *BTB* 19 (1989): 63–69.

[47] On which, see esp. William H. Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Sēmeia in the Gospel of John* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

John's concept of faith—an embryonic stage that is at least open to faith (which is required before God will grant any sign), preliminary faith based on signs, and a mature faith that no longer requires them.[48]

Incipient Trinitarianism and the Unity of Jesus's Followers in Love. Particularly in his private teaching to the disciples in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus comes as close as anywhere in the Gospels to the type of Trinitarian theology that would later issue from early Christian creeds and councils.[49] He insists that he is "in the Father" and "the Father is in" him (14:11); when he leaves, the Spirit will replace him as "another advocate" performing many of the identical roles he played (v. 16). Jesus's High Priestly Prayer speaks of the Father's and Son's reciprocal glorification (17:1–5). Yet Father, Son, and Spirit are not entirely interchangeable in function or status. John 14:28 preserves a classic "subordinationist" strain, with Jesus's declaration "The Father is greater than I." John's characteristic language of the Father sending the Son or the Son doing only what the Father commands (see esp. 5:19–42) is never reversed. That is, the Son never sends the Father, and the Father never does what the Son commands. To use the language of later theological reflection, John preserves ontological equality within missional (often called "functional") subordination among the members of the Godhead.[50]

Similar comparisons and contrasts emerge from a study of the key Johannine theme of the unity of all true disciples. John never confuses the creature with the Creator or says that believers can become gods (on 10:34, see p. 483). Jesus prays that all of his followers will experience a unity created by their relationship with God in Christ, so "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (17:21; cf. vv. 11, 23a). This unity is to produce a powerful evangelistic effect: "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (v. 23b). The spirit of Christian interpersonal relationships may be summed up by the one word "love" (see esp. 13:34 and 15:12), which fulfills the law as it was embodied in Jesus (see esp. 1:17).[51] Even so, love throughout John's Gospel and his Epistles is consistently defined in terms of obedience and keeping God's commands, even to

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[48] Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: WJKP, 2007), 95–102. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 272–79.

[49] For a thorough study, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008).

[50] Subsequent theological reflection in the early Christian centuries would clarify that this subordination was temporal—limited to Jesus's incarnation—rather than eternal.

[51] Cf. G. Charles A. Fernando, *The Relationship between Law and Love in the Gospel of John* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004).

the point of sacrificing one's life for another as Christ did for us (see classically John 15:9–17). In short, love frequently involves suffering.[52] Moreover, even though the Greek word for covenant (*diathēkē*) does not appear in John, the whole portrait of the Christian's obligation in the Fourth Gospel may be conceived of as that of remaining faithful to the new covenant that now defines God's will for his people.[53]

The combination of the unity within the Godhead and Jesus's prayer that his followers experience at least something of that same unity disproves claims that John has no ecclesiology, or doctrine of the church. The intimacy of fellowship with healthy relationships that is implied can only be realized if believers experience close community among themselves. John 17:20–23 not only likens that oneness to the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with each other but also speaks of believers being "in" the Father and the Son and of Jesus being "in" believers—an interpenetration of existence that some would call *theosis* or deification. These terms, of course, have to be carefully defined, because John never hints that any persons besides those of the triune Godhead can be, for example, omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient. But the Fourth Gospel is the one that has Jesus quote Ps 82:6 approvingly, with its reference to God declaring human leaders in Israel as "gods." If the unity John envisions for the church has to be visible and outward so that it can have a positive, evangelistic function, it must also be inward and spiritual. The closer believers are connected with God, the more they can become like him in attributes of love, mercy, justice, and the like, with the image of God increasingly renewed and perfected in them.[54]

The Election and Security of the Believer. John includes several distinctive texts that speak of God's (and Jesus's) unique role in choosing, drawing, and preserving those who are his people. Most famous of these are probably 6:39 ("And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day") and 10:29 ("My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand"). The disciples did not choose Christ, but he chose them (15:16). Conversely,

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[52] Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 213.

[53] See esp. Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

[54] See esp. Andrew J. Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017). "The prayer 'that they may be one, as we are one' also envisions an ecclesiology of divine participation as believers enter the Father-Son interrelation as family members newly generated and in the process of divinization" (240).

Judas's betrayal demonstrates that he was not elected to salvation; Christ protected all the Father gave him. The one who was lost was "the one doomed to destruction" (17:12).

Yet balancing this predestinarian emphasis is John's equally prominent use of the word "abide" (or "remain"; Gk. *menō*), particularly in chapter 15. Believers must abide in Christ, and then he will abide in them, so that they can bear much fruit (v. 4). Verse 2 offers a solemn warning that the Father "cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit." John's own harmonization of these two seemingly contrary strands of thought in his theology is probably provided in 1 John 2:19, where he describes those who abandoned the church to follow false teachers: "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."[55]

The Death of Christ as Exaltation/Glorification. It is sometimes argued that the death of Jesus in John is "docetic"—Christ is so in control of events that he only *seems* to be human (see, e.g., John 18:6; 19:11, 30).[56] John 19:33–34 would surely preclude this; here John insists that the man Jesus truly died. Others argue that John has no theology of atonement, but the image of the Lamb of God in 1:29 and 36 directly challenges this claim.[57] Indirectly, so also do 3:16–17 (God giving his Son) and 10:15 (Jesus laying down his life).[58] What is a genuine Johannine distinctive involves several references to Christ's crucifixion as exaltation or glorification. John appears to collapse the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ all into one event, anticipating their final outcome.[59] A key reference is 12:32—"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"—presumably anticipating both his physical crucifixion and spiritual exaltation. John 7:39; 12:16, 23; and 13:31 all anticipate Christ's "glorification" with similar double meanings. In particular, 12:23 reflects the culmination of a recurring motif

[55] On the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, see D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in John: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981; Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2002). On the commands to abide, in the contexts of promises of security, see Christopher D. Bass, "A Johannine Perspective of the Human Responsibility to Persevere in the Faith through the Use of Μένω and Other Related Motifs," *WTJ* 69 (2007): 305–25.

[56] The classic exponent was Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

[57] Cf. John Dennis, "Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts," *CBR* 4 (2006): 331–63.

[58] Jintae Kim, "The Concept of Atonement in the Gospel of John," *JGRChJ* 6 (2009): 9–27. See also D. A. Carson, "Adumbrations of Atonement Theology in the Fourth Gospel," *JETS* 57 (2014): 513–22.

[59] John Morgan-Wynne, *The Cross in the Johannine Writings* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

throughout the Fourth Gospel. After repeatedly insisting that his "hour" had not yet come (2:4; 7:30; 8:20), now Jesus declares, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."[60]

The Holy Spirit as Paraclete. The Holy Spirit is even more prominent in John than in Luke. Wholly unparalleled elsewhere is John's use of the term *paraklētos* in the Farewell Discourse to refer to the Spirit. The word does not have a precise English equivalent; in different contexts it can include such concepts as counselor, comforter, or advocate. Five discrete roles for the Paraclete emerge in John 14–16: helper (14:15–21), interpreter (14:25–31), witness (15:26–16:4), prosecutor (16:5–11), and revealer (16:12–16).[61] One possible but not demonstrable reconstruction of the Johannine church finds it as a "charismatic" holdout (putting Spirit-filled experience at the forefront of the Christian life) against an increasingly institutionalized ecclesiastical world surrounding it.[62] To the disciples, Jesus explains that the Paraclete "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (14:26) and "will guide you into all the truth" (16:13). While not limited to New Testament revelation, this is no doubt included in this combination of new teaching with all that Jesus has previous taught them, with neither contradicting the other.[63]

Relationship to Judaism. Like Matthew, John has often been accused of being anti-Semitic (or, more precisely, anti-Jewish) because of his frequent use of "the Jews" as a seemingly blanket term for condemning all of Jesus's opponents. This expression occurs sixty-six times in John and only sixteen times in all of the Synoptics. On the other hand, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in 4:22 that "salvation is from the Jews."[64] A careful analysis of contexts shows that sometimes *Ioudaioi* means merely Judeans (as opposed to Galileans), other times it is shorthand for certain Jewish leaders, and frequently it refers to the general rejection of Jesus by the bulk (but not all) of the Jewish people. John recognizes as readily as the Synoptics that Jesus's first followers were all Jewish, so there is no universal indictment of an entire

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[60] Probably alluding to LXX Daniel's repeated use of *hōra* ("hour" or "time") for the time of the end, for final tribulation and resurrection. See Stefanos Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour in the Johannine Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

[61] F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 301–21.

[62] Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[63] Köstenberger, *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 489.

[64] For a detailed treatment of what appear to be both pro- and anti-Jewish sentiments in John, see Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews, and Jewishness* (Boston: Brill, 2005). Cf. also R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, eds., *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017).

ethnic group here.[65] What John does stress, though, is how Jesus fulfills the purpose of all the major Jewish institutions and rituals, including the Scriptures themselves. Without ever using the explicit language of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecies (Jer 31:31–34), John has Jesus inaugurating everything that the new covenant anticipated.[66] The multiethnic community of Jesus's followers is now the people of God who are chosen for salvation.

Dualisms.[67] John certainly does like to paint pictures in very black-and-white colors. Pairs of opposites characterize various aspects of his theology: light versus darkness, life versus death, love versus judgment, above versus below, spirit versus flesh, truth versus falsehood, those who believe versus the world. In reality there are many shades and nuances of perspective throughout humanity, but John points to the one central truth that ultimately all people will be judged by God and put into one of only two camps: those who have believed in Jesus and those who have not. Painting these stark contrasts fits (but does not require) the proposal of a "sectarian" context for John's community. When one is embattled by hostile forces both inside and outside the church, it is natural to warn against error with strong language, even as it is important, as John does, to stress love and unity. Another kind of dualism is not one of opposing but balancing theological concepts, but one of intended double meanings in passages that often led to misunderstandings that were corrected only after the resurrection (e.g., John 2:20–22; 3:5–15; 4:10–14; et al.).[68]

Anti-sacramentalism? One of the puzzling features of John's narrative is that he gives more details surrounding the events of Christ's baptism and the institution of the Lord's Supper than do the Synoptics (1:19–34; chaps. 13–17), and yet he never actually describes either of these rituals. Many scholars have seen his teachings in 3:5 ("No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit") and 6:53 ("Unless you eat the

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[65] Robustly defending at length this rebuttal of charges of anti-Semitism in John is Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). For the contextual restrictions of the term on numerous occasions, see Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus*, 149–73; cf. also Cornelis Bennema, "The Identity and Composition of *OI IOUDAIOI* in the Gospel of John," *TynB* 60 (2009): 239–63.

[66] John W. Pryor, *John, Evangelist of the Covenant People: The Narrative and Themes of the Fourth Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), esp. 157–80.

[67] For a chart of eighty-eight discrete examples of dualistic language in the Fourth Gospel, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 121–22.

[68] For a fuller survey of John's themes, in comparison and contrast with their appearance in the letters and apocalypse of John, see Blomberg, *New Testament Theology*, 579–690 (see chap. 8, n. 9).

flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you") as cryptic allusions to or foreshadowings of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper. In context, however, these make adequate sense as metaphorical references to the cleansing work of the Spirit in bringing new life and to identification with Christ in his suffering and death, respectively.[69] It is at least possible that again John was trying to minimize the role of these two rituals in an era that had already begun to value them too highly, viewing them perhaps as means of grace in and of themselves.[70] Paul Anderson helpfully suggests that instead of a *cultic* sacramentalism, John offers an *incarnational* sacramentalism. In other words, John does not present any rituals for Christians to repeat but recognizes throughout his Gospel "that the physical can be the vehicle for the spiritual."[71] This could reflect a response to an abuse or overuse of the sacraments but need not.

Anti-Baptist Cult? John has also struck readers with the way he plays down John the Baptist's authority. Although in the Synoptics Jesus speaks of the Baptist figuratively as Elijah come again (Matt 11:14; cf. Luke 1:17), in the Fourth Gospel the Baptist explicitly denies that he is Elijah (John 1:21). He also denies that he is the Christ. The Fourth Gospel goes out of its way to stress that the Baptist recognized that he must decrease in importance while Jesus increased (3:30). Given the presence of a group of John the Baptist's followers in Ephesus in the mid-first century who had a very truncated understanding of the gospel (Acts 19:1–7), and given later testimony about second-century followers of John who elevated him to messianic status (Pseudo-Clementine *Recog.* 1.54, 60; cf. also the passing allusion in Justin, *Dial.* 80), it is at least plausible to suggest that John was trying to dampen any improper enthusiasm some in his church might have had for the Baptist when he was writing to Ephesus at the end of the first century. But again, it may simply reflect the positive perspectives he is interested in highlighting.

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[69] Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 191–96 and 295–98; Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 39–40.

[70] See, cautiously, Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 155. For a survey of approaches and a balanced assessment, cf. R. W. Paschal Jr., "Sacramental Symbolism and Physical Imagery in the Gospel of John," *TynB* 32 (1981): 151–76.

[71] Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 230.

Circumstances

In the first half of the twentieth century, most scholarship assumed John to be very late and Hellenistic in origin. The assumption was common that its exalted Christology could have been the product only of a long, slow evolution away from a more primitive, Jewish understanding of Jesus that did not yet think of him as God. Today, however, particularly in light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls with their unrelenting dualism (e.g., "the sons of light versus the sons of darkness") and the more thorough knowledge of the diversity of pre-70 Judaism, the Jewishness of John and even of his Christology is much more widely affirmed.[72] Timothy Ling has recently pointed to intriguing parallels between John's emphasis on Judea and locations that were centers of Essene activity (Jerusalem, Bethany) and his portrayal of the disciples as akin to the Essenes at Qumran, especially with their common purse (12:6). Ling suggests that John's community and John's understanding of the community of Jesus and his followers reflect what social scientists call virtuoso religion—the ability to establish distinctive and influential sects within mainstream religious structures rather than simply isolating from them.[73] Larry Hurtado's detailed demonstration of the widespread nature of first-century worship of Jesus makes John's high Christology seem noticeably less anomalous as well.[74]

Reasonably strong early church tradition, however, does date the Gospel to *the end of the first century, probably during the reign of Domitian (81–96), when John was a very old man ministering in Ephesus.* This picture results from combining the testimony of such writers as Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1; 3.3.4), Polycrates, Papias, Polycarp, and Clement, all quoted in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.31.3; 3.39.4; 5.20.4–6; 6.14.7), Eusebius himself (3.24.7), and Jerome (*De vir. illustr.* 9).[75] Least secure of these details is the date. A few writers have argued for a

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[72] See esp. Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:171–232. Cf. Stephen S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), esp. 14–43; Bauckham, *Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 239–52; and John Lierman, "The Mosaic Pattern of John's Christology," in Lierman, *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, 210–34.

[73] Timothy J. M. Ling, *The Judaean Poor and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006).

[74] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Specifically on John's Christology, see pp. 353–407.

[75] For the texts of the most important patristic passages, see J. Ramsey Michaels, *Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 6–12. One ancient tradition has John banished by Nero before AD 70 (*Syriac History of John*), but it is of dubious historical worth.

pre-70 date, in part on the basis of present tense references to Jewish places destroyed in the war with Rome (e.g., John 5:2).[76] But this may simply reflect John's style. Other arguments tend to be from silences (such as no reference to the destruction of the temple), but these are of dubious worth in general (since a narrative about *Jesus* would not normally refer to events forty years after his death). Indeed, a good case can be made that the strong Johannine emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the deepest meaning of the various Jewish rituals and festivals makes best sense if the temple has already been destroyed so that many Jewish laws can no longer be literally obeyed.[77] Recently, Edward Klink has challenged wholesale the notion of a Johannine community or the idea that the Gospel was written with Christians in any one locale particularly in mind.[78] But just as scholarship of the past half century has usually overestimated how much the internal evidence of the Gospel enables us to flesh out a specific subsection of first-century Christianity to which it was addressed, Klink overly minimizes the significance of the external evidence that would give Ephesus a pride of place in the readership of a text doubtless also simultaneously intended to be spread further afield.[79]

A popular critical reconstruction of the Johannine community has described its development in two main stages (often with numerous, smaller phases identified as well). The first stage is a Jewish-Christian community perhaps in Palestine in the mid-first century, finding itself increasingly in tension with the Jewish authorities and eventually excommunicated from the synagogues (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The second stage is a Christian community of a more mixed nature but predominantly Gentile, in Asia Minor in and around Ephesus, toward the end of the first century. Both Jewish and Hellenistic features in John's Gospel would then be adequately accounted for.[80]

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[76] Most notably, Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 254–311 (see chap. 7, n. 40).

[77] See esp. Andreas Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," in Lierman, *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, 69–108.

[78] Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

[79] Tom Thatcher argues for a specific audience at the outset, based on external evidence, the research of anthropologists and literacy specialists, and John 19:35 and 21:24. See Thatcher, *Why John Wrote a Gospel: Jesus-Memory-History* (Louisville: WJKP, 2006), 20. Both Klink (*Sheep of the Fold*) and I ("The Gospels for Specific Communities *and* All Christians" [see chap. 4, n. 85]) interact with the important article by Margaret M. Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim That 'Gospels Were Written for All Christians,'" *NTS* 51 (2005): 36–79, while coming to partly different conclusions.

[80] The most nuanced articulation of this evolution, dividing itself into eight phases altogether, appears in John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 103–7.

On the other hand, it is not obvious why both of these strands of thought could not have been present simultaneously, given what we know about Ephesus at the end of the first century. Irenaeus and Eusebius both report on the presence of a heretical teacher named Cerinthus, clearly a docetist (believing only in Christ's deity and not his humanity) and probably a Gnostic, who ministered in Ephesus at the end of the first century (*Adv. Haer.* 3.2.1; *Hist. eccl.* 3.28.6; 3.31.3; 4.14.6). Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, however, refer to Jewish communities that were hostile to Christianity in two cities near Ephesus as "synagogues of Satan." Clearly, it was possible that *the church in Asia Minor had to combat both a growing Gnostic and an antagonistic Jewish presence.*[81]

Johannine interpreters during the last fifty years have gravitated especially to J. Louis Martyn's approach, which promotes a two-level reading of John's Gospel. Although the narrative purports to describe events from Jesus's lifetime, so the argument goes, it is actually a mixture of fact and fiction. The fictional part corresponds more to the situation faced by the Johannine community toward the end of the first century. Most notable are the references to excommunication of Jesus's followers from Jerusalem synagogues. According to Martyn's approach, these do not reflect any historical realities of the late 20s in Israel but of the Johannine community two generations later.[82] This approach derived significant support from the belief that the *birkath-ha-minim* was an empire-wide Jewish curse of Jewish Christians (see p. 33); as the evidence for this has been shown to be lacking, enthusiasm for Martyn's approach has started to wane some, though not at the same rate.[83]

Interestingly, the Johannine epistles seem to reflect a corrective or balancing emphasis to some of the Fourth Gospel's theological distinctives. Raymond Brown notes four in particular: (1) more of an emphasis on Jesus's humanity than on his deity; (2) the importance of keeping God's commandments versus claims of sinlessness; (3) more future than present eschatology; (4) and an insistence that the community has already learned God's truth through his Spirit versus the promise of being guided into further truth. All of these contrasts make sense against

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[81] Similarly, Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 27–29; D. Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 1999; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), esp. 31–36.

[82] J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (1968; repr., London: WJKP, 2003).

[83] An excellent, succinct rebuttal appears in Tobias Hägerland, "John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?" *JSNT* 25 (2003): 309–22. On the excommunication issue, see esp. Jonathan Bernier, Aposynagōgos *and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages* (Boston: Brill, 2013).

a backdrop of increasing Gnostic distortion of the Gospel. *It could be that John originally wrote as he did to contextualize the Good News about Jesus for a community beginning to be interested in or influenced by incipient Gnosticism, only to find that the false teachers were picking up on those themes that orthodoxy and Gnosticism had in common and emphasizing them at the expense of balancing themes.* The Johannine epistles, particularly 1 John, would then have been written with slightly different emphases to try to correct the imbalance.[84]

A quite different reconstruction of the circumstances behind John's composition understands the Fourth Gospel as an evangelistic tract to unsaved Jews.[85] This would certainly account for the emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish institutions and festivals, but it is not as clear that a writer would use John's more virulent polemic against Jesus's Jewish opponents if he were trying to win over hostile opponents. Part of this argument also depends on translating John 20:31 as "that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus," that is, helping people looking for a Messiah to recognize who he is. This translation is possible but, in this context, not the only possibility.[86] There is a second issue surrounding this verse as well. Slightly better textual evidence supports a reading of the verb "believe" as a present rather than an aorist subjunctive, which could lend support to the Church Fathers' testimony that John is writing first of all to believers in Jesus so that they might continue to believe in the face of this two-pronged opposition.[87] Ben Witherington suggests a plausible compromise: John is writing to Christians to help them, among other things, be more effective in evangelizing non-Christian friends and relatives, with a special focus on Jews.[88]

A final issue involves the literary relationship of John and the Synoptics. As noted already, commentators a century or more ago usually explained John's differences as due to the fact that

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[84] Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 109–44. For anti-docetic tendencies present already in the Gospel of John, see Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

[85] See esp. D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *JBL* 106 (1987): 639–51; and his "Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 124 (2005): 693–714.

[86] See James V. Brownson, "John 20:31 and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Reformed Review* 48 (1995): 212–16; Murray J. Harris, *John* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 336. Reaffirming Carson is Matthew D. Jensen, "John Is No Exception: Identifying the Subject of εἰμί and Its Implications," *JBL* 135 (2016): 341–53.

[87] Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 504–7; Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 1022, rightly noting that one cannot draw a hard-and-fast boundary between the two options.

[88] Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 2, 11, and throughout.

John was writing last of all the four. He knew what Matthew, Mark, and Luke had already written and for the most part felt no need to repeat their information. In short, he went about supplementing their material. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the pendulum swung dramatically to the view that John was largely independent of the Synoptics.[89] There are relatively few places in which John's wording is so close to that of the Synoptics, even where they run parallel, to prove literary borrowing. But if John is not dependent on the written form of the other three evangelists' compositions, then we can deduce nothing about the date of the Fourth Gospel on the grounds of literary borrowing. As noted above, though, a few writers have plausibly suggested a mediating approach: several sets of parallel texts suggest that John may well have known at least Mark but did not feel compelled to follow him closely (see p. 257).[90] So any date from the 60s on is in theory possible. Older views that placed John well into the second century have been discarded, however, with the discovery of the John Rylands fragment ($\mathfrak{p}^{52}$)—already at least one stage of copying removed from John's original and yet dating from around 125–140. *The traditional idea of a date in the late 80s or early 90s remains best.*[91]

Authorship and Sources

The internal evidence points to an individual whom five passages call "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) as the primary witness to the events of this Gospel (21:24). With the "new look on John" recovering an emphasis on the Jewish roots of the Fourth Gospel, most commentators today agree that the author himself could well have been Jewish, and even originally from Palestine. "Disciple" for John does not necessarily mean one of the Twelve, however, and some have imagined the "beloved disciple" to be Lazarus (cf. 11:3),[92] Thomas,[93] or some other anonymous follower of Jesus. It is more natural to think of

[89] Usually credited with initiating this surge is Percival Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1938).

[90] See also Craig L. Blomberg, "The Sayings of Jesus in Mark: Does Mark Ever Rely on a Pre-Johannine Tradition?" in *The Origins of John's Gospel*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong (Boston: Brill, 2015), 81–98; Paul N. Anderson, *Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, 101–24; and C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 42–54.

[91] So also Kruse, *John*, 16–17; Thompson, *John*, 21–22; Klink, *John*, 59–60.

[92] See esp. Vernard Eller, *The Beloved Disciple: His Name, His Story, His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); cf. Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus? Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 141–56.

[93] Note, e.g., how Peter and Thomas are paired in 21:1, and then Peter and the beloved disciple are compared and contrasted in vv. 7–23. The view is defended at length by James H. Charlesworth, who

one of Christ's inner circle, probably from the group of three that the Synoptics described as his closest followers (Mark 9:2; 14:33)—Peter, James, and John. The Fourth Gospel reports that Jesus had twelve apostles (John 6:67, 70, 71) but never names them all. It does, however, refer to Peter as separate from and paired with the beloved disciple on two occasions (20:2–9; 21:20–24). James, the son of Zebedee, was martyred too early to be this Gospel's author (AD 44; cf. Acts 12:1–2). That leaves only his brother, the apostle John. Interestingly, this John never appears by name in the Gospel, while the John who does appear is always the Baptist, without ever being called by that title. Unless John the apostle were known to be the author of this document, surely this omission of any further clarification as to which "John" was in view would be surprising. All this adds up to strong circumstantial evidence for equating the beloved disciple with the apostle John.[94]

The external evidence generally concurs. Here, however, is the one Gospel for which early church testimony is in one instance ambiguous. Papias (arguably the oldest surviving witness) declared, "If ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord's disciples, were saying" (cited in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4). It is not clear if Papias is referring to one or two different individuals named John here. Some, following Eusebius himself, believe he lists two different groups of Christians—first generation apostles and church leaders of Papias's day ("presbyter" can also be translated "elder"). If there was a presbyter John active in the early second century, one would not have to imagine the eighty- or ninety-year-old apostle still alive and capable of writing the Fourth Gospel at the end of the first century. Martin Hengel has maintained this as the best explanation and ascribed authorship of the Fourth Gospel to this John the presbyter (the same title given to the anonymous author of 2 and 3 John in the opening verses of those letters).[95] On the other hand, if the aged John was

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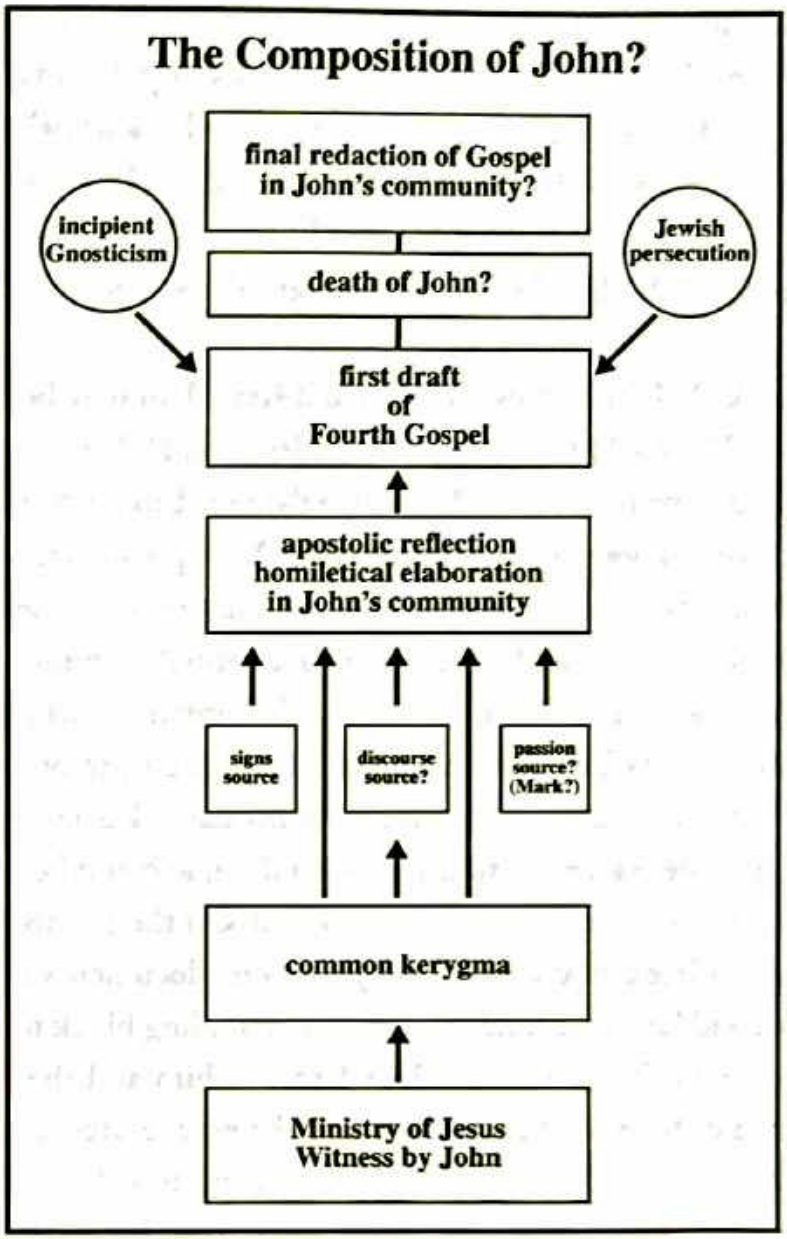
also comprehensively surveys the other proposals and arguments concerning authorship, in *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1995).

[94] The detailed evidence for narrowing down the author of this Gospel to a Jew, from Israel, an eyewitness, an apostle, and then John is classically stated by B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1908; Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004), x–lii. Significantly expanding the evidence under each heading is Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 139–292. A thorough survey of arguments for and against the various proposed authors appears in Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:83–139.

[95] Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989). But Hengel's reconstruction of John the presbyter closely matches traditional reconstructions of John the apostle. Bauckham (*Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 33–72) likewise supports a John the Elder, separate from the apostle, who authored



the only apostle still alive at the time to which Papias refers, it would explain John's inclusion in both lists: the first reference would link him with the other (now deceased) apostles; the second, with a fellow elder in the church of his day. This is the more common and more natural interpretation of Papias's testimony.[96]

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the Fourth Gospel. But Bauckham's elder was the Beloved Disciple and eyewitness of Jesus's ministry, just separate from the Twelve, rather than a second-generation disciple of the apostle. In each case, the Fourth Gospel is connected with eyewitness tradition, just as it is when John the son of Zebedee is taken to be the author.

[96] See Charles E. Hill, "What Papias Said about John (and Luke): A 'New' Papian Fragment," *JTS* 49 (1998): 582–629; Gundry, *The Old Is Better*, 52–55 (see chap. 6, n. 47).

Modern scholars, however, often reject Johannine authorship for several other reasons. For example, they claim that: (1) the Judean focus of the Gospel is inappropriate for someone of Galilean origin (cf. Mark 1:16–20), especially given this author's apparent connection with the high priest (John 18:15–16); (2) a "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) would have been too volatile to pen this calm treatise; (3) John was illiterate (cf. Acts 4:13); (4) a Jew would not have used the phrase "the Jews" so critically; and (5) the apostle could not have called himself "beloved."

On the other hand, (1) John's focus on Judea and Jerusalem may be due to historical and theological reasons, and he could have accompanied Jesus on all his trips there. His closeness to Mary (John 19:26–27), who herself had priestly relatives (Luke 1:5, 36), could suggest that John also had friends or relations in high places.[97] (2) A simple nickname hardly determines someone's entire personality. (3) The view that John was illiterate is based on a mistranslation of Acts 4:13, which affirms only that John did not have formal rabbinic training. (4) We have already seen Matthew use equally pointed language in situations where Judaism staunchly rejected early Christianity. (5) This witness never calls himself the only disciple Jesus loved or the one he loved most, and his refusal to mention his name has even been seen as a mark of humility. More likely, the references to the beloved disciple could be redactional insertions by the first editors of the document John largely created. On the positive side, the simple but generally accurate *koinē* Greek used in all of the Johannine documents fits well with one who learned Greek as a second language. The only serious stumbling block to accepting Johannine authorship is the striking difference in theology between him and the Synoptics. While we must not minimize the differences, they can certainly be exaggerated. Furthermore, one must not underestimate the diversity that existed even within apostolic Christianity.

A related issue is that of Johannine source criticism. Rudolf Bultmann's groundbreaking commentary argued for three major sources behind the Fourth Gospel: a signs source,

[97] R. Alan Culpepper believes that the story of Peter's denial requires the beloved disciple to be relatively unknown. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 62. Presumably, he meant that this disciple, who accompanied Peter, if John the apostle, would have stood equally accused. But the accusers were only servants and bystanders. Perhaps they did know about John but were unsure of Peter, which is why they questioned him—more out of mockery than overt hostility. Charlesworth (*The Beloved Disciple*, 56) observes that Jerusalem depended on Galilean fishermen for their fish supply, so some of the more well-to-do fishermen would be the most likely to have access to the elite in Judea. With more than one hired servant (Mark 1:20), Zebedee and his sons might have comprised just such a family.

discourse source, and passion source.[98] Supporting stylistic and literary evidence appears in a significant amount only for the first of these.[99] There are intriguing "seams" in John's narrative where it appears that material could have been reversed in sequence in some stage of editing or copying. The most noteworthy of these comes at John 14:31–15:1, in which Jesus declares, "Come now; let us leave," and then continues for two more chapters with his discourse. But it may well be that John did intend to portray Jesus as getting up at that point and heading with his disciples from the upper room toward the garden of Gethsemane while continuing to teach.[100] Be that as it may, more recent studies have stressed the stylistic and narrative unity of John's Gospel in its finished form.[101] As one writer put it (tongue-in-cheek), "If the author of the Fourth Gospel used documentary sources, he wrote them all himself."[102]

Many commentators have taken a slightly different tack and tried to isolate stages or levels of redaction within the Gospel. The prologue and final chapter are regular candidates for "add-ons" to an original document. Various schemes of two, three, and five stages of editing have proved popular,[103] but again the data are too slippery to pin down any of these with confidence. The closing two verses of the Gospel (21:24–25) support at least some minimal redactional activity, as they distinguish the beloved disciple who recorded the events of the Gospel from a group of people ("we") who "know that his testimony is true" and an "I" who supposes that the whole world could not contain the books that could be written about Jesus. The fact that 21:20–23 debunks a false rumor that had spread that the beloved disciple would

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[98] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014 [Germ. orig. 1941]), 6–7.

[99] See esp. Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970); and his *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; London: T&T Clark, 2004).

[100] Kruse, *John*, 362; Murray J. Harris, *John*, 265. Or this may reflect the literary device of a "delayed exit." See George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell Discourses in Light of Greco-Roman Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 49–76.

[101] See esp. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

[102] Pierson Parker, "Two Editions of John," *JBL* 75 (1956): 304.

[103] See, respectively, Martyn, *History and Theology*; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 1 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 100–104; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), xxxiv–xxxix.

live until Christ's return makes the hypothesis attractive that John had just died and a group of his followers or members of his church were now editing his work for final "publication."[104]

Such editing could have affected many parts of the Gospel, but we really have no way of knowing for sure. Beyond this, theories of the composition of the Fourth Gospel tend merely to compound one speculative hypothesis with another. It seems safest to assume that at least a substantial core of the Gospel as we know it goes back to the apostle John, and any editing that may have occurred was done to put it into a form that enabled God's Spirit best to apply the truths of the Gospel to the Johannine community. The story of Jesus may have been contextualized, but it has not been distorted or falsified.

Questions for Review

1. What is a plausible overall outline for the Gospel of John? That is, how many main sections may it be divided into and by what criteria? What theology may be inferred from this structure?
2. According to typical evangelical reconstructions, who wrote this Gospel, when, where, to whom, and under what circumstances (to the extent that this information may be reasonably inferred)?
3. What are some of the unique issues surrounding the authorship of this Gospel that are not present with the Synoptics? What are some of the unique issues surrounding the source and redaction criticism of this Gospel?
4. What are several of the major theological distinctives of this Gospel?
5. In what ways is John more different from the Synoptics than they are from each other? Why might this be? Can its historicity be defended? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Given the emphases and probable circumstances of John's Gospel, in what settings in contemporary Christian living might it be even more acutely relevant than the other Gospels?

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[104] See esp. Armin D. Baum, "The Original Epilogue (John 20:30–31), the Secondary Appendix (21:1–23), and the Editorial Epilogues (21:24–25) of John's Gospel: Observations against the Background of Ancient Literary Conventions," in *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature and Theology—Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honour of Martin Hengel*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Jason Maston (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 227–70. Cf. also Beasley-Murray, *John*, 412.

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