

Author

The Gospel itself comes to us anonymously, as do the other three Gospels and much other ancient literature. Although most English translations have the title 'The Gospel according to John', the Greek only says 'According to John', and even this phrase was not part of the original text but a later addition of the Early Church. Even so, does this mean that John himself wrote this Gospel or merely that John was a source for this Gospel? And who is this 'John' anyway – John the apostle (the son of Zebedee) or John the Elder (mentioned by the fourth-century historian Eusebius)?

Alternatively, when we consider some of the internal evidence of the Gospel, is the author the so-called Beloved Disciple, i.e., the disciple that Jesus loved (21:20, 24)? John 21:24 may simply mean that the author is testifying to the authenticity of the Beloved Disciple's witness. In this case, the Beloved Disciple is presented as the witness on whose testimony the Gospel is based but not necessarily as its author. Even if the Beloved Disciple were the author, we still have to resolve the problem of his identity – is he a 'fictional' exemplary character or can he be identified as John the apostle?

As you can see, identifying the author is not a simple task. The Gospel came to us anonymously, so perhaps we need not pry too much. In this commentary we shall call the author 'John'.

Audience

The issue of who John's original readers were, is perhaps a more interesting one. Since the 1960s, there has been a growing consensus that John was writing for a so-called 'Johannine community'. Probably based in Ephesus, this community is believed to have consisted of Jewish Christians who had been expelled from the Jewish synagogues because of their stance regarding Jesus, and who had, according to some, become isolated and 'sectarian'.

Those who hold this view say that John's Gospel should be read as a two-level drama in that the retelling of the story of Jesus actually matches the story of the Johannine community. For