

Why Four Gospels?

	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>	<u>John</u>
<u>Audience</u>	Jews	Romans	Hellenists	Greek World
<u>Portrait of Jesus</u>	*Jesus is the Messiah/King who fulfills Old Testament prophecy and expectations *Jesus is the authoritative Son of God *Jesus is the perfect Son of Man who came to save and minister to all people through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer *Jesus is the fully divine Son of God in whom we should believe to receive eternal life (the "I AM" of God)			
<u>Key Verses</u>	Matthew 1:1; 16:16; 20:28 Mark 1:1; 8:27; 10:45; 15:34 Luke 19:10 John 20:31			
<u>Key Words</u>	Fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man	Believe; Eternal Life

The "I AM" Statements

Twenty-three times in all we find our Lord's meaningful "I AM" (*ego eimi*, Gk.) in the Greek text of this Gospel (4:26; 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5, 6, 8). In several of these He joins His "I AM" with seven tremendous metaphors which are expressive of His saving relationship toward the world.

"I AM the Bread of life" (6:35, 41, 48, 51)

"I AM the Light of the world" (8:12)

"I AM the Door of the sheep" (10:7, 9)

"I AM the Good Shepherd" (10:11, 14)

"I AM the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25)

"I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life" (14:6)

"I AM the true Vine" (15:1, 5).¹

¹Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

Author

a. There is a very strong tradition, supported by early evidence from patristic sources, that the author was the apostle John. There are no specific references to the identity of the author in the gospel itself. So how dependable is the tradition? At least as early as Irenaeus (*c.* AD 130–200) there was belief in the apostolic authorship. Irenaeus may have had access to authentic tradition through his earlier acquaintance with Polycarp (*c.* mid-second century), who knew the apostle. The fact that Polycarp did not refer to the fourth gospel when writing his letter to the Philippians need not lead to the conclusion that he was ignorant of it. The sole opposition to the apostolic authorship came from a group known as the Alogoi (the Alogoi attributed the fourth gospel to Cerinthus, which defies logic since Cerinthus, a contemporary of John stated that Jesus was merely human the son of Joseph and Mary by natural birth and that at his baptism by John the Christ descended upon him and then left him just before his crucifixion), who appear to have been a small splinter group in Rome. Their view was opposed by Hyppolytus who wrote a defence of the gospel. The history of the book before Irenaeus is not easy to determine, but it must have been regarded as authoritative for some considerable time to have been placed indisputably on a level with the other three as part of the fourfold gospel.

b. Some internal considerations point to the reliability of the tradition (*e.g.* 1:14; 19:35; 21:24). Although all of these references have been otherwise understood by some scholars, it is most natural to see them as evidence of the author's own claim to have been an eyewitness.

John, the son of Zebedee, is nowhere mentioned by name in the gospel, while John the Baptist is named simply as John without further description. This would certainly be more intelligible if the author were himself the other John.

A further consideration is the anonymous mention of the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', which may well be a reference to John the apostle. Some have disputed that John would have described himself in this way and have concluded from this that John the apostle was not the author. It is impossible to be sure who 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' was, but his close association with Peter would support the view that he was John. His very close association with Jesus in the upper room points to the same conclusion.

c. The author appears to possess detailed knowledge of Palestine and of Jewish customs. This would be most intelligible if he were a Palestinian Jew.

d. Many incidental details also suggest that an eyewitness account lies behind the gospel, *e.g.* the number of waterjars at Cana and the number of the fish caught in the Sea of Galilee. Such details are not essential to the narrative but add a certain vividness to the account.

e. The Hellenistic (Greek) aspects of this gospel are, nevertheless, said to militate against the correctness of the early tradition, since John the apostle was not a Hellenistic Jew. Moreover, parallels with the non-Christian philosophical tractates known as the *Hermetica* are said to support this contention. There are certainly parallels in terminology with both Philo of Alexandria and Hermes, but this factor does not conclusively show that the author was a Hellenist. Some similar parallels in thought are found also in the Jewish literature at Qumran, and this evidence has tended to lessen the strength of the Hellenistic argument.

f. The close acquaintance of the author with rabbinical methods of argument is another reason why some have rejected apostolic authorship, since John was a Galilean fisherman. But due allowance must be made for the fact that the rabbinical arguments are found in the teaching of Jesus, not in the author's own comments. It is admittedly difficult, however, in this gospel, always to differentiate between the author's style and the words of Jesus.

g. The evangelist appears to adopt an almost hostile attitude towards some of Jesus' contemporaries, as if they were a race apart from himself, referring to them as 'the Jews'. This

c. circa, about (with dates)

may be evidence of the deep feeling of a Jewish Christian over the bitter hostility of his own people towards Jesus.

h. Alternative theories regarding authorship generally attempt to retain some connection of John the apostle with the gospel by regarding him as the witness, while proposing someone else as author. The most widely held theory is that the author was another John, known as John the elder. If there were two Johns so closely associated in the production of the gospel, it is not impossible that confusion may have arisen between them in the early tradition. But the existence of John the elder depends on a somewhat ambiguous statement of Papias, who makes no mention in any case of a gospel being written by him.

i. Some deny all connection of John the apostle with the gospel and suppose that it was attributed to him to gain authority for the work.

In face of all these various opinions it is difficult to be dogmatic, but it is reasonable to suppose that the internal and external evidence points to John the apostle as author.

Date

The church father Irenaeus explicitly testifies that John wrote the Gospel while residing in Ephesus (A.D. 66–98), and there is little reason to challenge a date within this period. Although some scholars in the past have argued that John's Gospel was composed during the middle of the second century A.D., the discovery in Egypt of a papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John dating to c. A.D. 125 makes a first-century date almost certain.

Themes and Literary Structure

The Gospel of John is built around seven miracles and seven "I am" statements of Christ. The five basic sections of this Gospel are: the incarnation of the Son of God (1:1–18); the presentation of the Son of God (1:19–4:54); the opposition to the Son of God (5:1–12:50); the preparation of the disciples by the Son of God (13:1–17:26); and the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God (18:1–21:25).

That John's Gospel is significantly different from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) has been noticed from the earliest days of church history. It is probable that John wrote after the Synoptics had been completed, and that he was aware of them. That being the case, John wrote to supplement the Synoptics and to provide a theological interpretation of the Person and work of Christ especially suited for his Hellenistic audience.

Unlike the Synoptics, which present Jesus' teaching in the form of short sayings and parables, John presents Jesus' teaching in the form of longer theological discourses: the discourse on the bread of life (6:41–59), the good shepherd and His sheep (10:1–30), the vine and the branches (15:1–8), and the priestly prayer (17:1–26). In these discourses, contrasting pairs of ideas are frequently utilized, such as light/darkness, belief/unbelief, love/hate, and earthly/heavenly. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels' focus upon the Galilean ministry, John emphasizes events in Judea and he records three or four Passover visits by Jesus to Jerusalem. Although the Synoptics are full of the raw material for Christological doctrine, John displays a more intense conviction of the centrality of the Person of Christ. For John, the activity of Christ is not understandable apart from the fact that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, and God

²Carson, D. A. *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. Jn 1:1.

himself (1:1–18). This emphasis upon the Person of Jesus is highlighted by John’s inclusion of seven “I am” sayings.³

Outline of The Gospel of John

Part One: The Incarnation of the Word

- I. 1:1-5 The Pre-existent Word
- II. 1:6-8 John’s Witness of the Word
- III. 1:9-13 The Light comes into the World
- IV. 1:14-18 The Word Becomes Flesh

Part Two: The Presentation of the Son of God

- I. 1:19-34 The Presentation of Christ by John the Baptist
- II. 1:35-51 The Presentation of Christ to the Disciples
- III. 2:1-12 The Presentation of Christ in Galilee
- IV. 2:13-3:36 The Presentation of Christ in Judea
- V. 4:1-42 The Presentation of Christ in Samaria
- VI. 4:43-54 Christ’s Return to Galilee

Part Three: The Opposition to the Son of God

- I. 5:1-47 Opposition at feast in Jerusalem - Jesus Heals Lame Man
- II. 6:1-71 Opposition in Galilee - Feeds 5000 - Walks on Sea
- III. 7:1-53 Opposition at Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem
- IV. 8:1-10:42 Opposition to: “I AM” - Healing Blind Man- Good Shepherd
- V. 11:1-12:50 Opposition Because Jesus Raises Lazarus From Dead

Part Four: The Preparation of the Disciples

- I. 13:1-16:33 Jesus Prepares His Disciples in the Upper Room
- II. 17:1-26 Jesus Prays For Himself, His Disciples and All Believers

Part Five: The Crucifixion & Resurrection

- I. 18:1-19:16 Jesus’ Betrayal and Arrest in Garden of Gethsemane
- II. 19:17-37 The Crucifixion of Christ
- III. 19:38-42 The Burial of Christ
- IV. 20:1-10 The Resurrection of Christ
- V. 20:11-21:25 The Appearance of Christ to His Disciples

³Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.