Today, critics often assert that the Gospel of John was written in the 100's CE, not by the apostle John, but by someone, or even multiple writers, who weren't even born until long after Jesus' death. These critics, of course, deny the inspiration by God's holy Spirit **(2 Timothy 3:16), "as they do also the rest of the scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16 NKJV).** Although the Gospel of John was written anonymously, it is important for us to know when, and by whom, was the gospel of John written, if possible. Every extant manuscript that includes the beginning of the book names John as the writer. Was this "John" someone other than the apostle John? This article investigates and analyzes the facts.

JOHN WAS LITERATE

Critics have claimed that John was an illiterate fisherman. However, this claim is unsupported by any facts. When Jesus "**called"** John and his brother James to follow him full time, **"they . . . were in a boat mending their nets. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat in the boat along with the hired men and followed Jesus" (Mark 1:19,20 NAB).** John was involved with his father's fishing business on the Sea of Galilee, which was lucrative enough to have "hired men". The Galilee area was an international crossroads, with Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek being spoken, and it is likely that John was fluent in these languages. He likely had business dealings with various people who spoke these languages.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN WAS WRITTEN AFTER THE OTHER GOSPELS

The writer of John apparently had the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, before him as he wrote, and he tried to fill in some of the gaps, because about 92% of the book of John contains unique material. Clement of Alexandria, who lived in the late 100's to early 200's, reported that John wrote to supplement the accounts found in the other Gospels. *"Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain* [in the other canonical gospels] . . . *composed a spiritual gospel"* (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History,* 6.14.7). This, of

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course, means that the Gospel of John was written after Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Another clue as to when the Gospel was written is the fact that **“the Sea of Galilee”** is explained to be **“the Sea of Tiberias”** in **John 6:1,** and is simply called **“the Sea of Tiberias”** in **John 21:1.** The designation, **“the Sea of Tiberias,”** was not even used until late in the 1st century. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark use the name “Sea of Galilee,” and Luke uses “the Lake of Gennesaret” **(Luke 5:1).**

EXTERNAL TESTIMONY TO THE APOSTLE JOHN’S WRITERSHIP

Early Church tradition indicates that John wrote the Gospel toward the end of his long life, in the 90’s CE. The apostle John is identified as the writer by such early Church historians and authorities as:

Papias of Asia Minor, 125 CE

Basilides of Alexandria, a Gnostic heretic, 170-138 CE

Justin Martyr of Rome, 150 CE

Clement of Alexandria, 180 CE

Irenaeus of Lyon, !80 CE

The Moratoria Fragment, 180 CE

Tertullian of Carthage, 200 CE

Origin of Alexandria, 220 CE

These independent testimonies provide very strong external evidence of John’s writership of

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the Gospel bearing his name.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF WRITERSHIP

The internal evidence of the Gospel of John reveals that the writer of the book did leave some clues as to his identity. Of the four Gospels, John is the only book that:

—Does not mention by name the apostles John and James, who were sons of Zebedee **(Matthew 4:21,22).** The Gospel of John does make reference to them as **"the sons of Zebedee" (John 21:2).** James and John were two of Jesus' three closest, most intimate apostles, one of Jesus' inner circle of three **(Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:32,33)**, and they were very prominent in the early church **(Acts 3:1; 4:1-20; 8:14; Galatians 2:9)**. These facts are very difficult to explain if one of them did not write the book, but quite natural to understand if one of them did write the book, and modestly refrained from identifying himself by name in the book.

—Does not use the term "John the Baptist **(Matthew 3:1; 11:11,12; 14:2,8: 16:14; 17:3; Mark 1:4; 6:14,24,25; 8:28; Luke 7:20,33; 9:19),** but instead, simply uses the name "John" to describe "John the Baptist" **(John 1:6,15,23,26,29,32,35,40,42; 3:23,24,26,27; 4:1; 5:33,35,36; 10:41),** with one exception; the name of Simon Peter's father (John 21:15-17).

John's brother James is eliminated as possibly being the writer of the book of John because, **"King Herod . . . had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword" (Acts 12:1,2 NIV).** History confirms this event took place in 44 CE, which is far too early in time for James to have been the writer of the Gospel of John.

Even though the apostle John is not named in the book, every extant manuscript of the fourth gospel that includes the title names John as the writer. Critics often claim that the titles of the Gospels, including John, aren't original, but were added many years after they were

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composed. However, there is no evidence to support such assertions.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN HAS UNIQUE DETAILS

There are unique details to the Gospel of John that are very oddly specific, and highly unlikely to be made up. Only the Gospel of John:

—Refers to one of the apostles as **"the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20),** rather than by his name, which, again, is difficult to explain if John did not write the book, but easy to understand if he did write the book. The "Church Fathers" {for example, Irenaeus) attested to this expression referring to the apostle John.

—Also makes several references to **"another disciple," "this disciple,"** and **"the other disciple" (John 18:15,16; 19:27; 20:3,4,8).**

—Records the special closeness Jesus felt for **"the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23-25).**

—Records that Jesus, just before he died, entrusted the care of his mother to **"the disciple whom he loved" (John 19:26,27).**

THE WRITER OF JOHN WAS A JEW WITH INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF JEWISH LIFE AND OPINIONS

The writer of this book appears to be a Jew with an intimate knowledge of Jewish life, expectations, and opinions in the first third of the first century, such as:

—Popular messianic speculations, such as, the Messiah would be "the prophet," or "Elijah," and would come from David's line of descent, and be from Bethlehem, (**John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40-42). "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever" (John 12:34 NKJV).**

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—Customs, such as the purification rituals of the Jews, (**John 2:6**), the hostility of Jews toward Samaritans (**John 4:9**), the duty of circumcision on the 8th day taking precedence over the prohibition of working on the Sabbath (**John 7:22**).

—The popular low estimate of women (**John 4:27**).

—The Judean disparagement of **"the dispersion", "the Jews in other lands" (John 7:35 NAB; NLT).**

—Festivals, for example, the Festival of Dedication (**John 10:22,23**) is in the **"winter."**.

—The Messiah was expected to live **"forever" (John 12:34).**

THE WRITER WAS VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE AREA

He also shows a very detailed knowledge of the geography of Palestine and Jerusalem (which suggests he was a native), such as:

—**"Bethany across the Jordan" (John 1:28).** This Bethany was north of the Dead Sea, just over the Jordan River in Perea.

—His mention of **"Cana of Galilee" (John 2:1),** which is a village that is not referred to in any previous writing that is known to us.

—Thw trip from Cana to Capernum was going **"down"** in elevation **(John 2:12).** Jesus, in Cana, was asked by an official to **"come down"** to Capernaum to heal his sick son **(John 4:46,47),** even though he would travel northeast. Cana is 709 feet above sea level, Capernaum is 682 feet below sea level, almost an 1400 foot drop in elevation, as one travels from Cana to Capernaum.

—The well at Sychar that Jacob gave to Joseph was **"deep"** (**John 4:5,11**).

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—The Sea of Galilee, or Tiberias, was large enough for the apostles to have rowed **"about three or four miles" (John 6:19 NIV; NAB)** out into it and be in the middle of it, because today we know it is about 13 miles north to south and about 8 miles west to east.

—**"Jesus spoke in the treasury as He taught in the temple" (John 8:20 NKJV).**

—"Ephraim" was in **"the region near the desert" (John 11:54 NAB)**.

—**"The Kidron valley"** is just outside Jerusalem **(John 18:1 NAB).**

—**"In the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried" (John 19:41 NAB).** The burial place of Jesus was close to his execution site.

THE WRITER OF JOHN WAS AN EYEWITNESS

The book has numerous clues that its writer was an eyewitness. Many of these details are very specific, but for no apparent reason, other than they are the vivid observations of an eyewitness. The writer twice explicitly admits to being an **"eyewitness"** to, at a minimum, at least some of the events he recorded **(John 19:35 GWT; 21:24 GWT),** and very likely many of the events he recorded. The writer includes personal touches in his accounts that reveal he was an eyewitness, such as:

— Includes himself as being an eyewitness of Jesus. Notice his use of **"we"** in the scripture. **"The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NASB).**

—Naming people who said, did, or experienced, certain things. **"Andrew was one of the two" (John 1:40). "Nicodemus" (John 3:1,4,9; 7:50; 19:39). "Jesus . . . said to Philip . . . Philip said to him" (6:5,7). "Simon,"** Judas Iscariot's father **(John 6:71). "Lazarus"**

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(John 11:1-44; 12:10). "Malchus" (John 18:10). Caiphus' relationship to Annas **(John 18:13).** The slave who identified Peter as being with Jesus, and was a relative of the man whose ear was cut off **(John 18:26). (**Also see **John 12:21; 14:5,8,22; 18:10).**

—Giving details about the times of events **(John 4:6,52; 6:16; 13:30; 18:28; 19:14; 20:1; 21:4).**

—Accurately providing exact numeric descriptions, as well as references to days, or the time of day or night, and time periods, without embellishment **(John 1:35,39; 2:6,20; 3:2; 4:6,18,40,43,52; 5:5; 6:9,16,17,19; 11:39; 12:5; 13:30; 18:28; 19:14,33; 21:8,11,26).**

—The type of bread used to feed 5,000 was **"barley" (John 6:9).**

—**"There was a great deal of grass in that place"** where Jesus fed the **"five thousand" (John 6:10 NAB).**

—The type of "leafy branches" used for Jesus' triumphal entry (Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8) were **"palm branches" (John 12:12,13)**

— The house at Bethany being filled the fragrance of the broken perfume jar **(John 12:3).**

—The type of fire for warmth in the high priest's "courtyard" was **"a charcoal fire" (John 18:15-18).**

—During Jesus' last **"Passover . . . evening meal"** with **"his disciples" (John 13:1,2,22),** when **"Judas . . . went out . . . it was night" (John 13:30).**

—John's form of the inscription on the cross is the fullest of the four Gospels, **"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,"** and John's gospel notes that it was written in, **"Hebrew, Latin, and Greek" (John 19:19,20 REB).**

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—Jesus' **"undergarment"** was **"seamless" (John 19:23 NIV).**

THE WRITER OF JOHN KNEW MUCH ABOUT JESUS' THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

The writer of the Gospel of John must have been not only an apostle of Jesus, but one of his inner circle, because he knew so much about Jesus' mind, feelings, and reasons for certain actions. Some examples of this are:

"Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people" (John 2:24 NIV).

"Jesus . . . asked Philip" a question only **"to test him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do" (John 6:5,6 HCSB).**

"Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone" (John 6:15 NAB).

"Jesus was aware that his disciples were criticizing his message" (John 6:61 GWT).

"Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death" (John 7:1 NLT).

"He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" (John 11:33 NRSV). (Also see **John 13:21).**

"Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him" (John 18:4 NLT).

THE WRITER WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE APOSTLES' THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

The writer of John seems to have had firsthand knowledge of the apostles thinking. Even when some of the apostles' ideas were unclear or wrong, the writer of John was familiar with them.

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—"The temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said" (John 2:21,22 NIV).

—"They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died" (John 11:13 NLT).

—"At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus had been glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him" (John 12:16 NIV).

—"But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him" (John 13:28 NIV).

—"They did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead" (John 20:9 NAB).

—"When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize it was Jesus" (John 21:4 NAB).

The writer of John knew:

—What the apostles said to Jesus **(John 4:31; 9:2; 11:8,12; 16:29,30).**

—What the apostles said among themselves **(John 4:33; 16:17,18; 20:25; 21:3,5).**

—Where Jesus went to get away from, or avoid, people **(John 11:54; 18:1,2).**

POWERFUL EVIDENCE THE APOSTLE JOHN WROTE THE GOSPEL PRIOR TO 100 CE

The historian Eusebius (c 260-340 CE) quotes Irenaeus as saying: *"John, the disciple of the Lord, who had rested upon his breast, himself gave fourth the gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia" (The Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius, V, viii 4; Irenaeus, Hair., 3.1.2).*

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The prediction by Jesus of Peter's martyrdom **(John 21:17-19),** led Peter to ask Jesus about the life of **"the disciple whom Jesus loved " (John 21:20,21).** Jesus' reply, **"'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?'"** and **"Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers' that this disciple would not die" (John 21:22,23 NIV).** This seems fit well with the apostle John's very long life, since he lived into his upper 90's.

As mentioned earlier, some have strongly asserted that the Gospel of John was written as late the middle of the second century. However, the discovery of the *Rylands Papyrus 457 (P52)* (a papyrus fragment of John 18:31-33,37,38), paleographically dated to about 125-135 CE, has led most scholars back to the traditional date of the 90's CE as the time period of the writing of John's Gospel. Why? Because several decades would have been required between the time of the original writing, likely in Ephesus (Asia Minor, today Turkey), and its being copied and circulated as far south as Egypt. Additionally, discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, by improving understanding of Palestine in the first century, have confirmed the genuineness of the Jewish background and thought patterns evidenced in the book. These facts fit in well with the evidence presented above that the apostle John wrote the 4th gospel in the 90's CE.

WHY THIS IS VITALLY IMPORTANT

All of this information helps us to accept the Gospel of John **"not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV).** We have such an abundance of powerful facts that we don't have to be in any **"doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6 NIV),** and is **"in confusion" (Acts 19:32 NIV).** Why is this belief in the Gospel of John so important? Because it was **"written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name" (John 20:31 NLT).** Our eternal life depends on it!

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For more information related to this subject, please see the following articles on this website:

“The Rylands Papyrus 457 Dated To 125-135 CE” – https://bibleauthenticity.com/?s=457

“Is the Gospel of John Historical and True?” – https://bibleauthenticity.com/?s=John+historical

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