

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR CANONICAL GOSPELS

As our primary sources for the life of Jesus on the earth, the four canonical Gospels are of the utmost importance. In this section we will examine their claim to historical reliability, paying special attention to their authorship and date.

MATTHEW

Authorship of Matthew

Book title

The author is not named in the Greek text, but in the title. All Greek MSS of Matthew which are extant bear his name on the title: KATA MATTHAION.

These titles may have been added when the NT books were collected in volumes (cf. Metzger, *Text of the NT*, p. 26). The titles are at least as early as A.D. 125 (Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, p. 33). The importance of these Gospel titles is mentioned by Stonehouse in *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 15-18.

Quotation of Papias concerning Matthew

Papias, ca. A.D. 70-155; quotation in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 3:39 (Theron, p. 65)

“Of Matthew he [Papias] has stated as follows: ‘Matthew composed his history [*ta logia*] in the Hebrew dialect [probably Aramaic], and every one translated it as he was able.’”

Note the title of Papias’ work: “Exposition of the Oracles [*logia*] of the Lord.”

Confirmed by modern study

Compare arguments of W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann in the *Anchor Bible* commentary on Matthew (Introduction, pp. 182-86).

Identity of Matthew

Matthew's call

Matt 9:9 = Mark 2:14 = Luke 5:27-28

In Matthew, called "Matthew"; in Mark "son of Alphaeus"

Mark & Luke call him "Levi"; could be tribe = "Levite" (cf. Albright)

Luke says he left all to follow Jesus (emphasis of Luke on social outcasts).

Luke says he was a tax-collector (*telones*); all the Synoptics say he was sitting at the tax office (*telonion*).

Matthew's celebration

Matt 9:10-13 = Mark 2:15-17 = Luke 5:29-32

It is interesting to note each Gospel's identification of the house:

Matt – "the house"

Mark – "his house"

Luke – "Levi . . . his house"

Matthew's language

As a tax collector, Matthew would have needed to know both Aramaic and Greek well, since he must have dealt with the common Jewish people, with the gentiles in Galilee, and with the officials of Herod Antipas in Galilee.

Date of Matthew

Statement of Irenaeus

Against Heresies 3:1:1; also quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:8; Theron, p. 43; cf. Bettenson, pp. 39-40.

“Matthew among the Hebrews published a gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome and founding the church there. After their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.”

To determine the time when Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome is not easy. Paul was in Rome during his first imprisonment, ca. A.D. 57-59. Perhaps he was preaching at times there before his second imprisonment; that would be in the period ca. A.D. 60-64. Peter could well have been in Rome when he wrote 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet 5:13). Of course, the church had been founded there much earlier (Rom 1:7-10; 15:23; 16:3-5ff; cf. Acts 2:10).

We might conclude that, according to Irenaeus, Matthew was written in Aramaic about A.D. 60.

Possible redating of P⁶⁴ and P⁶⁷

Several small NT papyrus fragments discovered by papyrologist Charles B. Huleatt in Luxor, Egypt, and sent by him in 1901 to his alma mater in Oxford are apparently from the same codex of Matthew, with verses from chapters 3, 5, and 26. They are divided into two groups, P⁶⁴ and P⁶⁷. P⁶⁴ is in Magdalen College, Oxford, and P⁶⁷ is in the Fundación San Lucas Evangelista in Barcelona, Spain.

These fragments are dated by Metzger and Aland at ca. A.D. 200. However, some recent research on these fragments by papyrologists dates them very early—in the 60’s. See Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D’Ancona, *The Jesus Papyrus* (1997).

Critical position on date of Matthew

Cf. Kümmel, *Introduction to the NT*, who dates Matthew after A.D. 70, probably A.D. 80-100.

Reasons given:

- (1) Matt 22:7; 24:2, since they predict the downfall of Jerusalem, demand a date after A.D. 70.
- (2) Matt 23, demands date after Jewish-Christian rejection; cf. A.D. 80, when Gamaliel II's edict forbade Christianity.
- (3) Matt 28:19, trinitarian formula implies later development; opposed to Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5; etc.
- (4) Matt 16:18; 18:17, use of word "church" implies date after the organization of churches; cf. his argument at Phil 1:1.

Answer to arguments:

The trinitarian formula and church organization were probably earlier than Kümmel assumes. There is no real evidence to the contrary.

If Jesus could predict the future, and actually did deliver the Olivet Discourse, then Matthew could have been written before A.D. 70. Jesus also could well have spoken the words of Matt 23 during his earthly ministry; they do not imply a later date.

Cf. the positive arguments for an earlier date from the tradition of the church fathers, and other arguments from Albright and Mann.

Matthew's relation to Mark

If Mark was written first, then Matthew would be in the 60's or later. It is possible that Mark was written earlier than that (see under Mark).

If Matthew was written independently of Mark, then it can be dated much earlier.

Some have suggested that the Aramaic version of Matthew was early; then came Mark; then came the Greek version of Matthew (cf. Zahn; and Berkhof, *NT Introduction*, pp. 73-74).

[Note a recent article, which denies the two (or four) source theory: Eta Linnemann, "The Lost Gospel of Q—Fact or Fantasy?" *Trinity Journal* 17:1 (Spring, 1996) 3-18. For an excellent update on the current state of the source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels, see David Alan Black and David R. Beck, eds., *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Baker, 2001).]

Matthew's relation to Luke

Most scholars (not all) feel that Matthew was written before Luke (cf. Luke 1:1).

Luke was written before Acts (cf. Acts 1:1), and Acts probably was written about A.D. 59 (see below; cf. the abrupt ending at that point).

Therefore, it might appear that Luke was written before A.D. 57-59, and that Matthew was written before that.

Suggested date of Matthew: A.D. 50-60

Considering all the evidence above, this range of dates seems probable. Perhaps there was an earlier Aramaic gospel of Matthew, dated about A.D. 45. This would be about the time when Christians had to flee from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; cf. Gal. 1:17-19). That would be a suitable time for Matthew to write down the words of Jesus.

MARK

Authorship of Mark

Book title

The author is not named in the Gospel, but is indicated in the title of all extant copies of Mark. For importance of Gospel titles, see under Matthew.

Statement of Papias concerning Mark

Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3:39 (Theron, p. 67)

“And John the Presbyter also said this, Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy, but not, however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord’s discourses; wherefore Mark has not erred in any thing, by writing some things as he has recorded them; for he was carefully attentive to one

thing, not to pass by any thing that he heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts.”

It should be noted that the tradition that Mark recorded the teachings of Peter concerning Jesus agrees with the evidence of Peter’s preaching in the book of Acts, and the parts of Jesus’ life he mentions in his epistles (especially compare Mark with Acts 10:37-43).

It is also interesting to note that Mark is one of the less prominent men of the apostolic community, and it is unlikely that later tradition would ascribe this Gospel to him if in fact he were not the actual author.

Identity of Mark

Mark is the same as John Mark, mentioned in Acts and in several NT epistles:

- Lived with his mother in a house in Jerusalem, Acts 12:12
- Perhaps was the young man mentioned in Mark 14:51-53 (This section of Mark is one of the few events not mentioned in the other Gospels).
- Taken with his cousin Barnabas and Paul to Antioch after their famine visit to Jerusalem, Acts 12:25 (Barnabas his cousin, Col 4:10)
- Went on their first missionary journey, deserted the mission, caused the quarrel which divided the second mission, later returned to Antioch, Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37-39
- After argument between Barnabas and Paul, went with Barnabas to Cyprus, Acts 15:39
- Was reconciled to Paul and was with him during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, Col 4:10; Phlm 24
- Active with Peter in “Babylon” (probably Rome); Peter called him “my son,” 1 Pet 5:13
- Was with Timothy in Ephesus, sent for by Paul during his second Roman imprisonment; Paul said he was “useful” to him in the ministry, 2 Tim 4:11

For a good study of the life and work of Mark, see A. T. Robertson, *Making Good in the Ministry* (1918).

Date of Mark

Statement of Papias

See under Authorship of Mark, above. (Theron, p. 67)

—in company with Peter, and wrote Peter’s account; must have been during or after his close association with Peter

Place of association unknown. Perhaps Palestine, Rome, or Babylon.

Statement of Irenaeus

See under Date of Matthew, above. (Theron, p. 43)

— “After their [Peter and Paul’s] departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching.”

This reference would date Mark perhaps after A.D. 60, probably after A.D. 64-67.

Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark

This note is one of many which were attached to the Gospels by copyists. This particular note is found in many Old Latin MSS of Mark, and is dated as starting ca. A.D. 160 (see Lane in the *NIC* of Mark, p. 9).

“ . . . Mark declared, who is called ‘stump-fingered,’ because he had rather small fingers in comparison with the stature of the rest of his body. He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.”

This prologue to Mark places the writing of the Gospel in Rome definitely after the death of Peter.

Statements of Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria wrote ca. A.D. 200.

Quotation found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2:15 (not in Theron; Eusebius p. 65).

—claims that Peter saw and approved of the work of Mark

Quotation found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6:14 (Theron, p. 45)

—states that Mark was written after the gospels with genealogies were written (Matt & Luke)

—also states that Peter knew that Mark had written this account (some claim text corrupt here, Theron, n. 1)

These statements of Clement of Alexandria would point to a date before A.D. 67, perhaps before A.D. 64.

Dead Sea fragments from Cave 7

For a good discussion, see Lane, *NICNT*, pp. 18-21.

In Cave 7 at Qumran, 19 tiny scraps of papyrus were discovered, some with only one letter.

Scholar Jose O’Callaghan studied these fragments with normal and infra-red photography. He dates them by paleography 50 B.C. to A.D. 50.

Originally two fragments were identified as being portions of works already known from other sources:

7Q1 — Exod 28:4-7

7Q2 — 5 lines, fragmentary, Epistle of Jeremiah 43-44

Since the other fragments were so small, no one had ventured to identify them. However, O’Callaghan proposed the following identifications for many of them:

7Q4 — 1 Tim 3:16; 4:1, 3 (suggestion)

*7Q5 — (20 letters, 9 uncertain, 5 lines) Mark 6:52-53

7Q6, 1 — (5 letters, 3 lines) Mark 4:28

7Q6, 2 — Acts 27:38 (“very probable”)

7Q7 — (4 letters, 3 lines) Mark 12:17

7Q8 — Jas 1:23-24

7Q9 — Rom 5:11-12 (“very probable”)

7Q10 — 2 Pet 1:15 (“possible”)

7Q15 — (4 letters, 2 lines) Mark 6:48 (“suggestion”)

The most important conclusion of O'Callaghan is that 7Q5 (marked with *) comes from Mark's Gospel. That is the largest of the disputed fragments. If he is right, then Mark would be dated before A.D. 50. However, it is important that his paleographic dating methods are accurate to 25 years, thus allowing some latitude.

The identity of 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53 is not at all certain. It requires many assumptions of textual changes for which there is not other evidence (cf. Lane, pp. 20-21). For good criticisms against O'Callaghan's theory, see Jerry Vardaman, "Earliest Fragments of the NT," *Expository Times* 83 (Spring, 1972), 374-76; also "The Gospel of Mark and the Scrolls," *Christianity Today* 17:25 (Sept. 28, 1973), 4-7. See comments of Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (3rd ed., 1992), pp. 264-65. For support for its being from Mark, see Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *The Jesus Papyrus* (1997), pp. 84-88. For a final criticism against its being from Mark, see Robert H. Gundry, "No *NU* in Line 2 of 7Q5: A Final Disidentification of 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53," *JBL* 118:4 (Winter 1999) 698-707.

Critical date for Mark

—usually about A.D. 70 (cf. Kümmel)

Mark 13:2, 14, could be written slightly before or after A.D. 70, since its language is more vague than Luke's or Matthew's.

Most critics now accept Mark as the author of the Gospel.

Suggested date for Mark, ca. A.D. 65

This would be the date for the final form of the Gospel. Perhaps he was working on it earlier, thus accounting for some references in the fathers to Peter's overseeing the work (cf. Clement of Alexandria, Zahn).

LUKE

Authorship of Luke

Statement of Irenaeus

See under Date of Matthew, above (p. 2.3). *Against Heresies* 3:1:1.

“Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher.”

Statement of the Muratorian Canon

—in Theron, p. 107; Bettenson, p. 40

This 8th century manuscript was written in barbarous Latin by a careless and ignorant scribe. The Greek original probably is to be dated from the end of the 2nd century, ca. A.D. 170 (see B. F. Westcott, *The Canon of the NT*, p. 236).

“The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke the physician, when, after the ascension of Christ, Paul had taken him to himself as one studious of right, wrote in his own name what he had been told, although he had not himself seen the Lord in the flesh. He set down the events as far as he could ascertain them, and began his story with the birth of John.”

Statement of the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke

The heretic Marcion accepted a mutilated version of Luke. This prologue, written to oppose Marcionism, is found in Old Latin MSS of Luke. It is dated ca. A.D. 175.

It states that Luke, the author, was a native of Antioch in Syria, and that he died at the age of 84 in Boeotia.

Internal evidence concerning the authorship of Luke

(1) Luke’s prologue, and general information

- one capable of high literary style
- not an original apostle
- had access to eyewitnesses

(2) Same as the author of Acts

- evident from prologue of Acts
- Theophilus addressed in both
- similar style and vocabulary
- external evidence unanimous
- accepted by all scholars

(3) Companion of Paul

—”We” sections:

- Acts 16:10-17 (second missionary journey, Troas to Philippi)
- Acts 20:5 - 21:18 (third missionary journey, Philippi to Jerusalem)
- Acts 27:1 - 28:16 (Caesarea to Rome for first imprisonment)
- Also Codex D at Acts 11:28 (before the missionary journeys, in Antioch-Syria)

“ . . . and there was much rejoicing; and when we were gathered together, one of them, Agabus by name, spoke signifying . . .” (Acts 11:27-28 in Western text)

(4) Luke is the companion indicated

—With Paul in his Roman imprisonment (Acts 28)

—Deduced from list of Paul’s companions there according to the Prison Epistles (especially in Colossians 4 and Philemon):

- Epaphras, Epaphroditus, not in Acts 27
- Timothy, Tychicus, Aristarchus, Mark, mentioned in the third person in Acts (Tychicus is mentioned only in a we-section, but no one asserts he authored the book.)
- Jesus called Justus, not with Paul in earlier sections; no external evidence for him either
- Demas, deserted Paul (2 Tim 4:10)
- Only man left: Luke

Evidence of medical language

Luke a physician (Col 4:14)

If Luke was a physician, and the author of the third Gospel, then there should be evidence of his medical training and outlook in that Gospel. This was the reasoning of W. K. Hobart, who wrote *The Medical Language of St. Luke* in 1882. Hobart compared Luke’s vocabulary with that of Hippocrates, Galen, and two other Greek physicians. He found 400 words used in common.

Examples: Luke 5:18, 24; 4:38; 8:44; 7:14 (cf. Louis Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 94).

Hobart's work was fairly uncritical. His thesis was refined and presented in a more guarded manner by Adolf von Harnack, *Lukas der Arzt* (1906; ET *Luke the Physician*, 1907). It was believed that these examples gave strong evidence that Luke's Gospel was in fact written by a physician.

In 1920 H. J. Cadbury wrote *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*, in which he criticized this approach. He found 300 of Hobart's words in the LXX and Josephus, and more of them in Plutarch and Lucian. None of those writers was a physician. Cadbury maintained that the style of Luke was that of a well-educated man of general culture, and did not indicate that he was a physician.

Result. Luke's vocabulary agrees with the author's being a physician, but does not prove that he was. See A. T. Robertson, *Luke the Historian in the Light of Research* (1920).

Many have noted the sympathetic view Luke had for physicians in Luke 8:43 (see the Greek), as opposed to Mark 5:26.

There is a textual variant in this verse that may impact this argument. Some MSS include the clause "who had spent all her living on physicians" in Luke; the UBS editors include the clause in brackets, with a {C} rating. Metzger says "the early and diversified evidence for the shorter text is well-nigh compelling" (*Textual Commentary*, 121). The clause is included in the KJV and ESV, but not in the NASB or the NIV.

Critical position regarding the authorship of Luke

Most critical writers say that Luke and Acts were written by a Gentile Christian who was not familiar with Palestine or with Paul (cf. Kümmel, p. 150).

Earlier critics of Luke-Acts, personified in the Tübingen school led by F. C. Baur, maintained that these books were written during the second century, to harmonize the opposite teachings of the "Paul" school and the "Peter" school. This approach was called "tendency criticism." The theory has long since been debunked, but many writers still incorporate some of its ideas.

One reason given for the critical approach is the supposed historical inaccuracies in Acts. For evidence showing the accuracy of Luke's writings, see Ward Gasque, *William Ramsay*, pp. 24-27; A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the NT* (1963).

More recently the attack has come from redaction criticism, which maintains that the peculiar Lucan material and editorial work on Mark show a theological approach which ignores historical reliability. E.g, see Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (1960).

Identity of Luke

Luke was a Gentile and a physician, Col 4:14; cf. v. 11. He quite possibly was one of the early Gentile converts to Christianity in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). Note the comments of F. F. Bruce:

“Although the Western reading [placing Luke in Antioch in Acts 11:28] is probably not part of the original text, it does reflect knowledge of the tradition which has been preserved independently in the anti-Marcionite prologue to the third Gospel (ca. A.D. 170), that Luke was a native of Syrian Antioch. If Luke was one of the Antiochene Gentiles who were evangelized in those days, we can readily appreciate both his interest in Antioch and his enthusiasm for the Gentile mission of Christianity.” (*Acts, NIC*, 243)

Luke was a companion of Paul during his second and third missionary journeys, his voyage to Rome, and his first and second Roman imprisonments (“we” sections of Acts; references in Prison Epistles, Col 4:14 and Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11).

Luke is not the same person as Lucius in Rom 16:21.

Some sources say that Luke was a native of Antioch in Syria: Codex D at Acts 11:28; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3:4:6 (Theron, p. 69); Anti-Marcionite Prologue of Luke.

Some think the “we” sections of Acts may seem to favor Philippi; cf. Acts 16:12. They follow this pattern: Troas ⇔ Philippi; Philippi ⇔ Jerusalem; Caesarea ⇔ Rome. If Luke was a native of Antioch, he at least stayed for some time in Philippi for some reason.

Date of Luke

Relation to Acts

Acts 28 ends with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment, ca. A.D. 59.

Thus, Acts was probably written about that time. For good arguments for this date of Acts, see F. F. Bruce’s commentary on the Greek text of Acts, pp. 10-14.

Luke’s Gospel was written before Acts (Acts 1:1).

A logical time for Luke to have gathered his information and written his Gospel would be during Paul's confinement in Caesarea, A.D. 54-56.

Relation to Mark

If Mark was the first Gospel and a source for Luke, then Luke would have been written later than Mark, ca. A.D. 65-70.

This date is possible, but the priority of Mark is not now that firmly established. Luke seems to have relied more on eye-witnesses (according to the Two-Gospel source theory, Luke relied on Matthew, and Mark in turn relied on Matthew and Luke). Cf. Paul's attitude toward Peter and the other apostles.

Critical date for Luke

—A.D. 70-90 (Kümmel)

Markan priority is assumed by most critics, thus making the late 60's the earliest possible date.

The specifics mentioned in Luke 19:43-44; 21:20, 24 lead most critics to assume that the book could not have been written before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 (cf. Mark 13:14).

Earlier critics dated the Gospel during the second century, but that theory is now discredited on the basis of the dating of Acts.

Statement of Clement of Alexandria

Quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6:14 (Theron, p. 45); see above under Date of Mark.

Clement of Alexandria stated that the Gospels with genealogies were written first (Matthew & Luke). This order would place the writing of Luke before that of Mark.

Suggested date for Luke: ca. A.D. 55

This date seems to fit all the evidence best. The primary argument against it would be the general assumption that Mark was written first, but that assumption is not at all settled.

JOHN

Authorship of John

Statement of Irenaeus

Against Heresies 3:1 (Theron, p. 43); see above under Date of Matthew (p. 2.3).

“Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.”

We note the importance of Irenaeus and his testimony to John. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of the Apostle John. This chain is mentioned by Irenaeus in his letter to Florinus, quoted by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5:20; Theron, pp. 25-27).

Statement of the Muratorian Canon

See above under Authorship of Luke. Theron, pp. 107-09.

“The fourth gospel is that of John, one of the disciples. . . . When his fellow disciples and bishops exhorted him he said, ‘Fast with me for three days from today, and then let us relate to each other whatever may be revealed to each of us.’ On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should narrate all things in his own name as they remembered them.”

Statement of Theophilus of Antioch

Letter to Autolycus 2:22 (Theron, p. 73), written ca. A.D. 170.

Theophilus was the earliest extant writer to name John as the author of the fourth Gospel.

“And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the Spirit-bearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.’”

Internal evidence for the authorship of John

The author of the Gospel is named in the title, but not in the actual text of the Gospel. Rather, he is designated as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

—John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20 = author 21:24; cf. 19:35

In his commentary on John, B. F. Westcott set forth a massive argument from internal evidence pointing toward the Apostle John as the author of the Gospel (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 1881, pp. v-xxviii). His line of argument has been followed by most conservative writers since then. More recently Westcott's argument has been elaborated and updated by Leon Morris (*Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 1969, ch. 4, pp. 215-80).

This is the outline as presented by Westcott and Morris:

(1) The author was a Jew

- Knowledge of Jewish customs, schools of thought, observances, theology, exegesis
- Vocabulary and syntax reflect Aramaic patterns
- Adopts world-view of the OT

(2) The author was a Jew of Palestine

- Probably written after A.D. 70, when many landmarks were destroyed and thereafter forgotten
- Yet John shows knowledge of topography, distances, towns, Jerusalem layout, temple ceremonies
- Palestinian view of the Logos in John, as opposed to Alexandrian view; cf. the Targums, and now, cf. the DSS (Morris, ch. 6)

(3) The author was an eyewitness of what he described

- Minute details of persons, times, numbers, places, manner; details often inserted when not necessary to the narrative
- Recent confirmation includes studies of first century Jewish controversies, archaeology, etc.

(4) The author was an apostle

- Present at intimate scenes, acquainted with emotions of apostles and of Jesus, acquainted with faults of apostles

(5) The author was the Apostle John

- See references above, esp. 21:24
- Close to Peter: 13:24; 20:2; 21:7; cf. 18:15; Acts 3:1; 8:14
- One of the seven disciples in John 21:2; cf. 1:35-47
 - Peter, named in ch. 1, 21
 - Thomas, named
 - Nathaniel, named in ch. 1, 21
 - sons of Zebedee (James and John, not named)
 - two other disciples:
 - perhaps Andrew, brother of Peter (named in ch. 1)
 - perhaps Philip, friend of Nathaniel (named in ch. 1)
- According to the Synoptics, the closest apostles to Jesus were Peter, James, John (e.g., Matt 17:1; 26:37)
- Peter is ruled out in John 21
- James was martyred early (Acts 12:2)
- John, the logical choice

Further, John usually is very careful to give full names; e.g., Simon Peter, Judas Iscariot son of Simon, Thomas Didymus. But he does not name John, James, his mother Salome (probable; Matt 27:56 = Mark 15:40; cf. Mark 16:1; perhaps John and Jesus were cousins, John 19:25), or his adopted mother Mary (19:26-27). Also, he refers to John the Baptist merely as “John.”

(6) Conclusion of argument

Thus, internal evidence confirms the external evidence that the author is John the apostle.

Modern critical views of authorship of John

Raymond E. Brown, commentary on John in the *Anchor Bible* series (1966): Apostle John was the “author,” but someone else was the “writer.” Two major editions were produced; then they were redacted by one of John’s disciples after his death.

Kümmel (1973): Author was a disciple of the unknown “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Neither of them was the Apostle John.

Conclusion for authorship of John

The author is the Apostle John. John probably had the help of an amanuensis, which might explain some stylistic differences between John’s Gospel and the Revelation.

Date of John

Relation of John to the Synoptic Gospels

John appears to be dated later than the Synoptics.

(1) John avoids duplicating Synoptic material.

—ca. 92% of John is unique

(2) Yet John assumes the Synoptic history

John 3:24, assumes knowledge of imprisonment of John

John 6:67-71, assumes appointment of the twelve

John 6:52-59, may assume Lord’s Supper narrative

(3) Statement of Irenaeus

Haer. 3:1 (Theron, p. 43), see under Date of Matthew, above.

“Then John . . . himself produced his gospel.” (While John was residing in Ephesus)

(4) Statement of Clement of Alexandria

Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6:14 (Theron, p. 45); see under Date of Mark, above.

According to Eusebius, Clement stated that the gospels with genealogies were written first; then Mark was written, while Peter was preaching; and then . . .

“But John, last of all, perceiving that what had reference to the body in the gospel of our Savior, was sufficiently detailed, and being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the Spirit, he wrote a spiritual gospel.”

Relation of John to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

If John was written after the Synoptics, it is unlikely that it was written before A.D. 70.

Some preterists place the writing of John’s gospel prior to A.D. 70, because they are especially concerned to place Revelation before that date.

On the other hand, if it was written after A.D. 70, it probably was written long after, since it does not mention the fall of Jerusalem.

Relation to John’s career

According to Irenaeus, John wrote his Gospel while he was living in Ephesus. *Haer.* 3:1 (Theron, p. 43), see under Date of Matthew, above.

“John . . . produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.”

According to the NT, John apparently did not move there until after the death of Paul.

- John not there in Acts.
- John not referred to in 2 Timothy. Cf. 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:15-18; 4:19. Cf. Onesiphorus and Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:19, but Rom 16:3-5 in Rome).
- John writing to the Asian churches from nearby Patmos (Rev 1:9); addressed Ephesus first.

Irenaeus provides a further indication of the date of John’s writing as being after the ministry of Paul. *Haer.* 2:22:5 (Theron, p. 25); also in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3:23:3.

“All the presbyters of Asia, that had conferred with John the disciple of our Lord, testify that John had delivered it [sound doctrine] to them; for he continued with them until the times of Trajan.”

Here are the times of the rules of the Roman emperors at the end of the first century:

Domitian	81 - 96 (John’s exile during his reign)
Nerva	96 - 98
Trajan	98 -117 (John’s death in his reign)

The testimony of Irenaeus concerning the place and time of John’s ministry is agreed to by others, including Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius.

Early manuscript evidence for the date of John

There are two very early NT fragments which contain portions of John’s Gospel. Information about both of these fragments was first published in 1935. Each of them would push the date for the Gospel back into the first part of the second century, at the latest.

(1) ρ^{52} , Papyrus Rylands Greek 457

This fragment was found in Egypt in 1920 by B. P. Grenfell, and obtained by the Rylands library at Manchester University. It was published by C. H. Roberts in 1935. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rylands_Library_Papyrus_P52 for photos and discussion.)

This small fragment, which consists of portions of John 18:31-33, 37-38, is dated as circulating in Egypt no later than A.D. 125.

(2) Egerton Papyrus 2

This papyrus document of the British Museum, published in 1935, contains a quotation from John’s Gospel. It is dated ca. A.D. 150.

For more information, see C. H. Dodd, *NT Studies* (1953), pp. 12-52.

Relation of John to Epistles of Ignatius

J. B. Lightfoot demonstrated conclusively that seven of the extant epistles attributed to Ignatius are indeed genuine. They were written by him to various churches as he traveled to Rome to face a martyr's death in A.D. 110.

These seven genuine epistles of Ignatius contain several references to the fourth Gospel.

Older and recent critical views

F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school, late 2nd century

Some later critics, ca. A.D. 135 (time of Bar-Cochba revolt)

Almost universal opinion now (cf. Kümmel), A.D. 90-100

Some critics (e.g., J. A. T. Robinson), before A.D. 70

Suggested date for John: ca. A.D. 90

This date seems to fit all the evidence best. It would allow for the Gospel to be written before John's exile under the Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96).

VALUE OF THE CANONICAL GOSPELS FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS

Historical Qualifications of Authors

Access to original information

Matthew was an original apostle, an eyewitness of the events he describes.

Mark, a resident of Jerusalem, had access to the apostles, and was extremely close to Peter, his primary source.

Luke, a careful historian, had access to the apostles and eyewitnesses and participants within about 30 years of the events he describes.

John, an original apostle and eyewitness, perhaps a relative of Jesus, was very close to Jesus, a part of his inner circle. [See Thomas D. Lea, "The Reliability of History in John's Gospel," *JETS* 38:3 (September 1995) 387-402.]

Sound historical procedures

The writers were intelligent, educated men; they employed the active use of memory, both their own and that of others.

The writers were aware of other literary evidence about the life and teachings of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:1).

The writers were not rationalistic, but they were rational, not fanciful (cf. the wild stories in the apocryphal gospels, and some of the legends believed by some of the church fathers).

The writers were not isolated, but were checking with eyewitnesses. They had continual contact with the early Christians (cf. Luke's contacts; e.g., Acts 21:16; 1 Cor 15:6).

Absolute sincerity

Since the time of Reimarus, no responsible biblical scholar has questioned the absolute sincerity of the apostles and early Christians. No one questions their faith in Christ, or their belief in the truth of their writings.

Historical Evaluation of the Gospels

Weight of testimony: unity with diversity

Cf. John 17:8, 11

The testimony of each Gospel agrees with each of the others. Yet the contents are not identical, showing collusion or mere copying. This type of evidence is admissible in law (cf. Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, 1846).

Agreement with other sources

The Gospels confirm information known about Jesus from other sources, biblical and non-biblical.

Most facts are confirmed (e.g., Jesus' basic chronology).

Discrepancies are few, and are explained obviously by the bias in the non-biblical source (e.g., Babylon Talmud's account of Jesus' death).

Historical reliability of the Gospels

This is a probabilistic argument, but a strong one nonetheless. For a good defense of the Gospels' historicity, especially for the Synoptics, see Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (2007).

Work of inspiration

For the Christian who has accepted the Scriptures as God's Word, the Gospels are not only reliable history, but they are inspired and inerrant in all they say about Jesus.

- ⇒ The NT writers were inspired in the same way as the OT writers, and therefore have the same authority (2 Pet 3:16).
- ⇒ The Holy Spirit aided the memory of the Gospel writers (John 14:26).
- ⇒ The Holy Spirit added God's intended interpretation to the gospel events, and prophecies about the future (John 16:13-15).
- ⇒ The Holy Spirit led in the circumstances of writing, and in the selection of material for each Gospel (cf. 2 Pet 1:21).
- ⇒ The Holy Spirit kept all Scripture free from error, including matters of the gospel history.

Conclusion concerning the canonical gospels

- The Gospels are valid historical documents.
- The Gospels have the added importance of divine inspiration and consequent inerrancy. This inerrancy does not mean that they are written in scientifically precise form, or contain all possible information; it does mean that, interpreted in the spirit in which they were written, they do not contain error.

- The Gospels are our primary source for the life of Jesus. They alone are both detailed and authoritative.