

77 DID LAZARUS WRITE THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

INTRODUCTION: The author of the gospel of John is nowhere explicitly stated, but is commonly assumed to be John, one of the twelve disciples. However, this assumption does not fit with scripture. This gospel references two non-specific identities: “the disciple Jesus loved” and “the other disciple.” Since the text states the gospel was written by “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24) and also states, in several ways, Lazarus was loved by Jesus, we will start with that premise in this study and see where it takes us. Based on John 20:2-4, we can also infer the “unnamed disciple” and “the disciple Jesus loved” were one and the same. We do not claim this study is conclusive, but believe it may provide a deeper insight into the life of Christ.

1. PASSAGES THAT PERTAIN TO “THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED”.

A. Lazarus was loved by Jesus: “The sisters [Mary, Martha] sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, look, the one you love [Lazarus] is sick.” Jn 11:3

B. Lazarus was part of the family Jesus loved: “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister [Mary], and Lazarus.” Jn 11:5

C. Jesus referred to Lazarus as “our friend”. “He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going so that I may awake him out of sleep.’” Jn 11:11

D. Community members knew of Jesus’ love for Lazarus: “Jesus wept. Thus the people who had come to mourn said, ‘Look how much he loved him [Lazarus]!’” Jn 11:35-36

E. Jesus dined with the family He loved just before Passover: “Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom he had raised from the dead. So they prepared a dinner for Jesus there. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was among those present at the table with him.” Jn 12:1-2 (see 1B)

F. “The disciple Jesus loved” had a place of honor at the Passover dinner: “One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was at the table to the right of Jesus in a place of honor.” Jn 13:23.

(Comment: Some believe only Jesus and the 12 were at the Passover dinner, but there is evidence to the contrary.)

G. Jesus entrusted his mother to “the disciple Jesus loved.” “Standing beside Jesus’ cross were his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. So when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, look, here is your son!’ He then said to his disciple, ‘Look, here is your mother!’ From that very time the disciple took her into his own home.” Jn 19:25-27

H. “The disciple Jesus loved” was “the other disciple”: “So she [Mary] went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him’.

Therefore Peter and the other disciple went out, and they went toward the tomb.” Jn 20:2-3

I. Rumor (resurrected) “disciple Jesus loved” would not die: Then Peter...saw a disciple following. This was the disciple whom Jesus loved...“ Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.” This saying therefore went out among the brothers that this disciple wouldn’t die. Yet Jesus didn’t say to him that he wouldn’t die, but, “If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you?” Jn 21:20-23

J. “The disciple Jesus loved” wrote the gospel of John: “Then Peter, turning around, saw a disciple following. This was the disciple whom Jesus loved... This is the disciple who testifies about these things [Gospel of John], and wrote these things. We know that his witness is true.” Jn 21:20-24

2. PASSAGES THAT PERTAIN TO “THE OTHER DISCIPLE”.

A. Unnamed disciple with Peter’s brother Andrew, was a disciple of John the Baptist: “Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus.” Jn 1:40

B. “The other disciple” was acquainted with High Priest Annas and went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard: “Simon Peter and another disciple followed them [soldiers with Jesus] as they brought Jesus to Annas. Now the other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, and he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard. But Simon Peter was left standing outside by the door. So the other disciple who was acquainted with the high priest came out and spoke to the slave girl who watched the door, and brought Peter inside.” Jn 18:12-16

C. “The other disciple” was “the loved disciple”: “She [Mary] went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’ Therefore Peter and the other disciple went out, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. Jn 20:2-4 (same as 1H)

D. “The other disciple” understood Jesus had escaped death: “Stooping and looking in, he [the other disciple] saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he didn’t enter in... So then the other disciple who came first to the tomb also entered in, and he saw and believed.” Jn 20:5-8

E. The unnamed disciple was fishing along with John, the apostle, therefore John was not “the other disciple” or “the disciple Jesus loved”. “Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael, who was from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee [the apostles, James and John], and two other disciples of his were together. Simon Peter told them, ‘I am going fishing.’ ‘We will go with you,’ they replied. They went out and got into the boat...” Jn 21:2-3

3. TESTIMONY OF JESUS RAISING LAZARUS WAS COMPELLING TO MANY AND DISTURBING TO OTHERS.

- A. A large crowd wanted to see Lazarus:** “Now a large crowd of Judeans learned that Jesus was there, and so they came not only because of him but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead.” Jn 12:9
- B. Crowd spread the news regarding Lazarus being raised:** “So the crowd who had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead were continuing to testify about it. Because they had heard that Jesus had performed this miraculous sign, the crowd went out to meet him.” Jn 12:17-18
- C. High priests planned to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus:** “So the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus too, for on account of him many of the Jewish people from Jerusalem were going away and believing in Jesus.” Jn 12:10-11

4. THE TWELVE DISCIPLES WERE LIKELY RARELY ALONE WITH JESUS.

- A. Others with the apostles:** “So they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and those with them gathered together and saying, ‘The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon!’” Lk 24:33
- B. Others beside the twelve had accompanied Jesus through His ministry:** “Thus one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with us, beginning from his baptism by John until the day he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us.” Acts 1:21-22
- C. There were others beside the twelve present at the last supper:** “He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve [distinct from others who were present], one who dips his hand with me into the bowl.’” Mk 14:20

5. THE “OTHER DISCIPLE” WAS KNOWN TO THE HIGH PRIEST. JOHN, THE APOSTLE, WAS NOT.

- A. The “other disciple” was known to the High Priest and was easily admitted to the interrogation proceedings.** “Simon Peter and another disciple followed them [soldiers, officials] as they brought Jesus to Annas. Now the other disciple was acquainted with the High Priest, and he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard. But Simon Peter was left standing outside by the door.” Jn 18:12-16
(**Comment:** The name “Lazarus” was the greek version of “Eleazar”, a name used in Israel’s priestly lineage.)
- B. John, the apostle, was not known to Jewish leadership. He would not have been let into Annas’s courtyard:** “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John [the apostles], and discovered that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13

6. THOSE WHO HAD BEEN WITH JESUS DISBELIEVED THE RESURRECTION REPORTS—EXCEPT ONE MAN.

- A. The disciples didn’t believe Mary’s report of the resurrection.** “Now when he had risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they disbelieved.” Mk 16:9-10
- B. The disciples didn’t believe the two witnesses who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.** “After these things he was revealed in another form to two of them as they walked, on their way into the country. They went away and told it to the rest. They didn’t believe them, either.” Mk 16:12-13 (also see Luke 24:33-42)
- C. Peter witnessed the empty tomb, but didn’t understand the meaning.** “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent down and saw only the strips of linen cloth; then he went home, wondering what had happened.” Lk 24:12
- D. “The eleven” were chastised for not believing reports of the resurrection from eye-witnesses.** “Afterward he [Jesus] was revealed to the eleven [no Judas] themselves as they sat at the table; and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they didn’t believe those who had seen him after he had risen.” Mk 16:13
- E. “The other disciple”, understood the resurrection of Jesus upon seeing the empty tomb.** “Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, came in, and he saw and believed...” Jn 20:8-9

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: A letter written by Clement to Theodore referenced a young man named John Eleazar whom Jesus raised from the dead, and this may account for the name. The gospel of John is centered in Judea, the place Lazarus lived, whereas the synoptic gospels, which do not mention the Lazarus story, center more on Galilee. Regardless of the uncertainties, we believe this material gives us rich connections to ponder and insight into Jesus’ personal relationships during his earthly ministry.

Our source for this paper is David Curtis’ sermon “Gospel of John—Authorship”. We highly recommend this for study. https://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/john/authorship-of-gospel-of-john_video.php