

“The Disciple Jesus Loved”: Witness, Author, Apostle— A Response to Richard Bauckham’s Jesus and the Eyewitnesses

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Richard Bauckham’s Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) makes a persuasive argument that the Gospels display eyewitness testimony and thus renews the quest for the identity of the Beloved Disciple as the author of the Fourth Gospel. While Bauckham attributes this Gospel to “the presbyter John” mentioned by Papias, the authors of this study show that the patristic evidence more likely seems to support the authorship of John the apostle and that the literary device of *inclusio* in the Fourth Gospel, astutely observed by Bauckham, also favors the authorship of John the son of Zebedee.

Key Words: Fourth Gospel, Beloved Disciple, John, authorship, apostle, Zebedee, John the Elder, Papias, Eusebius, Muratorian Fragment, Polycrates, Irenaeus, Bauckham

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a significant number of publications on the identity of “the disciple Jesus loved” in John’s Gospel. The ever more daring proposals have included identifications of this figure as diverse as the apostle Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, James the son of Zebedee, and even the Samaritan woman, among others.¹ Most recently, Richard Bauckham has weighed in on this debate in his landmark volume *Jesus and the*

1. *Thomas:* James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 414–21. He lists and evaluates 22 proposals made by other scholars (pp. 127–224). *Mary Magdalene:* Joseph A. Grassi, *The Secret Identity of the Beloved Disciple* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992); Esther A. de Boer, *The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene* (New York: Continuum, 2005). *Lazarus:* Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006), 141–56. *James the son of Zebedee:* Bob Thurston, affirmed in personal correspondence dated May 21, 2007. *The Samaritan woman:* James P. Carse, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997).



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Eyewitnesses.² In it, Bauckham persuasively demonstrates that the written Gospels represent instances of eyewitness testimony, in keeping with the claim registered in the prologue of Luke (Luke 1:2: αὐτόπται) and in early apostolic preaching.³ What is more, the closing paragraph of John's Gospel (21:24–25) leads Bauckham to assert that the entire work was not only "based on eyewitness accounts" but that it claims "to have been actually written by an eyewitness."⁴

So who is this influential disciple, so well known in the early church that he did not need to mention his name even though rumors circulated that he would never die? While Bauckham adduces compelling arguments supporting apostolic eyewitness testimony of the life and teaching of Jesus behind the Synoptic Gospels, he rather puzzlingly asserts that the Gospel of John, while based on the eyewitness testimony of "the disciple Jesus loved"—featured in four major episodes⁵—is actually the product of an unnamed and (now) unknown disciple. Although the traditional interpretation identifies this "disciple Jesus loved" with John the son of Zebedee, Bauckham instead suggests that the author of the Gospel is the enigmatic figure "John the Elder" mentioned by the second-century theologian Papias.⁶

This identification, however, undercuts Bauckham's own prior assertion that the New Testament rests on named, or at least well-known, eyewitnesses, and that its writers shunned anonymous sources. While it is indeed puzzling that John the son of Zebedee is identified in the Gospel

2. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

3. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41–42; 13:31.

4. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 358.

5. "The disciple Jesus loved" appears in the upper room, conversing with Peter (John 13:23, εἷς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς); with Mary at the crucifixion (John 19:26–27, τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα); at the tomb of Jesus with Peter (John 20:2–8, πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς); and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, fishing with Peter (John 21:7, ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς) and as the topic of Peter's conversation with Jesus (John 21:20–23, τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς). Note the articular specification in each reference.

6. Some may object that the present article takes what is a comparatively minor point in Bauckham's work and provides a thorough critique of it rather than engaging in a broader discussion of his thesis and assessing its significance for historical Jesus studies at large. Our response is that certainly both are needed (cf. Matt 23:23): a comprehensive evaluation of Bauckham's contribution *and* a detailed critique of specific aspects of his proposal. In our case, while we are very sympathetic to Bauckham's overall thesis (in fact, we agree with it), we take exception to his rejection of the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel on the basis of his reading of the patristic evidence (which is doubtful at several points, as we will attempt to show). Hence, we hope to make a contribution by providing a corrective to Bauckham's work at this one specific point. This is needed, especially because some of the early conservative evangelical reviews of Bauckham's work have insufficiently recognized this weakness. See the reviews by C. L. Quarles in *JETS* 50 (2007): 617–20 and C. L. Blomberg in *Denver Seminary Journal* 10 (2007), online: <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/jesus-and-the-eyewitnesses-the-gospels-as-eyewitness-testimony>, both of which are almost entirely descriptive and broadly appreciative in nature.

only in John 21:2 (and then not by name but only as one of "the sons of Zebedee"), even though he plays such an important role in the Synoptics and in the early chapters of the book of Acts, it is the purpose of this study to examine the exegetical and patristic evidence adduced by Bauckham in support of his view that the author of John's Gospel was "John the Elder" rather than John the apostle, as has been traditionally held.⁷

STARTING AT THE END: JOHN 21:24–25

The proper starting point for this investigation is the closing epilogue of John's Gospel, which is where the author is identified as "the disciple Jesus loved," who appears at strategic points of the Johannine narrative, beginning in the second half of the Gospel (first at 13:23): "This is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written" (John 21:24–25; cf. 21:20–23). As Lincoln notes, "Endings of narratives are vital for the retrospective analysis of the direction for their plots and for the reader's perception of their coherence and unity. . . . In this regard the Fourth Gospel presents an interesting case."⁸ Here, the narrator stamps his *imprimatur* on the entire work, raising in the minds of the readers many fascinating questions that shall now be addressed.

Who Is the Disciple Who Testifies?

The most reasonable deduction from John 21:24–25 is that the one who claims, "This is the disciple who bears witness of these things," is the same as "the disciple Jesus loved," who has just been the topic of conversation in John 21:21–23 between Jesus and Peter. This observation supports eyewitness testimony (cf. John 19:35), as is noted by Bauckham, causing the reader to ask: "Who is this disciple who seems to be greater than the apostle Peter—one who in John's Gospel appears before the '*inclusio* of eyewitness testimony' pointing to Peter's eyewitness testimony as a major source for John's Gospel—if not, as has traditionally been held, John the son of Zebedee?"⁹

7. Note in this regard the Johannine pattern of assuming basic information included in the Synoptic Gospels, which is acknowledged by Bauckham himself in his important essay "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147–71; see also Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 36–37; and idem, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 17–18 n. 29 and *passim*.

8. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 152; see also Köstenberger, *John*, 583–86 and the literature cited there.

9. According to Bauckham, the "*inclusio* of eyewitness testimony" is composed of the first and last reference to a named individual in a Gospel, indicating that this person served as a major source of eyewitness testimony for the evangelist. See chap. 6 in Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

Despite the reasonable (if not compelling) case that can be made in favor of an identification of this sort, however, this hypothesis has fallen on hard times in recent years.¹⁰ Whatever this disciple's identity, the Gospel's first readers very likely knew who the author of the Gospel was, and so the writer sought to correct a misunderstanding of Jesus' statement to the effect that this disciple would not die until Jesus' return. The author understands his role to be that of a witness to the life and teachings of Jesus, adding himself to the impressive list of those bearing witness in this Gospel.¹¹ The bearing of truthful witness is the subject of John 19:35, where the author testifies, "And he who has *seen* has borne witness, and his witness is *true*; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe."¹² It is quite reasonable to link this individual with "the

10. However, note that this has not always been a function of compelling evidence to the contrary: see Andreas J. Köstenberger ("Early Doubts of the Apostolic Authorship of the Fourth Gospel in the History of Modern Biblical Criticism," in *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* [Studies in Biblical Literature 38; New York: Peter Lang, 2001], 17–47), who surveys the time period of 1790–1810, during which doubts of the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel first arose in the history of biblical interpretation. M. de Jonge ("The Beloved Disciple and the Date of the Gospel of John," in *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* [ed. Ernest Best and R. M. Wilson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 109) claims, "There is no indication in the Gospel that the later identification of this disciple as John the son of Zebedee is right." Also, Ben Witherington ("Was Lazarus the Beloved Disciple?" online: <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/01/was-lazarus-beloved-disciple.html>) cites the following reasons he deems "fatal to the theory that John son of Zebedee is the Beloved Disciple and also the author of this entire document": (1) "none, and I do mean none, of the special Zebedee stories (in the Synoptics) are included in the Fourth Gospel"; (2) "this Gospel includes none or almost none of the special Galilean miracle stories found in the Synoptics with the exception of the feeding of the 5,000/walking on water tandem"; (3) "the lack of Galilean stories in general in this Gospel and more particularly the lack of exorcism tales, none of which, according to the Synoptics, are said to have occurred in Jerusalem or Judea"; and (4) "there is absolutely no emphasis or real interest in this Gospel in the Twelve as Twelve or as Galileans." One observes that virtually all of these are arguments from silence rather than arguments based on internal evidence.

11. The verb μαρτυρῶ appears 47 times in the Johannine literature and the noun μαρτυρία another 30 times. Various individuals are said to bear witness to another (John 1:15, 32, 34; 2:25; 3:26; 5:31–32, 37, 39; 7:7; 8:18; 10:25; 12:17; 15:26–27), to what they have either seen or heard (John 1:32, 34; 3:11, 32; 4:39; 19:35), or to the truth (John 3:33; 5:31–33; 8:13–14, 17; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24) and to bear witness so that others might believe and be saved (John 1:17; 4:39; 5:34; 19:35).

12. This emphasis on witnessing to actual truth is reinterpreted by Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness," *JSNT* 85 (2002): 2–36. He argues that the language of witness and testimony is not necessarily physical sight but rather belief in the identity of Jesus. According to Lincoln, the Johannine notion of witness does not necessarily entail the reporting of historical events (p. 9); thus "the disciple Jesus loved" is not claiming eyewitness testimony but giving confessional insight. In his exegesis, however, Lincoln cites only a few of the references of this sort of "seeing," such as John 1:18 ("we beheld his glory"), as being metaphorical, whereas if John the apostle were the author, this may constitute a reference to his witness of Jesus' transfiguration. To Lincoln, however, the author is telling a story through the eyes of "the disciple Jesus loved" but not recounting real history. He insists that taking the story as history nullifies the metaphorical seeing of Jesus and misses the author's point. This is a most odd way of interpreting otherwise plain language,

disciple Jesus loved," the person to whom Jesus had entrusted the care of his mother nine verses earlier (John 19:26–27). Any ambiguity of identity, as mentioned, is certainly removed when the same individual claims to be the author of the Gospel in John 21:24, but "[o]nly then are we supposed to learn that the witness behind the Gospel is specifically that of the Beloved Disciple and that he wrote it."¹³

Bauckham also draws special attention to John 15:26–27, where Jesus says to his disciples in the upper room, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness of me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with me from the beginning."¹⁴ Jesus makes a clear connection between the impending witness of the Holy Spirit and the resulting witness of the disciples, as confirmed in the book of Acts.¹⁵ Particularly, these disciples testify to what they had seen of Jesus "from the beginning," that is, from the start of his public ministry (John 2:11; cf. Mark 1:1, Luke 1:2, Acts 1:22).

This provides another clue to the identity of "the disciple Jesus loved," in that he was not only present in the upper room (John 13:23, 21:20) but must also have been present "from the beginning" (John 15:27) of Jesus' ministry. This, in turn, suggests a possible link with the unnamed disciple mentioned in conjunction with Andrew in John 1:40, who conversed with Jesus on the day after his baptism (John 1:35). Because John the son of Zebedee had been a fishing partner with Andrew according to Luke 5:10, this raises the even greater probability that he is also the unnamed "disciple Jesus loved."¹⁶

Some scholars, however, have no particular interest in the identification of a historical individual as "the disciple Jesus loved." Raymond Collins, for example, notes that the characters mentioned in the Fourth Gospel serve but to "augment the dramatic quality of the narrative,"¹⁷ so that this Beloved Disciple who "looms large in the narrative" as the "epitome of discipleship" serves merely as a "literary technique to identify Jesus."¹⁸ Thus, who any of the characters are or even if they existed at all is insignificant. Ed Block wryly notes that such an ahistorical treatment of the Gospels

making it the opposite of what a natural meaning would be. Lincoln correctly notes that in the epilogue the author wants to remain anonymous because his focus is not on himself but on Jesus (p. 23), whereas it could be argued the other way, that his first-person eyewitness is a clue to the readers of his identity: while he remains unnamed, he is certainly not anonymous.

13. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 368.

14. *Ibid.*, 366.

15. Acts 1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16.

16. Cf. Köstenberger, *John*, 76: "The name of the other disciple is not given. This unusual omission can best be explained if the disciple was John the evangelist, since he never refers to himself by name in this Gospel" (citing Ridderbos, Morris, Burge, and Witherington).

17. Raymond F. Collins, "From John to the Beloved Disciple: An Essay on Johannine Characters," *Int* 49 (1995): 361.

18. *Ibid.*, 367.

leaves behind the “picture of Jesus which our postmodern age desires,” but not the Jesus to whom “the disciple Jesus loved” sought to bear witness.¹⁹

The assertion, “This is the disciple who bears witness of these things,” however, shows that there is a very real author to this text, namely “the disciple Jesus loved.” As Vanhoozer notes, he is the one who heard and saw these events, and because he is a disciple of the Lord, he beckons his readers to “trust the voice of [Jesus], to follow [his] call. This is what we find the Beloved Disciple doing at the conclusion of the fourth Gospel.”²⁰

What Are “These Things” to Which the Disciple Testifies?

In the immediate context, “these things” to which the Beloved Disciple claims to be a witness refers to the preceding conversation of Peter and Jesus about that disciple “who also had leaned back on his chest at the supper” (John 21:20), whether or not he would remain until the Lord’s return (John 21:21–23). The additional comment at John 21:25, however, suggests that this disciple is responsible for writing more than just this one episode.²¹ From these “many other things which Jesus did,” the author selected episodes to which he could bear personal witness, organizing them so that his readers “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30–31).²² In short, assuming “the disciple Jesus loved” is the same as the unnamed disciple of John 1:35, and especially if he is John the son of Zebedee, he would have been an eyewitness of most (if not all) the events and teachings in the Fourth Gospel.²³

19. Ed Block Jr., “Review of James P. Carse, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997),” *Commonwealth* 125/10 (1998): 25.

20. Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 20:21–24 and the ‘Death’ of the Author,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. Graeme Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997), 386. He argues that the rumor of the death of the Beloved Disciple is similar to the death of the author among present day hermeneutics, or “how we are to preserve and do justice to the authoritative textual witness” (p. 367). “What is at stake in the death of the author, and the death of this author, the Beloved Disciple, in particular is the integrity and authority of the text” (p. 374).

21. De Jonge (“The Beloved Disciple and the Date of the Gospel of John,” 101 n. 4) notes, “In verse 24 as an editorial remark at the end of the present Gospel τῶντα can hardly refer to anything else but the contents of the book.”

22. Craig Blomberg (*The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 19–20) lists the following differences between John’s Gospel and the Synoptics: (1) John’s selection of material differs vastly from the Synoptics; (2) his theological distinctives prove striking; (3) his chronology appears to contradict the Synoptic framework; (4) John’s Gospel contains apparent historical discrepancies; and (5) John’s style of writing differs markedly from the Synoptics. Blomberg devotes his volume to discussing these distinctive features of John’s Gospel in relation to the Synoptics.

23. While Lincoln (*Truth on Trial*, 153) notes that the author closes with his own testimony to the lawsuit motif as “a key feature for interpreting the narrative as a whole and discerning its coherence,” he seems to overlook that this sort of witness can only be credible if the author is in fact a witness to the things he claims to testify.

Some, however, contend that because the "disciple Jesus loved" does not actually claim to be the author of the Gospel, he instead "caused" these things to be written, in the way Paul wrote Romans through Tertius (Rom 16:22) and Pilate "wrote" the placard over the head of Jesus on the cross (John 19:19) not by his own hand but through a secretarial intermediary.²⁴ In response, Bauckham argues compellingly that no evidence exists to show that γραφεῖν can be used for anything more remote than dictation of a text to a scribe.²⁵ In fact, the only other time γράψας (an aorist active participle, "the one having written") is used in the New Testament besides these two references is in Acts 23:25, where Claudius Lysias "wrote an epistle" to the "most excellent governor Felix." Whereas the commander may have dictated the letter through a scribe, it is certainly his autograph postscripted on the letter. Likewise, while Pilate may have dictated the text for the inscription placed above Jesus' head, he states emphatically, "What I have written I have written" (John 19:22), which sounds very much as if he himself insisted to stand behind his message, whether or not he wrote the notice himself. By the same token, one should assume the same to be true regarding the eyewitness who claims to have written the Gospel. Even if this disciple wrote down the Gospel by using the services of an amanuensis, he should still be regarded as the primary author and thus the authority standing behind the material he selected for inclusion.

Who Confirms the Author's Witness?

The claim to authorship is corroborated in the last sentence in John 21:24 ("we know his witness is true"), but this statement, in turn, raises the question, "Who are these confirming witnesses?"²⁶ Bauckham lists the following options: (1) the readers; (2) a body of elders; (3) a circle of eyewitnesses; or (4) the author referring to himself as the one providing authoritative

24. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 2:713.

25. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 361.

26. Proponents of various forms of the Johannine community hypothesis find in this verse support for their view that a group of followers of John the apostle compiled the Gospel subsequent to John's death. Cf., e.g., Raymond Brown (*The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978], 165–66) who gives quite an elaborate, if somewhat speculative, chart of this community. Oscar Cullmann (*The Johannine Circle* [trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 78) also posits a "Johannine circle" of disciples who surrounded this remarkable but unknown disciple of Jesus, who was closer to him than any of the Twelve, and claims that these disciples produced the Fourth Gospel using his testimonies and recollections (pp. 84–85). The entire thesis is challenged in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), as the various essays defend the position that each Gospel was written not for isolated communities, but for the entire Church, as the fourth evangelist seems to maintain in his conclusion. See also Köstenberger, "'I Suppose' (οἶμαι): The Conclusion of John's Gospel in Its Literary and Historical Context," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday* (ed. Pete J. Williams et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 72–82, 87–88; on the topic of that essay, see further below.

testimony, so that the first-person plural pronoun *we* serves as a substitute for the first-person singular *I*, a view Bauckham defends with evidence from contemporary literature and similar uses in the Johannine literature.²⁷

Indeed, as Andreas Köstenberger concludes after a careful consideration of all the available evidence, “taking ‘we’ as a self-reference of the evangelist is preferable, with the first-person plural functioning editorially, as in other places in the present Gospel or elsewhere in the NT.”²⁸ Köstenberger, building on a seminal essay by H. M. Jackson, also has provided a thorough study of the first-person authorial self-reference οἶμαι (“I suppose”) in John 21:25, concluding that the phrase is best understood as a device of authorial modesty, tying in the conclusion with the entire preceding Gospel.²⁹

The Author's Closing Supposition

In his conclusion to the entire Gospel in John 21:25, the author, strikingly, provides the only first-person reference to himself: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, *I suppose* (οἶμαι) that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written.”³⁰ In this, the writer gives a clue to his own identity—at the very least, he expects that his original readers know who he is, and even the modern reader quite naturally may reasonably be expected to ask, “Who is this writer who makes this supposition in the closing sentence of what is arguably the most-read book of the New Testament?”

Whereas, as mentioned, Lincoln contends that “the disciple Jesus loved” is merely a literary device of the author, invented to involve the reader as if a witness to the events of Jesus,³¹ Bauckham “strongly con-

27. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 369–70 (contemporary), 371–79 (Johannine).

28. Köstenberger, *John*, 604.

29. Idem, “οἶμαι,” 72–88; cf. H. M. Jackson, “Ancient Self-Referential Conventions and Their Implications for the Authorship and Integrity of the Gospel of John,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 1–34.

30. While some argue that the Fourth Gospel originally ended at John 20:31 and John 21 was a later addition, Bauckham (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 364) observes that there is no textual evidence for this: all the full manuscripts include chap. 21. He also notes that John 21:24 is an integral part of the Gospel, serving as a literary device to balance the opening prologue of prehistory (John 1:1–18) with this episode of posthistory (after the resurrection), extending it “until I come” (John 21:22–23; *ibid.*, p. 364). He also observes an interesting (if not convincing) piece of numerical evidence, namely, that the prologue contains 496 syllables and the epilogue 496 words, and that John 20:30–31 and 21:24–25 both contain 43 words, although these mathematical curiosities may be mere coincidences rather than part of a carefully crafted literary plan, as Bauckham contends (*ibid.*, pp. 364–65). The first ending closes the discussion on “signs,” and the second closes the matter of “things”; the first closes with references to the disciples; the second with the “disciple Jesus loved,” who is prominent in chap. 21. The first ends the testimonies of faith, “so that you [the reader] might believe”; the epilogue closes with the role of the prime witnesses (Peter and “the disciple Jesus loved”). The epilogue also takes the reader back to John 19:35, so that it is clear that chap. 21 is not a later addition. See also Köstenberger, *John*, 583–86, and the literature cited there.

31. A. T. Lincoln, “The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness,” 26.

tests" a view of this sort, noting that this disciple claims to be a true eyewitness (John 19:35) and that the issue of the truth is of keen importance to the author.³² Bauckham describes "the disciple Jesus loved" as the most "perceptive witness"³³ among the disciples, as the one who leaned on Jesus' chest in a place of significance around the table in the upper room (John 13:23). He is also the only disciple mentioned as an eyewitness of the crucifixion (John 19:35) and the one to whom Jesus entrusts the care of his mother (John 19:26–27). Subsequently, he becomes the first disciple to believe in the resurrection (20:2, 8). In this capacity, he is eminently qualified to give an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus, presented not so much as an ideal disciple as the "ideal author" of the Fourth Gospel.³⁴

At this point, Bauckham takes an unexpected turn by claiming that "the disciple Jesus loved" was not one of the Twelve and did not wish to claim that his Gospel was based on official apostolic witness.³⁵ This is a surprising deduction, especially because Bauckham has argued so convincingly that "the eyewitnesses and servants of the word" cited in Luke's prologue meant primarily the apostles. Bauckham, however, insists that the "disciple Jesus loved" waits for the end of the book to identify himself because he was *not* one of the Twelve but an obscure disciple unknown to the church at large and not even mentioned in the Synoptics. This seems to be odd reasoning, particularly because the author of this Gospel certainly gives far more clues to his identity than the writers of the Synoptics do for their own identification. Besides, this argument can cut equally the other way, in that the author does not need to identify himself because he was so well known by the early community as the disciple closest to Jesus—either argument being one from silence.

THE POSTAPOSTOLIC TESTIMONY

Having argued that "the disciple Jesus loved" is the author of the Fourth Gospel but not the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, Bauckham insists that this disciple is one of the two unidentified followers of Jesus listed in John 21:2.³⁶ This raises the related queries: "Why is it that the only name attached to this Gospel from the earliest time was that of John—and which John was intended?" Bauckham turns to the postapostolic Fathers for

32. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 405. The purpose of a witness is to testify to truth (John 3:33; 5:32–33; 8:14, 17; 15:26; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24). For the author, "seeing" is not a synonym for "believing" but instead refers to what one actually sees, so that what he saw with his eyes is the basis of his testimony (John 1:14, 3:11, 19:35, 20:8) and becomes his written testimony (John 21:24).

33. *Ibid.*, 395.

34. Richard Bauckham, "The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 24. The Beloved Disciple is qualified as an ideal witness because of his special intimacy with Jesus (p. 36); his presence at key events of Jesus' ministry (p. 37); and his perceptive spiritual insight (p. 38).

35. *Idem*, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 403.

36. *Ibid.*, 415.

support of his hypothesis that this John was the “disciple of Jesus whom Papias calls ‘John the Elder,’ who is one and the same as the Beloved Disciple,”³⁷ and it is to his reading of the patristic evidence that we now turn. As we will seek to demonstrate, contrary to Bauckham’s own assertions, his somewhat novel readings of the relevant passages in the Church Fathers are far from compelling and certainly anything but unassailable.

Papias on John

The pertinent source of the second-century Father Papias actually comes via Irenaeus and then thirdhand through the fourth-century historian Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1–5), who provides this information attributed to Papias, which reads in full as follows:

(1) Five books of Papias are in circulation, which are entitled *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*. Irenaeus also mentions these as the only works written by him, saying something like this: “Papias, a man of the early period, who was a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp, bears witness to these things in writing in the fourth of his books. For there are five books composed by him.” (2) So says Irenaeus. Yet Papias himself, in the preface to his discourses, indicates that he was by no means a hearer or eyewitness of the holy apostles, but shows by the language he uses that he received the matters of the faith from those who had known them: (3) “I will not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, everything I carefully learned then from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For unlike most people I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say, but those who teach the truth. Nor did I enjoy those who recall someone else’s commandments, but those who remember the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the truth itself. (4) And if by chance someone who had been a follower of the elders should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders—what Andrew or Peter said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples, and whatever Aristion and the elder John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and abiding voice.”³⁸

It should be noted that Papias mentions various elders who had heard the firsthand sayings of the Lord’s apostles: “Andrew or Peter said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples.” In addition, Papias mentions “Aristion and the elder John, the Lord’s disciples.” The question at this point is whether Papias here refers to two different individuals named John or if the reference is to one and the same

37. *Ibid.*, 416.

38. “Fragments of Papias,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes; 3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 733–35.

person.³⁹ The first "John" is included with other known apostles, making it all but certain that this reference pertains to John the son of Zebedee. The second individual named John is identified as "the Elder (*presbyteros*) John," who is associated with an otherwise unknown Aristion. We note that there is a change in verb tense from past ("said," εἶπεν) with regard to the witness of the first "John" to present ("is saying," λέγουσιν), which most take as implying that these two disciples of the Lord, Aristion and the Elder John, were still living.⁴⁰ If so, the distinction is not necessarily between two different individuals named "John" but between those among Jesus' first followers who are now deceased and two still living witnesses, which allows for the possibility that Papias refers to the same John twice, once as a member of the original Twelve and second as still being alive.⁴¹ In this case, "Aristion and John the elder" may mean something like "Aristion and the aforementioned elder John."⁴²

Bauckham notes that the order of the disciples listed by Papias is the order in which they appear in the Gospel of John (excluding Judas [not Iscariot]), and from this observation he surmises that "if Papias recognized the Beloved Disciple in the anonymous disciple of 1:35–39, he would have placed him first in the list."⁴³ Instead, he concludes, "It seems Papias has not included the Beloved Disciple in this list (21:2) and did not identify him as the son of Zebedee."⁴⁴ But this is a somewhat questionable way of putting things. In fact, it seems to be more accurate to say, "Papias did not mention 'the disciple Jesus loved' in this list and did not identify him with anyone at all." Papias has nothing to say about the identity of "the disciple Jesus loved," so he cannot be cited as giving any insight into his identity—although it is clear that Eusebius thinks that John, "the one Jesus loved," is also the apostle and evangelist (*Hist. eccl.* 3.23.1).⁴⁵ The silence of Papias

39. Eusebius suggests that these were two different Johns (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.5–6). His attempt at reconciling the two occurrences of the name John has held sway among biblical scholars, but too much confidence in this conclusion may be unwarranted. Since Eusebius was several centuries removed from Papias, his statement is more conjecture than fact. What is more, Eusebius was also subject to his own bias and agenda, as we will discuss below.

40. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 234.

41. Note that the terms "elder" and "apostle" are used synonymously in 1 Pet 5:1, on which, see further the discussion below. See Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 233–34, especially p. 234 n. 18: "Those who instead preserve a distinction between the apostles and the elders in Papias's words must introduce a couple of rather clumsy ellipses," with reference to Richard Bauckham, "The Eyewitnesses and the Gospel Traditions," *JSHJ* 1 (2003): 31–32. Note that Bauckham perpetrates the same conjectural emendation of the Papias quotation in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 16.

42. See Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 234, which also mentions the possibility that Papias may echo the language of 2 John 1 and 3 John 1 in calling John an "elder."

43. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 418.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Eusebius notes in *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.5, "Yet nevertheless of all those who had been with the Lord only Matthew and John have left us their recollections" (LCL [Lake]). Clearly, "those who had been with the Lord" includes the apostles Matthew and John, the ones listed in the

can cut both ways—not only to identify the unnamed disciple of John 1:39 as “the disciple Jesus loved” but also to suggest that the two unnamed disciples in John 21:2 are the other two whom Papias lists but who are not specifically named there, Nathaniel and Matthew. It is mere speculation to suggest that the unnamed disciples of John 21:2 are Aristion and John the Elder, because Papias mentions neither “the disciple Jesus loved” nor these unnamed disciples, nor is anything more known of either Aristion or John the Elder other than this single reference by Papias.

Bauckham, however, presses the issue by suggesting that an unnamed “elder” mentioned by Papias in *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4, 14 is this “John the Elder” who is the same as “the Elder” who also wrote 2 and 3 John.⁴⁶ Even if Papias believed this (which is far from certain), Eusebius does not give it much credence, noting, “Of the writings of John in addition to the gospel the first of his epistles has been accepted without controversy by ancients and moderns alike” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.24.17–18, LCL [Lake]).⁴⁷ Bauckham, however, argues that if John the son of Zebedee had written these epistles, one would expect him to identify himself as “the apostle” rather than as “the elder,” because the latter was a common title for a congregational leader.⁴⁸ However, it should be noted that Peter calls himself a “fellow elder” (ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος, 1 Pet 5:1), and Paul describes himself to Philemon as “the elder” or “older man” (πρεσβύτερος, Phlm 9). The record of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.23.3) is that “the apostle and evangelist John, the one whom Jesus loved, lived in Ephesus until the time of the emperor Trajan,” who came to power in A.D. 98, meaning that John the apostle could well have identified himself as “the elder” as a play of words on both his ecclesiastical office and his advanced age.

Gospels, not otherwise unknown disciples such as Aristion and John the Elder. He provides a helpful explanation why John was reluctant to write his memoirs of Jesus, as he did not want to replace the Synoptics, but instead provided a record of the ministry of Jesus before the execution of John the Baptist. Although Eusebius questions the identity of the John who wrote the Revelation, he quotes Dionysius as saying, “But I should not readily agree that he was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, whose are the Gospel entitled According to John and the Catholic Epistle,” because “the evangelist nowhere adds his name, nor yet proclaims himself, throughout either the Gospel or the Epistle” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.7–8). Also, “not even in the second or third extant epistles of John, although they are short, is John set forth by name; but he has written ‘the elder,’ without giving his name” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11, LCL [Lake]). (Neither Dionysius nor Eusebius make any connection here to Papias’s John the Elder.) What is more, the John of Revelation “did not say that he was, as is frequently said in the Gospel, the disciple loved by the Lord, nor he which leaned back on His breast, nor the brother of James, nor the eye-witness and hearer of the Lord” (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.12, LCL [Lake]). Whether Eusebius or Dionysius were mistaken regarding the Johannine authorship of Revelation is not at issue here; what is important is that both of them thought that John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, was one and the same as “the disciple Jesus loved” and the author of the Gospel that bears his name.

46. *Ibid.*, 421–22.

47. Moreover, as Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 234, note, Eusebius may have had his own agenda in that he so disliked the apocalyptic language of Revelation that he was trying to assign a different authorship to it by a John other than the apostle, seizing on the “John the elder” retrieved from Papias.

48. Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:23, 20:17, 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14.

Still, it is a quite a leap to assume that Papias's "John the Elder" is the same as "the disciple Jesus loved" when Papias does not mention this disciple at all. This being the case, when Bauckham declares that "what Papias said about the origin of John's Gospel was that John the Elder, the disciple of the Lord, wrote it,"⁴⁹ this is even a greater leap, because Papias is not discussing the literary sources of the New Testament. All this equation of "the disciple Jesus loved" with an otherwise unknown "John the Elder" mentioned only by Papias and distinguished from John the apostle is scholarly speculation, to say the least. As Joseph Grassi rightly observes, "No early church writing claims that he (John the presbyter) was the author of the Gospel of John. . . . Papias nowhere makes the claim that this John the presbyter was the author of the fourth gospel."⁵⁰ Of course, as has been suggested above, if Papias refers to only one John in the quotation in question, this would further cast doubt on the very existence of a "John the Elder" distinct from John the apostle, which would strengthen the argument for the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel even more.

The Muratorian Fragment on John

Bauckham next turns to the Muratorian Fragment, the earliest extant listing of the New Testament canon, dating from the late second century. The pertinent section concerning the Gospel of John reads as follows:

(9) The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. (10) To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], (11) he said: "Fast with me from today for three days, and what (12) will be revealed to each one (13) let us tell it to one another." In the same night it was revealed (14) to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, (15–16) that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, (18) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, (22) concerning life with his disciples, (23) and concerning his twofold coming; (24) the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, (25) the second glorious in royal power, (26) which is still in the future. What (27) marvel is it, then, if John so consistently (28) mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, (29) saying about himself: "What we have seen with our eyes (30) and heard with our ears and our hands (31) have

49. *Ibid.*, 433.

50. Joseph A. Grassi, *The Secret Identity of the Beloved Disciple* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 14. Despite giving a penetrating character sketch of "the disciple Jesus loved" as one of the most powerful minds of early Christianity, Grassi concludes that "he was certainly not John, son of Zebedee and one of the twelve" (p. 115), although he cannot explain why this great man of thought and spirit inexplicably disappeared from church records.

handled, these things we have written to you"? (32) For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, (33) but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.⁵¹

Bauckham contends that this fragment draws a striking contrast between "John one of the disciples" (line 10) and Andrew, "one of the apostles," in order to distinguish this John (who Bauckham suggests is Papias's John the Elder) from John the apostle.⁵² However, Bauckham overlooks the order of individuals listed here: first is "John, one of the disciples," who is urged by a second group consisting of "fellow disciples and bishops" (*condiscipulis et episcopis*), who then, along with Andrew the apostle and "with all of them reviewing it" (*ut recognoscentibus cunctis*), urged John to describe all things in his own name. The contrast that this fragment draws is not between "John one of the disciples" and Andrew "one of the apostles," but with the group that lies between them, "the fellow disciples and bishops." The fragment provides insufficient information to determine whether the author meant to deny apostleship to "John the disciple" by contrast with "Andrew the apostle," particularly because the New Testament calls the Twelve both apostles and disciples (Luke 22:11, 14). Anyone not reading this fragment on the prior assumption of the two Johns mentioned by Papias (one the apostle and the other the elder) may well conclude that this "John the disciple" is also John the apostle.

If anything, the Muratorian Fragment gives a possible explanation to the confirming postscript in John 21:24 ("We know that his testimony is true") as referring to the "fellow disciples and bishops" who reviewed John's writing.⁵³ Because Bauckham concludes that the "we" in John 21:24 does not refer to an authoritative group confirming John's testimony, he denies this implication of the statement, that "all should certify what John wrote in his own name."⁵⁴ What is more, by calling Andrew "the apostle," the fragment gives confirmation to the revelation Andrew received urging John to write his Gospel. In a case of this sort, the only John intended here by the Muratorian Fragment would be John the son of Zebedee.

Polycrates on John

To garner further support for his view that the "disciple Jesus loved" of John's Gospel is Papias's John the Elder, Bauckham next quotes Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.1–7, where Eusebius cites Polycrates, who served as bishop of Ephesus in the late second century.⁵⁵ The pertinent section reads as follows: "John, who lay on the Lord's breast, who was a priest wearing the breastplate, and a martyr, and teacher. He sleeps at Ephesus" (LCL [Lake]).

51. Translation taken from Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 306.

52. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 429.

53. The authors of this essay, however, stand by the earlier suggestion that this "we" serves as a self-reference of the evangelist, as defended by Köstenberger, "οἱμαί," 72–88.

54. *Ibid.*, 430.

55. *Ibid.*, 439.

Clearly, Polycrates identifies this John as "the disciple Jesus loved" (John 13:23) but adds that he was a priest who wore the *petalon* of the high priest.

Some think that Polycrates confuses this John with the one mentioned in Acts 4:6, "Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and *John* and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent," especially because Josephus reports that a Jonathan son of Annas served briefly as high priest. It is most unlikely that this Jonathan was a disciple of Jesus, but Polycrates makes the fascinating suggestion that John son of Zebedee, although a fisherman by trade, was also a member of the priestly order, like Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5).⁵⁶

If so, and if John son of Zebedee is the unnamed disciple mentioned in John 18:15, this might explain how he gained access to the courtyard of the high priest as one who was known by the high priest. Bauckham, however, surmises that Polycrates did not think this John was the son of Zebedee,⁵⁷ but what is clear is that Polycrates thought that the name of "the disciple Jesus loved" was John, even though John's Gospel does not name "the disciple Jesus loved." It seems far more likely that Polycrates referred to John son of Zebedee rather than to an otherwise unknown "John the Elder."

Irenaeus on John

In order to gain further support for his position that the "disciple Jesus loved" was an otherwise unknown John, Bauckham appeals to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*) and his brief statement about the apostolic origins of the four Gospels. The passage reads as follows:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterward, John the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.⁵⁸

56. Blomberg (*Historical Reliability*, 35) notes,

It is at least suggestive to observe that if one be permitted to 'harmonize' the list of women standing by the cross in the various Gospels, the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25) is equated with Salome, the mother of James and John (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40). But Luke 1:36 also calls Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah the priest and herself a descendant of Aaron (v. 5), a relative of Mary. The upshot is that the sons of Zebedee were relatives to at least one priestly family in Judea (v. 39). It is not impossible that such connections led to some kind of acquaintance with the household of Caiaphas.

If true, this would mean that Polycrates' identification of John as a priest is not so farfetched after all.

57. *Ibid.*, 444.

58. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; trans. A. Cleveland Cox; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 3.1.1. on p. 1:414.

What is evident is that Irenaeus gives a name and title to “the disciple Jesus loved” who leaned on Jesus’ chest: “John the disciple.” After Bauckham gives an excellent summary of what Irenaeus wrote about John, he deduces, “We should make it clear that none of Irenaeus’s references to John that we have been considering indicate that he was John the son of Zebedee.”⁵⁹

This is an astounding assertion, because Irenaeus never mentions Papias’s John the Elder but instead uses “John the disciple” to distinguish this individual from “John the Baptist.” Had Papias not written of “John the Elder,” no one would think that Irenaeus meant any John other than the son of Zebedee, whom he mentions five times, but Bauckham argues that there is nothing in these occurrences to suggest that this John is the same person as John of Ephesus, “the disciple Jesus loved” and the author of John’s Gospel.

Instead, Bauckham contends that “for the members of the church of Ephesus and of the churches in the province of Asia generally, *the* disciple of the Lord was their own John (this would be John the Elder), the one who reclined on the Lord’s breast and wrote his Gospel in Ephesus.”⁶⁰ Bauckham must bear the burden of proof to show unmistakably that this “Ephesian” John is also Papias’s “John the Elder” and not John the son of Zebedee, because Irenaeus makes no distinction between “John the disciple,” John the apostle, and John the author of the Gospel, “the disciple Jesus loved.”

In fact, Irenaeus makes no connection with Papias’s John the Elder, most likely because there was no connection of this sort to be made—he never even mentions a person such as this, although he knew about Papias’s writings and thus, presumably, about John the Elder.⁶¹ Instead, when Irenaeus wants to distinguish John the apostle from John the Baptist, Irenaeus consistently describes him as “John the disciple.”⁶²

In fact, in *Haer.* 2.22.5, he discusses “those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan.”⁶³ The identity of this John is unmistakable when Irenaeus continues in the next sentence, “Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but *the other apostles* also, and heard the very same account from

59. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 458.

60. *Ibid.*, 460 (emphasis Bauckham’s).

61. At no time does Irenaeus ever mention “John the Elder,” and he mentions Papias only once (*Haer.* 5.33.4).

62. *Ibid.*, 1.8.5 (quoting John 1:1, 1:14), 9.2, 17.3 (citing 2 John), 2.2.5 (quoting John 1:4), *Haer.* 2.22.3 (citing John 2:23).

63. De Jonge (“The Beloved Disciple and the Date of the Gospel of John,” 110) dismisses this connection, asserting, “We cannot connect [John] xxi.24 with Irenaeus’s statement that the Apostle John remained (*παρამείναντος*) with the Church of Ephesus until the time of Trajan and conclude that he must have died as an old man a considerable time after Peter’s death.” Granted, the connection of Irenaeus with the Beloved Disciple is outside the perimeters of de Jonge’s study, but this cavalier comment, made without any support, is surely condescending to Eusebius.

them, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement." The same connection is seen in *Lost Writings* of Irenaeus: "For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp to forego the observance [in his own way], inasmuch as these things had been always [so] observed by John the disciple of our Lord, and *by other apostles* with whom he had been conversant."⁶⁴

After Bauckham lists Irenaeus's identifications of John as an apostle in *Haer.* (1.9.2.3, 3.21.3, 3.5.1, 3.11.9, 3.22.5, 3.3.4 [twice]), and in his *Letter to Victor*, he states, "it is clear that John the author of the Gospel of John is meant."⁶⁵ Rather than conclude that this John must be one of the apostles—which is the natural interpretation—Bauckham insists that Irenaeus means by "apostles" not the Twelve, but the wider circle of the 70 (Luke 10:1, 17), because Irenaeus also calls Barnabas an apostle.

Granted, the New Testament labels people besides the Twelve as apostles, notably Paul, possibly "Andronicus and Junias . . . who are outstanding among the apostles" (Rom 16:7),⁶⁶ and James, the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19). It is also likely that Paul includes Barnabas among "the rest of the apostles" in 1 Cor 9:5–6. At question, however, is whether Irenaeus meant some other John (Papias's John the Elder?) in all these references when the most natural reading suggests that he intended to refer to John the son of Zebedee. It seems reasonable to conclude that few (if any) of Irenaeus's first readers would assume he meant anyone else.

Bauckham, however, takes the opposite tack, insisting, "If we come to Irenaeus instead with the knowledge that the John who resided in Ephesus and was known as the author of the Gospel in local tradition was not John the son of Zebedee, then nothing that Irenaeus says either about John 'the disciple of the Lord' or about John the son of Zebedee even suggests that they might be the same person."⁶⁷ This statement, however, reads far too much of Papias into Irenaeus.

Conclusion

Bauckham's primary argument is that the ante-Nicene Fathers (Clement, Justin, Irenaeus, Papias, and others) all seem to know of a John, a disciple of Jesus, who lived in Ephesus toward the end of the first century. They variously identify this John as an apostle, as the author of the Fourth Gospel, and as the "disciple Jesus loved" who leaned on Jesus' chest.

64. *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1: *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 569.

65. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 461.

66. However, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Women in the Pauline Mission," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* (ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 229–31, who suggests that a nontechnical sense of ἀποστόλος is more likely in Rom 16:7.

67. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 462–63.

After mentioning a "John" as one of the apostles, Papias refers to a "John the Elder," and Eusebius makes distinct note of this:

5 Here it is worth noting that he [Papias] lists twice the name of John. The first he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the Evangelist, but he classes the other John with others outside the number of the apostles by changing the wording and putting Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him "elder." 6 Moreover, by these remarks he confirms the truth of the story told by those who have said that there were two men in Asia who had the same name, and there are two tombs in Ephesus, each of which even today is said to be John's. It is important to notice this, for it is probably the second, unless one prefers the first, who saw the Revelation that circulates under the name of John. 7 And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, acknowledges that he had received the words of the apostles from those who had followed them, but he says that he was himself a hearer of Aristion and John the Elder. In any event he frequently mentions them by name and includes their traditions in his writings as well. (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.5)⁶⁸

Eusebius hopes to clear up any confusion between the two Johns: the one he believes to be the evangelist (the author of the Gospel) is John the apostle, the son of Zebedee.

Bauckham, however, suggests that Eusebius was confused as to which John wrote the Gospel and argues that Papias's John the Elder is "the Elder" of 2 and 3 John, the author of the Fourth Gospel, and the "disciple Jesus loved." However, had Papias not made one reference to "John the Elder," there would be no question that John the disciple/apostle mentioned by the patristic writers would be the same as John the son of Zebedee mentioned in the Gospels.

In sum, the evidence from the Church Fathers is nearly unanimous, as Blomberg notes: "The external evidence must be deemed to opt overwhelmingly in favour of John, the son of Zebedee, as author of this document."⁶⁹

THE CASE FOR JOHANNINE APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP

Because, from earliest times, the Church Fathers attribute the Fourth Gospel to John the son of Zebedee, what gave rise to this virtually unanimous tradition? Can the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel be successfully defended from evidence within the Gospel itself? The classic formulation of this case has been provided by B. F. Westcott, who contended that

68. "The Fragments of Papias," 735–37. While Eusebius notes that Papias "frequently mentions" Aristion and John the Elder, in the extant fragments Papias mentions them only once. It is vain to speculate what else Papias may have written about John the Elder because these works are now lost.

69. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 26.

the authorship of the Fourth Gospel rests first and foremost on indirect internal evidence⁷⁰ and who listed the following pieces of evidence: (a) The author was a Jew, because he shows familiarity with messianic expectations, Jewish observances, Hebrew expressions, and the Old Testament and identifies with the Jewish people (John 4:22).⁷¹ (b) The author was a Jew of Palestine, because he mentions places and events, showing knowledge of Jewish customs and doctrines.⁷² (c) The author was an eyewitness, "marked by minute details of persons, and time, and number, and place and manner, which cannot but have come from a direct experience."⁷³ (d) The author was an apostle, shown by intimate acquaintance which he exhibits with the thoughts, conversations, and feelings of the disciples and the Lord.⁷⁴ Finally, (e) the author was the apostle John, although he is not mentioned by name in the Gospel; instead, the only "John" in John's Gospel is the Baptist.

Bauckham himself provides an unwitting key in his observation regarding the literary device of the "inclusio of eyewitness testimony," that is, the practice of a given evangelist to indicate his primary eyewitness source by his first and last reference to a named disciple in his Gospel.⁷⁵ For example, in each of the Synoptic Gospels, Simon Peter is the first (Matt 4:18, Mark 1:16, Luke 5:40) and the last (Matt 26:75, Mark 16:7, Luke 24:34) named disciple/apostle. John's Gospel, however, opens and closes with Peter *next to last*, as he is introduced *subsequent to* an unnamed disciple (John 1:35, 37, 40) and is mentioned next to last at the end of the Fourth Gospel when Peter asks about "this man" (John 21:21) who identifies himself as the disciple "who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things" (John 21:24) and ventures his closing supposition (John 21:25).

When compared with the Synoptics, who else besides Peter is present both at the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry? Every one of the Synoptists records that the brother of Peter, Andrew (Matt 4:18, Mark 1:16, Luke 6:14), and the two sons of Zebedee were also present (Matt 4:21, Mark 1:19, Luke 5:10). John mentions that Jesus' first followers were two disciples of John the Baptist, one of whom is identified as Andrew, who brought his brother Simon/Peter to Jesus (John 1:41). Even though John 1:44–45 also refers to Philip and Nathaniel by name (John 1:44–45), the other disciple associated with Andrew remains unnamed, and the reasonable assumption is

70. B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951). The objection that the author would not have identified himself as "the disciple Jesus loved" is met by Westcott's reply that this designation is not a title of distinction but of "personal thanksgiving for a blessing which the Evangelist had experienced" (p. xxiv). The direct evidence of authorship appears in John 1:14 ("we behold his glory"); 19:35; and 21:24. As Blomberg (*Historical Reliability*, 27) notes, "No full-scale refutation of Westcott has ever appeared, although important segments of his argument have been scrutinized."

71. Westcott, *Gospel According to St. John*, v–x.

72. *Ibid.*, x–xviii.

73. *Ibid.*, xviii.

74. *Ibid.*, xxi.

75. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 390.

that this must either be James or John the son of Zebedee as reported by the Synoptics.

The difficulty arises when Bauckham equates this unnamed disciple with one of the two unnamed disciples in John 21:2, Andrew presumably being the other one, as he is in John 1:40, thus eliminating John son of Zebedee as the writer of the Gospel, because he is mentioned in John 21:2.⁷⁶ Whereas this may seem to be a reasonable connection, “the disciple Jesus loved” cannot be one of these unnamed disciples in John 21:2 if he can be identified as John the son of Zebedee in John 1:35, because all the Synoptics specifically mention James and John as being present along with Andrew and Peter at the initial ministry of Jesus. The question, then, is whether “the disciple Jesus loved” is to be identified as one of the sons of Zebedee or with one of the two other unnamed disciples. Which is more likely, given the portrayal of “the disciple Jesus loved” throughout John’s Gospel?

Because “the disciple Jesus loved” had a special place in the ministry of Jesus as one who leaned on his chest in the upper room, it is a natural assumption to include this disciple in Jesus’ inner circle, which consisted of Peter, James, and John as reported in the Synoptics.⁷⁷ John’s pairing with Peter in both the Gospels and Acts also lends support to the identification of “the disciple Jesus loved” with John the son of Zebedee, but the primary exegetical support comes when the Synoptics concur that only the twelve apostles were present in the upper room.⁷⁸ If this record is accurate—and there is no good reason to doubt that it is—then when John 13:5 reports that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at that Passover, the disciple whom Jesus loved and who reclined on his chest would have to be one of the Twelve. On exegetical grounds, this eliminates the other suggestions that “the disciple Jesus loved” is Lazarus or John the Elder.

Which of the Twelve was “the disciple Jesus loved”? Judas Iscariot is eliminated by John 13:26, as is Simon Peter, who asked “the disciple Jesus loved,” “Tell us who it is of whom he is speaking” (John 13:24). Assuming that disciple is not one of the named disciples in John’s Gospel, this would eliminate Thomas (John 14:5), Andrew (John 1:40, 44; 6:8, 12:22), and Judas (not Iscariot; John 14:22; called Judas the son of James in Luke 6:16). If the Bartholomew mentioned in the Synoptics is the same as Nathaniel of John 1:45–49 and 21:2 and if Matthew is ruled out because he is credited by the early church with being the author of the First Gospel, this means “the disciple Jesus loved” is either James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:14–15) or one of the two sons of Zebedee, James and John.

76. *Ibid.*, 391.

77. They are together at the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:37 // Luke 8:51); the transfiguration (Matt 17:1 // Mark 9:2 // Luke 9:28); the Olivet discourse (Mark 13:3; includes Andrew); and at Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).

78. Matt 26:20: “Now when evening had come, he was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.” Mark 14:17: “when it was evening he came (to the room) with the *twelve*.” Luke is more specific: “And when the hour had come he reclined at the table, and the *apostles* with him” (Luke 22:14).

Here, Bauckham's argument holds some weight in that John 21:2 lists "the sons of Zebedee" as being present at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Because any named apostle has been eliminated as the author, would this mean that John must be ruled out as well? It should not go unnoticed, however, that in each other instance the *first name* is mentioned and not the family name, so that this citation need not eliminate John as "the disciple Jesus loved"—if anything, the writer gives a substantial clue to his identity. Of these four remaining disciples, the New Testament reports nothing more about James the son of Alphaeus and about Simon the Zealot other than their names, and Acts 12:2 reports that James the son of Zebedee was martyred by Herod decades before the likely date of composition for John's Gospel. Thus, the process of elimination leaves but one nominee as "the disciple Jesus loved": John the son of Zebedee. This was the testimony of the Church Fathers, and it is a natural deduction from a natural reading of the Gospels that the Beloved Disciple surely must be one of the Twelve and one of the three whom Jesus includes in his closest circle. Hence, John son of Zebedee becomes the most likely choice.

Yet, for a variety of reasons, critical scholarship cannot bear this conclusion. For example, although Hengel attributes the Fourth Gospel to an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry whom he describes as "the greatest theological thinker in the earliest church alongside Paul,"⁷⁹ he cannot bring himself to identify the author as John the son of Zebedee, although he recognizes that this was the predominant view from the middle of the second century onward—hence he suggests Papias's John the Elder. Hengel concedes, however, that this John the Elder wanted to point to the son of Zebedee as the ideal disciple so that John's followers soon identified him as (and eventually confused him with) "the disciple Jesus loved."⁸⁰ According to Hengel, who speaks of John's "dual face" (*Doppelantlitz*) in the Fourth Gospel, the two Johns are all but indistinguishable for the reader of his Gospel.⁸¹

Which John is more likely as the author of a Gospel record—an unknown John the Elder, or John the son of Zebedee, known as one of three "pillars" of the Jerusalem Church (Gal 2:9)? As one of the three disciples in Jesus' inner circle, along with Peter and James, John would have witnessed in greater number and detail more signs performed by Jesus, making him an ideal candidate to record his memoirs, as a witness 'who supplies first-hand contact with the events of Jesus' history, a point made by Bauckham

79. Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM / Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 96. Bauckham, "The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author," 21, credits his own view, that the author of the Fourth Gospel is John the Elder, to Hengel.

80. Hengel, *Johannine Question*, 130.

81. Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 317 passim. For a review of Hengel's view, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Review of Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage*," *JETS* 39 (1996): 154–55, in which the reviewer suggests that Hengel's unquestioned erudition may have complicated matters unnecessarily (referring to Acts 26:24).

himself.⁸² Who would be more suitable (and believable) to bear such vivid eyewitness testimony: a recognized (if unnamed) apostle of Jesus—whom the original readers would readily identify—or an anonymous disciple whose name was strangely forgotten by the third generation of the church?

CONCLUSION

After building a very convincing case for the presence of “the disciple Jesus loved” at virtually all the major junctures of Jesus’ ministry (his baptism, the upper room, the high priest’s courtyard, the crucifixion, and the resurrection) and having concluded that this “disciple Jesus loved” was the primary witness behind the Fourth Gospel and also its author, Richard Bauckham rather surprisingly and unexpectedly backs away from identifying “the disciple Jesus loved” as John the son of Zebedee.⁸³ Instead, he argues that, because the author of the Fourth Gospel does not name the Twelve, he does not wish to be considered as an official witness of the apostolic circle but only remembered as a close disciple of Jesus not mentioned by the Synoptics.

This begs the basic question raised by the epilogue to the Fourth Gospel: “Who is this disciple who claims to provide eyewitness testimony of the life of Jesus?” Why should the reader believe his testimony and place his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31)? Bauckham’s book, while brilliant at many points, would have been much more valuable in the present case if he had spent less time seeking to disprove that “the disciple Jesus loved” was John the son of Zebedee and instead had attempted to bolster his main argument that the Gospels present eyewitness testimony, in keeping with the Beloved Disciple’s claim. By rejecting apostolic authorship, Bauckham unnecessarily foists a problem on the New Testament: that a disciple who was not one of the Twelve was not only present in the upper room—when Matt 26:20 and Mark 14:17 state it was only the Twelve, identified in Luke 22:14 as “the apostles”—but leaned on Jesus’ chest in a place of high honor.⁸⁴

Proportionately, Bauckham places far too much weight on Papias’s designation of “John the Elder” as being a person separate from John the son of Zebedee and then reads this identification into other early Fathers

82. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 389. He contends on p. 390 n. 6 that Andreas J. Köstenberger (*The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 150–51) contests this assertion but can only “do so by an argument from analogy and not from actual Johannine usage.” An examination of Köstenberger’s argument shows, however, that he makes numerous references to actual Johannine usage.

83. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 384.

84. In personal conversation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature on November 20, 2007 in San Diego, CA, Bauckham suggested to one of the authors (Andreas Köstenberger) that the “beloved disciple” at Jesus’ side at the Last Supper was the host who had rented the Upper Room to Jesus and his followers. However, while this is an ingenious proposal, it is entirely without textual support and in fact is contradicted by the unanimous testimony of the Synoptists.

when they, with high probability, refer to John the apostle. Bauckham could have gone the other direction and found great support for apostolic eyewitness testimony behind John's Gospel rather than defending authorship by a mysterious John the Elder who is not John the son of Zebedee. In this, Bauckham overlooks (or at least recognizes inadequately) the question that, if this unknown John was the real author, why would the early church authorize this Gospel (as the Muratorian Canon and other canonical lists indicate) and credit it to John the apostle?

One final point speaks decisively against Bauckham's thesis, in our view. Why, if John the apostle is not the author, is he left unmentioned (apart from the oblique reference in John 21:2) in the Fourth Gospel? For an apostle who, according to the unanimous testimony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, played such a key role in Jesus' ministry and was a member of the inner circle of the Twelve not even to be named or featured in John's narrative at all is more than remarkable; and then to believe that the "disciple Jesus loved" is instead *another* John who is virtually unknown otherwise and not a member of the Twelve is just too much to swallow. Bauckham has to come up with an adequate reason for the conspicuous alleged silence about John the apostle in the Fourth Gospel, and he has not done so.

We conclude that, even though the reader cannot say with absolute certainty that the author of the Fourth Gospel is the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, because the author does not explicitly provide his name, he certainly leaves more than enough hints to narrow the list. The author is an eyewitness of Jesus, "the disciple Jesus loved," who writes with apostolic authority. After all the other names are eliminated, one "towering figure"⁸⁵ remains: the apostle John, the one who had the ear of Jesus and leaned close to his chest. In keeping with both the Synoptic and the patristic testimony, properly interpreted, it is this John who is "the disciple Jesus loved"—he is the witness, the author, and the apostle behind the Gospel. This, of course, is what the Church has widely affirmed for almost two millennia, a fact that even as brilliant a scholar as Bauckham is unlikely to change.

85. In this regard, Hengel's description of the author (*Johannine Question*, 84) is certainly fitting.