

I have given evidence so far that the Gospel of John is not a single composition written by a single author sitting down to produce the account at a single time, but is made up of written sources that have all been edited together into the finished product. Here I lay out a bit more information about the sources that appear to lie behind this account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Thus the theory of written sources behind the Fourth Gospel can explain many of the literary problems of the narrative. These sources obviously no longer survive. What can we say about them?

Character of the Sources in John

(1) The Signs Source. Some of the seams that we have observed appear to suggest that the author incorporated a source that described the signs of Jesus, written to persuade people that he was the messiah, the Son of God. There are seven "signs" in the Gospel; it is possible that these were all original to the source. You may recall that "seven" is the perfect number, the number of God: is it an accident that there were seven signs?

The source may have simply described the signs that Jesus did, in sequence, enumerating them as it went ("This is the first sign that Jesus did," "This is the second sign," etc.). If so, the evangelist kept the first two enumerations (2:11 and 4:54) but for some unknown reason eliminated the others. Keeping the first two, however, left a seam in his narrative, since Jesus does other "signs" between them (2:23).

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