I've been asked about who wrote the book of Revelation. Here are some musings on it, the first part taken from my textbook on the New Testament.

Even though the book of Revelation was finally included in the New Testament canon because Christian leaders came to think it had been written by Jesus’ disciple, John the son of Zebedee, there were outspoken dissenters against its inclusion. Perhaps the most famous was Dionysius, a bishop of the city of Alexandria (Egypt) in the mid-third century, whose remarks about the book have a surprisingly modern feel to them. Dionysius used the author’s self-presentation and his Greek writing style to show that he was not the writer of the Fourth Gospel (whom Dionysius assumed was the disciple John). His conclusion? There must have been two different early Christian leaders named John, both of whom were active in Asia Minor, whence both the Gospel and Revelation derived. The following quotations are drawn from Dionysius’s writings, as quoted by the fourth-century church historian Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 7.25).

The one who wrote these things [i.e., the book of Revelation] calls himself John, and we should believe him. But it is not clear which John he was. For he doesn’t call himself the disciple whom the Lord loved—as happens often in the Gospel—nor does he say that he was the one who leaned on Jesus’ breast or that he was the brother of James, who both saw and heard the Lord. But surely he would have described himself in one of these ways if he had wanted to make himself clearly known. . . . I think [therefore] that there must have been another John living among the Christians in Asia Minor, just as they say that there are two different tombs in Ephesus, both of them allegedly John’s.

The phrasing itself also helps to differentiate between the Gospel and Epistle [of John] on the one hand and the book of Revelation on the other. The first two are written not only without errors in the Greek, but also with real skill with respect to vocabulary, logic, and coherence of meaning. You won’t find any barbaric expression, grammatical flaw, or vulgar expression in them. . . . I don’t deny that this other author had revelations . . . but I notice that in neither language nor style does he write accurate Greek. He makes use of barbaric expressions and is sometimes guilty even of grammatical error. . . . I don’t say this in order to accuse him (far from it!), but simply to demonstrate that the two books are not at all similar.

Today, *part* of Dionysius’s views are widely held. Whoever wrote Revelation did not also write the Gospel of John. The writings styles really are massively different; whoever wrote Revelation (unlike the author of the Gospel) did not have Greek as his first language.

And there is another reason, something that Dionysius does *not* emphasize: the eschatological views are radically different. John is against the apocalyptic views of Jesus found in Matthew and Mark, for example; whereas Revelation promotes such apocalyptic ideas – even more than the earlier Gospels. The apocalypse is entirely what the book is about.

So two different authors. Was one of them John the son of Zebedee? Almost certainly not. Virtually the one thing the traditions agree on about John is that he was a fisherman in rural Galilee. That means he was almost certainly a lower-class day laborer (working in a rural part of a remote area of the empire). Such people did not receive an education. Learning to
read and write – i.e. to *compose* — took many years of education. Day laborers couldn’t afford the time and money. Only the urban elites educated their young. John was not among that class. Very few people were – fewer than 95% of the entire population (and again, only ones living in cities).

Conclusion: John did not write the book of Revelation. But, well, a different John did!

A Bit of Fun with 666!
The Lake of Fire in Revelation