

## Introduction to the Epistles of John

**Who is Author:** John, the Apostle AD 5-~100. Recognized as the author by early Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen and his pupil Dionysius.

**Who is John:** As we study this letter we will see that the author knew Jesus very well, spent time with Him, and knew what Jesus taught. The author of 1<sup>st</sup> John claims to be an eyewitness of Christ in the epistle of **1 John 1:1-3** (NASB) <sup>1</sup> *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— <sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— <sup>3</sup> what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

We will see that the author writes with the authority of one who was an older spiritual leader of the church; as well as seeing terminology that coincides with the Gospel of John.

**What is John's lineage:** John the apostle, was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James and was one of Jesus' youngest followers. Born in his father Zebedee's family in the Bethsaida area near the Sea of Galilee. From **Matthew 27:56** (NASB) <sup>56</sup> *Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee and **Mark 15:40** <sup>40</sup> *There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome, we can determine that John's mother was named Salome. **John 19:25** <sup>25</sup> *Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene* this would indicate that she was also the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary. So, it is likely that John may have been Jesus' first cousin.**

But since scripture does not define him as such, it is all supposition based on scripture. However, we see in **John 19:26-27** <sup>26</sup> *When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.* Jesus didn't just say it because they were all standing together, and it seemed a nice thing to do but because they were family.

The sons of Zebedee were among the first disciples that were called **Matthew 4:21-22** <sup>21</sup> *Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.* And in **Mark 1:19-20** <sup>19</sup> *Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in*

*the boat mending the nets.* <sup>20</sup> *Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.* They were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, probably living in Capernaum. Their father apparently was prosperous enough to have ‘hired men’, and in **Luke 5:9-11** <sup>9</sup> *For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken;* <sup>10</sup> *and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.* And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” <sup>11</sup> *When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him* it states that James and John were partners with Simon (Peter).

**What does Scripture say about John:** John may have been among the youngest called but he was not the effeminate, meek figure that the classical painters Ruben and Da Vinci portrayed. Jesus Himself gave to the sons of Zebedee the surname or nickname of Boanerges, “sons of thunder” **Mark 3:16-17** <sup>6</sup> *And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), <sup>17</sup> and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”).*

When a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus, they (James & John) asked, “*Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?*” **Luke 9:54**. The only words in the four Gospels attributed specifically to John are: **Mark 9:38** <sup>38</sup> *John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.”* And repeated in **Luke 9:49** <sup>49</sup> *John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.”*

On another occasion the two brothers asked to sit in places of honor, on Jesus’ left and right in His glory **Mark 10:35-41** <sup>35</sup> *James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, \*came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.”* <sup>36</sup> *And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”* <sup>37</sup> *They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”* <sup>38</sup> *But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* <sup>39</sup> *They said to Him, “We are able.”* And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.” <sup>40</sup> *But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* <sup>41</sup> *Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John*

and we also see in **Matthew 20:20-23** <sup>20</sup> *Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.* <sup>21</sup> *And He said to her, “What do you wish?”* She *\*said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”* <sup>22</sup> *But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”* They *\*said to Him, “We are able.”* <sup>23</sup> *He \*said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to*

*give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”* On each of these occasions Jesus challenged or rebuked John.

**Luke 22:8** <sup>8</sup> *And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it.”* identifies Peter and John as the two disciples who were sent to prepare the Passover meal for Jesus and the disciples. Jesus taught John and the other disciples knowledge about God and His kingdom, the need to repent of sin, and salvation as a gift of God.

Jesus ordained John as one of his 12 apostles, sent out to preach the good news and heal people by the power of God. Jesus also allowed John to be one of three favored friends whom He took with Him up a mountain as He was transfigured and temporarily revealed in His glory as the Son of God. The three apostles were also present with Jesus when He resurrected Jairus' daughter, and later at the scene of his prayers in the garden of Gethsemane

**What do Historical sources say:** John was one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem following the ascension of Christ to heaven’ says Paul in **Galatians 2:9** <sup>9</sup> *and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

John left Jerusalem sometime before the Roman legions destroyed the city in AD 70, and most likely relocated to Ephesus, where he spent the last years of his life. The emperor Domitian (reigned AD 81-96) was known to persecute Christians. It is said that he took John to Rome and put him into a vat of boiling oil in the Colosseum to entertain the crowds – but John walked about without harm. Then he banished John to the island known as Patmos of the coast of Asia Minor – which John refers to as his location when he wrote the Book of The Revelation.

John was the last apostle living who had been with Jesus. According to tradition, John lived to an old age in Ephesus, where he preached love and fought heresy, especially the teachings of Cerinthus. Legends about the apostle continued to develop long after his death. The tomb of John was the site of a fourth-century church over which Justinian built the splendid basilica of St. John. The ruins of this basilica are still visible in Ephesus today.

**When were these letters written:** The most commonly accepted date is probably AD 85-100. However, some historians have given the case for a time between AD 60-70. But whatever the date these epistles give truths which are timeless.

**Where were they written:** Early church tradition associates John with the Roman province of Asia (in Western Turkey), and many of his readers lived in this region. So, it is believed that these letters were written to Christian Believers from the city of Ephesus where it is believed that John spent his last years ministering to the churches of Asia Minor. These are general epistles meaning that they are written to all Christian believers not just to a particular church; even though we can be sure that John would have known who he was sending the letters to, and that John intended for the letters to be distributed. This larger audience could then receive the instructions from the letter while at the same time being encouraged to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and their Spirit-taught leadership.

**Purposes:** 1<sup>st</sup> John – that our joy may be complete, that we may not sin, to defend the faith, strengthen the church against false doctrine, teachers/teaching, and that we would believe in Christ Jesus.

2<sup>nd</sup> John – to commend a lady in the church for taking a stand against false teachers, and to urge her to continue to stand against them; the importance of refusing hospitality to false teachers; to walk in truth, obey the commandments, love each other, and guard themselves against deception.

3<sup>rd</sup> John – to warn against rejecting true ministers and spiritual leadership

**Themes:** 1<sup>st</sup> John – Combat false teachers & Doctrinal Error; Christian Assurance in Jesus; Examination of what we know both personally & spiritually.

2<sup>nd</sup> John – the heart of a pastor who recognizes a lady in the Lord and the errors she saw and called out regarding Traveling Ministers.

3<sup>rd</sup> John – written from a pastor who has been rejected and now appeals to another leader regarding – prophets, teachers, evangelists & missionaries – warning against rejecting true ministers and spiritual leadership

References: Jeremiah Study Bible, Believers Bible Commentary, Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Olive Tree People of the Bible

## 1<sup>st</sup> John – Chapter 1.1-5

**1 John 1:1-5** (NASB) <sup>1</sup> *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—* <sup>2</sup> *and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—* <sup>3</sup> *what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* <sup>4</sup> *These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.* <sup>5</sup> *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.*

All people search for something real, something tangible, something honest. So, it is with us as Bereans – we want to know the real, the tangible, the true and honest. Here is a quote from **Warren Wiersbe**:

*They [people] waste priceless years on empty substitutes for reality. This is where the apostle John's first epistle comes in. Written centuries ago, this letter deals with a theme that is forever up-to-date: the life that is real. John had discovered that satisfying reality is not to be found in things or thrills, but in a Person—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without wasting any time, he told us about this “living reality” in the first paragraph of his letter. As you read 1 John 1:1-4, you learn three vital facts about the life that is real – This life is Revealed, it is to be Experienced, and it is to be Shared.*

BE Series Commentary

Calvary Pastor David Guzik said in his introduction to 1<sup>st</sup> John:

*Most people understand that the important things in life are not things at all – they are the relationships we have. God has put a desire for relationship in every one of us, a desire He intended to be met with relationships with other people, but most of all, to be met by a relationship with Him. In this remarkable letter, John tells us the truth about relationships – and shows us how to have relationships that are real, for both now and eternity.*

So, let's get busy and explore this amazing little letter [epistle] written to each of us. Written to affirm the tangible reality of Christ, His Incarnation, and to give us relationship, fellowship and joy.

### I. The Son of God has come to earth

1. **1 John 1:1**<sup>1</sup> *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life*

Jesus Christ has always existed

- i. *Beginning - g0746 archē - origin, the person or thing that commences; that by which anything begins to be, the first place*

- a. John is proclaiming that **Jesus was from the beginning**. As we see in the gospel of **John 1:1-3** <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* <sup>2</sup> *He was in the beginning with God.* <sup>3</sup> *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*
  - ii. As one of the apostles, they saw Jesus, they walked with Him, they saw His miracles, they shared food with Him and related to Him, but they didn't really know Him – then. Their fellowship was superficial, true fellowship was not possible without the work of the Holy Spirit. Which the apostles entered into after the finished work of Christ on the Cross.
  - iii. John is saying that He was an eye-witness to the real and living Jesus Christ – who was from the beginning. He declares this in his gospel, and he is reminding us now. Also, that they were with Jesus from the beginning of His Ministry
  - iv. The **Word of Life** was not just a passing illusion. This was about Life, a real person in a body of flesh just like John was, just like you are. Jesus' message is about life.
- 2. **1 John 1:2** *and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us*  
 Jesus has **proven** who He is
  - i. *Manifested – g5319 phaneroo - to make visible, clear, manifest. The true meaning is 'to uncover, lay bare, reveal'*
    - a. Jesus revealed to the whole world who He is and proved it by rising from the grave and ascending into Heaven to join His Father.
    - b. It is personal – not only did the Word of Life appear but it is eternal life – which was with the Father. This is about the Incarnation – God becoming man.
  - ii. **1 John 5:20** *And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*
    - a. John is testifying proclaiming the eternal life which Jesus claimed would be for all believers
  - iii. **John 10:28** *and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*
- 3. **1 John 1:3** *what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*  
 Jesus has **revealed** who He is – The Word of Life

- i. *John 17:3* <sup>3</sup> *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
  - ii. Revelation – John wants his readers to have fellowship with us. He wants us to fellowship with each other as the apostles had done during Jesus' life and afterwards.
  - iii. *1 Corinthians 1:9* *God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
  - iv. Identification – Specifically that apostolic fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. John was talking and writing to Christians, true Christians should be identifying as followers of Jesus Christ and being accountable thru fellowship to one another.
4. *1 John 1:4* *These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*  
 Jesus has **come** for a glorious purpose
- i. *Fellowship* g2842 *koinōnia* - *partnership, participation, sharing, intimacy*
    - a. John is writing to remind us that Jesus wants to fellowship with us, to be in the midst of our meals, to listen in to our conversations, to hear us as we read the scriptures (even if it's just in our minds). He loves to walk among us as we worship and sit with us at these tables – being the Bereans He is calling us to be.
  - ii. *Joy* g5479 *chara* *cheerfulness, calm delight, gladness*
    - a. Our Joy – and when we allow Jesus to constantly be in our midst – not only does it make John (in Heaven) joyful, it makes Jesus glad. This is the joy that makes us have a cheerful spirit, calmly delighting in the relationship we have with each other and in the Lord.
5. *1 John 1:5* *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*  
 John is **declaring** that Jesus preached a wonderful message and declaring to his readers that:
- i. God is Light
    - a. *Light* g5457 *phōs* - *to shine or make manifest, especially by rays. Light emitted by a lamp; a heavenly light such as surrounds angels when they appear on earth; anything emitting light; a star, fire, lamp or torch.*
    - b. As a metaphor - God is light because light has the extremely delicate, subtle, pure, brilliant quality of truth and its knowledge, together with the spiritual purity associated with it, that which is exposed to the view of all, openly

- c. **1 Timothy 6:15-16** <sup>15</sup> *which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.*
- ii. No darkness in God
  - a. *Darkness g4653 skotia - dimness, obscurity (literally or figuratively) -the darkness due to want of light*
  - b. As a metaphor - used of ignorance of divine things, and its associated wickedness, and the resultant misery in hell
  - c. **James 1:17** <sup>17</sup> *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*