

# John

- **Author**

- Grew up most likely in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. His mother was Salome. His father, Zebedee, was a fisherman. May have been well to do, which explains how John had a good education. However, this was a common practice to have both formal education and knowledge of a trade (e.g., Paul was a tent maker). His brother was James 'the Greater'. (Our Lord changes their name to 'Sons of Thunder' Lk 9:54).
- Cryptic signature in 21:20-24 "*the disciple whom Jesus loved...this is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things*". Further evidence that he wrote it himself is seen in the fact that his name is never mentioned, whereas it is mentioned a sum total of 19 times in the three synoptic gospels.
- Was with Peter in Jerusalem and Samaria. Paul mentions seeing him in Jerusalem.
- Tradition has it that he went to Ephesus, but was exiled to the island of Patmos during the persecution of the Church by the Emperor Diocletian. (St. Polycarp makes mention of these things in his letters).
- He wrote the book of Revelation on the island of Patmos.
- After Diocletian's death, he returned to Ephesus, where he died of natural causes.
- John's Jewish background is evident in his writing style and method.
  - He uses many purely Semitic expressions and words (son of perdition, rejoiceth with joy, Rabbi, Rabboni, Messiah, Cephas, Siloe, etc.)
  - Use of Hebrew tendency towards parallelism of ideas often found in poetry
    - "*No servant is greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than he who sent him...*" (13:16)
  - Detailed knowledge of biblical feasts and institutions.
- This seems clearly to be eyewitness testimony given the axiom that the two eyes of history are geography and chronology.
  - Has exceptional knowledge of the geography of Palestine.
    - Mentions that there were two different Bethany's, which has been confirmed by modern archeology.
    - Speaks of the judgment seat of Pilate by name as Gabbatha to the Jews and the Lithostrotos to the Romans. This has also been confirmed by excavations.

- Mentions three different Pasch's during the public ministry. The synoptic material almost suggests a time frame of one year, but John clarifies that it is closer to three.
  - Someone who has seen and touched these mysteries (1<sup>st</sup> letter of John 1:1)
    - According to St. Jerome, St. John is '*saturated with revelation*'.
  - 92% of John's material is not found in the synoptic, but he seems very familiar with them. It appears that he is deliberately filling in details that they have missed.
  - Only 7 miracle stories, but 5 of them only found in John.
- **Date**
  - Anywhere from AD 50-90
  - Casual present tense reference to a pool near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem (5:2) seems to indicate that the Temple has not yet been destroyed.
  - A fragment of John's Gospel has been found in Egypt in 1935 which has been dated to AD 120 lends support to an earlier writing of this Gospel, since it would have taken time for it to have been copied and spread as far as Africa.
- **Destination and Purpose**
  - Writing aimed at counteracted the influence of Gnosticism, which was a pre-Christian religious philosophy that denied revelation. They saw the material world as evil, and therefore the incarnation of the Son of God as an abhorrence. (Paul was dealing more with the Judaizers who were erroneously binding the new covenant to old covenant practices and religious observance).
  - Seems to be writing primarily for Jews spread around the Mediterranean.
- **Structure**
  - Prologue 1:1-18
  - Book of Signs 1:19 – 12:50 (not simply facts, but events that point beyond themselves).
  - Book of Glory 13-20
  - Epilogue 21
- **Themes**
  - John emphasizes the incarnation and the sacramental economy as both linking the spiritual and physical worlds.

- Eucharist is alluded to in the turning of water into wine at Cana, and the blood that flows from our Lord's side on the cross.
  - Baptism is alluded to in the words to Nicodemus that a man must be born again of water and the Spirit. Also, the water that flowed from the side of Christ.
  - After his resurrection our Lord gives the Apostles authority to forgive sins (20:19-23).
- The family of God is a master interpretive key.
  - He refers to God as Father 118 times.
  - Christ gave us power to become children of God.
  - Changing the lower to the higher, water into wine, children of Adam to children of God, Law to Love.
- He emphasizes the divinity and transcendence of Jesus.
  - There is no 'Messianic Secret' as in the Synoptics, where Jesus hides his divinity. Here Jesus' ministerial style is aggressive and bold.
  - Jesus refers to himself in the 'I AM' formula (Ego Eimi), 54 times.
- Uses many open-ended spiritual symbolic abstract terms (e.g., Light, Darkness, Water, World, Flesh, Life, Death, Truth, Justice, Sin, etc.).
  - The Kingdom of God is rarely mentioned, unlike in the synoptic gospels.
- Moses is very important for John.
  - He begins his gospel imitating Genesis (In the beginning... light and darkness).
  - His use of the 'I AM' formula (echoing the burning bush revelation).
  - Jesus passes by at the Jordan River, like God passing by Moses in the cleft of rock. St. John says to James and John, 'Behold the Lamb of God' (1:36).
- Famous for use of the term 'Logos' for our Lord. A term borrowed from Greek Philosophy, but adapted in a unique way by John.
  - The story is told that Christopher Columbus when in a terrific storm would recite the beginning of John's Gospel from the prow of the ship, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; and all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made*" (1:1-3).