

The Book of John – Introduction

Introduction: We are beginning our series on the book of John. Before we begin in the book itself, I would like to know a little about John the apostle.



What do we know about the apostle John?

Knowing what we can about John helps us understand the book of John.

1. **John is probably from Bethsaida** (**John 1:44** tells us that Simon Peter is from Bethsaida. In **Luke 5:10**, we see that James and John were partners with Simon Peter.) If he was not from Bethsaida, we can safely conclude that he was undoubtedly from the region of Galilee.
2. **John's father's name is Zebedee.** Little is known about Zebedee except that he ran the family fishing business. (**Matthew 4:21** *"21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in a ship with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets; and he called them."*)
3. **John's mother's name is Salome.** His mother's name is Salome putting together what we find in **Mark 15:40**, **Mark 16:1**, and **Matthew 27:56**. If Salome is related to Mary, the mother of Jesus (some believe by inference they are sisters), John would be the cousin of Jesus.
4. **John's brother's name is James.** (**Mark 3:17** *"17 And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:"*)
5. **John's family was well known, and Zebedee possessed some wealth.** It is evident that the family was well known and had some means.

- John's family had hired servants.

Mark 1:20 *"20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him."*

- John was known to the high priest.

John 18:15-16 *"15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter."*

- John possessed a home.

John 19:27 *“27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took **her unto his own home.**”*

6. **John was a follower of John the Baptist and one of the first disciples of Jesus Christ.**

John 1:35-36 *“35 Again the next day after John stood, and **two of his disciples;**”*

John 1:40 *“40 **One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.**”*

Matthew 4:18-21 shows us that John was one of the first disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. **John was part of the “inner circle.”**

Mark 5:37 *“37 And he suffered no man to follow him, **save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.**”*

Mark 9:2 *“2 And after six days Jesus taketh with him **Peter, and James, and John,** and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.”*

Mark 14:33 *“33 And he taketh with him **Peter and James and John,** and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;”*

8. **John was a Jew.**

It is noted that John displayed first-hand knowledge of his own people, the Old Testament, Jewish customs and feasts, and the geography of Palestine.

Here are just a few:

Jewish Wedding Feast, along with the customs, are penned in **John 2.**

Jewish Ceremonial Purification is spoken about in chapter **3.**

Jewish Burial Practices are spoken about in chapters **11 and 19.**

Old Testament Prophecy concerning the Messiah is **1:19-28.**

John brings to light Jewish thought concerning family precedence, like claiming to be one with the Father is tantamount to claiming deity.

John speaks about the specifics of the traditions involving the Passover Feast

and the Feast of Tabernacles. (The pouring out of water.)

John records the 'I AM' statements of Jesus Christ, pointing to the Old Testament revelation of God's name to Moses.

The religious differences between the Samaritans and Jews are spoken about in **chapter 4**. (Specifics include the sacred mountain of worship for the Samaritans.)

John references Old Testament law concerning witnesses.

He also records several dialogues concerning Abraham.

John mentions Jewish thought concerning sin and physical maladies like blindness.

John mentions various Jewish feasts. (**2:23, 5:1, 6:4, 7:2, 10:22, 13:1**)

John details many locations and geographical features in and around Jerusalem, Galilee, and Samaria. Here are just a few examples:

- The pool of Bethesda has five porches.
- Bethany's location in relation to Jerusalem.
- The Garden of Gethsemane location across the brook Cedron.
- The paved area outside of Praetorium.

John identifies the city where Jacobs well was (Sychar) and speaks to its depth.

John identifies Cana of Galilee.

John identifies the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

John identifies Capernaum.

John alludes to the fact that "Jewry" is stronger in Judaea than it is in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (as it is called in the book of Matthew.)

Traditions Concerning John

When we speak of tradition, we mean that these are extrabiblical references from early church fathers and others concerning John.

The Bible shows us that John was involved very early in the book of Acts after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. After this, we hear nothing about John until the Revelation of Jesus Christ from the isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, the Gospel record of John.

According to the early church father **Eusebius (260 AD- 339 AD)**, "John lived at Jerusalem until the death of Mary, 15 years after the crucifixion of Christ. Until this time, it is probable that he had not been engaged in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles."

Tradition tells us also that “John became a leader of the Ephesian church in his later years and that he was banished to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea by the Roman Emperor Domitian. Nerva, Domitian’s successor, permitted John to return to Ephesus in **A.D. 96**. There is stayed till his death sometime during the reign of Trajan (**A.D. 98-117**).

Irenaeus of Smyrna (130 AD- 202 AD)

Excerpt from *Against Heresies Book III Chapter 3*, “Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having **John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan**, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.” **Trajan began to rule in A.D. 98.**

Excerpt from *Against Heresies 5.30.3*, speaking about the man of perdition and the number 666, “for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. **For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian’s reign.**” **Domitian died in A.D. 96.**

We can surmise that John was most likely less than 30 years of age. As far as we know, John is also the only one of the Apostles **who was not martyred.**

This is an excerpt from *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*:

“He is called the beloved disciple and was brother to James the Great. He was previously the disciple of John the Baptist and afterward not only one of the twelve apostles, but one of the three whom Christ communicated the most secret passages of his life. He founded the churches at Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea and Thyatira, to which he directs his book of the Revelation. Being at Ephesus, he was ordered by the emperor Domitian to be sent bound to Rome, where he was condemned to be cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. But here a miracle was wrought in his favour, the oil did him no injury; and Domitian, not being able to put him to death, banished him to Patmos to labour in the mines, A.D. 73. He was, however, recalled by Nerva, who succeeded Domitian but was deemed a martyr on account of his having undergone an execution, though it did not take effect. He wrote the epistles, gospel, and Revelation, each in a different style; but they are all equally admired. He was the only apostle who escaped violent death and lived the longest of any, he being nearly 100 years of age at the time of his death.” **John Foxe - 1516-1587**

When we look at **John chapter 21**, we see that there was a rumor that John would live till the Lord’s return from His dialogue with Peter,

*“20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth **the disciple whom Jesus loved** [John] following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? 21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 22 Jesus saith unto him, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?** follow thou me. 23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?**”*