

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

The Gospel of John

Grant R. Osborne

1-3 John

Philip W. Comfort &
Wendell C. Hawley

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort

WITH THE ENTIRE TEXT OF THE
 New Living
Translation

CORNERSTONE
BIBLICAL
COMMENTARY

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The Gospel of John

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2004). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament
bar.	baraita	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
c.	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , the same	OS	Old Syriac
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	in loc.	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	OT	Old Testament
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	lit.	literally	p., pp.	page, pages
contra	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint	pl.	plural
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	Ⲛ	Majority Text	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
ed.	edition, editor	m.	Mishnah	rev.	revision
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	masc.	masculine	sg.	singular
et al.	<i>et alli</i> , and others	mg	margin	t.	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	ms	manuscript	TR	Textus Receptus
ff	following (verses, pages)	mss	manuscripts	v., vv.	verse, verses
fl.	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	vid.	<i>videur</i> , it seems
Gr.	Greek	n.d.	no date	viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
		neut.	neuter	vol.	volume
		no.	number	γ.	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NIV	New International Version	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God's Word	NIrV	New International Reader's Version	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation	TEV	Today's English Version
KJV	King James Version		(<i>Tanakh</i>)	TLB	The Living Bible
NAB	New American Bible				
NASB	New American Standard Bible				

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDFA	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS³ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]
- UBS⁴ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	1 Sam	1 Samuel	Esth	Esther
Exod	Exodus	2 Sam	2 Samuel	Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms
Lev	Leviticus	1 Kgs	1 Kings	Prov	Proverbs
Num	Numbers	2 Kgs	2 Kings	Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs
Josh	Joshua	2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah
Judg	Judges	Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah
Ruth	Ruth	Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations

Ezek	Ezekiel	Obad	Obadiah	Zeph	Zephaniah
Dan	Daniel	Jonah	Jonah	Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea	Mic	Micah	Zech	Zechariah
Joel	Joel	Nah	Nahum	Mal	Malachi
Amos	Amos	Hab	Habakkuk		

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Sir	Sirach
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Tob	Tobit
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sus	Susanna	3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QP ^s ^a	Psalms
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple ^{a,b}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11QtgJob	<i>Targum of Job</i>

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	P20 James 2-3; 3rd	P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1-6; late 2nd	P22 John 15-16; mid 3rd	P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P23 James 1; c. 200	P45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd	P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd	P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
P15+P16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7-8, Phil 3-4; late 3rd	P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd	P47 Rev 9-17; 3rd
	P32 Titus 1-2; late 2nd	
	P37 Matt 26; late 3rd	

- P49+P65 Eph 4-5; 1 Thess 1-2; 3rd
 P52 John 18; c. 125
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9-10; middle 3rd
 P66 John; late 2nd
 P70 Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd
 P72 1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300
 P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200
 P77+P103 (probably part of same codex) Matt 13-14, 23; late 2nd
 P87 Phlm; late 2nd
 P90 John 18-19; late 2nd
 P91 Acts 2-3; 3rd
 P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
 P98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
 P100 James 3-5; c. 300
 P101 Matt 3-4; 3rd
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd
 P106 John 1; 3rd
 P115 Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

- Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT; 5th
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most of NT with many lacunae; 5th
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
 D (Claramontanus), Paul's Epistles; 6th (different MS than Bezae)
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
 F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 H (Coislinianus) Paul's Epistles; 6th
 I (Freerianus or Washington) Paul's Epistles; 5th
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke, John; 5th
 P (Porphyrianus) Acts—Revelation; 9th
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
 W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels; 9th
 038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels; 9th
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matt, Mark; 6th
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae) Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 9th
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 5th
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22; c. 300
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

- 1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles; 12th
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles; 1044
 565 Gospels; 9th
 700 Gospels; 11th
 1424 (or Family 1424—a group of 29 manuscripts sharing nearly the same text) most of NT; 9th-10th
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
 2053 Rev; 13th
 2344 Rev; 11th
 f¹ (a family of manuscripts including 1, 118, 131, 209) Gospels; 12th-14th
 f¹³ (a family of manuscripts including 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709—known as the Ferrar group) Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

- SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian) Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus) Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire NT; 616
 OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
 it^b (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
 it^d (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts, 3 John; 5th
 it^e (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
 it^k (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark; c. 400
 COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fav} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)
 OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian)

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	<i>aleph</i>	= '		מ, ם	<i>mem</i>	= <i>m</i>
ב, ן	<i>beth</i>	= <i>b</i>		נ, ן	<i>nun</i>	= <i>n</i>
ג, ן	<i>gimel</i>	= <i>g</i>		ס	<i>samekh</i>	= <i>s</i>
ד, ך	<i>daleth</i>	= <i>d</i>		ע	<i>ayin</i>	= '
ה	<i>he</i>	= <i>h</i>		פ, ן, ף	<i>pe</i>	= <i>p</i>
ו	<i>waw</i>	= <i>w</i>		צ, ץ	<i>tsadhe</i>	= <i>ts</i>
ז	<i>zayin</i>	= <i>z</i>		ק	<i>qoph</i>	= <i>q</i>
ח	<i>heth</i>	= <i>kh</i>		ר	<i>resh</i>	= <i>r</i>
ט	<i>teth</i>	= <i>t</i>		שׁ	<i>shin</i>	= <i>sh</i>
י	<i>yodh</i>	= <i>y</i>		שׂ	<i>sin</i>	= <i>s</i>
כ, ן, ן	<i>kaph</i>	= <i>k</i>		ת, ך	<i>taw</i>	= <i>t, th</i> (spirant)
ל	<i>lamedh</i>	= <i>l</i>				

Vowels

ֿ	<i>patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>			<i>qamets khatuf</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>furtive patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>		ֿ	<i>holem</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>qamets</i>	= <i>a</i>		ֿ	<i>full holem</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>final qamets he</i>	= <i>ah</i>		ֿ	<i>short qibbuts</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>segol</i>	= <i>e</i>		ֿ	<i>long qibbuts</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere</i>	= <i>e</i>		ֿ	<i>shureq</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere yod</i>	= <i>e</i>		ֿ	<i>khatuf patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>
ֿ	<i>short hireq</i>	= <i>i</i>		ֿ	<i>khatuf qamets</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>long hireq</i>	= <i>i</i>		ֿ	<i>vocalic shewa</i>	= <i>e</i>
ֿ	<i>hireq yod</i>	= <i>i</i>		ֿ	<i>patakh yodh</i>	= <i>a</i>

Greek

α	<i>alpha</i>	= <i>a</i>		ε	<i>epsilon</i>	= <i>e</i>
β	<i>beta</i>	= <i>b</i>		ζ	<i>zeta</i>	= <i>z</i>
γ	<i>gamma</i>	= <i>g, n</i> (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)		η	<i>eta</i>	= <i>ē</i>
δ	<i>delta</i>	= <i>d</i>		θ	<i>theta</i>	= <i>th</i>
				ι	<i>iota</i>	= <i>i</i>

κ	<i>kappa</i>	= k	τ	<i>tau</i>	= t
λ	<i>lamda</i>	= l	υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u
μ	<i>mu</i>	= m	φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph
ν	<i>nu</i>	= n	χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch
ξ	<i>ksi</i>	= x	ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
ο	<i>omicron</i>	= o	ω	<i>omega</i>	= \bar{o}
π	<i>pi</i>	= p	·	<i>rough</i>	= h (with
ρ	<i>rho</i>	= r (ῥ = rh)		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.¹

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA	Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	ZA	Zondervan Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [T626, Z627], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., T61692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., T62013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



The Gospel of
John

GRANT OSBORNE

INTRODUCTION TO *John*

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is so simple that it is often the first biblical book given to seekers and recent converts to help them understand Christian truth, and yet it is so difficult that only experienced scholars attempt to study it. It is paradoxically the most accessible and yet the most complex of the four Gospels. There are many reasons why this is so. John presents the basic gospel, as well as the necessity of having faith, more directly than any of the Gospels. It also brilliantly dramatizes the process of one's decision to have faith. If I were teaching a course in creative writing, I would use John's Gospel along with Shakespeare's plays as examples of brilliant characterization and plot. The longest stories in the synoptic Gospels consist of about 20 or so verses, but John's dramas (chs 1; 3; 4; 6; 9; 11) are closer to 40 verses long, and they are powerfully written, centering on the encounter of various characters with Jesus as the Christ and Son of God.

AUTHOR

It is important to know the author of a document in order to interpret the message and determine the historical veracity of what the document reports. All four canonical Gospels, however, are anonymous—that is, they do not name their authors. In order to determine the author of John, there are two sources of information that must be examined—the external evidence from the early church fathers and the internal evidence from the Gospel itself.

External Evidence for Authorship. The earliest church fathers (such as Ignatius and Polycarp) do not mention John by name. Polycarp, however, quotes 1 John 4:2 (*To the Philippians* 7.1), and Justin Martyr alludes to John 3:3-5 (*First Apology* 61.4-5) and speaks of the "memoirs of the apostles" (*First Apology* 67.4), undoubtedly referring to Matthew and John, the two apostles among the four Evangelists. In addition, John was an apparent favorite of the Gnostics (it was often cited in the *Gospel of Truth*), and this misuse of his Gospel by the Gnostics may have contributed to a reluctance of the orthodox to quote him. Tatian used John as the historical basis of his harmonization of the four Gospels (the *Diatesseron*), and Athenagorus also alluded to it. The first to quote from John's Gospel is Theophilus of Antioch (AD 181). Irenaeus (c. AD 180) attributes the Gospel to John (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1), as does the Muratorian Canon and the anti-Marcionite prologue (both late-second century). Irenaeus, in that same statement, says he heard Polycarp talk about being tutored by John, the apostle who had seen the Lord. By the end of the second century (and from that point on) there was near unanimous acceptance of John's

Gospel. The one exception was the *Alogoi* (those who rejected John's Gospel or *logos* [TH3056, ZH3364]; cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.2.9; Epiphanius *Refutation of All Heresies* 51), who opposed it primarily because of its use by the Montanists, a charismatic group who claimed its founder (Montanus) was the Paraclete of 14:16.

One item remains: Eusebius (c. AD 300) believed there had been two leaders of the church named John and quotes Papias (beginning of the second century) as speaking of "the discourses of the elders, what Andrew or what Peter said . . . or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and things which Aristion and John the elder, disciples of the Lord, say" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4-5). This is often taken as evidence that the "elder John" rather than the apostle was author of the fourth Gospel, but Carson (1991:69-70) sums up the view of many who believe Eusebius misunderstood Papias, who more likely equated the "elder John" with the John who wrote one of "the discourses of the elders." While Eusebius separated elders from apostles, Papias did not. More likely, Papias was distinguishing eyewitnesses who had died from eyewitnesses who were still alive. Thus, the elder John was identical with the apostle John and wrote this Gospel. (See discussion on this issue in the Introduction to 1 John.) In short, the external testimony strongly favors John's authorship of the fourth Gospel—that is, John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles.

Internal Evidence of Authorship. As for internal evidence of John's authorship, Morris (1969:218-256, building on Westcott) mounts his evidence in five steps. The writer was (1) Jewish, as seen in his knowledge of Jewish customs and culture, as well as his knowledge of groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees in the time of Jesus and his acquaintance with Aramaic; (2) Palestinian, as seen in his accurate knowledge of the geography of the area—for example, the pools of Bethesda (5:2) and Siloam (9:11), Jacob's well (4:5), and the "Stone Pavement" (19:13); (3) an eyewitness (emphasized in 19:35, 21:24; cf. 1 John 1:1), as demonstrated in the accuracy of the minute details in the Gospel that can be corroborated historically or have parallels with the Synoptics (Stauffer 1960b); (4) one of the twelve disciples, as seen in 21:20-24, which calls the author the "disciple Jesus loved"; and (5) John the son of Zebedee, also linked to the identity of the beloved disciple.

Who was the "disciple Jesus loved"? He is mentioned in five passages (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) and is called "the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here" (21:24). He has been variously identified as Lazarus ("loved" by Jesus in 11:3, 36; cf. "dear friend," NLT); John Mark (Acts 12:12), associated with Peter and traditionally ascribed as the author of the second Gospel; Thomas, a leader among the disciples according to the fourth Gospel (11:16; 20:24); an unknown convert from the Essenes who was living in Jerusalem (Capper 1998: 47-55); the elder John (cf. above); John the son of Zebedee; or a fictional creation intended to portray the ideal disciple (or the ideal author—so Bauckham 1993). When one considers the evidence in the fourth Gospel, certain things seem fairly evident. Few any longer think of this beloved disciple as entirely fictional. First, O'Grady (1998:24-26) argues that he is both a historical person and the archetypal disciple. Second, in 13:23 the beloved disciple is at the Last Supper, and Matthew

26:20 tells us that only the Twelve were present with Jesus. Also, in 21:2 he is with or among a group of seven disciples, all of whom were probably members of the Twelve. This makes Lazarus, John Mark, and a separate "elder John" (cf. above) unlikely. Third, in every story the beloved disciple is paired with Peter, and this would favor John the apostle, one of the inner circle of three that was made up of Peter, James, and John. James could not have been the author because he died at the hands of Herod (Acts 12:2) long before John was written.

Critics (e.g., Brown, Schnackenburg, Barrett) have dismissed John's authorship of the fourth Gospel on the grounds that a nearly illiterate fisherman from Galilee could hardly have written so deep a work and that the detailed knowledge of Judean geography and topography means the person was from Judea not Galilee. They also doubt whether a Galilean fisherman could have had access to Herod's courtyard (cf. note on 18:15). (For a more complete list of criticisms, see Blomberg 2001:31-35.) These arguments are not entirely valid, however. Most Jews were quite literate, and John spent a great deal of time, perhaps years, in Judea (on his access to the courtyard, see commentary on 18:15-16). Charlesworth (1995:225-437) is the major proponent of the view that the beloved disciple was Thomas, but this argument falters when we read in 20:8 that the beloved disciple came to faith at the empty tomb, whereas Thomas did not believe in the risen Christ until Jesus' second post-Resurrection appearance (20:27-29). Therefore, the beloved disciple who penned this Gospel is most likely John the son of Zebedee.

The Johannine Circle as "Author." It has been common for critical scholars in recent decades (e.g., Bultmann, Brown, Schnackenburg, Culpepper [1975], Zumstein) to posit that this Gospel was written by a circle or community of disciples of John rather than by John himself. The reason they do so are the many "aporias," the clumsy transitions that make them think a later editor has inserted material. They point out, for example, the different style of 1:1-18; Jesus going from Judea to Galilee, back to Judea, and then back to Galilee again in chapters 2-4; a similar movement from Samaria to Galilee to Jerusalem to Galilee and back to Jerusalem in chapters 5-6; the mention of Mary anointing Jesus in 11:2 before the event; and so on. The best known reconstruction came from Brown (1966:xxxiv-xxxix), who has five stages: (1) tradition stemming from the apostle himself; (2) elaboration on that tradition with preaching from the Johannine community; (3) the first collection in a Gospel form; (4) further editing from an anonymous disciple; and (5) a final reworking from a later editor. The speculative nature of such reconstructions is startling, and Carson (1991:42-43) speaks of it as "the uncontrolled pursuit of sources and traditions" in a manner that cannot be tested. Is the fourth Gospel really that clumsy? Culpepper wrote a later volume, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983), which demonstrated the remarkable unity and precision of the plot development. He did not realize that his second book made his first (*The Johannine School*, 1975) unnecessary; if John fits together perfectly, there is no need to posit successive redactions. There are no truly clumsy transitions in John. In short, John is a whole Gospel written by a single person (cf. Hengel 1989:80-83), John the apostle and disciple of Jesus.

DATE

The latest possible date for the writing of John's Gospel is AD 110–120 because there is an early papyrus fragment of John (P52; John Rylands Papyrus 457) dated to this period. Another papyrus fragment of an unknown Gospel (known as Egerton Papyrus 2) that was based on John's Gospel is dated c. 130–150. These copies evidence the existence of John's Gospel at least to the beginning of the second century, if not earlier. The earliest possible date for John's Gospel is probably the late 60s (if John knew of Mark and perhaps Matthew; Morris [1969] and Burge [2000] place it here). Most assign it to the 80s or early 90s due to 21:23, which probably was penned while John was either near the end of his life or already dead (if he wrote Revelation, he lived past AD 95, when it was most likely composed [cf. Osborne 2002]). Beyond this rough time frame we cannot go with certainty. We simply do not know the order of his writings—the Gospel, the three epistles, Revelation. Many think the phrase “expelled from the synagogue” in 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2 refers to the time after Christians were kicked out of synagogues in the early 80s, but that is an unprovable assumption. The Jewish ban expelling Jews from synagogues probably existed in Jesus' day as well (for examples see Brown 1970:374).

Though there is no absolute proof, the traditional place of writing, Ephesus, remains the most likely. John ministered there for a great deal of time (attested by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 3.1.2 and by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.1), and the book of Revelation was written for the churches in that area.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE OF WRITING

The key to the purpose of the fourth Gospel is found in 20:31—“These are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.” Scholars, however, debate as to whether this means saving faith on the part of non-Christians or growing faith on the part of Christians. Some (Morris and especially Carson) believe John wrote primarily to evangelize Jews; others (Brown, Kysar, Michaels, Ridderbos) think he wrote mainly for believers. This is certainly a false dichotomy. I am not convinced by either extreme. Rather, John wrote both to awaken faith in the lost and to quicken faith in the followers of Jesus (so Bruce, Beasley-Murray, Whitacre, Burge). This issue is similar to that found in all four Gospels.

It is common today to believe that all four Gospels, including John, were originally intended almost entirely for Christians. Some have thought they were written for specific Christian communities. Bauckham (1998) provides a valuable service in showing that the Gospels were not written to separate communities (the Markan community, the Johannine community), as has been presupposed by critical scholars (who always searched for the *Sitz im Leben* or “situation in the life” of each differing community behind a Gospel). Rather, each Gospel was intended for the whole church. However, Bauckham dismisses in one footnote (1998:9) the possibility of an evangelistic or apologetic purpose and concludes, “On this question the present chapter takes for granted, without arguing the point, the answer given by the scholarly consensus, that all Gospels were intended to reach, in the first place, a Christian

audience" (1998:9-10). However, such an assumption should not be made. While this is likely true for Matthew and Mark, it is not true for Luke and John, as seen in the fact that the central theme in both is soteriology (for Luke see Marshall 1970 and Evans 1990:104-111). Though Carson does not prove his point that John centers entirely on evangelistic concerns (1991:87-95), he certainly does prove that evangelism is a major purpose of his Gospel (so also Keener, Köstenberger).

John wanted to win the lost as well as strengthen the believers. In fact, in chapters 1–12, encounters with Jesus and faith-decisions are certainly in the foreground. It is true that the diatribe against the Jewish people (e.g., chs 5–10) is a telling point against a purely evangelistic interest. In fact, Whitacre (1999:28-33) sees conflict both with the synagogue/rabbinic Judaism and with a similar proto-Gnosticism as that which John fought against in his first epistle. The latter is questionable (there is not enough evidence for such a theme), but the former is a definite emphasis. John wanted to encourage the church in light of Jewish persecution.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The fourth Gospel has long been recognized as one of the four canonical Gospels. Irenaeus was among the first to recognize the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as being the exclusively canonized Gospels (*Against Heresies* 3.11.11). The Muratorian Canon (c. AD 200) also affirms John's Gospel as part of the canon, as did Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.7) in about 325, and Athanasius in 367 (presenting the Canon of the Western church in his *Festal Letter*).

There are more extant early manuscripts for the Gospel of John than for any other book of the New Testament. Manuscripts of the second and third century include: $\mathfrak{P}5$, $\mathfrak{P}22$, $\mathfrak{P}28$, $\mathfrak{P}39$, $\mathfrak{P}45$, $\mathfrak{P}52$, $\mathfrak{P}66$, $\mathfrak{P}75$, $\mathfrak{P}80$, $\mathfrak{P}90$, $\mathfrak{P}95$, $\mathfrak{P}107$, $\mathfrak{P}108$, and $\mathfrak{P}109$. Among these, $\mathfrak{P}52$ belongs to the early second century (c. 110, the earliest extant ms of the NT), $\mathfrak{P}66$ belongs to middle of the second century, and $\mathfrak{P}75$ to the end of the second century (Comfort and Barrett 2001:365-366, 376-379, 501). Of all these manuscripts, $\mathfrak{P}75$ is the most accurate copy of John. The manuscript, produced by a very careful scribe, has the kind of text that was used by another careful scribe—the one who produced the fourth-century manuscript known as codex Vaticanus (cf. Porter 1962:363-376). All textual critics agree that $\mathfrak{P}75$ and B provide the best textual witness to the original wording of John's Gospel. The corrected text of $\mathfrak{P}66$ (notated as $\mathfrak{P}66^c$) is also a good witness, as are $\mathfrak{P}39$ and $\mathfrak{P}90$. Other manuscripts of the fourth and fifth century that provide good witness to the original text of John are codex Sinaiticus (\aleph , from John 9–21), T, and W (Comfort 2007: Introduction).

LITERARY STYLE

John's style is very memorable. His discourses were written in high prose, at times close to poetry, and have a definite "ring" to them. At the same time, his Greek seems clumsy, using a great deal of parataxis (coordinate clauses instead of subordination) and asyndeton (clauses connected without conjunctions), neither of which was

OUTLINE

While some have detailed outlines involving an intricate pattern of chiasmus (Barnhart 1993, Ellis 1999), such a complex pattern is unlikely. John was primarily interested in theological history, and the book has a structure similar to the other Gospels, including a prologue (1:1-18) and epilogue (21:1-25), a preparatory period (1:19-51), a series of events comprising Jesus' public ministry (2:1-12:50), a lengthy farewell address to the disciples (13:35-17:26), a Passion narrative (18:1-19:42), and a two-pronged Resurrection narrative (20:1-21:25; ch 21 is both an epilogue and part of the Resurrection narrative).

- I. Prologue (1:1-18)
- II. Jesus Prepares for His Ministry (1:19-51)
 - A. John Answers the Pharisees (1:19-28)
 - B. John's Witness to Jesus (1:29-34)
 - C. The First Disciples Come to Jesus (1:35-42)
 - D. Philip and Nathanael Come to Jesus (1:43-50)
 - E. Jesus Unites Heaven and Earth (1:51)
- III. The Public Ministry of Jesus: Signs and Teaching (2:1-12:50)
 - A. Glory Revealed: the Beginning Stages (2:1-4:54)
 1. The first sign: water into wine (2:1-12)
 2. Confrontation in the Temple (2:13-22)
 3. Inadequate faith based on signs (2:23-25)
 4. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about regeneration (3:1-15)
 5. Life and light confront the world (3:16-21)
 6. John the Baptist exalts Jesus (3:22-30)
 7. The glory of the Son (3:31-36)
 8. Jesus converts the Samaritan woman (4:1-42)
 9. Healing and conversion in Cana (4:43-54)
 - B. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews—Conflict and Fulfillment (5:1-10:42)
 1. Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath (5:1-15)
 2. Conflict over Jesus' claim to be the Son of God (5:16-30)
 3. Witness and unbelief (5:31-47)
 4. Jesus feeds five thousand (6:1-15)
 5. Jesus walks on water (6:16-21)
 6. Jesus, the Bread of Life (6:22-58)
 7. Division among Jesus' disciples (6:59-71)
 8. Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-13)
 9. Conflict at the Feast (7:14-52)
 10. Excursus: the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11)
 11. Jesus, the Light of the World (8:12-20)
 12. Jesus warns the unbelievers (8:21-30)
 13. The children of Abraham and the children of the devil (8:31-59)
 14. Jesus heals a man born blind (9:1-41)

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15. The Good Shepherd and his sheep (10:1-21)
 16. Jesus at the Feast of Dedication claims to be the Son of God (10:22-42)
 - C. Final Events: The Raising of Lazarus and the Beginning of Jesus' Passion (11:1-12:50)
 1. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (11:1-57)
 2. Jesus anointed at Bethany (12:1-11)
 3. Jesus' triumphal entry (12:12-19)
 4. Jesus predicts his death (12:20-36)
 5. The unbelief of the people (12:37-50)
 - IV. The Last Supper and Farewell Discourse (13:1-17:26)
 - A. Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet (13:1-17)
 - B. Jesus Predicts His Betrayal (13:18-30)
 - C. The Farewell Discourse (13:31-17:26)
 1. The first discourse (13:31-14:31)
 2. The second discourse (15:1-16:33)
 3. The farewell prayer of Jesus (17:1-26)
 - V. The Arrest, Trial, and Passion of Jesus (18:1-19:42)
 - A. The Arrest of Jesus (18:1-11)
 - B. Jesus' Trial before Annas and Peter's Denials (18:12-27)
 - C. Jesus' Trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16a)
 - D. The Crucifixion of Jesus (19:16b-37)
 - E. The Burial of Jesus (19:38-42)
 - VI. The Resurrection of Jesus (20:1-21:25)
 - A. Jesus' Appearances in Jerusalem (20:1-31)
 - B. Epilogue: Jesus' Appearance in Galilee (21:1-25)

COMMENTARY ON
John

◆ I. Prologue (1:1-18)

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

²He existed in the beginning with God.

³God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except
through him.

⁴The Word gave life to everything that
was created,*
and his life brought light to
everyone.

⁵The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never
extinguish it.*

⁶God sent a man, John the Baptist,* ⁷to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. ⁹The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.

¹¹He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹²But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

¹⁴So the Word became human* and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.* And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

¹⁵John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me!'"

¹⁶From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.* ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God,* is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

1:3-4 Or *and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything.*

1:5 Or *and the darkness has not understood it.* 1:6 Greek *a man named John.* 1:14a Greek *became flesh.*

1:14b Or *grace and truth*; also in 1:17. 1:16 Or *received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law*; Greek reads *received grace upon grace.* 1:18 Some manuscripts read *But the one and only Son.*

NOTES

1:1-18 It has often been suggested that the prologue was an addendum written by another author and added after the Gospel was finished (cf. Brown). However, the language and style are quite close to the rest of the Gospel, and such a theory is unnecessary. It is also often argued that this was originally a hymn with a couple of prose insertions (1:6-8, 15). Witherington (1995:47-48) calls it John's "hymn to the Emperor" in

four strophes (1-2, 3-5, 10-12a, 14). Others (Harrington) see the hymn in 1:1-5, 10-14, 16 or in 1:1-3; 4-5, 9; 10-12c; 14, 16 (so Hofius 1987:10-15). While it does have poetic elegance, the actual rhythm and organization of the lines of John's prologue do not quite fit either Greek or Hebrew poetry. It is therefore better to understand it as heightened prose (so Barrett, Carson, Michaels). It is indeed possible that John was utilizing the form of prologue found in Greco-Roman drama here (E. Harris 1994:12-16). Others (Boismard, Culpepper, Pryor, Köstenberger) see the prologue as a chiasm (A = 1:1-5; B = 1:6-8; C = 1:9-14; B' = 1:15; A' = 1:16-18).

1:1 the Word was God. The Gr. for "the Word was God" (*theos ēn ho logos* [T^{62316/3056}, Z^{62536/3364}]) has been misused by Jehovah's Witnesses, who interpret the absence of the article before "God" as equaling the English indefinite article "a," thereby yielding the translation "a god." There are several serious errors here. First, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the Greek article and the English article, as if it has to be "a god." Actually, the absence of the article normally emphasizes the abstract aspect, namely that Jesus partook of "divinity" or "God-ness." Second, it was common in Greek to highlight the subject with the article (the Word) and to designate the predicate nominative (God) when it came before the verb "to be" by leaving out the article (cf. Harris 1992:51-73). Finally, *theos* [T⁶²³¹⁶, Z⁶²⁵³⁶] is also missing the article in 1:18, where it definitely speaks of God the Father ("no one has ever seen God") as well as in 1:6, 12, 13 (cf. Keener 2003:372-374), and the connection between 1:1 and 1:18 has long been recognized (cf. the extensive discussion in M. Harris 1992:51-103). In short, to translate this as "the Word was a god" is an obvious error and a very bad translation.

1:3b-4 everything that was created. It is debated whether the words at the end of 1:3 (lit., "that was made/created") belong with 1:3 (so KJV, NASB, NIV, Schnackenburg, Carson, Ridderbos, Köstenberger) or 1:4 (NRSV, NJB, REB, NLT, Brown, Beasley-Murray, Whitacre). If it is the former, 1:4 would simply read "in him was life," but the parallelism of the lines favors the latter option, seen in the NLT. In this sense, 1:3 ends with the statement "nothing was created except through him," and 1:4 begins, "The Word gave life to everything that was created." This fits the developing thought better than the redundant "apart from him nothing was created that was created," and this was the older interpretation. However, when the Arians (fourth-century heretics) began to use this to argue that the Holy Spirit was a created being, the reading that placed the phrase with 1:3 became the accepted one.

1:5 can never extinguish it. Translators face a difficult decision as to whether to translate the verb here (*katelaben* [T⁶²⁶³⁸, Z⁶²⁸⁹⁸]) as "understand/comprehend" (so KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT mg) or "overcome" (so NRSV, NJB, NLT, TNIV). The former could be favored by 1:10, 11, where the world does not "recognize" or "know" him, and in fact some (Barrett, Carson, Comfort, Burge, Keener) believe there might be a double meaning in the verb, in which the world cannot understand the light and therefore opposes it. This may well be correct, but the main thrust is on the conflict between darkness and light, making "overcome" the better choice (cf. the only other use of the verb, in 12:35, "so the darkness will not overtake you"; so Brown, Köstenberger).

1:6 sent. In this book the verb "sent" occurs 59 times, mainly of four cases in which God is the sender: Jesus (over 30 times), the Holy Spirit, the disciples, and John the Baptist. The verb in these instances partakes of the Jewish idea of the *shaliach* (cf. TDNT 1.414-420), the official envoy or representative sent on behalf of the sender—in this case, God. It is a major term used for the mission theme in John's Gospel. Here, the Baptist is sent on a mission by God. Cf. 3:17.

1:9 coming into the world. This expression could modify "everyone," thus meaning the light came to all who were in the world (so KJV), and by the Gr. word order, that is a distinct possibility. But the context is clearly that of the Incarnation, and the style of this

expression is quite common in John (*ēn . . . erchomenon* would be a periphrastic, “was coming,” similar to 1:28; 2:6; 3:23; 10:40 and others; cf. Schnackenburg). Thus, it is best to see the expression as modifying “the true light,” as in the NLT.

1:13 not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan. Lit., “not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” Whitacre (1999:56) thinks there is an ABA pattern here, with the emphasis on the middle concept (lit., “the will of the flesh”), borrowing Brown’s definition of “flesh” as “the sphere of the natural, the powerless, the superficial, opposed to ‘spirit,’ which is the sphere of the heavenly and the real.”

1:14 his glory. With the term “glory,” we have another of John’s major themes. In the Synoptics it describes primarily the glory of the risen Lord (Luke 24:26) and his second coming (Mark 8:38; 13:26 and parallels). The only use of it for the earthly Jesus is at the Transfiguration, when the disciples “saw Jesus’ glory” (Luke 9:32). In John, however, the glory of Jesus is visible to the disciples (2:11), and indeed it is always used of the earthly Jesus (18 times in chs 1–17). The divine glory was evident in the earthly Jesus for those with the faith to see it.

1:15 John testified. John’s disciples continued to follow him even after his death (Acts 18:25; 19:1-7), and there are indications that the movement lasted well into the second century. In fact, a sect called the Mandaeans in Iran and Iraq still claim a connection with him today. It is widely believed by scholars that many passages in the Gospels about the Baptist (e.g., 1:6-9, 15; 3:22-36) were partly meant to show his followers that he never intended to found a movement apart from Christ.

shouted. There is an interesting change of tense here: the testifying is stated in the present tense, indicating an ongoing witness, while the shouting is in the perfect tense (“has shouted”), which may well add a stative thrust, stressing the comprehensiveness of the witness (so Carson).

1:17 unfailing love. The term *charis* (“grace,” translated “unfailing love” here) only occurs four times in the fourth Gospel, all of them in 1:14, 16, 17. Yet in one sense, John’s whole Gospel is an account of the grace of God in Christ. It is a fitting introduction.

1:18 unique One, who is himself God. Lit., “an only one, God” (*monogenēs theos* [T^G3439/2316, Z^G3666/2536]). This is supported by the best mss (P⁶⁶ K* B C* L), and the reading with *theos* is also supported by P⁷⁵ N^c, though both include the definite article before *theos*. Inferior mss (A C³ W^s M) substitute *huios* [T^G5207, Z^G5626] (Son) for *theos* (God). The NLT translation follows the evidence of the earlier, better mss. It is likely that later scribes added “Son” under the influence of other passages that have “one and only Son” (3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). This is one of the clearest statements of Jesus’ deity in the fourth Gospel and forms a parallel to the assertion of 1:1 (“the Word was God”) to close the prologue. (For a further discussion on this, see Comfort 2007:[John 1:18]).

COMMENTARY

If you were to write a biography of a famous person, you would try to sum up the impact of that person’s life and give an overarching theme to your presentation before you provided all the details. This is what John did in his prologue. The purpose of a prologue or introduction in any New Testament book (e.g., Mark 1:1-15) is to introduce the major themes and to help the reader understand who Jesus really is. This is nowhere better exemplified than in John’s Gospel. Here, the primary truth of the book is clear—Jesus is God himself!

In his Gospel, John has given us a theological masterpiece centering upon key terms, the most significant of which are introduced in the prologue—life, light,

darkness, sent, truth, world, believe, know, receive, witness, new birth, love, glory. Most of all, he has given us a theology of the Incarnation unmatched in the New Testament (with the exception of Phil 2:6-8). Here we see a powerful presentation of what it meant for God to become flesh in order to bring light and life to sinful mankind.

The prologue has an ABAB pattern, from the Word (1:1-5) to John the Baptist (1:6-9), to salvation by believing in the Word (1:10-14), to John and the law (1:15-18). We will explore each of these sections.

The Essence of the Word (1:1-5). It is difficult to imagine a more magnificent introduction. "In the beginning" reiterates Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." With Jesus as the Word, there is a new beginning, in a sense a new creation—a spiritual re-creation of the world. This is evident in 1:3-4, where Christ is creator of both physical and spiritual life. Yet at the same time, this says Jesus was in existence "in the beginning." The idea of the Son of God as the preexistent Word is the basis of the incredible claims of this section. Verses 1-2 tell who he was (before creation), and 1:3-4 tell what he did (in creation). This One who was in the beginning is called the "Word" (*logos* [T63056, Z63364]), a term that, in Greek thought, connoted the principle of reason that governs the world and makes thinking possible. Closer to the thrust here, however, is the Jewish connotation for "word"—the divine Wisdom, which was at God's side at Creation (Prov 8:30-31) and was viewed as God's living voice (Whitacre 1999:50-51; Keener 2003:339-363). Most of all, Jesus as the "Word" means that he is the living revealer of God, the very voice of God in this world. Carson (1991:127) translates this as God's "self-expression." Psalm 33:6 says, "The LORD merely *spoke*, and the heavens were created." Jesus is God's living "voice" to this world.

John 1:1 tells us three things about the Word: he is/was preexistent (he "already existed"), he enjoys a special relationship "with God," and he is the Deity. Note the progression. Each is more intense. The Word exists prior to Creation, then is in intimate communion "with" God (the idea is not just casual contact but special relationship), and finally is in his very nature God himself. This is a major theme in the fourth Gospel (cf. "Major Themes" in the Introduction), and everything flows from it. Only very God of very God could create the world and bring light and life to it. In fact, this is the most astounding claim John could pen. This Jesus who walked the earth was actually the eternal Word, partaking of the very essence of God! This is a truth so startlingly wondrous that John repeated key elements in 1:2 to make certain the reader caught these essential truths. Only one who had that special relationship "with God" and was there "in the beginning" could create the universe.

To affirm the divinity of the Word, John tells us that he was God's agent in the very act of creation (1:3). To emphasize this truth, John states it positively ("God created everything through him") and negatively ("nothing was created except through him"). The stress is on every single aspect of the created order. This is perhaps more astounding today than it was in John's time: today we know there are more stars in our own galaxy than any human being could count in a lifetime, and

there are more galaxies in this universe than there are stars in our own galaxy. And there are more complex cells in our bodies than we could begin to imagine. At both the micro- and macrocosmic levels, our universe is made perfectly. The created universe is beyond scientific understanding, and the Son of God made it all! The work of God's Son in Creation is also stressed in 1 Corinthians 8:6 ("through whom God made everything"), Colossians 1:16-17 ("everything was created through him and for him"), Hebrews 1:2 ("through the Son he created the universe"), and Revelation 3:14 ("the ruler of God's new creation," NLT mg). He is both creator and sustainer of all there is.

Life and light were the two essential aspects of the Genesis 1 creation, but Christ has brought more. There is a double meaning in "the Word gave life to everything that was created" (1:4). In the original creation, he gave physical life and light to all beings, but now he has also made spiritual life available to all. The Word breathed the breath of "life" into Adam; now as the last Adam (Rom 5:12-21), he brings eternal life to mankind—another major theological emphasis of the book. Moreover, the Word does so by bringing "light to everyone," a theme emphasized in 1:7, 9. This has often been labeled "universal salvific will," namely God's desire that no one should perish but rather that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Through the Word as "the light of the world" (8:12), God illumines every person with the light of the gospel. This looks to the revelation of God in Jesus, through whom every person is confronted with their sin and with the light that God has brought in the sacrificial death of Jesus. This is the heart of John's message.

The darkness/light dualism (1:5) is a key feature of John's Gospel. The light of the Word "shines in the darkness" of this world. In the original creation, "the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters" until God said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:2-3). In this new era, a more important darkness—the darkness of sin—has felt God's salvific light. Darkness is a common metaphor for sin in John (3:19; 8:12; 12:35), and here the idea is the war between darkness and light. When the Word shines in this world, "the darkness can never extinguish it." Darkness hates light and fights against it (3:19-20), but the light must triumph. In our normal day-to-day experience, we may think of it this way: when we shine a flashlight into a dark closet, the closet can never say, "I don't want the light; go away," and cause the light to bend into another room. Darkness cannot "overcome" light and bend it to its will! Similarly, every person is brought under the light of Christ and must respond. Since this Gospel is an encounter Gospel (cf. "Literary Style" in the Introduction), this may also refer to the convicting power of the Spirit (16:8-11) as the light of Christ. As we will see throughout this book, the light of Christ will continually confront the darkness of sin and force the sinner to a "faith-decision." That decision will determine their eternal destiny.

The Ministry of John the Baptist (1:6-9). The first five verses speak of the exalted origin and status of the Word. Now we realize that the Word has appeared on the stage of this world, and he was heralded by John the Baptist, "sent" by God as his official envoy to prepare for Christ's coming. John's ministry was one of "witness,"

another frequent theme that speaks of official testimony to the reality of Jesus (cf. 5:31-40; 8:14-18). John was sent to testify “about the light”—namely, Jesus—“so that everyone might believe.” This continues the message of 1:4-5; John was one of the divinely sent heralds who were to enable the light to shine on every person and prompt them to make a decision based on faith. God’s purpose in sending John was the salvation of mankind. The mission theme of this Gospel officially begins here, and this prepares the reader for 1:35-49, where John the Baptist’s witness about Jesus encourages some of John’s disciples to follow Jesus.

To make certain that readers do not misunderstand, the author clarifies that John “was not the light” but was “simply a witness” regarding the light (1:8-9). His entire focus was upon introducing the world to Jesus, “who is the true light,” namely the only one who can light the way to God. The word “true” means he is the “genuine” or “ultimate” revelation of God, the final and only answer to the dilemma of sin (so Carson). For the third time (with 1:4, 7), the emphasis is that he “gives light to everyone,” meaning that every human being has experienced the light of God in their lives through Christ. This, however, does not support universalism, the belief that everyone eventually will be saved. The “light” does not guarantee that everyone will accept the light, just that everyone will see the truth. They cannot “extinguish” the light (1:5), but those who “love the darkness more than the light” will “hate the light” and reject it (3:18-20). Most wonderful of all is the fact that this true light “was coming into the world,” a reference to the Incarnation. He was no Olympian deity, dwelling in a society above humanity with little attachment to humans or their affairs. No, he became one of us so that he could bring us to God. He is the God-man! The fact that the Word came into the “world” (*kosmos* [T62889, Z63180]) is significant. Throughout John, the world is characterized as rebelling against God. Yet it is also the focus of God’s salvific love (3:16)—so much so that Christ gave his life for the world (6:51) in order to save it (3:17; 12:47). He came to take away the sins of the world (1:29), bring life to the world (6:33), and be the Savior of the world (4:42).

The Incarnate Word (1:10-14). There are three themes here: the rejection of the Word by the world (1:10-11), the new birth given to those who accept Jesus (1:12-13), and the true meaning of the Incarnation (1:14). The incredible fact is that the Word came into the world to experience rejection. John begins by reiterating the truth that the one who came into the world is the very one who created the world (1:3). One would expect that the people would cheer and worship their creator, who had loved them enough to become one of them. Instead, they “didn’t recognize him,” an idiom that does not mean they simply failed to know who he was but rather that they rejected who he was. As Brown says (1966:10), “Knowledge of Jesus would also imply repentance and a new life in his service.” This is similar to Romans 1:18-32; they had experienced divine revelation (cf. 1:4, 9 above) but had rejected it.

Moreover, he did not just come into the world—“he came to his own people,” the Jews (1:11). In the fourth Gospel, the Jewish people are regarded as part of the

world. The reason is that they too “rejected him.” The parallelism between 1:10 and 1:11 is clear. Whitacre says it well (1999:54): the world had experienced “the general revelation of creation” and refused, but God’s own people had experienced “the special revelation of covenant” and rejected it. Then the most unbelievable affair of all occurred—God’s own Son arrived and they repudiated him. They had long speculated about and anticipated the Messiah, yet when he arrived they rejected him!

John divides mankind into two groups—those who reject and those who accept. In 1:12, the promise is given: all those who “believe” and “accept” the Word have an entirely new status and authority. God gives them “the right to become [his] children.” Believing and receiving are virtual synonyms, and they are further described as believing “in his name”—that is, accepting the reality of who he is. In the ancient world, a person’s name connoted the essence of who they were; thus, the belief here is focused on Jesus’ real self, not just his name. The result is that believers have the “right” or “authority” (*exousia* [TG1849, ZG2026]) to join a new family. While Paul utilizes the metaphor of adoption (Rom 8:15), John uses the image of the new birth (1:13; 3:3, 5). In both cases, the new believers become “children of God,” a wondrous truth describing in a powerful way the new status and authority they have.

In 1:13, John emphasizes that this is not controlled by human effort but only by God. This new birth cannot come via “a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan.” In other words, we have no power over the process. It is a spiritual reality and so only “comes from God.” We cannot produce spiritual rebirth via human passion or family planning. Only God can accomplish it.

It is clear that this salvation will come in an entirely new way, and John spells this out in 1:14, one of the deepest theological statements ever written. The only basis for mankind entering the realm and family of God is for God to enter the realm of humanity himself and provide redemption. John states it unequivocally: “The Word became human.” This is the high point of the prologue—indeed, the high point of history. God has entered this world; his Word has become “flesh”; the Creator has become a creature. More than that, he has “made his home among us.” John chose a very particular term here (*skēnoō* [TG4637, ZG5012]), which means he has “pitched his tent” or “tabernacled” among us. The image of the tabernacle (*skēnē* [TG4633, ZG5008]) is very prominent, especially with the correspondence between the glory of the Word (1:14) and the “shekinah glory” of God that filled the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple). The shekinah (cf. Heb. verb *shakan* [TH7931, ZH8905], referring to God “dwelling” among his people) or presence of God was seen in the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day in the Exodus (cf. Exod 13:21). This glory then filled the Tabernacle. This was what made the Tabernacle the most sacred object in the universe; the physical manifestation of God’s holy presence was there. The dwelling of God among his people was everything (cf. Exod 25:8-9; Ezek 43:7; Joel 3:17; Zech 2:13; 8:3) and will be the chief characteristic of the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:3). With this in mind, John was saying that in Jesus as the Word, God’s “shekinah” glory had become incarnate.

Since God’s indwelling presence was in the Word, John adds that in Jesus “we

have seen his glory." No wonder there was no more need for a Temple; God's shekinah glory now walked the earth, visible to all with the eye of faith! As Burge says, "Christ is the locus of God's dwelling with Israel *as he had dwelt with them in the tabernacle in the desert* (Exod 25:8-9; Zech 2:10). Hence, the glory of God, once restricted to the tabernacle (Exod 40:34), is now visible in Christ" (2000:59, italics his). In actuality, the praise and worship of the church are simply the natural result of the recognition and affirmation of the glory of God in Jesus—when we feel God's presence in a tangible way, we shout, "Glory!" as did the Israelites (Ps 29:1, 9). As Comfort indicates (1994:37-38), the image of Jesus being God's Tabernacle "also speaks of God's presence accompanying the believers in their spiritual journey." God dwelt with the Israelites and walked with them (cf. Lev 26:12) via his presence in the Tabernacle. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see Jesus bringing God's presence to people, especially the believers who saw the glory of God in Jesus.

This is even more true when we realize it is "the glory of the Father's *one and only Son*." This used to be translated "only begotten" (KJV), and indeed the term was used of an only child (Judg 11:34; Luke 7:12; Heb 11:17), but that is not the connotation here (contra Dahms 1983). The components of the word (*monogenēs* [TG3439, Z63666]) mean "only one of a kind" and stress the uniqueness of the Word (cf. Pendrick 1995:597, 600, who argues that the idea of "only begotten" was introduced in the fourth and fifth centuries). He is the unique Son, the God-man, the one who alone shared the divine glory. Finally, this glorious Word is "full of unfailing love and faithfulness" (lit., "full of grace and truth"). It is commonly agreed that the background to this is Exodus 33-34, where Moses asks to see God's glory (Exod 33:18), and God passes in front of him, declaring himself to be "the God of compassion and mercy . . . [full of] *unfailing love and faithfulness*" (Exod 34:6). It is here that God gives Moses the two stone tablets that summed up the loving relationship between God and his people. These last two terms (in italics) are key Old Testament characteristics of God, his *khesed* [TH2617, ZH2876] ("gracious lovingkindness") and *'emeth* [TH571, ZH622] ("covenant faithfulness"), and are reflected here in John's (literal) "full of grace and truth." The Word is the embodiment of God's gracious love and the proof of his absolute faithfulness. John's choice of "grace" and "truth" to express this is critical. In Christ, the "grace" of God is especially seen, and he is the only "truth" or reality (14:6).

The Greatness and Grace of the Word (1:15-18). John now expands on the "testimony" of John the Baptist mentioned in 1:7. That testimony was that Jesus was "coming after me" but was "far greater than I am" (1:15). There is a play on words in the Greek, as Jesus is described as coming "after" (temporally) but is actually "before" John (both temporally and in degree or status). John was the forerunner, but Jesus was the important figure, the one whose "coming" had been anticipated for generations. The fact that "he existed long before me" refers back to the preexistence spoken of in 1:1. The Word had absolute primacy and precedence over John.

Picking up on the phrase "full of unfailing love and faithfulness" (1:14), John now turns to Christ's "abundance" or "fullness," reminding the reader that "we have

all received" the benefits of what the Word has given us (1:16). Christ has filled us with blessings. The blessings are then spelled out in what is literally "grace instead of (*anti* [^{IG473, ZG505}]) grace." There are three major options for the term *anti*: (1) accumulation—as NLT, we could take it as "grace upon grace," thus "one gracious blessing after another," as Christ gives an inexhaustible supply of gracious gifts (so Barrett, Bruce, Morris, Schnackenburg, Comfort, Whitacre, Keener); (2) correspondence—it could mean "grace for grace," thus saying that the grace shown the believer corresponds to the grace of the Word (so Bernard, Robinson); (3) replacement—in the more common use of *anti*, and it would be translated "grace instead of grace"—in other words, the grace of Christ replacing the grace of the law (so Brown, Edwards [1988], Michaels, Carson, Blomberg, Köstenberger). While the first makes good sense, the third is favored by 1:17, which spells out the implications of the new covenant blessings replacing the old covenant blessings. The Word has given us the full blessings of the Kingdom he has inaugurated. The previous time of grace was that of Moses, who gave God's people "the law." This was also a gift from the preexistent Word, as hinted at in 1:16-17, but it was a temporary blessing, meant to be replaced by a greater gift (cf. Gal 3:21-4:7). This greater gift is the full expression of "God's unfailing love and faithfulness," and it "came through Jesus Christ." This will become a major emphasis of John's Gospel, as it explores the implications of the final "grace" that Christ brought for the Jewish people.

In 1:18, John frames his prologue with the same truth with which he began—the deity of Christ (cf. 1:1). As Comfort states: "The prologue begins and ends on the same theme; verses 1 and 18, in effect, mirror each other. In both verses, the Son is called 'God' and is depicted as the expression ('the Word') and explainer of God; the Son is shown in intimate fellowship with the Father—'face to face to with God' and 'in the bosom of the Father'" (1994:40).

In this verse, John begins again with the experience of Moses in Exodus 33:18-23 (cf. 1:14, 17, and comments). When Moses asked to see God's glory, he was told to stand in the cleft of a rock as God passed by so that God could cover his face lest he look upon God's face and die. John's statement, "no one has ever seen God," does not mean people have never seen visions of God (as does occur in Exod 24:9-11; Isa 6:1-13; Ezek 1-3). Those visions were partial, however, and no one has ever seen God as he truly is. In the case of the Word, this is no longer correct because Jesus is "the one and only God" (1:18, NLT mg). Note how clear a statement of his deity this is. The Word is uniquely God, and as such he was "near to the Father's heart" (lit., "in the bosom of the Father"). Harris (1992:101) speaks of "the unparalleled intimacy that existed (and still exists) between the Son and the Father." Here, we are at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus is fully God and yet a different person than the Father. This is an expansion of 1:1b, "The Word was with God." They had the deepest relationship imaginable. As a result, the Word "has revealed God to us," the heart of the message. If the Word is indeed God's "self-expression," the living revealer, then he alone is able to make God truly known to us. The rest of this Gospel flows out of this essential truth.

◆ II. Jesus Prepares for His Ministry (1:19-51)

A. John Answers the Pharisees (1:19-28)

¹⁹This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants* from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" ²⁰He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"*

"No."

²²"Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

²³John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,
'Clear the way for the LORD's
coming!'"*

²⁴Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

²⁶John told them, "I baptize with* water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

²⁸This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

1:19 Greek *and Levites*. 1:21 Greek *Are you the Prophet?* See Deut 18:15, 18; Mal 4:5-6. 1:23 Isa 40:3. 1:26 Or *in*; also in 1:31, 33.

NOTES

1:19 Jewish leaders. Lit., "the Jews," occurring 71 times in John versus 17 total in the Synoptics. Most of the time it is used in contexts referring to the Jewish leaders, but John also intends to portray the Jewish people in their hostility and rejection of Jesus. Over half the occurrences are in conflict settings, and the leaders are portrayed as completely opposed to Jesus. Still, there are "Jews" who are believers (8:31; 11:45; 12:11), and the Samaritan woman calls Jesus a "Jew" (4:9). In spite of the conflict John portrays, Israel was still the focus of God's salvific work (EDNT 2.195-196).

1:21 "Are you Elijah?" "No." While John denied that he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet, Jesus identified him as Elijah in Matt 11:14: "If you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah" (cf. Matt 17:12; Mark 9:13). While some have held this to be a contradiction or seen Matt 11:14 as a later church reflection read back onto Jesus' lips (so Brown), it is better to see the issue historically, namely that the Baptist "did not detect as much significance in his own ministry as Jesus did" (Carson 1991:143).

1:24 the Pharisees who had been sent. There are several ways to understand this. The KJV, due to a definite article in the TR, has "they which were sent were of the Pharisees." The article is missing in the best mss (Ɑ66 Ɑ75 ⚭* A* B C* L). Even with this reading, there are three ways to translate it: (1) "those sent by the Pharisees"; (2) "some Pharisees who had been sent" (NLT, REB, NIV); or (3) "some Pharisees had been sent" (Phillips). The problem with the first is that the Pharisees were not in charge of the Sanhedrin, and the problem with the third is that there is no hint of a separate delegation from that mentioned in 1:19. Thus, the second is the best translation, meaning that there were some Pharisees in the delegation that was sent from the Sanhedrin, a natural surmise due to Pharisaic membership in that council.

1:28 Bethany. This is not the same "Bethany" near Jerusalem where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived; this is the Bethany on the other side of the Jordan. There is no record of the location of the place, and some simply consider it another biblical site that has disappeared through the centuries (Brown, Morris, Witherington). Origen believed it was



1 John

PHILIP W. COMFORT
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INTRODUCTION TO

1 John

AFTER READING AND STUDYING John's Gospel, a person might wonder how the great truths presented in it were lived out in the church. Readers might also wonder how they themselves can better understand and experience the truths revealed by Jesus—ideas such as “walking in the light” (John 8:12; 12:35-36), “remaining in Christ” (John 15:4-8), and “loving one another” (John 13:34; 15:12). John's first epistle answers both questions. It tells how Christians in the late first century were practicing (or not practicing) the profound truths proclaimed by Jesus, and it provides key insights into how we today can live in the Spirit of Jesus to experience spiritual transformation and love for the members of Christ's community, the church.

AUTHOR

Since the author does not name himself, the key to determining the authorship of this epistle (as well as that of 2 John and 3 John) is its similarity to the Gospel of John. The similarities between John's Gospel and John's epistles are so remarkable that it would be difficult to argue that these writings were done by two different people. The syntax, vocabulary, and the thematic developments are so strikingly similar that most readers can tell that the epistles were penned by the writer of the Gospel of John. Therefore, the way to establish the authorship of the three epistles is to establish the authorship of the fourth Gospel.

Whoever wrote the Gospel of John was an eyewitness of Jesus and among the very first followers of Jesus. The writer of this Gospel calls himself “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20); he was one of the twelve disciples, and among them he was one of those who was very close to Jesus (e.g., see John 13:23-25 where “the disciple Jesus loved” is said to have been leaning on Jesus' breast during the Last Supper). From the synoptic Gospels we realize that three disciples were very close to Jesus: Peter, James, and John. Peter could not have been the author of this Gospel because the one who called himself “the disciple Jesus loved” communicated with Peter at the Last Supper (John 13:23-25), outran Peter to the empty tomb on the morning of the Resurrection (John 20:2-4), and walked with Jesus and Peter along the shore of Galilee after Jesus' resurrection appearance to them (John 21:20-23). Thus, someone other than Peter authored this Gospel. And that someone could not have been James, for he was martyred many years before this Gospel was written (AD 44; cf. Acts 12:2). This leaves us with John, the son of Zebedee, who, like Peter and James, shared an intimate relationship with Jesus. Most likely, John is also the “other disciple” mentioned in the fourth Gospel (e.g.,

John 18:15). He and Andrew (Peter's brother) were the first to follow Jesus (John 1:35-40), and he was the one who was known to the high priest and therefore gained access for himself and Peter into the courtyard of the place where Jesus was on trial (John 18:15-16). This one, "the disciple Jesus loved," stood by Jesus during his crucifixion (John 19:25-26) and walked with Jesus after his resurrection (John 21:20). And this same disciple wrote the Gospel that today bears his name (John 21:24-25).

The author's claim to have been an eyewitness is just as pronounced in 1 John as it is in the Gospel of John. The author of 1 John claims to be among those who heard, saw, and even touched the eternal Word made flesh (1:1-4). In other words, John lived with Jesus, the God-man. As such, his testimony is firsthand; he was an eyewitness of the greatest person ever to enter human history. As Smith (1979:151) put it: "The author of [1 John] claims to have been an eye-witness of the Word of Life (1:1-3) and speaks throughout in a tone of apostolic authority, and there is abundance of primitive and credible testimony that he was St. John, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' and the last survivor of the Apostle-company."

But some scholars have thought that some other John (not the apostle) was the author. They make this judgment on the basis of a quotation from Papias, who was bishop of Hierapolis in the Roman province of Asia Minor (c. AD 100-130). His comment, transmitted through Irenaeus and recorded by Eusebius, is as follows: "If anywhere one came my way who had been a follower of the elders, I would inquire about the words of the elders—what Andrew and Peter had said, or what Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples say; and I would inquire about the things which Aristion and the elder John, the Lord's disciples, say" (Eusebius *History* 3.39.4-5).

Since two different people named "John" are referred to in this quotation, some scholars have surmised that the first "John" mentioned was John the apostle and the second "John" was an elder but not one of the original twelve disciples. (This was Eusebius's opinion, contra Irenaeus who considered both mentions to refer to the same person, the apostle John—see House 1992:530.) Since the writer of 2 John and 3 John calls himself "the elder," many have thought that the author of the three Johannine epistles was this "John the elder," not John the apostle. Although this could be true, it is not likely. First of all, according to Eusebius's quote, Papias did not say that John the elder was the writer of the three epistles of John. Second, it seems that Papias was speaking of two different categories of sources for his learning. The first was teachings passed down from those who *had been* eyewitnesses of Jesus, his original disciples—namely Andrew, Peter, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, and the other disciples of the Lord. The second source was the ongoing teaching of disciples who were still alive when Papias made this statement—those such as Aristion and John the elder (who was literally much older at this time). Note that Papias spoke of what the first group had "said" (past tense) and what the second group "says" (present tense; cf. Stott 2000:39-40). John the apostle was in both groups. Furthermore, John is lumped together with the other

“elders” in the first group (who were also Jesus’ apostles), and he is specifically called an elder in the second group.

Later in life, John the apostle called himself an elder. After all, Peter and Paul, both apostles, each called themselves “elder” (1 Pet 5:1; Phlm 1:9, “old man,” NLT). The title “elder” probably points to John’s position at that time; he was the oldest living apostle and chief leader among the churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. This is made clear in the First Epistle by the way he addresses the believers as his “dear children” (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7; 5:21).

In any event, whichever John wrote these epistles, he must have been an eyewitness of Jesus. We know, for certain, that John the son of Zebedee was an eyewitness. As for another John, called John the elder—he would have probably been one of Jesus’ 72 disciples (Luke 10:1) in order to claim “eyewitness” status. (This would also apply to Aristion.) But then, given the identical style between the epistles and the Gospel, this other “John” would also be the author of the fourth Gospel, and that can’t be so, for we know that the disciple who wrote the fourth Gospel was among the inner circle of the Twelve (see the discussion above). Once again, the facts presented in the fourth Gospel and the similarities of the first, second, and third epistles of John to the fourth Gospel press us to conclude that the author of the epistles and the author of the Gospel must be one and the same: John the apostle, the son of Zebedee. The earliest identification of John the apostle as the author of 1 John comes from the late second century, when both Irenaeus (*Heresies* 3.15.5, 8) and the Muratorian Fragment identified 1 John as his work.

Instead of dictating the epistle to an amanuensis, it appears that John himself penned it (2:12-14), as was his habit—as explicitly expressed in 2 John 12 and 3 John 13 and implicitly expressed in the Gospel (John 21:24-25).

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

We really do not know when 1 John was written. For one thing, it could have been written before he wrote the Gospel or after it. In 3 John 9, the apostle says, “I wrote to the church about this.” This could refer to 1 John or the Gospel, but the reference (in context) is more likely to 1 John (see note on 3 John 9). Nonetheless, the dating of John’s Gospel does bear on the dating of 1 John because the two are written in so similar a style and concern so many of the same issues. Extant manuscript evidence, particularly the papyrus manuscript known as P⁵² (P. Rylands 457, dated c. AD 100–120; for details of dating, see Comfort 2005:139-143), shows that the original Gospel had to have been composed before AD 100. The question is, how long before AD 100?

J. A. T. Robinson has placed the composition of the Gospel of John and 1–3 John before AD 70. In fact, Robinson has dated all the New Testament writings to pre-AD 70—primarily on the grounds that not one New Testament writer comments on the destruction of Jerusalem as having already occurred. This significant point, coupled with the fact that John speaks of a certain portico at the sheep gate in Jerusalem that

was *still* standing at the time of writing (see John 5:2, where John uses the present tense verb) points to a date of pre-AD 70 for John's Gospel. Based on their relationship to his Gospel, 1–3 John would be dated similarly in Robinson's perspective (see Robinson 1976:277-278).

However, we agree with most other scholars who tend to date the Gospel of John in the 80s, placing it in the following chronology: John and the other apostles were probably forced to leave Jerusalem by AD 70, if not earlier, due to mounting persecution. It is possible that John gathered with some of the Samaritan converts (see John 4:1-45; Acts 8:9-17) and with some of John the Baptist's followers in Palestine, where they continued to preach the word. Sometime thereafter (but probably no earlier than AD 70), they migrated to Asia Minor and began a successful ministry among the Gentiles (see Barker 1981:300-301).

John wrote a Gospel for these Gentiles somewhere around AD 80. Sometime thereafter, some of the members of the community left to form a rival group. John, therefore, wrote 1 John in order to deal with the crisis by encouraging the believers to remain in Christ and in the apostolic fellowship and by denouncing those who had not remained. Thus, the First Epistle was probably written around AD 85–90.

We have early historical records indicating that John wrote his Gospel while living in Ephesus. For example, Irenaeus wrote: "John, the disciple of the Lord, he who had leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel, while living at Ephesus in Asia" (*Heresies* 3.1.2). Irenaeus (who lived AD 130–200) received this information from Polycarp, who in his younger years was personally instructed by John. Thus, it stands to reason that John wrote his three epistles to certain local churches in Asia—especially to those around Ephesus, the church in which John functioned as an elder in his latter days. (The same churches probably include those mentioned in Rev 1:11.)

One of the reasons for this first epistle was that a heretical faction had developed within the church, one that promoted false teachings concerning the person of Christ. Scholars have identified this heresy as Docetism in a general sense and have pointed specifically to Cerinthus as the perpetrator of the specific brand of Docetism that 1 John addresses. Our knowledge of Cerinthus comes from Irenaeus, who cited Polycarp (a disciple of John) as saying that there was an incident once when John discovered that Cerinthus was in the same bath house in Ephesus—John cried out, "Let us save ourselves; the bath house may fall down, for inside is Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth." Irenaeus continued by saying that John proclaimed his Gospel to refute the errors of Cerinthus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4; 3.11.1; see Brown 1982:766-771 for a full record of the historical evidence concerning Cerinthus). The Docetists denied that Jesus had actually partaken of flesh and blood; they denied that God had come in the flesh (see 4:1-3). They did not deny Jesus Christ's deity; they denied his true humanity (see discussion below under "Major Themes"). John specifically refuted the Cerinthian heresy in 5:5-8. This setting undermines Robinson's dating of John's writings (both Gospel and epistles to pre-AD 70); instead, it points to a date in John's later life, in which he was probably in his 70s or 80s.

AUDIENCE

In recent years various scholars have tried to identify the original Johannine community—the group of believers for whom John wrote his Gospel and the epistles. That there was a Johannine community seems evident from the way John speaks to them and of them in his three epistles. The apostle John and the believers knew each other well, and the believers accepted the teachings of the apostle as “the truth.” John encouraged them to stay in fellowship with him (and the other apostles); if they did so, they would enjoy true fellowship with the Father and the Son (1:1-4).

In the Gospel this link between the believers and John and Jesus is also made evident. Throughout the Gospel, John lets his readers know that he had a special relationship with Jesus. As the Son, who was “near to the Father’s heart,” was the one qualified to explain the Father to mankind because of his special relationship with the Father (John 1:18), so John, who reclined on Jesus’ chest, was qualified to explain Jesus and his message to his readers because of his intimate relationship with Jesus. In John’s Gospel “the beloved disciple” or “the other disciple” is given a certain kind of preeminence: He is one of the first two followers of Jesus (John 1:35-37); he is the closest to Jesus during the Last Supper (John 13:22-25); he follows Jesus to his trial (John 18:15); and then he alone of the Twelve goes to Jesus’ cross and is given a direct command from Jesus to care for Jesus’ mother (John 19:26-27). He outruns Peter to the empty tomb and is the first to believe in Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:1-8); and he is the first to recognize that it was Jesus appearing to them in the Galilean visitation (John 21:7). Because of his relationship to Jesus, John’s testimony to his community could be trusted.

Culpepper (1975:261-290) attempted to reconstruct some of the distinctives of this Johannine community. He conjectured that this community was a kind of school (*scholē* [T⁶4981, Z⁶5391]) that claimed Jesus as its founder and John as its master-teacher. This school studied the Old Testament and was reared on the teachings of John about Jesus, therein absorbing John’s esoteric language about mystical experiences with Jesus. This school was also responsible in collaborating with John in producing his written Gospel. As a community, they were detached from Judaism (perhaps several of the members were ex-synagogue members who were expelled for their faith in Jesus), and they struggled with false teachers who denied Jesus as the God-man.

Then Culpepper did another study of John’s Gospel based on theories of reader-reception. Adopting Iser’s model of the implied reader (see Comfort’s evaluation [1997:27-28]), Culpepper was able to sketch the general character of John’s intended readers by what information (or lack thereof) the author supplied in the narrative concerning characters, events, language, cultural practices, and so forth. According to Culpepper’s study (1983:206-223), John’s intended readers were expected to already know most of the characters in the Gospel of John (with the exception of the beloved disciple, Lazarus, Nicodemus, Caiaphas, and Annas). The readers could be expected to know the general regions where the stories take place

ments to those who were claiming to have a relationship with God and yet had left the fellowship of believers and did not love their brothers in Christ. Further, they had rejected the apostolic authority of John.

Throughout this epistle John calls into question all professed spirituality. This element is presented in a series of statements (usually phrased “if we say”) that probably mimic what various gnostic believers were claiming about their spiritual experiences (e.g., see 1:6, 8; 2:4, 6, 9). Talk is cheap; reality must be tested by one’s relationship with the members of the church community. John urged the believers to know the truth and to live in it.

John’s first epistle has much to say to those today who have gnostic tendencies in the sense that they claim to have superior spiritual knowledge (or even experience) beyond that which ordinary Christians have. Indeed, some may even claim to have found the “secrets” to the deeper spiritual life, “secrets” which others can never know unless they become part of their special group. This superior knowledge often leads to an elitist attitude and disdain for other Christians. In short, the superior knowledge leads to rejection (a form of hatred) of other believers. John’s epistle exposes this. If one truly knows Christ and lives in him, that person should be loving all fellow Christians. Love, not “superior” knowledge, is the proof that one has a genuine spiritual life.

OUTLINE

This book almost defies being outlined due to its symphonic thematic presentation (cf. “Literary Style,” above). Among the many outlines offered by various scholars, some have organized it according to the three tests of life: righteousness, love, and belief. Others have used a simpler outline, generally framing 1 John according to the God proclamations: “God is light” (1:5) and “God is love” (4:8). (For discussions concerning the various outlines, see Brown 1982:764; Burge 1996:42-45). But there is far too much overlapping material to make a clear-cut outline built around this thematic development. We have taken another approach: to organize the epistle around the theme of community fellowship, which is a fellowship that emanates from the triune God and should permeate the members of the believing community.

- I. Experiencing Authentic Christian Fellowship (1:1–2:11)
 - A. The Prologue (1:1–4)
 - B. Living in God’s Light with the Community of Believers (1:5–10)
 - C. Experiencing the Ministry of Jesus, the Advocate (2:1–2)
 - D. Living in the Light Means Loving Fellow Believers (2:3–11)
- II. Maintaining the True Fellowship (2:12–3:10)
 - A. The Community of Believers Affirmed as a Spiritual Family (2:12–17)
 - B. Identifying the False Believers and the True (2:18–27)
 - C. Being Prepared for Christ’s Return (2:28–3:3)
 - D. Recognizing What Kind of Life Prospers the Fellowship and What Contradicts It (3:4–10)

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- III. Loving One Another in the Community of Believers (3:11–4:21)
 - A. Loving the Members of the Community: A Sign of Divine Life (3:11–18)
 - B. Maintaining a Relationship with God by Being Faithful to Him and Living in Christ (3:19–24)
 - C. Community Fellowship Protected by Watchfulness for Deceivers (4:1–6)
 - D. God's Love Expressed in Community Love (4:7–21)
 - IV. Overcoming Hindrances to Community Fellowship (5:1–21)
 - A. Overcoming the World (5:1–5)
 - B. Discerning Truth from Falsehood and Keeping Eternal Life (5:6–12)
 - C. Conclusion: Helping the Wayward Return to the Fellowship (5:13–21)

COMMENTARY ON

1 John

◆ I. Experiencing Authentic Christian Fellowship (1:1–2:11) A. The Prologue (1:1–4)

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning,* whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ²This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is

eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*

1:1 Greek *What was from the beginning*. 1:4 Or *so that our joy may be complete*; some manuscripts read *your joy*.

NOTES

1:1 *who existed from the beginning*. Lit., “what was from the beginning” (cf. NLT mg). There are two explanations for John’s use of the relative pronoun (“what”) instead of the personal pronoun (“who”): (1) John used the relative pronoun because it is more inclusive; it encompasses everything about “the Word of life” that the apostles had come to know and experience (so Westcott 1886:4-7). (2) John used the relative pronoun to point to “the message of life” (so Smalley 1984:5-6) as embodied in Christ, the Word. Since the prologue is a poem, John likely intended both meanings. In any event, this relative pronoun is resumed in the beginning of 1:3, where it is made clear the subject is that which pertains to “the Word of life” (1:1).

we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. John made a point of saying that they had not only seen and heard the eternal One but had also touched him. In other words, Jesus was truly physical. A certain group of gnostics in John’s day (and thereafter), called Docetists (derived from a Gr. word meaning “it seems to be so”—*dokeō* [T⁶1380, Z⁶1506]), claimed that the Son of God merely assumed the guise of humanity but was not truly human. Later in this epistle, John says that any person who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is a person who does not belong to God (4:2-3).

the Word of life. This title describes the Son of God as the personal expression of the invisible God and the giver of divine, eternal life to the believers. In the prologue to the fourth Gospel, John identified the Son of God as both “the Word” (*logos* [T⁶3056, Z⁶3364]) and “life” (*zōē* [T⁶2222, Z⁶2437]). The title “the Word of life” is a combination of the two. As “the Word,” the Son expresses God; as “life,” he imparts God’s eternal life to believers.

1:2 *was revealed to us*. This phrase, which appears twice in this verse, accords with what John said in his prologue to the Gospel of John: “The Word was God . . . and the Word became human . . . and we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son” (John 1:1, 14).

eternal life. The Gr. word translated “life” is *zōē* [TG2222, ZG2437]. In classical Greek, it was used for life in general. There are a few examples of this usage in the NT (Acts 17:25; Jas 4:14; Rev 16:3), but in all other NT instances the word designates the divine, eternal life—the life of God (Eph 4:18). This life resided in Christ, and he made it available to all who believe in him.

with the Father. As in John 1:1, the word “with” (*pros* [TG4314, ZG4639]) suggests that the Word was “face to face with the Father.” This connotes intimate fellowship (MM 554). By using this expression, John was implying that the Word (the Son) and God (the Father) enjoyed an intimate, personal relationship from the beginning. In Jesus’ intercessory prayer of John 17, he revealed that the Father had loved him before the foundation of the world.

1:3 We proclaim to you. The “we” occurring throughout the prologue refers either to John and the apostles (for whom John is the spokesman) or to John and any other believers who saw Jesus Christ in the flesh.

1:4 that you may fully share our joy. Lit., “that our joy may be full.” This is an attempt to render a variant reading found in \aleph B L 049, but it turns out to be a rendering of a conflated reading because it happens to accommodate another variant reading in other mss (A C P 33 1739), “that your joy may be complete” (as in the TR and KJV). This variant was created by some scribe(s) who thought it strange that John would have penned a letter for his own joy. However, the writer was thinking of their mutual happiness—his and his readers. In other words, he wrote this letter to encourage the readers’ participation in the fellowship that he (John) and the other believers were enjoying (cf. 2 John 12). Thus, the NLT rendering gets at the heart of the meaning.

COMMENTARY

The prologue to John’s first epistle is poetic, much in the same way the prologue to John’s Gospel is poetic. In poetic format, the text of 1:1-3 could be rendered as follows:

*As to what was from the beginning
as to what we have heard
as to what we have seen with our eyes
and what we have gazed upon
and as to what we have touched—
this is the Word of Life,
for the life was manifested
and we are those who have seen
and give you testimony
as we proclaim to you
the eternal Life that was with the Father
and was manifested to us.
What we have seen and heard
we proclaim to you
so that you may join our fellowship
and have communion with the Father
and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

As poetry, the prologue presents abstractions that demand the reader’s careful interpretation. For example, John did not identify “Jesus” as the subject in the first verse;

rather, he called him “the Word of life.” Furthermore, he did not use the personal pronoun, “he who was from the beginning,” which would have made the simplest presentation. Rather, he used the relative pronoun, “that which” or “what,” so as to be more encompassing—and more compelling. John was speaking of the apostles’ total experience of the incarnate God-man, wherein they heard his message, saw his miracles, gazed upon his glory, and even touched him.

John’s first epistle opens in the same manner as his Gospel—both begin with a prologue. When John commenced his Gospel, he fondly recollected how he (and the other disciples, for whom he was a spokesman) beheld the Son’s glory, the glory of a unique Son from the Father (John 1:14). And then John picturesquely described Jesus as the one who was both God and the Son of God living in the heart of the Father (John 1:18). In both the Gospel and the epistle, John reveals that he (along with the other apostles) has heard, seen, and even handled God in the flesh. In both books, he tells us that the one they experienced is both “the Word” and “eternal life.” The apostles had come to the realization that the Word of life, who had been in face-to-face fellowship with the Father for all eternity, had entered into time to be manifest in human flesh to them.

This experience was so life-changing and so memorable that John used the perfect tense verbs (“have seen” and “have heard”—1:1, 3) to convey the idea that the apostles’ past experience of the God-man, the incarnate Son of God, was still vivid and present with them. (Such is the force of the perfect tense in Greek.) When the Son entered into time, the eternal fellowship of the Father and Son also entered into time. Thus, to have heard Jesus was to have heard the Father speaking in the Son (John 14:10, 24), to have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father (John 14:8-10), and to have known him was to have known him who was one with the Father (John 10:30, 38). The Son and the Father are so united that they are said to indwell each other (John 14:8-10). Christ perfectly expressed the Father because he lived in perfect union with him. Thus, for the disciples, to know Jesus was to know the Father.

This is why the Son is called “the Word”: he is the revealer, the communicator of God to humanity. As the Word, the Son of God fully conveys and communicates God. The Greek term translated “Word” is *logos* [163056, 263364]; it was primarily used in two ways: “The word might be thought of as remaining within a man, when it denoted his thought or reason. Or it might refer to the word going forth from the man, when it denoted the expression of his thought—i.e., his speech. The *Logos*, a philosophical term, depended on the former use” (Morris 1971:72-78). As a philosophical term, the *logos* denoted the principle of the universe, even the creative energy that generated the universe. The term *logos* may also have some connection with the Old Testament presentation of “Wisdom” as a personification or attribute of God (Prov 8). In both its Jewish and Greek conceptions, the *logos* was associated with the idea of beginnings—the world began through the origination and instrumentality of the Word (cf. Gen 1:3ff, where the expression “God said” is used repeatedly). John may have had these ideas in mind, but most likely he was originating a new use of this term to identify the Son of God as the divine expression.

Paul had the same idea in mind when he said the Son is “the visible image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). And the writer of Hebrews was thinking similarly when he said that the Son “expresses the very character of God” (Heb 1:3), which means that the Son is the exact representation (*charaktēr* [T⁶5481, Z⁶5917]) of God’s nature and being (*hupostasis* [T⁶5287, Z⁶5712]). In the Godhead, the Son functions as the revealer of God and the reality of God. He is God made touchable.

During the days of his ministry, Jesus was revealing the Father to the disciples and thereby initiating them into the divine fellowship. Once the disciples were regenerated by the Spirit and received God’s eternal life, they actually entered into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Having been brought into this divine participation, the apostles became the new initiators—introducing this fellowship to others and encouraging them to enter into fellowship with them. Whoever would enter into fellowship with the apostles would actually be entering into their fellowship with the Father and the Son.

In summary, the one, unique fellowship between the Father and the Son began in eternity, was manifest in time through the incarnation of the Son, was introduced to the apostles, and then through the apostles was extended to each and every believer. When a person becomes a child of God (through the new life given by the Holy Spirit), he or she enters into this one ageless, universal fellowship—a fellowship springing from the Godhead, coursing through the apostles, and flowing through every genuine believer who has ever been or will ever be.

How much greater is this view of fellowship than is the view commonly held! The true fellowship, having a divine origin, has been extended to people for human participation. How privileged we are to have been included! And we must never forget that this fellowship includes all the believers from the apostles to the present; it is not exclusive. How then can we continue to be so restricted and so sectarian? The Bible does not talk about “this fellowship” and “that fellowship.” There is but one fellowship, as there is but one body of Christ. How good it is to come to the Lord’s table to enjoy the communion of the believers—communion not just with those present at that particular meeting but communion with all of God’s people who lived before us and who live now.

◆ B. Living in God’s Light with the Community of Believers (1:5-10)

⁵This is the message we heard from Jesus* and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. ⁷But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

1:5 Greek *from him*.

⁸If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

NOTES

1:5 *the message.* This wording is based on the excellent testimony of \aleph A B. One variant (in C P 33 1739 cop) substitutes “the promise” for “the message.” Another variant found in a few mss ($\aleph^2 \Psi$) reads “the love of the promise.” The idea of “promise” is difficult in this context because the statement that follows can hardly be construed as being a promise: “God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.” Of course, “the promise” could be referring back to 1:3-4, wherein John promised the readers that they would be communing with the Father and the Son if they (the readers) maintained fellowship with the apostles—resulting in full joy for all. Nonetheless, “the message” has better documentary support as the original wording.

God is light. This is a statement of the absolute nature and being of God, as are the statements that he is Spirit (John 4:24) and love (1 John 4:8). To say that “God is light” is to say that God symbolizes truth (compared to darkness that symbolizes error) and righteousness (compared to darkness that symbolizes evil). OT scriptures speak of this: Pss 27:1; 119:130; Isa 5:20; Micah 7:8. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is this light (John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36).

there is no darkness in him at all. The Gr. could be translated literally as “darkness is not in him never.” God is untainted by any evil or sin (= darkness). John speaks in absolutes, perhaps as no other writer in the NT. So here we have “God is light” and in him is no darkness whatsoever—that is, no change, no sin, no secrecy, no hiding in the shadows.

1:6 *if we say.* This is the first of several instances in which John challenges the claims of the gnostic secessionists (see notes on 1:8; 2:6, 9; see also “Christological Orthodoxy versus Heresy” and “Theological Concerns” in the Introduction). They claimed to be living in God but failed to reflect his moral character. If we have fellowship with God, we should have some of his characteristics—something we share in common. Fellowship is another way of saying “commonality” with God.

1:7 *fellowship with each other.* This is the fellowship among believers that results from each believer having fellowship with the triune God.

the blood of Jesus, his Son. This reading has excellent documentary support: \aleph B C P 1739 syr^p cop^{sa}. A variant in the TR (supported by A 33 \aleph . it^{twz} syr^{h**} cop^{bo}) reads, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son” (so KJV and NKJV). Since divine names were often expanded by scribes, it is very likely that “Jesus” was expanded to “Jesus Christ” under the influence of John’s usual wording (see 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20). The point of using just the human name “Jesus” is that it emphasizes the sacrifice he made in shedding his blood for our sins.

1:8 *If we claim we have no sin.* This is the second false claim of the secessionists (see note on 1:6).

the truth. In order to clarify just what this “truth” is, some scribes expanded this expression to “the truth of God.” When John speaks of “the truth” he is speaking of spiritual reality and veracity; it is a spiritual reality in the believer that could be verified by the apostles and other believers as being true (in both life and doctrine) to the teachings of Christ.

1:10 *If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar.* This verse parallels 1:8, except that here the focus is on the actual acts of sin emanating from the sinful nature. To claim we have no sin goes beyond self-delusion; it is charging that God is a liar! We must acknowledge that God’s Word emphasizes the permeating and penetrating nature of sin. So to deny sin is in us indicates God’s “word has no place in our hearts” (cf. 2:14; John 8:55; 10:35; 17:6, 14, 17). John is not saying that if we make such a false claim we do not have eternal life. He is saying that a person who makes such a denial of sinful acts does not have the Word of God permeating and changing his or her life.

COMMENTARY

Just as Christ shared the message he heard from the Father, so the apostles, in turn, shared the same message they heard from the Son. John did not use the term usually translated “gospel,” but he did use similar words such as “witness” or “testimony,” “word,” “truth,” and “message.” The message is God expresses himself as pure light (cf. John 1:4-5, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46). Those who claim to know God must also be living in the light, for darkness and light are incompatible. We cannot live both in the darkness of sin and in the light of fellowship with God in whom is “no darkness at all.” First John uses “darkness” seven times to refer to sin (1:5-6; 2:8-9, 11); one cannot live a sinful life and simultaneously claim to be living in the “light.”

When Jesus was on earth, his divine life illuminated the inner lives of men. It penetrated people—illuminating them to the divine truth and exposing them to their own sin. Everywhere Christ was present, he gave light—light to reveal his identity and light to expose sin (John 3:21; 8:12). No one could come into contact with Christ without being enlightened. His light would either expose or illumine, or both. So it is for the Christian who is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. In his presence we see our sin and we see his glory. Of course, a person can refuse to receive the light and remain in darkness. But whoever comes to the light will receive Christ’s enlightenment.

Since God is pure light, the Son of God lives in pure light and is the light. Those who claim to live in the Son must also live in the light—that is, one must be illumined by the truth of who God is. To live in the light cannot come from imitating God outwardly but from growing more like him in character; it involves transformation. As Paul put it, we are transformed into the image of the one we behold—the Lord, the Spirit (see 2 Cor 3:14-18).

The purpose of “living in the light” (1:7) is not to produce individual mystics but to arouse genuine fellowship among believers. This is important to John’s overall argument. True spirituality is manifest in community fellowship. One cannot say he or she communes with God but then refuse to commune with God’s people. Such was the case with the gnostics of John’s day, and this is the situation with many people in our own times. They claim to get along well with God but can’t get along with any of his children. John’s point is that the natural result of living in the light (in fellowship with God) is a joyful relationship with other Christians.

Those who live in the light will be enlightened by God’s Spirit concerning their sin. Jesus’ “blood” (1:7; an expression used throughout the NT to encapsulate Jesus’ redemptive death on the cross) cleansed us completely and brought us into fellowship with God; now the same blood of Jesus keeps us clean from every sin that would mar that fellowship. Confession of sin is a sign that truth, which is itself light, has already begun to illuminate our sin-darkened lives. If we refuse to admit that we have sin, we deceive ourselves. We certainly cannot fool God, but by refusing to admit our sin, we can cheat ourselves of fellowship with him.

So confession of sins is necessary for maintaining continual fellowship with God,

which, in turn, will enable us to have good fellowship with the members of the church community. The Greek word translated “confess” (*homologeō* [T⁶3670, Z⁶3933]) basically means “to say the same thing” or “to acknowledge.” Rather than denying our sin nature, we are to confess our sins. God says we are sinners in need of forgiveness. Therefore, to “confess” means to agree with God concerning specific acts of sin we have committed; it is to admit we are sinners. When believers admit their sins, God cleanses them. Forgiveness and cleansing are guaranteed because God is faithful to his promises. God acts on the basis of his justice, not on the basis of how we think he feels about us. Christ has satisfied God’s righteous demands on us so that now God is bound to forgive all who believe in his Son. We can depend on this.

Therefore, it is foolish to claim that “we have not sinned” (1:10). However, various Christians throughout the ages have made this claim because they considered Jesus to have abolished their sins once and for all at the moment they believed, or were filled with the Spirit, or were sanctified. But experience teaches against this. Though Jesus condemned sin once and for all, we still sin when we live in the old nature. When we live in the Spirit, we live a sin-defeating life, but no one lives in the Spirit every moment of life. Even Paul struggled with this (see Rom 7).

We may admit to the presence of the sin nature while denying any personal sin and so deny any need for confession. If we do this, we are guilty of calling God a liar. The statement “we have not sinned” (1:10; *ouch hēmartēkamen*, perfect tense) speaks of a denial in the past that continues to the present. Unlike verse 8, which speaks of the guilt of sin or sinful nature, this verse speaks of the denial of particular sins. To make such a claim is to make God a liar because God’s Word emphasizes the permeating and penetrating nature of sin. So to deny sin is in us indicates God’s “word has no place in our hearts” (1:10). John is not saying that if we make such a false claim, as given in verse 10, that we do not have eternal life. He is saying that a person who makes such a denial of sinful acts does not have the Word of God permeating and changing his or her life.

◆ C. Experiencing the Ministry of Jesus, the Advocate (2:1-2)

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ²He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

NOTES

2:1 My dear children. This expresses the tender affection of a father for his own children—the phrase could read, “My own dear children.” The expression is patronizing in the best sense of the term.

if anyone does sin. We are all liable to occasional sins. We should not condone these sins, but while condemning them we should not fear to confess them to God.

an advocate who pleads our case. This is an expanded translation of the word *paraklētos* [T⁶3875, Z⁶4156] (transliterated in English as “Paraclete”). The word means “one who is



2 & 3 John

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INTRODUCTION TO *2 & 3 John*

THE TWO SHORTEST EPISTLES in the New Testament, 2 and 3 John, are gems in their own right. Second John, a miniature version of 1 John, extols those who live in the truth and live in love and warns against those who do not teach the apostolic truths about Jesus Christ—who, in some fashion or another, deny that he is the unique Son of the Father, the Son of God come in the flesh. Third John, giving us a window into the early church, presents us with two kinds of leaders: one that serves the Lord and others by living in the truth and practicing love, and another that refuses apostolic authority and loves himself more than the church.

AUTHOR

These two epistles were written by the same author, as is evident from their similarity of tone, style, and thematic development—all of which are also extremely similar to 1 John, which is undeniably similar to the fourth Gospel. The grammar, style, and vocabulary of 2 John compare very closely to 1 John. Five of the 13 verses of the second letter are almost identical with verses in 1 John (cf. 2 John 1 with 1 John 3:13; 2 John 2 with 1 John 2:4; 2 John 5 with 1 John 2:7 and 5:3; 2 John 7 with 1 John 2:18 and 4:2; 2 John 9 with 1 John 2:23-24). Third John has vocabulary and expressions that are distinctly similar, if not identical, to 2 John (cf. 3 John 4 with 2 John 4; 3 John 13-14 with 2 John 12), as well as to 1 John (cf. 3 John 11 with 1 John 3:6, 10). The style and voice are also markedly similar. Thus, we must conclude that the same writer who composed 2 John and 3 John also composed 1 John, the author of which was most likely John the apostle, the son of Zebedee (see “Author” in the Introduction to 1 John). In fact, it must be said that these two short letters would hardly have been included in the New Testament canon if their author was not the apostle John. Their authorship—by the beloved disciple—is what warranted their inclusion in the New Testament canon.

In both 2 John and 3 John, the writer calls himself an “elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Quite literally, John was an old man at this point in his life. If he were 10 years (or so) younger than Jesus (who was born between 6 and 4 BC), then John would have been in his 80s (or thereabouts) when he wrote these two epistles (see below on date of writing).

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

There is very little in the letters of 2 John or 3 John to point us to a date of writing. The similarities to 1 John strongly suggest a similar time period, around the late 80s

or early 90s. The Second Epistle must have been written in the same time period as 1 John because it deals with the same issue—heresy regarding the human nature of Jesus Christ (2 John 7). It is a special warning for believers to not receive the traveling teachers who would be spreading the false teachings of the secessionists addressed in 1 John. The Third Epistle addresses related concerns: John cautioned Gaius about Diotrophes, who had evidently been affected by the secessionists to have a negative attitude about John and his coworkers.

The purpose of 2 John is manifold. In the first place, the recipient is urged to live in the truth and to continue practicing Christian love. The second and more compelling reason for the epistle is its warning against the deceivers who refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and were actively recruiting others to join them. This same concern to prevent and correct false teaching prompted Paul to write Galatians (Gal 1:6), Colossians (Col 2:16-23), 2 Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:1-3), and 1 Timothy (1 Tim 4:1; 6:20-21). Other epistles were also written to deal with false teachers and their doctrines (cf. 2 Pet 2:1ff; Jude 3-4). John's first two epistles were written specifically as antidotes to the poisonous effects of Docetic gnosticism, which was infecting many of the early churches. Third, the epistle was written to exhort the Christians to close their home meetings to false teachers (2 John 9-10).

Third, John was written by John to commend Gaius and the other Christians in the same local church for living in the truth. He also commended Gaius for the hospitality he had given to those who were traveling "for the sake of the Name" (3 John 7, NIV). These traveling teachers had spoken well of Gaius's love for the church. In contrast to Gaius stood Diotrophes, whose love of power and authority motivated him not only to defy the authority of the elder John, but also to convince others to follow his defiance. He had refused to receive the coworkers sent by John. (Interestingly, Diotrophes was doing to John's emissaries the very thing John had told his churches to do to the false teachers in 2 John. He was treating John and his coworkers as false teachers.) Thus, John indicated in this letter that he would come to the church and set things in order.

AUDIENCE

Second and Third John have been placed among the General Epistles (also known as the Catholic Epistles) by virtue of their association with 1 John. But they are not, by content, General Epistles. Second John was addressed to an individual or a specific local church, and 3 John was addressed to a specific individual, Gaius.

Second John was written to a "chosen lady and to her children" (2 John 1). Some commentators think this refers to a specific woman and her actual, physical children (Smith 1979:162; Morris 1970:1271). Accordingly, some think that the Greek word for "lady" (*kuria* [T62959, Z63257]) is a proper name, "Cyria"; this view was held by Athanasius (see note on 2 John 1). Clement of Alexandria in *Adumbrations* (see *Fragments of Clement of Alexandria* 1.4) said, "John's Second Epistle was written to a certain Babylonian lady named Electa," thus taking the word for "chosen" or "elect" as a proper name.

Most modern commentators think John was using this address as a surrogate for a particular local church, as perhaps Peter also did in 1 Peter 5:13 (cf. Smalley 1984:318; Marshall 1978:10; Burge 1996:232). They argue that the nature of the epistle points to a corporate personality, the local church (see comments on 2 John 5, 6, 8, 10, 12). As such, 2 John was probably sent to one of the churches in the Johannine community of churches, which was a cluster of churches in Asia Minor that were the recipients of John's apostolic ministry.

Another approach to identifying the addressee is to view this letter as being addressed to a specific woman *and* a local church that met in that woman's house. The New Testament gives us a picture of the early church wherein believers met in houses. This is the case in the book of Acts (cf. 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 12:5, 12), and it can be gathered from reading the New Testament epistles that there were similar situations elsewhere (cf. Rom 16:3-5, 14-15; 1 Cor 16:19-20; Col 4:15-16; Phlm 1-2). We know that some of these homes, where the church gathered, belonged to women—or, at least were known by the name of the lady of the house. The church in Jerusalem gathered in the house of Mary (the mother of John Mark) to pray for Peter (Acts 12:5-12), and the natural conclusion is that the church habitually gathered there. The church in Corinth at one time assembled in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3-5), and when Priscilla and Aquila lived in Ephesus, an assembly gathered in their home there (1 Cor 16:19-20). According to Colossians 4:15, the church in Laodicea assembled in the home of Nymphas—indeed, Paul specifically calls it “the church in her house.” (For more discussion on “house churches” in the NT, see Comfort 1993:153-158.) In light of this, the addressee in 2 John could very likely be a woman who housed an assembly of believers, who then are metaphorically and affectionately called “her children.” This position is further reinforced by 2 John 10, where John makes a specific point of telling the woman and her children not to receive false teachers “into the house” (*eis oikian* [TG1519/3614, ZG1650/3864]). In historical context, this would refer to the house wherein the believers assembled.

Third John was written to Gaius. Although the New Testament mentions several men with the name Gaius (Acts 19:29; 20:4ff; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14), it would be difficult to say that any one of these was the same as the Gaius in 3 John, especially since Gaius was a popular name in the first century. At any rate, Gaius was commended for his Christian life and hospitality and so was Demetrius (3 John 12), both of whom stand in sharp contrast to Diotrophes, who is literally called “the one loving to be first” (3 John 9).

Even though 2 John and 3 John were addressed to particular individuals or churches, John had his entire community of churches in mind. These churches had been infected by the false teachings of the gnostics, particularly those who were propagating a heretical view about the nature of Jesus Christ such as Cerinthus (see “Date and Occasion of Writing” and “Major Themes” in the Introduction to 1 John). John sent out various coworkers to promote the apostolic truths and to reunite the community in Christian love. Diotrophes rejected these coworkers and

THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The same theological motifs appear in 2 John that are in 1 John. In both epistles, heresies are denounced, and the church is warned not to support the messengers of the heresy. Third John provides a window into first-century church leadership problems. The concerns it addresses have more to do with the practical administration of the church than with theological doctrines, but it nonetheless affirms the theology of 1 and 2 John—namely, that one cannot claim to know God and yet reject the people of God.

John's letters "contain theological, ethical, and practical truths which are fundamental to the Christian position in every age: that Jesus is one with God as well as one with us; that love and righteousness are indispensable to the believer who seeks as a child of God to walk in the light; and that unity, however flexible, is a demand laid upon the whole Church at all times" (Smalley 1984:xxxiv).

OUTLINE OF 2 JOHN

- I. Greetings (vv. 1-3)
- II. Live in the Truth (vv. 4-11)
- III. John's Final Words (vv. 12-13)

OUTLINE OF 3 JOHN *(Commentary begins on p. 393)*

- I. Greetings (vv. 1-2)
- II. Caring for the Lord's Workers (vv. 3-12)
- III. John's Final Words (vv. 13-15)

COMMENTARY ON

2 John

◆ I. Greetings (vv. 1-3)

This letter is from John, the elder.*

I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children,* whom I love in the truth—as does everyone else who knows the truth—²because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever.

³Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.

1a Greek *From the elder.* 1b Or *the church God has chosen and its members.*

NOTES

1 John, the elder. The Greek text does not include the word “John” (cf. NLT mg); it was added for clarification. In *Demonstration of the Gospel* 3.5, Eusebius said that in John’s “epistles,” John did not mention his own name, nor call himself an apostle or evangelist, but an “elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The title “elder” probably points to John’s position at that time; he was the oldest living apostle and chief leader among the churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. For further discussion concerning the title “elder,” see “Author” in the Introduction to 1 John and in the Introduction to 2 & 3 John.

chosen lady. In ancient Greek, all words were written entirely in capital letters; thus, one cannot tell from the ancient page whether the phrase *eklectē kuria* (“chosen lady”) referred to a specific woman—either “Eclecta, a woman” or “elect Kyria”—or whether it denotes simply “an elect lady” or “chosen lady.” Clement of Alexandria thought her name was “Electa” (*Adumbrations* 4 [i.e., *Fragments* 1.4]). Athanasius thought her name was the elect “Kyria.” One modern English version (TLB) follows this, naming her “Cyria.” It is likely that *kuria* [T⁶2959, Z⁶3257] should be understood as “lady” inasmuch as this was a common term used in the papyri of that time period when a writer was addressing a woman (cf. examples in Hunt and Edgar 1959:302-303).

Most commentators do not identify the recipient of the letter as an individual because the epistle does not speak of the woman with any particular details (in contrast to 3 John, which speaks specifically of Gaius, Diotrefes, and Demetrius). Rather, they see this as being a symbolic way of speaking about a local church (cf. Marshall 1978:60; Schnackenburg 1979:306-307). This interpretation is reinforced by John concluding the letter with the salutation, “Greetings from the children of your sister, chosen by God” (v. 13). However, it is possible that the “elect lady” receiving the letter could be a reference to a particular woman in whose home a local church met, and the elect sister sending greetings also to a particular woman in whose home a local church met (see “Audience” in the Introduction).

her children. If the recipient was a woman, these would have been her actual children; if the recipient was a local church, these would have been the members of the church. This understanding is reflected in the NLT mg: “Or *the church God has chosen and its members.*”

But it seems more plausible to consider that this “lady” was an actual woman and that her “children” were those who met in her home.

2 *the truth lives in us.* This language personifies “truth.” Since Jesus Christ is the full expression and embodiment of truth (John 14:6; Eph 4:21), truth dwells in us because Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). The word translated “lives” is *menousan* [T⁶3306, Z⁶3531], which can also be translated “abiding” or “remaining”—a primary emphasis in this epistle is that believers remain in the truth and not stray from it.

3 *Grace, mercy, and peace.* This is a unique constellation of blessings, found only here in the NT. The only other time John mentions “grace” is in John 1:16-17, which says that “grace . . . came through Jesus Christ,” so that “from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace” (NRSV). John nowhere else mentions “mercy.” “Peace” is found a few times in John’s Gospel; each time Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, he blessed them with “peace” (John 20:19, 26).

Jesus Christ. Divine titles in the text of the NT were often subjected to scribal expansion. In this case, “Jesus Christ” (found in A B 048 0232 81 1739) was expanded to “Lord Jesus Christ” in Codex Sinaiticus (Σ) and the majority of late mss. Then it was popularized by its inclusion in the TR and KJV.

the Son of the Father. This reading is based on the strong textual support of Σ A B 048 0232 81 1739. The uniqueness of this expression (it occurs only here in the NT), prompted scribes to shorten it to “the Son” (found in a few late minuscules) or change it to “the Son of God” (1881 and some Vulgate mss). But the title “the Son of the Father” functions to show the unique relationship between the Son and the Father.

in truth and love. John speaks more directly about truth in v. 4 and about love in v. 5.

COMMENTARY

The opening verses display the typical format used for letters in the Hellenistic period: identification of the writer, identification of the recipients, and a greeting and blessing (the commentary on 3 John 1-2 gives two other examples of letters from the Hellenistic period).

In this informal letter, John did not stand on his authority as an apostle but instead identified himself as “the elder,” one who watched over the believers with loving concern for their spiritual well-being. The word “elder” (*presbuteros* [T⁶4245A, Z⁶4565]) was also a reference to John’s age; he must have been an old man at the time he wrote this epistle (perhaps in his 80s). As discussed in the notes, the identification of the recipients as “the chosen lady and her children” probably refers to a specific Christian woman in whose home a church assembled. The other two options are (1) a specific woman and her actual children, or (2) a local church (see comments on vv. 6, 12, and 13). This elect lady and her children were loved by all the believers who had come to know the truth. The “truth” John speaks of is the sum total of orthodox teachings concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as defined by the apostles. All who have embraced the truth concerning Jesus’ true deity and humanity are true members of the household of God.

Secular writers of the time often greeted their recipients with words of blessing such as these: “may good things be yours from the gods”; “may you have absence of conflict and good health.” Contrast that with the richness of this greeting and blessing: “May you have grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus

Christ, the Son of the Father." The apostle Paul often used "grace" and "peace" in his opening greetings; John also adds "mercy" here.

Though John does not speak of grace and peace as frequently as Paul does, he does mention them in his Gospel. The Greek text of John 1:16 indicates that grace is given to the believer as a continual supply—just when one measure of grace is used up, another replaces it. This grace keeps on giving, like a spring-fed well that never runs dry. Christ's dispensation of grace to every believer can never be exhausted because he is full of grace, which means he is full of God's kindness extended to us. God's mercy is seen in forgiving us and freeing us from sin, and peace is the result, providing cessation of turmoil and anxiety. These are gifts from God the Father and from the Father's Son, Jesus Christ. These blessings are transmitted to us from the Father through the Son. Some may claim to receive peace directly from God, apart from Jesus Christ, but no one can experience the Father apart from the Son. This is a consistent theme in John's Gospel (John 8:18; 14:6-10; 17:3) and John's epistles (see commentary on vv. 7-9).

"Truth" and "love" are appended to this blessing, as if they were afterthoughts, but this is not really the case because these words actually serve to introduce the next verses, where John emphasizes that it is necessary for all God's children to know the truth and live it out in their lives by practicing brotherly love.

◆ II. Live in the Truth (vv. 4-11)

⁴How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.

⁵I am writing to remind you, dear friends,* that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. ⁶Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

⁷I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came* in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist.

⁸Watch out that you do not lose what we* have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward.

⁹Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement. ¹¹Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.

5 Greek *I urge you, lady.* 7 Or *will come.* 8 Some manuscripts read *you.*

NOTES

4 *How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth.* Though we do not know the individuals John was referring to, he was probably speaking of believers he met at some place other than the local church itself—or other than the home of the elect lady. His joy at meeting them and then discovering that they were living in the truth prompted him to write this epistle. In identifying only "some" of the children, he was not necessarily saying that others were not living in the truth. Rather, he was probably speaking only of those he met.

COMMENTARY ON

3 John

◆ I. Greetings (vv. 1-2)

This letter is from John, the elder.*

I am writing to Gaius, my dear friend,
whom I love in the truth.

²Dear friend, I hope all is well with you
and that you are as healthy in body as you
are strong in spirit.

¹ Greek *From the elder*.

NOTES

1 John, the elder. The Greek text does not include the word “John” (see NLT mg). It was added for clarification. In *Demonstration of the Gospel* 3.5, Eusebius writes that John, in his epistles, does not mention his own name, nor call himself an apostle or evangelist but an “elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The title “elder” probably points to John’s position at that time; he was the oldest living apostle and chief leader among the churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. For further discussion concerning the title “elder,” see “Author” in the Introduction to 1 John and in the Introduction to 2 & 3 John.

Gaius. Several people with the name Gaius are mentioned in the NT: (1) a Macedonian traveling companion of Paul (Acts 19:29); (2) a native of Derbe in Lycaonia, who traveled with Paul from Ephesus to Macedonia (Acts 20:4); (3) a prominent believer who hosted Paul and the whole church in Corinth (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14). The Gaius in 3 John was probably a different person than these three inasmuch as “Gaius” was a common name in those days.

2 Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit. The first part of this statement is a typical “well-wishing” found at the beginning of many letters written in the Hellenistic era. The second part, which literally reads, “as it is with your soul,” is also found in many Hellenistic letters. The NLT rendering is a “Christianization” of it.

COMMENTARY

Of all the New Testament letters, this one has a format that is most typical of letters written during the Hellenistic age (325 BC–AD 325). The format for personal letters remained fairly constant for hundreds of years. Here is a letter dated 258/257 BC which came from a mummy’s cartonnage (the plastered layers of linen or papyrus covering the body):

Philotas to Epistratos, greeting. You do well if you are in health; we also are in health; Pleistarchos also is well and was gladly received by the king. You would please us if you take care of your health. Also remember us, just as we also remember you always. This will please us greatly. (Papyrus BCU XIV 2417)

Another papyrus manuscript (from the second century AD) demonstrates the continuation of the same style:

Apollinarius to Taesis, his mother and lady, many greetings. Before all I pray for your health. I myself am well and make supplication for you before the gods of this place. (Hunt and Edgar 1959:302-303)

The opening of John's letter hardly differs from these in form. The writer is first identified; then the recipient. What usually follows is a "well-wishing" concerning one's health, which is usually followed by the writer asking the recipient to increase their mutual joy or pleasure in some way or another.

The writer of 3 John did not name himself; he simply identified himself as "the elder," just as he did in 2 John. The term "elder" (*presbuteros* [IG4245A, ZG4565]) connotes that the writer was one who watched over the spiritual well-being of the believers. The word "elder" is also a reference to John's age; he must have been an old man at the time he wrote this letter (see "Author" in the Introduction). The recipient of the letter, Gaius, was probably an elder in a local church because he was in the position of receiving the traveling teachers or coworkers (see v. 5 and comments). Three times in the first two verses John speaks of Gaius in very loving terms. He was loved by the congregation, loved by other believers, and loved by John.

John's personal greeting to Gaius indicates that they must have had a close relationship. John cared about Gaius's physical health and total well-being (v. 2) and wished him well in regard to both. This is a good way for Christians to express their concern for each other. We should not care just for each other's souls but for each other's bodies as well. This is linked with the principle of incarnation—God taking on a human body—which is a major theme in all of John's epistles. Our attitudes toward the physical must reflect our relationship to the spiritual (1 John 3:14-18). We should not neglect the body under the pretense that we care only for that which is immaterial.

◆ II. Caring for the Lord's Workers (vv. 3-12)

³Some of the traveling teachers* recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth. ⁴I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

⁵Dear friend, you are being faithful to God when you care for the traveling teachers who pass through, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶They have told the church here of your loving friendship. Please continue providing for such teachers in a manner that pleases God. ⁷For they are traveling for the Lord,* and they

accept nothing from people who are not believers.* ⁸So we ourselves should support them so that we can be their partners as they teach the truth.

⁹I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrefes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. ¹⁰When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.