



THE EPISTLES OF

JOHN

John's Timeline Intersecting with Ephesus

4 - 33 AD

- ❖ **8?** - John the apostle, son of Zebedee and Salome, is born.
- ❖ **17** - Ephesus experiences a destructive earthquake.
- ❖ **25** - John and his brother James are part of their father's fishing business in Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee.
- ❖ **29** - Jesus calls James and John to be two of his twelve disciples.
- ❖ **32** - Peter, James, and John witness Jesus's transfiguration.
- ❖ **33** - John partakes in the Last Supper with Jesus, witnesses his crucifixion, receives Mary into his care, and witnesses the resurrected Jesus on that very first Easter. Following Pentecost, John and Peter show great courage in Jerusalem by bearing witness to Jesus's acts.

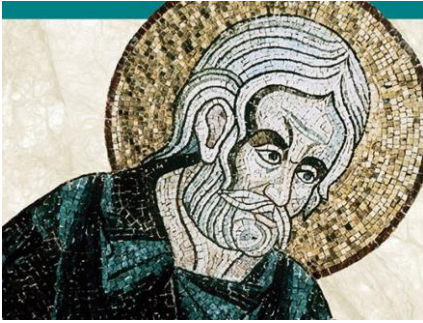
34 - 60 AD

- ❖ **44** - John's brother, James, is the first of the twelve disciples to die a martyr's death.
- ❖ **49** - John is among the pillars of the Jerusalem church who meet with Paul, Barnabas, and Titus in Jerusalem to deal with the question of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised to become Christians.
- ❖ **52** - Paul travels through Ephesus toward the end of his second missionary journey.

61 - 202 AD

- ❖ **64-67?** - Peter and Paul's death in Rome.
- ❖ **66** - The Jewish War is started by zealots who drive the Romans out of Jerusalem.
- ❖ **66-70?** - John leaves Jerusalem for Ephesus.
- ❖ **70** - The Romans crush the Jewish rebellion and destroy Jerusalem and the temple.
- ❖ **70-100** - John is spiritual leader of the church at Ephesus. During this time, he probably wrote these epistles between 85-95 AD, after he had written his Gospel.
- ❖ **95** - John is exiled to Patmos and writes the book of Revelation.
- ❖ **140-202** - Irenaeus, who is only one generation removed from John, affirms that the body of John's writings were composed in Ephesus.

Author: John



John's name in its original Hebrew, *Iochanan*, means literally "The Lord is gracious." There are ten *Johannans* in the Old Testament; five in the New Testament, where its spelling in Greek comes out *Ioannes*. Its Latin form often uses an initial *J* instead of *I*, and from *Joannes* come the German *Johannes*, French *Jean*, and Spanish *Juan*.

John was the son of Zebedee and Salome, who was possibly the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus (depending on how one understands **John 19:25**). If so, that would make John a first cousin of Jesus and perhaps explain why John was so close personally to Jesus. John is sometimes listed with his brother James (to be distinguished from the other disciple with the same name, who forever has to bear the humble title "James the Less" or "Younger"). Both sons of Zebedee had such forceful personalities that Jesus nicknamed them "Boanerges," or "Thunder Boys." John was a Galilean fisherman by trade, sniffed at by the Sanhedrin elite as an "unschooled, ordinary" man (**Acts 4:13**). It is possible that John is the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist who, along with Andrew, was the first of the Twelve to meet Jesus as his Judean ministry began (**John 1:35–42**). John was given his first, apparently temporary, call as a disciple of Jesus in Judea, along with Philip, Nathanael, Peter, and Andrew. They then went back to fishing, although apparently they also began to do some traveling with Jesus. It was some time later, back in Galilee, with a miraculous catch of fish, that Jesus called John and the others to permanent, full-time "people fishing."

John is always listed near the top of the four gospels' disciple roster and was chosen by Jesus as one of three disciples for special training and experience. John, along with Peter and James, got to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration, and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. It was John who complained about the "unauthorized" exorcist (**Mark 9:38**). Sadly, that special attention at times must have gone to his head. He and his brother, urged on by his mother, made a sneaky private appeal to Jesus for positions of power and honor in the coming "new world order" they expected. The other disciples were furious with them, but not because the two had asked for special power and prominence. It was because the "Thunder Boys" had thought of it first. That ugly and selfish incident furnished an occasion for Jesus to teach his future leaders about servant leadership (**Matthew 20:24–28**).

John was very aware of his special relationship with Jesus. Although he never calls himself by name in his gospel, he uses the unusual phrase "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He reclined next to Jesus during the Last Supper, was known to Caiaphas and thus actually managed to

enter the high priest's palace (**John 18:15–18**), and appears to have been the only disciple at the cross. It was to him that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother, at least until her other sons became believers. John was one of the first disciples to race to the empty tomb. It was he who correctly identified the risen Lord at the Sea of Galilee (**John 21:7**), and it was about his future that Jesus gave to Peter the mysterious utterance, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (**John 21:22**).

The early chapters of the book of **Acts** portray John as one of the leaders among the apostles. Though Peter usually does the talking, John is right there praying and waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, experiencing Pentecost, healing the crippled beggar, and being arrested, jailed, and arraigned before the Sanhedrin. They refused to be silent, no matter what the cost: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (**Acts 4:20**). He and the other apostles were arrested again. During the night they experienced an angelic jailbreak, and in the morning they were back preaching in the temple. Arrested yet again, they were spared execution on the advice of the Pharisee Gamaliel, but the high priest had them flogged anyway to make sure he had their attention. They heard, but the next day they were back in the temple and in private homes, spreading the word about the Savior.

Unlike most New Testament letters, the epistles of John do not tell us who their author is. The earliest identification of John comes from the church fathers: Irenaeus (c. AD 140–203), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Tertullian (c. 155–222) and Origen (c. 185–253) all designated the writer as the apostle John. As far as we know, no one else was suggested by the early church.

This traditional identification is confirmed by evidence in the letter itself:

1. The style of the Gospel of John is markedly similar to that of this letter. Both are written in simple Greek and use contrasting figures, such as light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, love and hate.

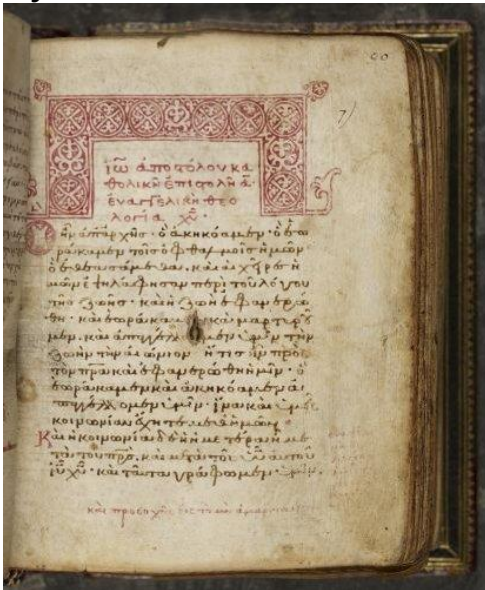
For a comparison of concepts and themes, cross reference the following:

2 John 5	1 John 2:7	John 13:34–35
2 John 6	1 John 5:3	John 14:23
2 John 7	1 John 4:2–3	
2 John 12	1 John 1:4	John 15:11; 16:24

2. The mention of eyewitness testimony (**1 John 1:1–4**) harmonizes with the fact that John was a follower of Christ from the earliest days of his ministry.

3. The authoritative manner that pervades the letter (seen in its commands, **1 John 2:15, 24, 28; 4:1; 5:21**; its firm assertions, **1 John 2:6; 3:14; 4:12**; and its pointed identification of error, **1 John 1:6, 8; 2:4, 22**) is what would be expected from an apostle.
4. The suggestions of advanced age (addressing his readers as “children,” **1 John 2:1, 28; 3:7**) agree with early church tradition concerning John’s age when he wrote the books known to be his.
5. The description of the heretics as antichrists (**1 John 2:18**), liars (**2:22**) and children of the devil (**3:10**) is consistent with Jesus’ characterization of John as a son of thunder.
6. The indications of a close relationship with the Lord (**1 John 1:1; 2:5–6, 24, 27–28**) fit the descriptions of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and the one who reclined “next to him” (**John 13:23**).

Style



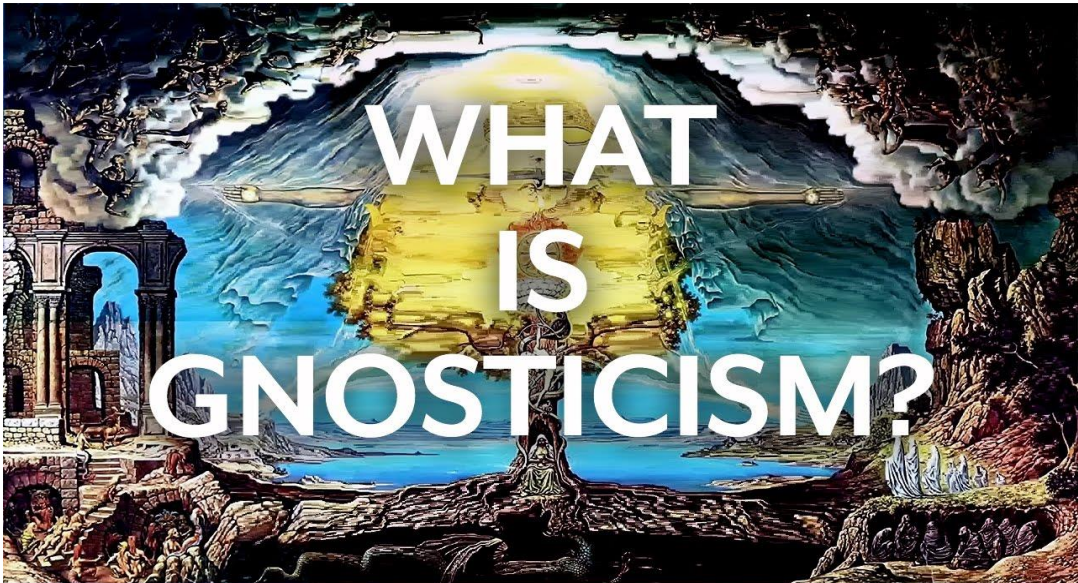
Most magazine articles and newspaper columns proceed from point A to point B to point C to conclusion D. Our way of thinking, of reasoning from premises to conclusions, has come down to us from the ancient Greeks. It is typically Western in approach.

As we read the Holy Scriptures, most of us tend to assume the writer will take this approach. And some biblical writers do. Most of the holy writers, though, came out of an Eastern, specifically Jewish, culture. Their reasoning was often different than what we are used to.

In these letters, the apostle weaves doctrine and practice together throughout. As a result, we see the intricate connections between “believing right” and “doing right.” John’s themes spiral outward and upward. Each time he returns to a key concept, he expands on it, adding more muscle to the skeleton. He prefers stating abstract principles to laying out concrete examples. He likes paradoxes - stating something and then seeming to assert the opposite. Jesus, of course, had done the same thing, and these daring, upside-down teachings became memorable ways of communicating God’s ways to people.

WHAT'S the POINT?

John made four purpose statements in his first letter: 1) he wrote to promote his readers' fellowship and joy. "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1:4); 2) he wrote to help readers avoid the pitfalls of sin, yet find forgiveness when they stumbled. "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin" (2:1); 3) he wrote to protect believers from false teachers. "I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (2:26); 4) he wrote so they might know they had eternal life. "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13). This last purpose statement governs the other three and brings them together in a unifying theme. In summary, John wrote these letters to confirm Christians in true apostolic Christianity by helping them avoid the destructive beliefs and behaviors to which some had fallen prey.



Combating Gnosticism

The recipients of **1 John** are not identified, but John's mention of several false teachings that were prevalent in Asia Minor at this time suggests that he may have written especially for the benefit of Christians in Ephesus and that general area.

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed five important errors:

- 1) Man's body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good. Also, because of this, it is not believed that God created the world. Some believed there was a low-ranking divine being, the Demiurge, who created the physical world and later descended to teach through the man Jesus.
- 2) Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not through faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism).
- 3) Christ's true humanity was denied in two ways: (1) Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body, a view called Docetism, from the Greek *dokeo* ("to seem"), and (2) others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. This view is the background of much of **1 John** (see **1 John 1:1; 2:22; 4:2-3**).
- 4) Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the **Colossians 2:21-23**.
- 5) Paradoxically, this dualism also led to licentiousness. The reasoning was that, since matter - and not the breaking of God's law (**1 John 3:4**) - was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.



Outline of John's Epistles

John's first letter is impossible to outline neatly. In these five short chapters, there is considerable overlapping of ideas. The following is an attempt to summarize the general movement of John's ideas as they swirl round and round.

Theme: "That you may have fellowship"

- I. Introduction: That which we saw, we testify, we proclaim to you *that you may have fellowship* with us, with the Father, and with his Son (1:1–4)
- II. Cycle 1: Christians walk in the light (1:5–2:28)
 - A. Obey his commands (1:3–2:8)
 - B. Love your brother (2:9–11)
 - C. Remember who you are (2:12–17)
 - D. Beware of antichrists (2:18–23)
 - E. Remain in Christ (2:24–28)
- III. Cycle 2: Christians know (2:29–4:6)
 - A. You know you are God's children (2:29–3:10)

- B. Acting in love helps you to know (3:11–24)
- C. Test the spirits with what you know (4:1–6)
- IV. Cycle 3: Christians love (4:7–5:5)
 - A. Since God so loved us, we ought to love one another (4:7–21)
 - B. This is love—to obey God’s commands (5:1–5)
- V. Conclusion: A review of some of the great themes (5:6–21)
 - A. Believers know that the Father sent the Son (6–12)
 - B. Believers know that they have eternal life (13–17)
 - C. Believers know that they are in Christ (18–21)

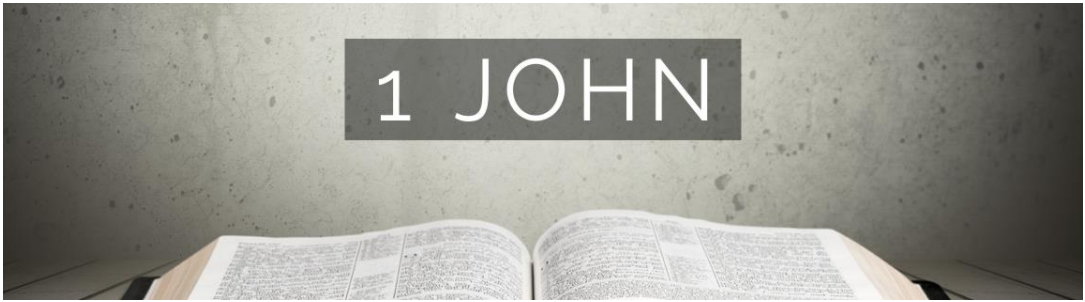
2 & 3 John are more simplified than **1 John**, but they still follow much of the style of **1 John**.

Outline of 2 John: Continue in the teaching of Christ

- I. Introduction (1–3)
- II. Walk in truth and love (4–6)
- III. Watch out for deceivers (7–11)
- IV. Final greetings (12, 13)

Outline of 3 John: Welcome the brothers

- I. Gaius—a beloved friend (1–8)
- II. Diotrophes—an abusive tyrant (9, 10)
- III. Demetrius—a respected role model (11, 12)
- IV. Final greetings (13, 14)

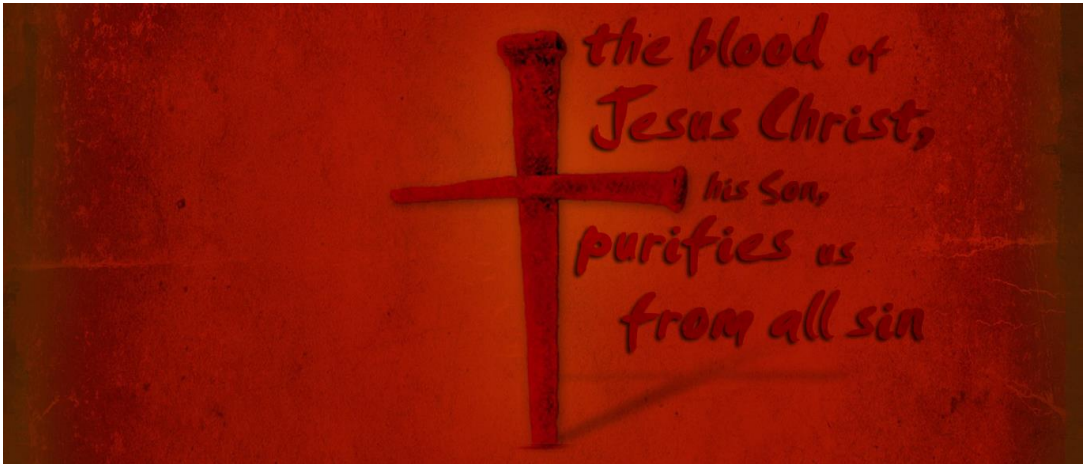


1 John 1:1-4

Why is this first letter of John being written? How will it make “our joy complete”?

Given that the author is not specifically identified, how do we understand the “we” and the “you” of these opening verses?

On what basis does fellowship exist among Christians?



1 John 1:5-2:2

Here John's "spiral staircase" style is displayed. Instead of moving in a straight line from point A to point B, what truths and immediate applications are made by John?

Ancient heretics in the early church, the Gnostics, denied the existence of sin in their lives. There are plenty of people who don't believe in God. But are there people who honestly believe that they have never done anything wrong? Who are these people? Why do they think that?

Because we struggle against the darkness of sin and fall into it every day, what will be a regular part of a Christian's life? Taking that idea a step farther, how do you respond to someone who says, "I don't need to ever confess my sins to another person, only to God"?

God is Light

The contrast between light and darkness is a common theme of Scripture. Sometimes light stands for salvation (Isaiah 60). Here it refers to holiness. In Jesus, there is no darkness or deception, only truth.

Atoning Sacrifice (Propitiation)

This is satisfaction for the demands of God's Law. Jesus satisfied (propitiated) God's demands for perfect obedience and perfect payment for sins. Through his substitutionary life and death on the cross, Jesus became the means of forgiveness, removing his anger over our sins. This is the only way of reconciling man to God.



1 John 2:3-14

What are some reasons that John gives as to why Christians strive to show love to one another?

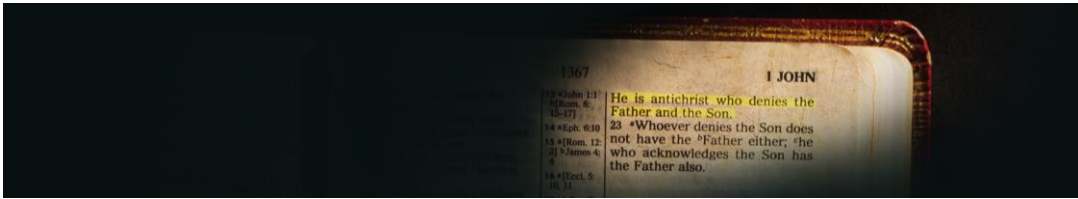
What is the new command? What was the old command? How is this new command new? (c.f. **John 3:34-35; Mark 12:28-31**)

How should we understand the phrase in verse 8 that "the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining"?

How do **verses 12-14** give us comfort after reading **verses 3-11**?

Children, Fathers, Young Men

There is nothing in the context and content of the poem that would restrict its gender or age application. This is probably just a poetic way of showing that the gospel truths apply to everyone, all generations, or possibly all levels of spiritual maturity.



1 John 2:15-27

What does John mean when he says not to love the world or anything in the world? Why should we not love the world or anything in it? Use especially **verses 16 & 17** in your answer. How do you measure your attachment to the things of the world?

What are the marks of an antichrist?

What is the "anointing" (**verse 27**) that we have received from the Lord? (c.f. **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**) What does John mean when he writes that "you do not need anyone to teach you"?

"Anti" christ

The Greek preposition "anti" means either "against" or "in place of." In the term antichrist, both meanings make sense: an agent of Satan who opposes Christ and is trying to replace Christ. Antichrist is one of a number of metaphors that the Scripture uses to teach Christians about Satan's human partners who do his work of trying to destroy people's relationship with their Savior.

The term antichrist occurs only in John's epistles: **1 John 2:18-23; 4:3; and 2 John 7. Daniel 7:8, 20-26** prophesies of a little horn that will persecute the saints of God. **Daniel 11:36-39** speaks of an evil king who will say unheard-of things against God. In **Matthew 24:24** Jesus warns against false Christs and false prophets. John refers to the false prophet in **Revelation 16:13.**

Revelation is rich in these metaphors: John sees also the beast of the earth in **13:11-18**, the great prostitute in **chapter 17**, and Babylon in **chapter 18. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12** describes the terrible man of lawlessness. These nine metaphors, although very different in imagery, overlap considerably in meaning.



1 John 2:28-3:10

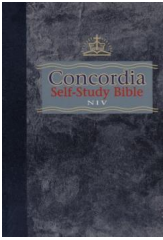
As soon as a baby is born, people begin to look for it. "Oh, look! She has her mother's nose!" "Listen to him! He has his father's voice!" Children of the heavenly Father also display distinctive features for all the world to see. What are they?

As I repeat sins, I'm not sure that I display the features of my Father in heaven. How can I be confident and unashamed for Christ's Second Coming on the Last Day? What has John written previously that gives us confidence to stand unashamed before Christ on Judgment Day? (c.f. **1 John 1:8-2:2; 2:12-14; 3:3,5**)

What comfort can we take in being called children of God?

How can **verses 5 and 8** help us resist temptation? (c.f. **Romans 6:1-2**)

CONCORDIA SELF-STUDY BIBLE: The Devil



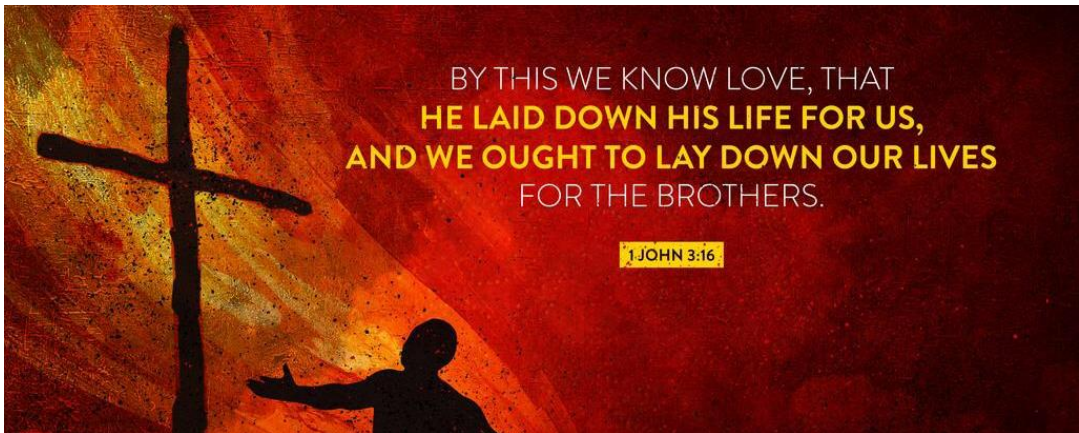
In this short letter John says much about the devil: 1. He is called “the devil” (**1 John 3:8**) and “the evil one” (v. **12**; **2:13–14**; **5:18–19**). 2. He “has been sinning from the beginning” (**1 John 3:8**), i.e., from the time he first rebelled against God, before the fall of Adam and Eve (**John 8:44**). 3. He is the instigator of human sin, and those who continue to sin belong to him (**vv. 8, 12**) and are his children (v. **10**). 4. He is in the world (**4:3**) and has “the whole world” of unbelievers under his control (**5:19**). 5. But he cannot lay hold of the believer to harm him (**5:18**). 6. On the contrary, the Christian will overcome him (**2:13–14**; **4:4**), and Christ will destroy his work.

EVANGELICAL HERITAGE VERSION STUDY BIBLE: God’s Seed Remains In Them



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God’s seed is God’s Word which causes people to be “born again” (**1 Peter 1:23**; **James 1:18**) and “remains in” believers (**1:10**; **2:14c**). Others explain that God’s seed is Jesus or God’s character that becomes a part of everyone who is born of God (essentially, the image of God). In this sense, it would be parallel to the anointing in **2:20, 27**.



1 John 3:11-24

In **verse 11**, what “beginning” is this?

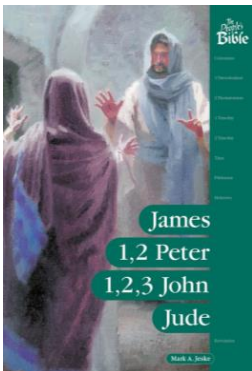
What new insight does John give us on Cain's sin? (You can also reference **Hebrews 11:4** and **Jude 8-11**.)

John is the only one of the original 12 apostles to die of natural causes. He lived in a world that heavily persecuted Christians. How do we as 21st century Christians experience the world hating us?

What is the best way that we can show love?

Verse 15 is one of the most condemning statements by God. What comfort has John offered us when our hearts condemn us?

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Receive From Him Anything We Ask



John links this whole discussion to prayer. Believe it or not, your spiritual self-confidence has a lot to do with your prayer life. As James wrote, a person praying with a doubtful heart better not expect anything from the Lord - such a person is double-minded, unstable (**1:6-7**). Whew! John's point is that God apparently finds it insulting if people approach him halfheartedly, unsure of his love, unsure of their relationship. John's point is also that finding satisfaction in deeds that come from faith, in obedience to God's will, will help our self-confidence. Then we will pray more confidently, present our needs boldly to the Lord, call on his fatherly obligation, trust him more, ask for things more in harmony with God's will, and receive more as well.

How to Test the Spirit FOR CHRISTIANS

Learn to:

Test the spirit and listening to God not the world.

1 John 4: 1-6



1 John 4:1-6

John tells us to test every spirit. What are these spirits? Who is behind them?

How do we test them?

What often makes it difficult for us to recognize false spirits?



1 John 4:7-21

What is love? How does this love compare to the models of love that people today seek to imitate? How does God's love change your love?

A man and his wife were visiting the pastor for help with their marriage. At the close of the hour, the pastor asked the man, "Would you be willing to die for your wife?" He said "Yes." The wife responded the same. Then the pastor asked, "Would you be willing to live for her?" How does this question relate to our lesson for today?

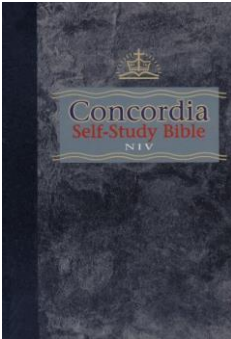


1 John 5:1-12

John continues to expound on the topic of love. **Verses 2 & 3** tells us that love for God and other children of God is carried out by keeping God's commands. Then John immediately follows up by saying that God's commands are not burdensome. With God's Word here through John, how can you change your mindset so that God's commands are not burdensome?

Jesus Christ came "by water and blood." (**verse 6**) Read the commentaries on the next page regarding this phrase. Which one do you prefer and why? Regardless of which commentary you prefer, what is the point of **verses 6-12**?

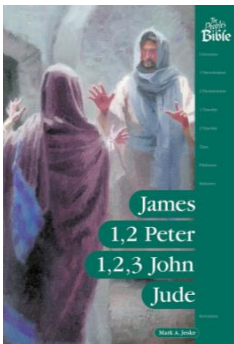
CONCORDIA SELF-STUDY BIBLE: By Water and Blood



Water symbolizes Jesus' baptism, and blood symbolizes his death. These are mentioned because Jesus' ministry began at his baptism and ended at his death. John is reacting to the heretics of his day (Gnosticism) who said that Jesus was born only a man and remained so until his baptism. At that time, they maintained, the Christ (the Son of God) descended on the human Jesus, but left him before his suffering on the cross—so that it was only the man Jesus who died. Throughout this letter John has been insisting that Jesus Christ is God as well as man (**1:1–4; 4:2; 5:5**). He now asserts that it was this God-man Jesus Christ who came into our world, was baptized and died.

Jesus was the Son of God not only at his baptism but also at his death (**v. 6b**). This truth is extremely important, because, if Jesus died only as a man, his sacrificial atonement (**2:2; 4:10**) would not have been sufficient to take away the guilt of man's sin.

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: By Water and Blood



For many centuries, going clear back to Saint Augustine in the 5th century, many Christians assumed that “water and blood” was an allusion to the separated fluids that ran from the pierced side of the crucified Savior. John was right there at the time, and in his biography of Jesus, John immediately points to those separated fluids as proof that Jesus Christ was really dead, proof that the Old Testament Scriptures had been carefully fulfilled, and proof that the sacrifice for the world's sins had really been made. He wrote: “The man who saw it [that is, John] has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

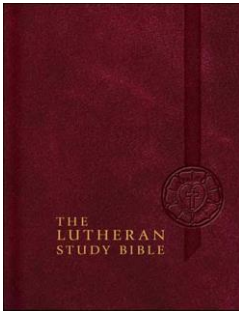
These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,’ and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced’ ” (**John 19:35–37**). John's point in our verse, then, would be to contradict the false teachers' claim either that the death of Christ never happened or that it was only the death of Jesus but not the death of the heavenly “Christ.”



1 John 5:13-21

Why has John written this letter?

LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE: Sin that Leads to Death



The “unpardonable sin,” as this sin has been called, is also commonly known as “the sin against the Holy Spirit.” To describe a sin as “unpardonable” seems to contradict our Christian hope and certainty. After all, the essence of the Christian faith is the declaration that God would have all people to be saved, that is, to come home to Him, forgiven (**1 Timothy 2:4**). In that light, how can there be an unpardonable sin?

Twice in the Gospels, the inspired writers remember our Lord’s reference to the unpardonable sin (**Matthew 12:31–32; Mark 3:29–30**). Another key text is **Hebrews 6:4–6**. A final reference to the unpardonable sin is here in 1 John, where the apostle describes that sin in a dreadful phrase, “sin that leads to death” (**5:16**). To understand what the unpardonable sin is, we need to understand the context of each of the passages noted above and how they relate to one another. We need to follow the interpretation principle “Let Scripture interpret Scripture.”

The Sin of the Scribes and Pharisees

Note the context of **Matthew 12:31–32; Mark 3:29–30**. The scribes and Pharisees were accusing Jesus, saying He was empowered by Satan to do His miraculous works. To the Jew of Jesus’ day, the Holy Spirit had two great functions: He revealed God’s truth to humanity, and He enabled human beings to recognize that truth when they saw and heard it. (Both of these are, of course, truly the work of the Spirit.)

Now here was a situation in which the Son of God Himself clearly and visibly was overthrowing Satan and his kingdom, healing people who were demon-possessed. As people saw this demonstration of God’s love in action, God the Holy Spirit was at work in their hearts, leading them to acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord (**Matthew 12:23**). But note the Pharisees’ deliberate and stubborn resistance to the Holy Spirit’s testimony (**Matthew 12:24**).

The sin against the Holy Spirit, then, is the consistent and stubborn refusal to believe in Christ - deliberately opposing the Holy Spirit as He seeks to bring a person to faith through the message of Christ. The Pharisees’ opposition to the Spirit was so extreme that they attributed Christ’s work to the devil. By definition, this sin of the Pharisees could not be forgiven because by their unbelief they refused to receive the forgiveness God in Christ so winsomely offered to them.

Trampling the Blood of Christ Underfoot

Most crucial to the fullest understanding of the sin against the Holy Spirit is **Hebrews 6:4–6**, a passage that describes the horrible possibility of apostasy. We Christians have been enlightened, brought to faith in Christ, who is the light of the world (**John 1:9; 9:5**). We have tasted the heavenly gift and seen “that the Lord is good” (**Psalms 34:8**). This is a gift that fills all of life as we are drawn to Christ on the cross. Christ does for us what we could never do for ourselves. His ransom of us from our sins takes on meaning for us today, as we see ourselves held hostage to the terrors of sin, death, and the flesh, unable to help ourselves until Jesus Christ helps us.

But since we have tasted the heavenly gift, we

- now see that our birth is not a biological accident but is God’s doing, as He calls us by name in our mother’s womb (**Jeremiah 1:5**);
- now live in our baptismal grace, dying daily to sin and rising to the new life that is ours through Jesus’ death and resurrection (**1 Peter 1:3; Romans 6:3–4**);
- now understand that Jesus Christ surrounds us with His good gifts and spirit, so that in the sun or in the shadow, in the rough or on the smooth, uphill or down, from life’s beginning to life eternal, we know His presence in the green valleys and in the valley of the shadow of death (**Psalms 23**);
- now realize that it is our privilege to share in the Holy Spirit, to taste “the goodness of the word of God,” and to experience in the here and now the “powers of the age to come” (**Hebrews 6:5**).

But at the end of this catalog of Christian blessedness comes a word about apostasy, about falling away, about that dreadful, terrible sin against the Holy Spirit. This passage was written in an age of Christian persecution, an age when, understandably, Christians came to consider apostasy the supreme sin.

But is any person beyond the mercy and forgiveness of God if, truly repentant, forgiveness is asked for? Is any person so strong and so alive in Christ that he or she can avoid all denial of Christ? Did not Peter himself deny Jesus? Did not Jesus Himself reinstate Peter (**John 21:15–19**)?

The cross has been described as a window to God’s heart. Through one historical event - Christ’s crucifixion - it has become possible for human beings in all times and places to look into God’s being, to see for certain that God’s suffering, enduring, patient, steadfast love is always available for sinners who want forgiveness and who repent.

“Have I Committed the Unpardonable Sin?”

The scriptural reference **1 John 5:16–17** places on us the responsibility to pray for one another so that the sin whose end is death is not ours. In the original context, the “sin that leads to death” was probably the false teachers’ adamant and persistent denial of the truth and their shameless immorality. We, too, live in a time of false teaching, in the sense that people

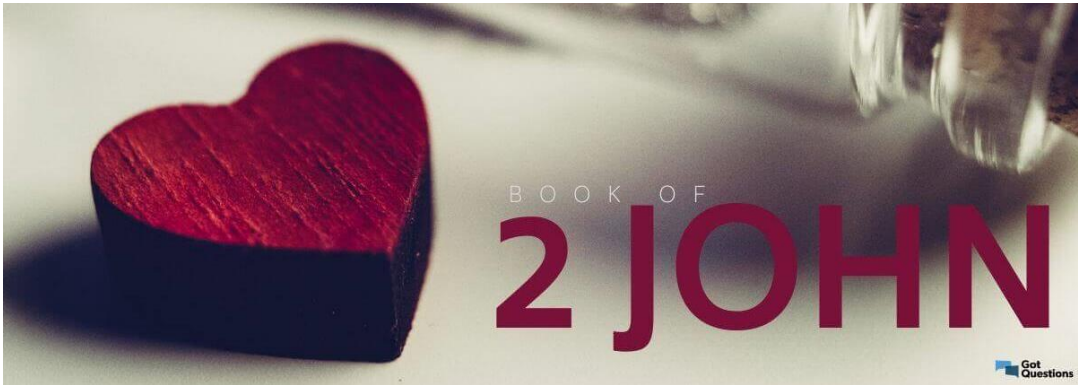
- “know it all,” denying the truth of God’s Word in their lives;
- think that Jesus Christ was a good teacher or fine example but deny Him as Savior and Lord;
- live by their own rules, often shamelessly and without consideration for others.

If we are willing to pray for one another when we are ill and in need, should we not also pray for one another as we stray from God? But there is more to this concern than the praying. Our duty is not yet done until we see our prayers as reminders that God would use us as bearers of His grace.

So pray we must, and the will of God will be done. God wants no one lost eternally, and we want no one to live so persistently in sin that the end is eternal death. The sin against the Holy Spirit, the unpardonable sin, is that sin of impenitence that hardens into stubborn and persistent unbelief. No one who worries that he or she has committed this sin is guilty of it, for the hallmark of the sin is that one defiantly and without worry rejects any thought of need for repentance or faith. So we look to Christ as we pray for ourselves and for others: “[Lord,] I believe; help my unbelief!” (**Mark 9:24**).

As we conclude **1 John**, how do you know that you have eternal life?

How is **verse 21** a fitting summary of John’s letter?



2 John

Who is the “lady chosen by God” and “her children”? How about the “sister”?

How do the children of the lady chosen by God walk in the truth?

What is the great joy of finding “some of your children walking in the truth”?

Do Not Lose What We Have Worked For

Verse 8 gives a simple truth that speaks against the idea of “once saved, always saved.” Christians can fall from faith. This is why John has been encouraging the continued actions of love as evidence of continued faith in Christ as our Savior from sin.

We heard about antichrists in **1 John**. What marks are listed here to help us as believers identify an antichrist?

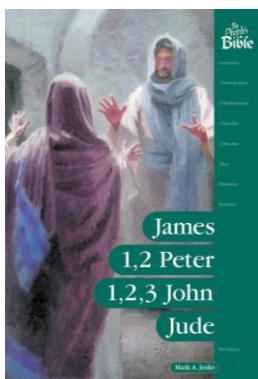
How can we avoid welcoming a deceiver / antichrist?

A confessional Lutheran congregation wants to learn how to spread the Gospel better. A member of another denomination, who offers seminars from place to place, is chosen to share his knowledge with the congregation. How should Christians react to such a thing?

Face to Face

Sometimes a letter is just not a good way to talk about God and faith. Face to face visits are needed. This truth is more front and center in a time of a pandemic. As lovingly as we can, may we always continue to meet face to face and talk about our God so that our joy may be complete, just as it was for the Apostle John.

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Do Not Welcome Them



How could you distinguish an authentic teacher of the Word from the false teachers? Satan made sure to put on the road earnest and friendly traveling liars. And then there were some who were just self-anointed pretenders, hustling people for attention, free food and lodging, or money. These religious scam artists knew how to manipulate and use people's generosity, trust, and guilt.

A manual of church organization in Syria from the late first century has survived; it is usually called by its Greek name, the Didache (pronounced did-ah-KHAY). This document laid down very strict rules for dealing with traveling teachers:

- They could stay only one night, two in an emergency.
- As they left, you could give them food for their journey.
- If they asked for money, you could assume that they were false prophets.
- If they chose to stay longer than one or two days, they had to get a job and work.

And so John wrote these little notes: **2 John** to warn against embracing false teachers and **3 John** to urge Christians to embrace true teachers. The need for this kind of vigilance and work will never go away.

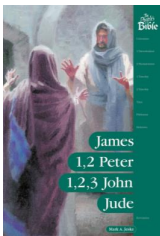
In the same way, leaders and members of a congregation cannot afford the luxury of sitting back and just being consumers of a religious experience. They must evaluate the people who do ministry among them. They must learn to discern truth and error. They must learn how to train and choose good leaders and how to hold their leaders accountable for what they do.



3 John

This letter is more specifically addressed to an individual named Gaius, someone who may have been brought to faith through John's ministry. What is John's desire for Gaius?

PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: Enjoy Good Health



Medical studies show that people live physically healthier lives when they are conscious of being loved, of being part of a positive human network, of enjoying the affection and support of other people. Expressing love and support for each other and praying for one another is one of the best things we can do to build one another up. It also is one of the secrets to building a healthy congregation.

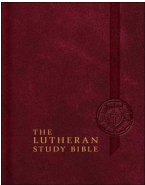
What value is there in hearing that people act like believers walking in the truth?

In reading John's encouragement to Gaius, how can we send Gospel preachers on their way in a manner that honors God?

The Name

*In the Old Testament "the Name" is a substitution for "the LORD." This expression is used for Jesus in the New Testament (**Acts 4:12; 5:41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; Romans 1:5; 1 John 3:23**).*

What would a modern-day Diotrephes look like? What should we do with a Diotrephes when we find one?



LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE: Greet the Friends There by Name

For early Christians, their baptismal name bore a special remembrance of God's grace. Such personal greetings would remind them that they were brothers and children of God by Baptism into Christ.

How does **3 John** complement **2 John**?

THE AUTHOR

"THE ELDER" → THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED
(SEE 2 & 3 JOHN) (SEE JOHN 21:20-24)



THE CRISIS



- A GROUP LEFT THE CHURCH & DENIED JESUS AS MESSIAH & SON OF GOD (SEE 1 JOHN 2:18-23, 4:1-3)
- THEY'VE GENERATED HOSTILITY (1 JOHN 3:9-10)
- JOHN WROTE THESE FOR DAMAGE CONTROL & TO ASSURE THE CHURCHES.

THE LETTER

KNOWING JESUS = KNOWING

1:5-3:10 THIS IS THE MESSAGE...

GOD IS...

1:5-2:11

2:12-17

3:11-24

1:1-4

INTRODUCTION

- SIMILAR TO JOHN 1:1-18
- ECHOES OF GENESIS 1 & PROVERBS 8

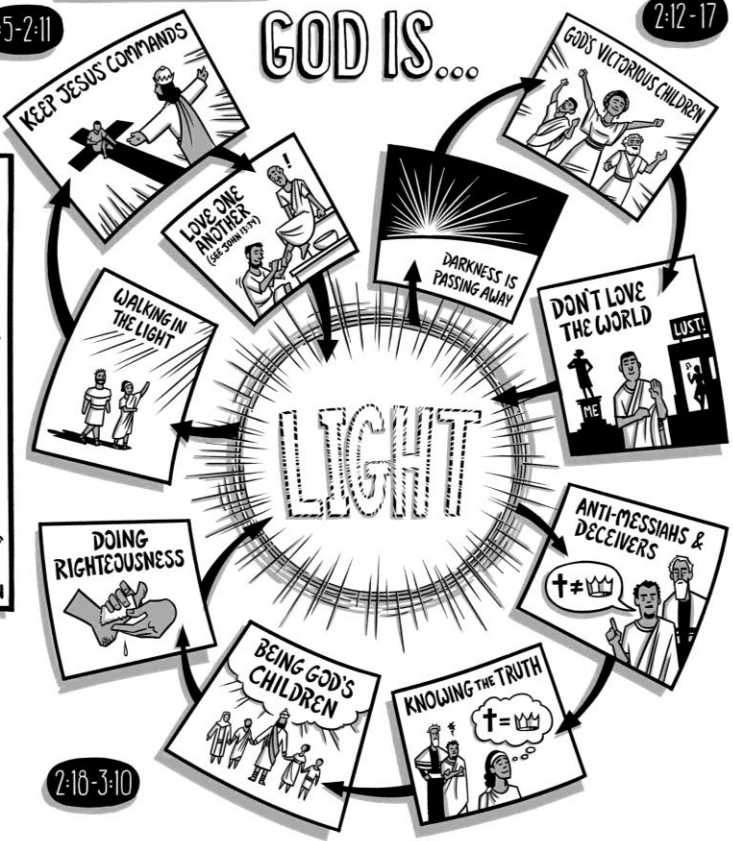
FATHER → **SON** ← **GOD**

Word of Life

"WE" = THE APOSTLES **"YOU" = NEXT GENERATION**

FELLOWSHIP = GREEK: KOINONIA

♥ PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S OWN LIFE & LOVE ♥



LOVE DEFINED

LOVE vs. HATE

CAIN (GENESIS)

ETERNAL LIFE

OF 1-2-3 JOHN

THE UNIQUENESS OF
1 JOHN

- NOT A LETTER, BUT A POETIC SERMON
- ALL THE KEY IDEAS COME FROM JESUS' FINAL SPEECH IN JOHN chs.13-17

~~NOT
LINEAR
1 and 2,
THE MORE,
3 but not 4
THUS, 5...~~

"AMPLIFICATION"

- CYCLICAL REPETITION
- HYPERBOLE
- STARK CONTRASTS

THE GOD OF LOVE

3:11-5:17 THIS IS THE MESSAGE...



2 JOHN

DEAR CHURCH, IF THE 'DECEIVERS' COME TO YOUR CHURCH...

† ≠ CROWN

...DON'T OFFER THEM SUPPORT.

5:18-21
CONCLUSION

"WE KNOW THE SON OF GOD HAS COME SO WE CAN KNOW THE ONE WHO IS TRUE & WE ARE IN THE ONE WHO IS TRUE, IN HIS SON JESUS THE MESSIAH. THIS IS THE TRUE GOD & ETERNAL LIFE." (5:20)

"KEEP AWAY FROM IDOLS." (5:21)

RESIST REMAKING GOD IN YOUR OWN IMAGE.

3 JOHN

DEAR GAIUS, WELCOME THE BROTHERS...

† = CROWN

...DON'T BE LIKE DIOTREPHES.

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