

Doctrine of John the Apostle

Preface

1. According to the testimony of the New Testament and of ancient church history, John was one of the leading figures in shaping the course of Christianity, whether by his writings (the fourth Gospel, three epistles, and the Apocalypse), his missionary and pastoral labors, or his defense of the faith against the attempted inroads of Gnostic error.

History

1. Biblical data furnishes considerable information about him, at least more than is available on most of the apostles. Zebedee was his father (Mar 1:19-20) and Salome his mother. (Mar 15:40 compared with Mat 27:56)

Mar 1:19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.

Mar 1:20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mar 15:40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

Mat 27:56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

1.2 A comparison with the above verses with Joh 19:25 make it possible that Salome was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Joh 19:25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

1.3 The family was engaged in the fishing business, with certain hired men or servants assisting the father and his sons. (Mar 1:20)

Mar 1:20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

1.4 A partnership had been formed with another pair of brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew. (Luk 5:9-10)

Luk 5:9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

Luk 5:10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

1.5 Since the latter lived at Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Joh 1:44), it may be assumed that this was John's residence also.

Joh 1:43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Joh 1:44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.



2. Whereas John is named rather frequently in the Synoptic Gospels especially in Mark, this is not true of the fourth Gospel, which merely refers to the sons of Zebedee. (Joh 21:2)

Joh 21:2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

2.1 However, there are several references to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Joh 13:23; Joh 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) and to "another disciple" (Joh 18:15) who brought Peter into the court of the high priest's house.

Joh 13:23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.

Joh 19:26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"

Joh 20:2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Joh 21:7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

Joh 21:20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")

2.1.1 Since Peter's companion a short time afterward was the beloved disciple (Joh 20:2) and since John was closely associated with Peter in the gospels and Acts, it is reasonable to infer that John was the beloved disciple.

Joh 20:2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

2.2 John was most likely the writer of the fourth Gospel, who for some reason, probably modesty, preferred to keep his name out of the record. In Joh 21:24 the writer of the Gospel is identified with the beloved disciple.

Joh 21:24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

3. It is highly probable that John was that unnamed disciple who, in company with Andrew, spent several hours with Jesus after John the Baptist had pointed Him out. (Joh 1:35-40)

Joh 1:35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.

Joh 1:36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

Joh 1:37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

Joh 1:38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

Joh 1:39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Joh 1:40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

3.1 If so, this means that he and a number of other disciples of Jesus had been followers of the Baptist before transferring their allegiance to Jesus. However, the more definite call came somewhat later in Galilee, when John and his brother James were summoned from their nets to become fishers of men. (Mar 1:19-20)

Mar 1:19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.

Mar 1:20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

4. Later still, when 12 men were set apart as apostles, John was included. He appears as a member of the inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John) who were with Jesus at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mar 5:35-37), at the transfiguration (Mar 9:2), and at the night vigil in Gethsemane. (Mar 14:32-33)

Mar 5:35 While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?"

Mar 5:36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

Mar 5:37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.

Mar 9:2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.

Mar 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

Mar 14:33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

5. On another occasion Peter and John were told to make preparations for the Passover feast. (Luk 22:8)

Luk 22:8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

6. Peter, James, John and Andrew were present when Jesus predicted the signs of His return at the Second Advent. (Mar 13:3-4)

Mar 13:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,

Mar 13:4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

7. If the reference in Joh 18:15-16 to the acquaintanceship between a certain disciple and the high priest refers to John, as seems most natural, then he is not to be regarded simply as an ordinary fisherman.

Joh 18:15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,

Joh 18:16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

7.1 It is quite possible that John's family possessed means. His mother was likely a member of that group of women who financially supported Jesus' ministry. (Luk 8:1-3)

Luk 8:1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,

Luk 8:2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;

Luk 8:3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

8. From Joh 19:26-27 it appears that the family maintained a home in the Jerusalem area. Jesus knew that in committing His mother to John He was ensuring her comfort as well as spiritual solace.

Joh 19:25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Joh 19:26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"

Joh 19:27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

9. Although it is only conjecture, one may conclude perhaps that it was during John's days in Judea as a disciple of John the Baptist that he secured quarters in Jerusalem and also became known to the high priest.

Personal Characteristics

1. Something of the character of John may be gleaned from the epithet given to him and his brother James by the Lord. Although "sons of thunder" (Mar 3:17) is not explained in the text, it seems to refer to the disposition or to the zeal of these brothers, or both.

Mar 3:17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder);

2. Fortunately, a few episodes are recorded that help to fill out the picture. On his own initiative John forbade a man to continue casting out demons in Jesus' name, on the ground that he did not belong to Jesus' chosen band of disciples. Christ did not permit this narrow view and accordingly, this narrowness, rebuked John. (Luk 9:49-50)

Luk 9:49 "Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

Luk 9:50 "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

3. On two other occasions John teamed with his brother James in exhibiting undesirable traits of character. Using their mother as a go-between, they asked for the choice places of honor on either side of Jesus when His kingdom glory was achieved. (Mar 10:35 and Mat 20:20)

Mar 10:35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

Mar 10:36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

Mar 10:37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Mat 20:20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

Mat 20:21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

3.1 They had not yet learned to crucify selfish ambition. At another time, on the way up to Jerusalem, the brothers proposed that they call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village that refused hospitality to their Master. Apparently it did not dawn on them that a vindictive use of miraculous power was completely alien to Jesus. They were "sons of thunder" indeed. (Luk 9:51-56)

Luk 9:51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Luk 9:52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;

Luk 9:53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.

Luk 9:54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"

Luk 9:55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them,

Luk 9:56 and they went to another village.

3.2 Despite his weaknesses, and perhaps even because of them, John was given a special close relationship to the Lord as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was the first of the apostolic company to believe in the resurrection on the basis of what he saw in the empty tomb. (Joh 20:8)

Joh 20:8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

4. It was his insight that detected the risen Lord as the one responsible for the great catch of fish. (Joh 21:7)

Joh 21:7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

5. With reference to John the Lord indicated that quite a different future might unfold than that reserved for Simon Peter. (Joh 21:21-23)

Joh 21:21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Joh 21:22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Joh 21:23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you?

You must follow me."

After Pentecost

1. Information after Pentecost centers around John's association with Simon Peter. He regularly took a subordinate role, content to let the initiative in speech and action rest with his friend. Because of his participation in the healing of the lame man he was brought before the Sanhedrin, along with Peter, and almost certainly made some statement, because the boldness of both men impressed the council. (Acts 3:1, 4, 11 and Acts 4:13; compared with verse 19)

Acts 3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer -- at three in the afternoon.

Acts 3:4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"

Acts 3:11 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

Acts 4:13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.

2. Peter and John were chosen by the other apostles to go to Samaria to oversee the results of Philip's labors there. (Acts 8:14)

Acts 8:14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

3. Our last glimpse of John in the Jerusalem area is furnished by Paul, who met with James the Lord's brother and Peter and John to discuss the nature of the gospel and their relation to that gospel as servants of Christ. (Gal 2:9-10)

Gal 2:9 James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

Gal 2:10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

3.1 At this meeting Paul refers to John as a pillar of the Jerusalem church. It may be that John remained in the city until the troubled days just prior to the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies under Titus.

4. Christian writers of the second century and later tell of John's work in Asia Minor, centering in the city of Ephesus. According to Rev 1:9, John was exiled to the isle of Patmos for his testimony to the gospel.

Rev 1:9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

4.1 Irenaeus asserts that this occurred near the end of the reign of Domitian, which terminated in A.D. 96. The same writer alleges that John lived on into the reign of Trajan, which began in the year 98.

5. John may well have supervised the work among the various churches in Asia Minor such as are named in (Rev 2-3).



6. Clement of Alexandria indicates a varied ministry in this area even after John's return from Patmos, when he must have been a very old man, including a moving story of his pastoral concern for a young man who fell into evil ways after his baptism. John allowed himself to be captured by the robbers over whom this young man was now chief, exhorted him, prayed with him, and brought him back to the Lord and to the church (*The Rich Man's Salvation*, p. 42).

7. During the later years of John's life Gnosticism was gaining ground and seriously challenging the apostolic faith. John showed that he was capable not only of manifesting love for the brethren, but that he was still in measure a son of thunder. Irenaeus relates that on entering a bathhouse in Ephesus and seeing the heretic Cerinthus (a Gnostic) within the bath house, John rushed out crying, "Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."