

CHAPTER 4

JOHN

Because of what we studied in [**Chapter 3**](#) we should already know some things about John. Who was John's brother (Matthew 4:21)? _____ Assuming that the first brother named is the older brother, was John older or younger than his brother (Matthew 4:21; 10:2)?

_____ Who was the father of John (Matthew 4:21)?

_____ What was John's occupation (Matthew 4:21)?

Do not confuse the Apostle John with another important man who was called John (see John 1:6). The "John" mentioned in John 1:6 is JOHN THE BAPTIST. Here are some of the key DIFFERENCES between these two men:

JOHN THE BAPTIST	JOHN THE APOSTLE
He had no brother.	His brother was James.
He was a great prophet.	He was a fisherman.
He was not one of Jesus' 12 disciples.	He was one of Jesus' 12 disciples.
He died before Christ went to the cross. (He had his head removed by Herod. See Matthew 14.)	He died as an old man many years after Christ went to the cross.
He wrote no books of the Bible.	He wrote 5 books of the Bible.

Because the author of the Gospel of John never mentions his name when he refers to himself in his book, we conclude that John is probably the unnamed disciple mentioned with Andrew in John 1:35-39. John, who was once a disciple of John the Baptist, has a similar early life history as Andrew. See [**Chapter 2**](#) on the life of Andrew.

Closest and Nearest

In the last chapter, we studied that Jesus had an "inner circle" which was made up of three men: Peter, James and John. At certain times these three men were taken certain places and allowed to do certain things that the other nine disciples were not. Out of these three men, John seemed to be the one disciple who kept the nearest to his Lord. Out of all of the Lord's sheep, John seemed to stay the closest to the Great Shepherd. We say this for the following reasons:

1. John had a very keen awareness of how much His Saviour loved him. Again and again he refers to himself as the disciple "whom _____" (John 13:23 and see also John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24). The Shepherd loves all of His Sheep, but not all the sheep appreciate or understand or fully realize His love. Jesus loved John, and ***John knew it and believed it!*** What about you? Are you convinced that the Saviour loves you? How do you know this? It is hard to get close to someone or draw near to someone if you are not sure that this person really loves you? John was sure! He knew the love of Christ, and this love drew him closer and closer to the Lover of his soul!
2. Which disciple was closest to Jesus when they sat (or reclined) at the table on the night before Jesus died on the cross (John 13:23)? _____ All of the disciples were around the table, but John was closest to his Lord.
3. When Jesus hung on the cross, which disciple was right there at the foot of the cross and close enough so that Jesus could talk to him (John 19:26)?

4. Although motivated by pride and ambition, John had a strong desire to be close to the King (Mark 10:35-37). He wanted to sit right next to Jesus (Mark 10:37)! John never wanted much of a distance to come between him and his Lord.
5. John was given the privilege of being the human author of five books of the Bible (more than any other of the 12 disciples were privileged to write). What were the five books that John wrote?

Hint: Four are among the last five books!

6. John was very sensitive to His Lord. Which disciple was the first to understand the significance of the empty tomb (John 20:2-8)? _____ Which disciple was the first to recognize Jesus (John 21:1-7)?

The Lord wants every believer to come nearer and nearer and closer and closer to Himself. How can a believer draw NEAR to God? Why does God sometimes seem "far away"? Why is there sometimes a "distance" between the believer and His Saviour? What do the following verses teach you about drawing nigh or near to God? See Psalm 34:18; Psalm 119:150-151; Psalm 145:18; James 4:8.

Glimpses of the Apostle John

The Bible does not tell us a great deal about the apostle John. We must learn about him through different bits and pieces that we find in the gospels and in the book of Acts. In Luke 9:49 John

saw a man doing what? _____ (The word "devils" means "demons"). In whose Name was this man doing this? _____ Did John and the others try to stop this man from doing what he was doing? _____ Why? _____ Was John right in what he did (Luke 9:50)? _____ Was this man an ENEMY ("against us") or an ALLY ("for us")?

Many have copied John's mistake. They think, "If he is not part of our little band (or group, or church), then he must not be serving Christ." They imagine that no man can be a soldier of Christ unless he wears their exact uniform. They try to stop every person who will not serve Christ **in their way**. They think, "If people do not follow us in every way, then how can they be following Christ?"

Example: The church of which you are a member may be associated with other Bible believing churches. There may be other Bible believing churches who are not part of your particular association. Does this mean that all other churches are not really serving Christ? _____ Should every person be condemned who does not attend churches that are part of your association or denomination? _____ Can you think of other examples of how people today could make the same mistake that John made?

J.C.Ryle's comments on this passage are very fitting:

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us a warning against a bigoted and illiberal spirit. Who this man was and why he did not consort with the disciples, we do not know. But we do know that he was doing a good work in casting out demons, and that he was doing what he did in the name of Christ. And yet John says, "we forbade him." Very striking is the reply which the Lord at once gave him: "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

Thousands, in every period of Church history, have spent their lives in copying John's mistake. They have labored to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined, in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment. They have been ready to say of every Christian who does not see everything with their eyes, "Forbid him! Forbid him! for he followeth not with us."

The plain truth is, that we are all too ready to say, "We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us" (Job 12:2). We forget that no Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil's kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like. We must try to believe that men may be true-hearted followers of Jesus Christ, and yet for some reason may be kept back from seeing all things in religion just as we do. Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified,—no matter who the preacher may be, and to what Church he may belong. Happy are those who can say with Paul, "If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yea and will rejoice," (Phil. 1:18) and with Moses, "Enviest thou for

my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that all did prophesy." (Numbers 11:29)

[Taken from *Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, under Luke 9:49-50]

In Luke 22:8 we learn that Peter and John were sent by Jesus on an assignment to prepare _____ (see also verses 9-13). In John 13:23-26, John asked the Lord a key question. John was a close companion of Peter, and these two men are often mentioned together:

John 20:1-10	Peter and John discover the empty tomb.
John 21:18-22	Peter and John hear the Lord speak of their future.
Acts 3:11	Peter and John are together when the lame man is healed.
Acts 4:1-22	Peter and John are arrested for preaching the gospel.

The Son of Thunder Became the Great Apostle of Love

As we studied in the previous chapter, James and John were called by Jesus the "sons of _____" (Mark 3:17). These men were very intolerant of anyone who seemed to be an enemy of their Lord. Because they completely misunderstood the Lord's love even for His enemies (Luke 9:56), they were very quick to desire the destruction of the enemies of the Lord (Luke 9:51-55).

Jesus rebuked John and said to him, "For the Son of man is not come to _____ men's lives, but to _____ them" (Luke 9:56). Let's go to John's own writing and see if he learned his lesson and see if he finally understood the reason Christ came into the world:

John 3:17--Why was Christ sent?

John 12:47--Why did Christ come?

1 John 4:14--Why did the Father send the Son?

The mark of a wise man is not that he never makes mistakes, but that *he learns from his*

mistakes! John learned Jesus' lesson of love, and he learned it well!

The Son of Thunder who was so zealous and so ready to throw lightning bolts at anyone who disagreed with him became a changed man by the grace of God. John, the son of thunder, became John, the Apostle of love. As you quickly look through the book of 1 John, can you find verses which speak on the important subject of LOVE? (See especially chapter 4.) Write down some of these verses _____

If a man is a good LOVER, then he must also be a good HATER! If a man loves THE TRUTH, then he must also hate ERROR. John was a good LOVER, and John was a good HATER! He hated that which was false and that which was wrong. He would not tolerate ERROR for one minute (see 1 John 4:1-6). When it came to that which was wrong and that which was false, John did not lose any of his thunder! The Bible says in Psalm 97:10, "Ye that _____ the LORD, _____ evil."

According to Irenaeus (a man who lived in the 2nd century), there was once a false teacher by the name of Cerinthus. One day the Apostle John saw Cerinthus in the public bath and fled saying, "Let us flee, for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." We are not sure that John really made this statement, but it does remind us that John was a man who really loved the truth and hated that which was against the truth. Are you a truth-lover? Are you an error-hater?

In Galatians 2:9, John is mentioned by the Apostle Paul. Paul describes James (the brother of Jesus), Cephas (Peter), and John as those who "seemed to be P _____. In a building nothing is more important than a pillar. Compare Judges 16:29-30. Without the pillar the building would collapse! Thus John was a **key man** in the early church. In Ephesians 2:20 men such as Peter, James and John are said to be FOUNDATIONAL men. It was through these men that God gave us His Word, the Bible, and there is no greater foundation than this!

John's Later Life

John died sometime at the end of the first century during the early part of the reign of Emperor Trajan, who began to reign in 98 A.D. As far as we know, John was the only disciple among the 12 who was not put to death as a martyr. He was probably born about 1-5 A.D., and if this was the case, he lived to be about 90 or 95 years old.

Even though John was not a martyr, he did suffer persecution for His Saviour:

1. As we have seen, he was arrested with Peter for preaching the gospel (Acts 4).
2. He was arrested again with the other apostles and beaten (Acts 5:18, 40).
3. There must have been many other persecutions that we are not told about (compare John 16:1-4, 33).
4. One tradition says that John was sent bound to Rome and under orders from Emperor Domitian, he was condemned to be cast into a caldron of boiling oil. God worked a miracle, and the oil did him no harm. Whether this occurrence really happened we cannot be sure, but we do know that God promised to protect His apostles in amazing ways (Mark 16:18). This story reminds us that a believer cannot die until his work is done. God still had work

for John to do! For further information on the persecution of first century men, refer to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

5. John was exiled or banished to a little island called Patmos (Revelation 1:9). It was here that he wrote the book of Revelation and where God showed him some amazing things about the future.

John was the last disciple to die. Who was the first disciple to die (Acts 12:1-2)?

One brother was the first to die, and the younger brother was the last to die. This should remind us that God has a different plan for each believer. God had a plan for James, and God had a plan for John. God has a unique plan that is especially fitted for each individual. In John 21:18-22, we learn that God had different plans for John and Peter. Do not expect God to deal with you the same way He deals with other believers. God may allow some things to happen to you that do not happen to others. ***God knows what is best for each person. Just trust Him. Get your eyes off others (John 21:21-22) and follow Christ!***

Are you thankful for the life of John the Apostle? What lessons have you learned from the study of His life? In what ways was John a good example to follow? In what ways can you learn from some of the mistakes that John made? Are there similarities between you and John? Are you like him in certain ways? Is he like you in certain ways?

How do the following words make you think of John?

LOVE
HATE
CLOSEST
FAITHFUL
THUNDER
AUTHOR
OLD MAN

LIFE is short,
DEATH is sure;
SIN the cause,
CHRIST the cure!