

Who Was John?

1. John wrote five books in the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the three epistles or letters of John, and the book of Revelation.
2. He was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James. Zebedee was wealthy enough to have hired servants to help him with his work, (Mark 1:19,20) and he owned at least one boat for fishing on the Sea of Galilee.
3. John's mother was named Salome. There is good evidence that she was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1) If true, that would make John and James cousins of Jesus.
4. John worked closely with his brother, James, before becoming a disciple. John—and perhaps James as well—was previously a disciple of John the Baptist. (John 1:35-42) If Salome was the sister of Mary, then they would be related to John the Baptist, as well.
5. In their fishing days, they worked with their father, Zebedee, but they were apparently also working with Peter and Andrew. (Luke 5:7-10)
6. **Andrew, Peter, James, and John were henceforth [after Jesus returned to the Jordan following His temptations in the wilderness] known as disciples of Jesus. They accompanied him to Jerusalem, and were with him while he preached in the cities and villages of Judea, and in Samaria on his return to Galilee.** They heard his teachings, and witnessed the exhibitions of divine power in the miracles which he performed; and day by day their faith increased, that **this unassuming Galilean peasant was indeed the promised Messiah, who should restore the kingdom to Israel.** {*ST*, January 8, 1885 par. 3}
7. He [Jesus] had been separated from His mother for quite a length of time. During this period He had been baptized by John and had endured the temptations in the wilderness. Rumors had reached Mary concerning her son and His sufferings. **John, one of the new disciples, had searched for Christ and had found Him in His humiliation, emaciated, and bearing the marks of great physical and mental distress. Jesus, unwilling that John should witness His humiliation, had gently yet firmly dismissed him from His presence. He wished to be alone; no human eye must behold His agony, no human heart be called out in sympathy with His distress.**
The disciple had sought Mary [his aunt] in her home and related to her the incidents of this meeting with Jesus, as well as the event of His baptism, when the voice of God was heard in acknowledgment of His Son, and the prophet John had pointed to Christ, saying “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” For thirty years this woman had been treasuring up evidences that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Saviour of the world. Joseph was dead, and she had no one in whom to confide the cherished thoughts of her heart. She had fluctuated between hope and perplexing doubts, but always feeling more or less of an assurance that her son was indeed the Promised One. (*2SP* 99, 100; *5BC* 1132.2,3; *3 Redemption: Or the Miracles of Christ the Mighty One* 3,4)
8. John, along with his brother, James, and Peter seem to have been the closest followers of Jesus. Jesus often took those three with Him on special occasions while leaving the other nine disciples behind. (Mark 3:17; 5:37; 9:2; 14:33)
9. John and James were apparently naturally “hotheaded” and explosive in nature. Jesus called them “the sons of thunder.” (Mark 3:17).

10. James and John became very upset when the people of a Samaritan village would not give them food and lodging because they were on their way to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:54) They could be considered intolerant and even exclusive in their attitude toward Jesus. (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49)
11. James and John convinced their mother—or possibly vice versa—to approach Jesus and ask if they could sit on His right and His left in the kingdom. (Mark 10:35-37; Matthew 20:20-22)
12. John was the one who got Peter into the courtyard during the trial of Jesus:

John 18:16,16 (GNB): ¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That other disciple was well known to the High Priest, so he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house, ¹⁶while Peter stayed outside by the gate. Then the other disciple went back out, spoke to the girl at the gate, and brought Peter inside.

After deserting their Master in the garden, two of the disciples had ventured to follow, at a distance, the mob that had Jesus in charge. These disciples were Peter and John. The priests recognized John as a well-known disciple of Jesus, and admitted him to the hall, hoping that as he witnessed the humiliation of his Leader, he would scorn the idea of such a one being the Son of God. John spoke in favor of Peter, and gained an entrance for him also. {DA 710.3}

The disciple John, upon entering the judgment hall, did not try to conceal the fact that he was a follower of Jesus. He did not mingle with the rough company who were reviling his Master. He was not questioned, for he did not assume a false character, and thus lay himself liable to suspicion. He sought a retired corner secure from the notice [712] of the mob, but as near Jesus as it was possible for him to be. Here he could see and hear all that took place at the trial of his Lord. {DA 711.1}

13. Arriving at the place of execution [Calvary], the prisoners were bound to the instruments of torture. The two thieves wrestled in the hands of those who placed them on the cross; but Jesus made no resistance. **The mother of Jesus, supported by John the beloved disciple, had followed the steps of her Son to Calvary.** She had seen Him fainting under the burden of the cross, and had longed to place a supporting hand beneath His wounded head, and to bathe that brow which had once been pillowed upon her bosom. But she was not permitted this mournful privilege. With the disciples she still cherished the hope that Jesus would manifest His power, and deliver Himself from His enemies. Again her heart would sink as she recalled the words in which He had foretold the very scenes that were then taking place. As the thieves were bound to the cross, she looked on with agonizing suspense. Would He who had given life to the dead suffer Himself to be crucified? Would the Son of God suffer Himself to be thus cruelly slain? Must she give up her faith that Jesus was the Messiah? Must she witness His shame and sorrow, without even the privilege of ministering to Him in His distress? **She saw His hands stretched upon the cross; the hammer and the nails were brought, and as the spikes were driven through the tender flesh, the heart-stricken disciples bore away from the cruel scene the fainting form of the mother of Jesus. {DA 744.1}**
14. As the eyes of Jesus wandered over the multitude about Him, one figure arrested His attention. **At the foot of the cross stood His mother, supported by the disciple John [apparently her nephew; see #3 above]. She could not endure to remain away from her Son; and John, knowing that the end was near, had brought her again to the cross. In His dying hour, Christ remembered His mother. Looking into her grief-stricken face and then upon John, He said to her,**

“Woman, behold thy son!” then to John, “Behold thy mother!” John understood Christ’s words, and accepted the trust. He at once took Mary to his home, and from that hour cared for her tenderly. O pitiful, loving Saviour; amid all His physical pain and mental anguish, He had a thoughtful care for His mother! He had no money with which to provide for her comfort; but He was enshrined in the heart of John, and He gave His mother to him as a precious legacy. Thus He provided for her that which she most needed,—the tender sympathy of one who loved her because she loved Jesus. And in receiving her as a sacred trust, John was receiving a great blessing. She was a constant reminder of his beloved Master. {DA 752.2}

15. **The women of Galilee had remained with the disciple John to see what disposition would be made of the body of Jesus, which was very precious to them, although their faith in Him as the promised Messiah had perished with Him. . . . The women were astonished to see Joseph [of Arimathea] and Nicodemus, both honored and wealthy councilors, as [68] anxious and interested as themselves for the proper disposal of the body of Jesus.--3SP 174, 175 (1878).**

While John was troubled about the burial of his Master, Joseph [of Arimathea] returned with Pilate’s order for the body of Christ; and Nicodemus came bringing a costly mixture of myrrh and aloes . . . for His embalming. . . . The disciples were astonished to see these wealthy rulers as much interested as they themselves in the burial of their Lord. . . .{DA 773-774}

Gently and reverently they [Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus—both members of the Sanhedrin] removed with their own hands the body of Jesus from the cross. Their tears of sympathy fell fast as they looked upon His bruised and lacerated form. Joseph owned a new tomb, hewn in a rock. This he was reserving for himself; but it was near Calvary, and he now prepared it for Jesus. The body, together with the spices brought by Nicodemus, was carefully wrapped in a linen sheet, and the Redeemer was borne to the tomb. **There the three disciples [John, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus] straightened the mangled limbs, and folded the bruised hands upon the pulseless breast.** The Galilean women came to see that all had been done that could be done for the lifeless form of their beloved Teacher. Then they saw the heavy stone rolled against the entrance of the tomb, and the Saviour was left at rest. The women were last at the cross and last at the tomb of Christ. While the evening shades were gathering, Mary Magdalene and the other Marys lingered about the resting place of their Lord, shedding tears of sorrow over the fate of Him whom they loved. “And they returned, . . . and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.” Luke 23:56.--DA 773, 774 (1898); DG 68.2.

16. As recorded in the book of Acts, after the death of Jesus, we see John closely associated with Peter. But Peter tended to do all the talking! (Acts 1:13; Acts 3:1-4:23; contrast Acts 4:1,13) They spoke very powerfully to the Sanhedrin in defense of Christ. “They [members of the Sanhedrin] realized then that they [John and Peter] had been companions of Jesus.” (Acts 4:13, *GNB*) Having been associated with Jesus for much of three years and having the paradigm shift at Pentecost as the Holy Spirit “came upon” them, the demeanor and speech of John and Peter changed dramatically as they truly realized who Jesus was.
17. John even traveled with Peter to Samaria to evaluate the work of Philip. (Acts 8:14)
18. John along with Peter and others are mentioned by Paul as “pillars” of the church. (Galatians 2:9)
19. John lived to be very old. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the stately temple. The last survivor of the disciples who had been intimately connected with the Saviour, his message had great influence in setting forth the fact

that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. No one could doubt his sincerity, and through his teachings many were led to turn from unbelief. {AA 569.1}

The rulers of the Jews were filled with bitter hatred against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. They declared that their efforts against the Christians would avail nothing so long as John's testimony kept ringing in the ears of the people. In order that the miracles and teachings of Jesus might be forgotten, the voice of the bold witness must be silenced. {AA 569.2}

John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities the apostle's doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple's death. {AA 569.3}

John answered for himself in a clear and convincing manner, and with such simplicity and candor that his words had a powerful effect. His hearers were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. But the more convincing his testimony, the deeper was the hatred of his opposers. The emperor Domitian was filled with rage. He could neither [570] dispute the reasoning of Christ's faithful advocate, nor match the power that attended his utterance of truth; yet he determined that he would silence his voice. {AA 569.4}

John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of His faithful servant, even as He preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. As the words were spoken, "Thus perish all who believe in that deceiver, Jesus Christ of Nazareth," John declared, "My Master patiently submitted to all that Satan and his angels could devise to humiliate and torture Him. He gave His life to save the world. I am honored in being permitted to suffer for His sake. I am a weak, sinful man. Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." {AA 570.1}

These words had their influence, and John was removed from the caldron by the very men who had cast him in. {AA 570.2}

Again the hand of persecution fell heavily upon the apostle. By the emperor's decree John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, condemned "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 1:9. Here, his enemies thought, his influence would no longer be felt, and he must finally die of hardship and distress. {AA 570.3}

20. Patmos apparently had Roman quarries and John was likely forced to perform hard labor even though he was an old man. (*Believer's Study Bible* - Intro to Revelation) It was from the Isle of Patmos that John wrote the book of Revelation. It was almost certainly written during the reign of Domitian which ended in A.D. 96. John returned to Ephesus thereafter.
21. John was the last of the disciples to survive. (AA 542) He wrote the Gospel of John about A.D. 90-100. A small piece of the Gospel has been found in Egypt, dated to A.D. 125. It is the earliest piece of the New Testament that we have found so far. (5SDABC 179-180)
22. See also *The Sanctified Life*, chap. 7, "The Character of John."