

Author¹

The author is most likely John son of Zebedee (see Mk 1:19–20)—the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation. He was a fisherman, one of Jesus’ inner circle (together with James and Peter), and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23).

Unlike most New Testament letters, 1 John does not tell us who its author is. The earliest identification of him comes from the church fathers: Irenaeus (c. a.d. 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.
2. Similar phrases and expressions, such as those found in the following passages, are striking (See appendix):

| 1 John | Gospel of John |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1:1 | 1:1,14 |
| 1:4 | 16:24 |
| 1:6–7 | 3:19–21 |
| 2:7 | 13:34–35 |
| 3:8 | 8:44 |
| 3:14 | 5:24 |
| 4:6 | 8:47 |
| 4:9 | 1:14,18; 3:16 |
| 5:9 | 5:32,37 |
| 5:12 | 3:36 |

3. The mention of eyewitness testimony (1:1–4) harmonizes with the fact that John was a follower of Christ from the earliest days of his ministry.
4. The authoritative manner that pervades the letter, seen in its commands (2:15,24,28; 4:1; 5:21), its firm assertions (2:6; 3:14; 4:12) and its pointed identification of error (1:6,8; 2:4,22) is what would be expected from an apostle.
5. The suggestions of advanced age (addressing his readers as “children,” 2:1,28; 3:7) agree with early church tradition concerning John’s age when he wrote the books known to be his.

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6. The description of the heretics as antichrists (2:18), liars (2:22) and children of the devil (3:10) is consistent with Jesus' characterization of John as a son of thunder (Mk 3:17).
7. The indications of a close relationship with the Lord (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” (Jn 13:23).

Date¹

The letter is difficult to date with precision, but factors such as (1) evidence from early Christian writers (Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria), (2) the early form of Gnosticism reflected in the denunciations of the letter and (3) indications of the advanced age of John suggest the end of the first century. Since the author of 1 John seems to build on concepts and themes found in the fourth Gospel (see 1 Jn 2:7–11), it is reasonable to date the letter somewhere between a.d. 85 and 95, after the writing of the Gospel, which may have been written c. 85.

Recipients¹

1 Jn 2:12–14,19; 3:1; 5:13 make it clear that this letter was addressed to believers. But the letter itself does not indicate who they were or where they lived. The fact that it mentions no one by name suggests it was a circular letter sent to Christians in a number of places. Evidence from early Christian writers places the apostle John in Ephesus during most of his later years (c. a.d. 70–100). The earliest confirmed use of 1 John was in the Roman province of Asia (in modern Turkey), where Ephesus was located. Clement of Alexandria indicates that John ministered in the various churches scattered throughout that province. It may be assumed, therefore, that 1 John was sent to the churches of the province of Asia.

Gnosticism¹

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. The human body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for “knowledge” is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism).

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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 1:1; 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 (see Col 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 (1Jn 3:4)—was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.

The Gnosticism addressed in the NT was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John's letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians.

Gnosticism in News / Media / Entertainment Today

- ***The Da Vinci Code*** – by Dan Brown

The 'Gnostic Gospels' - In 1945, group of ancient documents dating from approximately A.D. 350, predominantly Gnostic in character, were discovered near Nag Hammadi, Egypt. *Many of these texts were considered to be extinct, though they had been referred to and denounced in the writings of early church theologians such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.* ²

Examples: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Mary

"I was skeptical, but after a year and a half of research, I became a believer," says Brown. "As soon as people understand that the few Gospels included in the Bible are not the only version of the Christ story, they begin to sense contradictions. Magdalene is most obvious." Her role, he says, was deliberately distorted, a smear campaign by the early church fathers — as one of his characters declares, "the greatest cover-up in human history." - Source: The Da Vinci Code, by Roxanne Roberts, The Washington Post, Aug. 2, 2003

Brown's indicates that the Gnostic Gospels were widely accepted in early Christianity and that Constantine ordered them destroyed (~325 A.D.)

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The process of discerning the authentic Gospels was a lengthy one, but it had already begun in the early second century. Some communities used various other Gospels, but second-century Church Fathers frequently cited the four Gospels as authoritative. Their criteria were apostolic origins and fidelity to the rule of faith, not gender issues. Brown's conspiracy theory is a fabrication. Moreover, the final determinations about what constituted the Christian canon of Scripture were made by councils held after Constantine's time.³

Irenaeus and the Four Gospels

Irenaeus writes in *Adversus Haereses* (~180 A.D.):

The Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are. Since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is spread over all the earth, and the pillar and foundation of the Church is the gospel, and the Spirit of life, it fittingly has four pillars, everywhere breathing out incorruption and revivifying men. From this it is clear that the Word, the artificer of all things, being manifested to men gave us the gospel, fourfold in form but held together by one Spirit. As David said, when asking for his coming, 'O sitter upon the cherubim, show yourself'. For the cherubim have four faces, and their faces are images of the activity of the Son of God. For the first living creature, it says, was like a lion, signifying his active and princely and royal character; the second was like an ox, showing his sacrificial and priestly order; the third had the face of a man, indicating very clearly his coming in human guise; and the fourth was like a flying eagle, making plain the giving of the Spirit who broods over the Church. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these.

The 4 creatures are allusions to Revelations 4:7-8. Irenaeus goes on to compare them to the Gospels according to John, Luke, Matthew, and Mark respectively. The Davidic quotation is from Psalms 80:1.

- **Gospel of Judas** - <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/>⁴

The codex, containing the Gospel of Judas, was discovered in the 1970s near El Minya, Egypt, and moved from Egypt to Europe to the United States. Once in the United States, it was kept in a safe-deposit box for 16 years on Long Island, New York, until antiquities dealer Frieda Nussberger-Tchacos bought it in April 2000. After two unsuccessful resale attempts, Nussberger-Tchacos—alarmed by the codex's rapidly deteriorating state—transferred it to the Maecenas Foundation for Ancient Art in Basel, Switzerland, in February 2001, for restoration and translation.

The Maecenas Foundation approached National Geographic to play a key role in the authentication and conservation of the codex. National Geographic gathered numerous experts to bring the project to completion.

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The story of the restoration process and translation was recorded as a televised documentary on the National Geographic Channel.

Key Text

“But you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.

Occasion and Purpose¹

John’s readers were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety (see Gnosticism above). This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints.

Consequently, John wrote this letter with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teachers (see 2:26) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (see 5:13). In keeping with his intention to combat Gnostic teachers, John specifically struck at their total lack of morality (3:8–10); and by giving eyewitness testimony to the incarnation, he sought to confirm his readers’ belief in the incarnate Christ (1:3). Success in this would give the writer joy (1:4).

Sources

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²*www.apologeticsindex.org* - © Copyright 1996-2003 by Apologetics Index™.

³*www.catholiceducation.org* - Copyright © 2004 Our Sunday Visitor

⁴*The Lost Gospel of Judas – Frequently Asked Questions* - © 1996-2006 National Geographic Society.

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Appendix

Author

John son of Zebedee

Mark 1:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

John 13:23 (ESV)

²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side,

Similar Phrases and Expressions

| 1 John | Gospel of John |
|---|--|
| <p>1 John 1:1 (ESV) ¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—</p> | <p>John 1:1 (ESV) ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.</p> <p>John 1:14 (ESV) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.</p> |
| <p>1 John 1:4 (ESV) ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.</p> | <p>John 16:24 (ESV) ²⁴ <i>Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.</i></p> |

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| 1 John | Gospel of John |
|--|--|
| <p>1 John 1:6–7 (ESV) ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.</p> | <p>John 3:19–21 (ESV) ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”</p> |
| <p>1 John 2:7 (ESV) ⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.</p> | <p>John 13:34–35 (ESV) ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”</p> |
| <p>1 John 3:8 (ESV) ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.</p> | <p>John 8:44 (ESV) ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.</p> |
| <p>1 John 3:14 (ESV) ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.</p> | <p>John 5:24 (ESV) ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.</p> |
| <p>1 John 4:6 (ESV) ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.</p> | <p>John 8:47 (ESV) ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”</p> |

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| 1 John | Gospel of John |
|--|---|
| <p>1 John 4:9 (ESV) ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.</p> | <p>John 1:14 (ESV) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.</p> <p>John 1:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.</p> <p>John 3:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.</p> |
| <p>1 John 5:9 (ESV) ⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.</p> | <p>John 5:32 (ESV) ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.</p> <p>John 5:37 (ESV) ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,</p> |
| <p>1 John 5:12 (ESV) ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.</p> | <p>John 3:36 (ESV) ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.</p> |

Eyewitness Testimony

1 John 1:1–4 (ESV)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that

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which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

The authoritative manner that pervades the letter seen in its commands

1 John 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1 John 2:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

1 John 4:1 (ESV)

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Its firm assertions

1 John 2:6 (ESV)

⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

1 John 4:12 (ESV)

¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

And its pointed identification of error

1 John 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

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1 John 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

1 John 2:22 (ESV)

²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

Is what would be expected from an apostle.

Addressing his Readers as “Children”

1 John 2:1 (ESV)

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

1 John 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

Description of the Heretics as Antichrists

1 John 2:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

Liars

1 John 2:22 (ESV)

²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

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Children of the Devil

1 John 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Is consistent with Jesus' characterization of John as a son of thunder.

Mark 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);

The Indications of a Close Relationship with the Lord

1 John 1:1 (ESV)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

1 John 2:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 2:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1 John 2:27–28 (ESV)

²⁷ But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

Fit the descriptions of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and the one who reclined “next to him”

John 13:23 (ESV)

²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side,

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Date

Since the author of 1 John seems to build on concepts and themes found in the fourth Gospel...

1 John 2:7–11 (ESV)

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Recipients

Addressed to Believers

1 John 2:12–14 (ESV)

¹² I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.
¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.
¹⁴ I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

1 John 3:1 (ESV)

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¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

Gnosticism

Cerinthianism

1 John 1:1 (ESV)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

1 John 2:22 (ESV)

²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 4:2–3 (ESV)

² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Ascetic form of Gnosticism

Colossians 2:21 (ESV)

²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”

Colossians 2:23 (ESV)

²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Breaking of God’s Law

1 John 3:4 (ESV)

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

Gnosticism in News / Media / Entertainment Today

Irenaeus and the Four Gospels

Revelation 4:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”

Psalm 80:1 (ESV)

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

Occasion and Purpose

Expose False Teachers

1 John 2:26 (ESV)

²⁶ I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

Give Believers Assurance of Salvation

1 John 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

John specifically struck at the Gnostics total lack of morality

1 John 3:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Confirm his readers’ belief in the incarnate Christ

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1 John 1:3 (ESV)

³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Success in this would give the writer joy

1 John 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.