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# THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

**NEW TESTAMENT**

**BOOK 43**

**JOHN**



**Saint John by Guido Reni**

## SUMMARY

The Gospel of John is the latest-written of the four biographies of Jesus that have been preserved in the New Testament. Written by a Christian named John, the contents of the book indicate quite clearly that the author was not the John who was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, for it contains no direct personal references of the type that one would expect from an intimate associate of Jesus.

On the contrary, it presents an interpretation of Jesus that reflects ideas and situations that prevailed in the Christian community toward the end of the first century of the Christian era, a time when Christianity was under attack from several different quarters, including Jews, Romans, skeptics, and others making charges against it.

The author of the Gospel of John was evidently aware of these attacks and knew that some of the accounts given in earlier gospels were interpreted in a manner that seemed to support these charges.

Because he believed so firmly in the new Christian movement, he wanted to write a gospel that set forth its essential truth in the best possible manner. His hope was that he might write one that was not only true but that offered a presentation of the Christian faith that would overcome the objections of its critics and gain the respect of the educated and cultured people of his day.

The purpose of this gospel, as stated by John himself, is to show that Jesus of Nazareth was Christ, the Son of God, and that believers in him might have eternal life. This purpose was one that John had in common with the men who wrote the Synoptic Gospels, but his method for achieving it distinguishes his gospel from the earlier ones.

The central theme in the Synoptic Gospels is the coming of the kingdom of God, and it was in relation to this event that the accounts were given of the life and teachings of Jesus.

The messianic character of Jesus' mission was described in terms of the miracles that he performed, his kindly attitude toward the poor and the oppressed, his power to cast out demons and to heal the sick, and his instructions concerning the way people should live in view of the imminence of the coming kingdom.

In the Gospel of John, the central theme is the divine Logos, the word that was with God and that was God. This Logos became flesh and dwelt among men in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. John says nothing of a supernatural birth.

He regards Jesus as a human being who possessed actual flesh and blood, the same as other people. The most significant thing about Jesus is that the divine Logos was present in him, and all of the marvelous things that he accomplished were by virtue of the power of God.

In this way, John conceives the relationship between the divine and the human. Because God was present in Jesus, it is appropriate to refer to Jesus as the Son of God, which is an example of what can happen in the life of anyone else in whom the power of God dwells.

## SUMMARY Continued

In this connection, John says, Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John's account of the ministry of Jesus consists of two parts.

The first twelve chapters describe Jesus' public ministry, beginning with his meeting John the Baptist and closing with the visit of the Greeks who came to worship at the Feast of Passover.

The remaining chapters deal with the closing days of Jesus' earthly ministry, when he gave instruction to his disciples and explained the meaning of his life and approaching death in a number of lengthy discourses.

This division of the gospel into two parts follows the pattern used by the Synoptic Gospels' writers, but the contents of the two sections differ widely from the earlier accounts.

According to John, Jesus' public ministry can be summarized in connection with a number of miracles that John reports and then follows with interpretations that point to their spiritual significance.

John records only seven miracles, considerably less than the number reported in the Synoptic Gospels. But John's use of the miracle stories is different from that of his predecessors.

John does not regard the stories' miraculous elements themselves as having great significance but rather the spiritual meanings that he finds implicit in them. The miracles are signs not of the imminence of the coming of God's kingdom as that term is used in the Synoptic Gospels but of the presence of the Logos, or the power of God, which brings about a transformation in people's lives.

The seven miracle stories recorded in John are, first, the turning of water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana; second, the healing of a nobleman's son who was at the point of death; third, the healing of a man at the sheep-gate pool; fourth, the walking on water; fifth, the feeding of five thousand; sixth, the healing of the man born blind; and seventh, the raising of Lazarus.

Each of these stories is used as an introduction to a discourse concerning the significance of Jesus and his message in relation to the quality of a person's life. This use of the miracle stories for the purpose of teaching spiritual lessons is made possible by analogies and, in many instances, by allegorizing the materials found in the stories.

For example, the story of Jesus' turning water into wine is interpreted to mean the contrast between the old and the new dispensations. The water symbolizes a cleansing, and the transformation that takes place when a person's life is filled with the spirit present in Jesus sharply contrasts with the rites and ceremonies performed in the Jewish Temple.

This meaning of the story is given special emphasis in the narratives that follow. In one of these, Jesus drives out the buyers and sellers from the Temple. In the Synoptic Gospels, this event is placed toward the close of Jesus' ministry.

## SUMMARY Continued

John situates it toward the beginning because to him it represents the goal of Jesus' entire earthly career. He quotes Jesus as saying, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days, which is a reference to John's belief that Jesus' death and resurrection have brought about a new and more meaningful conception of salvation.

The point is illustrated even further in the story of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, in which Jesus says that unless a person is born of the water and the spirit, that person cannot see the kingdom of God.

The same point of view is expressed again in the account of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the Samaritan well. In reply to her questions concerning the proper place and manner of worship, Jesus explains that external forms of worship are not as important as worshipping the Father in spirit and truth.

The feeding of the five thousand appears to be taken from the Synoptic Gospels, which present the story as evidence that Jesus is the Messiah because he worked miracles. John reports the story as it was customarily understood, but the use that he makes of it is quite different from that of the earlier writers.

For John, the amount of physical food that came into existence was not of primary importance. Instead, the important meaning of the story is the spiritual food that alone can sustain the quality of living that characterizes true followers of Jesus.

Accordingly, the account of the miracles is followed immediately by a discourse in which Jesus says, I am the bread of life. In an obvious reference to the Christian practice of celebrating the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, John quotes Jesus as saying, Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

It is the presence of the Logos, or Spirit of God, in human life that really nourishes the spiritual quality of a person's life. Just as Jesus, by virtue of this spirit, gives the living water that brings eternal life, so he gives the food that can bring a new quality of life to the world.

When Jesus heals a man who was born blind, his disciples inquire of him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? In reply, Jesus says, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the power of God might be displayed in his life.

The discussion that follows this exchange makes clear that John's major concern in this narrative is not physical sight in place of physical blindness but rather the curing of men and women of their spiritual blindness.

Those who fail to understand Jesus and the purpose of his mission in the world are spiritually blind. Only by coming under the influence of his spirit can we pass from darkness into light.

In the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, John's interpretation of the signs reaches its climax. Lazarus was dead for four days, and at the call of Jesus he came back to life. For John, an event of this kind is a most appropriate symbol of what happens to spiritually dead people when they are receptive to the power of God made manifest in the person of Jesus.

## SUMMARY Continued

That this story is found only in the Gospel of John raises some questions concerning the historicity of the event, for it does not seem at all probable that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels would have failed to relate an event as important as this one if they had known about it.

Whether John was recording a popular tradition or writing a sequel to the story of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in the Gospel of Luke, we do not know. At any rate, the story in Luke closes with the statement that those who do not believe Moses and the prophets will not be convinced, even if a person raised from the dead should speak to them.

In John's story, someone does come from the dead, and even then the Jews are not persuaded by what he says and does. As John interprets the story, its deeper meaning is disclosed in a statement that Jesus makes:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Lazarus is typical of all human beings. Without the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, all human life is meaningless. When the Spirit of God enters into our lives, we are no longer dead in a spiritual sense but are partakers of the life that is everlasting.

The remaining portions of the Gospel of John record incidents closely related to the closing days of Jesus' earthly ministry. Unlike the Gospel of Mark, the story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary is placed before rather than after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The Passover meal with the disciples is said to have taken place one day earlier than in the account given in the Synoptic Gospels. These changes are quite in harmony with John's conception of Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Because the paschal lamb used as a sacrifice by the ancient Jews was always slain on the day before the Passover, it seemed most appropriate to John that the sacrifice of Jesus should be in conformity with the ancient tradition.

The major emphasis in this part of John's gospel is found in the discourses that are attributed to Jesus. Because John is interpreting the meaning of Jesus' earthly career from the perspective of the post-resurrection experiences and beliefs of the Christian community, these discourses are presented as though they were made in anticipation of the events that followed.

This narrative device is exemplified in the story of the foot-washing that precedes the eating of the Passover meal. By performing the work of a servant, Jesus not only gives to his disciples an example of humility that they are to follow, but the water used in the service is a symbol of that spiritual cleansing essential for all those who become true followers of him.

This symbolic washing is the meaning of Jesus' statement made to Peter: Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. And when Jesus says to the group of disciples, And you are clean, though not every one of you, he is referring to Judas, who betrays Jesus by contacting Jesus' enemies.



## SUMMARY Continued

In one of the discourses, Jesus explains his relation to God the Father by using the parable of the vine and the branches. He shows in what sense it is true that the Son and the Father are one in spirit and in purpose without either of them losing their personal identities.

The Father works through the Son for the redemption of the world, but the task must be continued after the earthly career of the Son has ended. In this connection, Jesus speaks of going to the Father in order that the Comforter or Spirit of God may be present in the hearts and minds of the believers.

Continuing through the church the work that Jesus did while dwelling in their midst, which is John's version of the second coming. John replaces, at least in part, the apocalyptic expectations present in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. John, no less than the Synoptic Gospels' writers, believes that the forces of evil in this world will be overcome, and God's reign of righteousness finally will be established.

But instead of being brought about by a sudden catastrophic event that will destroy the nations of the world and at which time Jesus will return to earth in power and great glory, John sees the return of Jesus whenever and wherever the Spirit of God enters into the lives of human beings.

He believes that the function of the Christian church is to follow the guidance and direction of this spirit until the whole world has been transformed into a kingdom of God.

In a long and remarkable prayer that John attributes to Jesus, the meaning and significance of Jesus' entire career are neatly summarized. We may be sure that the language used is that of John rather than of Jesus, for it contains the same type of statements used throughout the Gospels, and there are places where Jesus is referred to in the third person, but this is a relatively unimportant item.

What is important is that the prayer contains that which John believes to be implicit in the life and teachings of Jesus. It is a fitting resume, as John sees it, of what Jesus has done for the Christian community and indeed for all those who at any future time will become members of it.

The Christian community, at the time when John wrote, was experiencing a great deal of opposition, not only from Jews but from Romans and others who were skeptical of the claims that Christians were making.

At times, this opposition led to severe persecution, and some Christians wanted to withdraw from direct contact with the people of the world. It is to these Christians that Jesus' words to God are addressed: My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Following the prayer, John describes the events that culminate in the crucifixion of Jesus and reports the words that Jesus utters while on the cross. Jesus' last words — It is finished — carry a double meaning, for they indicate not only that Jesus is about to die but that the whole purpose of the incarnation is now complete. The gospel closes with an account of the post-resurrection experiences that took place both in Jerusalem and in Galilee.

## SUMMARY Continued

The importance of the Gospel of John can scarcely be overestimated. Throughout Christian history, it has been read and cherished far more than any of the other preserved accounts of Jesus' life.

The genius of the gospel lies in the way in which John conceives of the relationship between the human and the divine. This relationship has always been a problem that has puzzled people.

How can God, who is conceived as an eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent being, have any direct contact with that which is temporal, changing, and limited by the conditions of space and time?

In other words, how can divinity ever be united with humanity unless one thereby becomes involved in a contradiction of terms? John's answer to this question is his statement, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

The Logos is identified with God and is the spirit that dwelt in the human being known as Jesus of Nazareth. This divine spirit motivated Jesus' activities and enabled him to meet triumphantly the temptations to which all human beings are subject.

As John sees it, no human being using only his own strength can overcome the forces of evil. Only God can impart the power to human beings to do this. That it was done in the person of Jesus is all the evidence needed to assure that triumph over evil is a possibility for humans and that the ultimate overthrow of the forces of evil is something that has now been made certain.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus appears in the role of a human being, which is especially important because it means that he is an example for other people to follow. As a typical human being, he possessed no extraordinary power that is not available to anyone else who asks for it and who meets the conditions for receiving it.

Because Jesus' will is in complete harmony with the will of God, it is proper and right to refer to him as the Son of God; in this connection, we are to understand the statement Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John's treatment of the miracle stories is especially significant. In the Synoptic Gospels, the purpose of the miracles appears to be that of presenting evidence to support the claim that Jesus is the true Messiah.

The evidence for this claim rests on Jesus' ability to do that which ordinary human beings cannot do. In this case, the historical accuracy of an event as reported would be crucial.

In John's gospel, only seven miracles are reported, and in no one of these instances is the real meaning of the story dependent on its historical accuracy, which is not to say that John has any doubts about the events' historical accuracy.

He does not discuss historicity, for he has something else in mind that he regards as far more important: the spiritual lesson that he derives from the stories, whether the details are reported accurately or not.

## SUMMARY Continued

One of the advantages of the Gospel of John is that it presents the meaning of Christianity in a way that makes its validity dependent on neither scientific accuracy nor historical verification.

This position is a fortunate one for modern readers since we have no adequate means for determining exactly what happened in regard to any of the reported events. All of the evidence we have is what the individuals who made the records believed to have happened.

## NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 1:2** He was in the beginning with God.
- 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
- 1:17** For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- 1:18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.
- 1:29** The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
- 1:32** And John bore witness, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.
- 1:33** I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.
- 1:34** And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.
- 2:19** Jesus answered and said to them, ***Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.***
- 2:20** Then the Jews said, It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?
- 2:21** But He was speaking of the temple of His body.
- 3:5** Jesus answered, ***Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.***
- 3:6** ***That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***
- 3:7** ***Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again.***
- 3:8** ***The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.***
- 3:36** He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
- 4:13** ***but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.***
- 4:37** ***For in this the saying is true: One sows and another reaps.***
- 4:38** ***I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.***



**NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued**

- 5:14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ***See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.***
- 5:22** ***For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,***
- 5:23** ***that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.***
- 6:28** Then they said to Him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?
- 6:29** Jesus answered and said to them, ***This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.***
- 6:63** ***It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.***
- 7:7** ***The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.***
- 8:31** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ***If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.***
- 8:32** ***And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***
- 8:33** They answered Him, We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, You will be made free?
- 8:34** ***Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.***
- 8:35** ***And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.***
- 8:36** ***Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.***
- 8:42** Jesus said to them, ***If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.***
- 8:43** ***Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.***
- 8:44** ***You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.***
- 8:45** ***But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.***
- 8:46** ***Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?***
- 8:47** ***He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.***
- 11:4** When Jesus heard that, He said, ***This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.***
- 11:40** Jesus said to her, ***Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?***
- 11:41** Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ***Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.***

**NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued**

- 11:42** *And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.*
- 11:43** Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth!*
- 11:44** And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, *Loose him, and let him go.*
- 14:15** *If you love Me, keep My commandments.*
- 14:16** *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--*
- 14:17** *the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*
- 14:18** *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*
- 14:25** *These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.*
- 14:26** *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*
- 14:27** *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*
- 16:13** *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*
- 16:14** *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*
- 16:15** *All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*
- 17:1** Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: *Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,*
- 17:2** *as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.*
- 17:3** *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
- 17:14** *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*
- 17:15** *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*
- 17:16** *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*
- 17:17** *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*
- 20:29** Jesus said to him, *Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

## BIBLE TIMELINE

6 BC	Birth of John the Baptist	John 1:6
5 BC	Birth of Jesus	John 1:14
26 AD	John the Baptist Prepares the Way	John 1:15
27 AD	Wedding at Cana	John 2
27 AD	Jesus Teaches Nicodemus	John 3
27 AD	Jesus Testifies to the Samaritan Woman	John 4
28 AD	The Pool of Bethesda	John 5
29 AD	Jesus Feeds the 5,000	John 6
29 AD	Jesus Teaches at the Feast of Tabernacles	John 7
29 AD	The Woman Caught in Adultery	John 8
29 AD	Jesus Affirms He is the Son of God	John 9
29 AD	The Shepherd and His Flock	John 10
30 AD	Jesus Raises Lazarus	John 11
30 AD	The Triumphal Entry	John 12
30 AD	Thursday Before Passover	John 13
30 AD	Jesus Comforts His Disciples	John 14
30 AD	Jesus the True Vine	John 15
30 AD	Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit	John 16
30 AD	Jesus' Intercessory prayers	John 17
30 AD	Jesus' Betrayal, Trial, Crucifixion	John 18, 19
30 AD	Jesus' Resurrection	John 20, 21

## CHARACTER Definitions

**JOHN** - The Apostle John is the author of five New Testament books: the gospel of John, the three short epistles that also bear his name (1, 2, and 3 John) and the book of Revelation.

John was part of Jesus' inner circle and, along with Peter and James, John was given the privilege of witnessing Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah on the mount of the transfiguration.

His importance in the twelve grew as he matured, and after the crucifixion, he became a pillar in the Jerusalem church, ministered with Peter, and finally was exiled to the island of Patmos by the Romans, where he received from God the majestic visions that comprise the book of Revelation.

Not to be confused with John the Baptist, the Apostle John is the brother of James, another of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Together, they were called by Jesus Boanerges, which means sons of thunder, and therein we find a key to John's personality.

## CHARACTERS Continued

Both brothers were characterized by zeal, passion and ambition. In his early days with Jesus, at times John acted rashly, recklessly, impetuously, and aggressively. We see him in Mark 9 forbidding a man to cast out demons in Jesus' name because he was not part of the twelve.

Jesus gently rebuked him, saying no one could cast out demons in Jesus' name and then turn around and speak evil of Him. In Luke 9:51-54, we see the brothers wanting to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who refused to welcome Jesus. Again, Jesus had to rebuke them for their intolerance and lack of genuine love for the lost.

John's zeal for Jesus was also influenced by his natural ambition, as seen in his request (through his mother) that he and his brother be seated on Jesus' right and left hands in the kingdom, an incident that caused a temporary rift between the brothers and the other disciples.

In spite of these youthful expressions of misdirected passion, John aged well. He began to understand the need for humility in those who desired to be great. John's is the only gospel that records Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus' simple act of servanthood must have impacted John greatly. By the time of the crucifixion, Jesus had enough confidence in the young man to turn the care of His mother over to him, a charge John took very seriously.

From that day on, John cared for her as if she were his own mother. John's rash request for special honor in the kingdom had given way to a compassion and humility that would characterize his ministry in his later life. Although he remained courageous and bold, his ambition was balanced by the humility he learned at Jesus' feet.

This willingness to serve others and suffer for the sake of the gospel must have enabled him to bear his final imprisonment on Patmos where, according to reliable historical sources, he lived in a cave, cut off from those he loved, and was treated with cruelty and reproach.

In the opening of the book of Revelation, which he received from the Holy Spirit during this time, he referred to himself as your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus. He had learned to look beyond his earthly sufferings to the heavenly glory that awaits all who patiently endure.

John was passionately devoted to the proclamation of truth. No one in Scripture, except the Lord Jesus, had more to say about the concept of truth. His joy was proclaiming the truth to others and then watching them walk in it.

His strongest condemnation was for those who perverted the truth and led others astray, especially if they claimed to be believers. His passion for truth fueled his concern for the sheep who might be deceived by false teachers, and his warnings about them take up much of 1 John.

He had no qualms about identifying as false prophets and antichrists those who tried to pervert the truth, even proclaiming them to be demonic in nature.

## CHARACTERS Continued

At the same time, John is also called the apostle of love. In his own gospel, he refers to himself as the one whom Jesus loved.

He is depicted as the one leaning against Jesus' breast at the last supper. His brief second epistle is filled with expressions of his deep love for those in his care. He addresses his first epistle to a group of believers whom I love in the truth and exhorts them to love one another by walking in obedience to Jesus' commands.

John's life serves to remind us of several lessons which we can apply to our own lives. First, zeal for the truth must always be balanced by a love for people. Without it, zeal can turn to harshness and judgmental.

Conversely, abundant love that lacks the ability to discern truth from error can become gushing sentimentality. As John learned as he matured, if we speak the truth in love, we, and those we touch, will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Second, confidence and boldness, uncontrolled by compassion and grace, can quickly turn to pride and smugness. Confidence is a wonderful virtue, but without humility, it can become self-confidence, which can lead to boasting and an attitude of exclusiveness.

When that happens, our witness of the grace of God is tainted, and others see in us exactly the kind of person they wish not to be. Like John, if we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, our demeanor should be one that reflects a passion for the truth, compassion for people, and a steadfast desire to serve and represent our Lord by reflecting His humility and grace.

**JOHN THE BAPTIST** - Although his name implies that he baptized people (which he did), John's life on earth was more than just baptizing. John's adult life was characterized by blind devotion and utter surrender to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

John's voice was a lone voice in the wilderness as he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior. He was the precursor for the modern day evangelist as he unashamedly shared the good news of Jesus Christ. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others.

Most everyone, believer and non-believer alike, has heard of John the Baptist. He is arguably one of the most significant and well-known figures in the Bible. While John was known as the Baptist, he was in fact the first prophet called by God since Malachi some 400 years before his own birth.

John's own coming was foretold over 700 years previously by another prophet. In Isaiah 40:3-5 it states: A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.



## CHARACTERS Continued

This passage illustrates God's master plan in action as God selected John to be His special ambassador to proclaim His own coming.

Little is actually known of John, although we do know that John was a Levite, one of the special tribe set aside by God to take care of all of the work associated with the temple. John was the son of Zechariah, a temple priest of the lineage of Abijah, while John's mother Elizabeth was from the lineage of Aaron.

John was also related to Jesus as their mothers were cousins. John lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea, between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. It is written that he wore clothes made out of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His diet was a simple one—locusts and wild honey. John lived a simple life as he focused on the kingdom work set before him.

John's ministry grew in popularity, as recounted in Matthew 3:5-6: People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

We also see that he spoke very boldly to the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, calling them a brood of viper and warning them not to rely on their Jewish lineage for salvation, but to repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

People of that day simply did not address leaders, religious or otherwise, in this manner for fear of punishment. But John's faith made him fearless in the face of opposition.

While his ministry was gaining strength, John's message was gaining popularity. In fact, it became so popular that many people may have thought that he was the Messiah.

This assuredly was not his intent as he had a clear vision for what he was called to do. John 3:28 tells us, You yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. This verse speaks of John cautioning his disciples that what they had seen and heard from him is just the beginning of the miracle that was to come in the form of Jesus Christ.

John was merely a messenger sent by God to proclaim the truth. His message was simple and direct: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. He knew that once Jesus appeared on the scene, John's work would be all but finished. He willingly gave up the spotlight to Jesus saying, He must become greater; I must become less.

Perhaps there is no greater example of humility than the one demonstrated by both Jesus and John in Matthew 3:13-15. Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the river Jordan. John rightly recognized that the sinless Son of God needed no baptism of repentance and that he was certainly not worthy to baptize his own Savior.

But Jesus answered his concern by requesting baptism to fulfill all righteousness meaning that He was identifying Himself with sinners for whom He would ultimately sacrifice Himself, thereby securing all righteousness for them. In humility, John obeyed and consented to baptize Jesus.

## CHARACTERS Continued

John's ministry, as well as his life, came to an abrupt end at the hand of King Herod. In an act of unspeakable and violent vengeance, Herodias, Herod's wife and the former wife of Herod's brother Philip, plotted with her daughter to have John killed.

So incensed was Herodias at John for claiming her marriage to Herod to be unlawful that she prompted her daughter to ask for the head of John on a platter as a reward for her pleasing Herod with her dancing.

John had previously been arrested by Herod in attempt to silence him, and it was a simple thing to send the executioner to the prison and behead John, which is exactly what happened. This was a sad and ignoble end to the life of the man about whom Jesus said: I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John.

## MAP REFERENCES

