

New Testament Survey #4

(Gospel of John, 1 John, II John, Revelation)

LESSON OVERVIEW

- Five New Testament books are traditionally attributed to the apostle John: the Gospel of John, the three epistles (1, 2, and 3 John), and the book of Revelation. Revelation names John explicitly, while the other four works remain anonymous. Yet their shared vocabulary, style, and theological emphasis strongly suggest they come from the same author.
- John is one of the best-known apostles in the New Testament. He was the younger brother of James, son of Zebedee and Salome, and possibly Jesus's cousin (cf. John 19:25; Matt. 27:56). Alongside Peter and James, John belonged to Jesus's inner circle of disciples. He had once followed John the Baptist but later became known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). John alone remained at the cross during Jesus's crucifixion and was among the first to witness the empty tomb (John 20:2–8).
- Early church tradition holds that John ministered in Jerusalem and later in Ephesus, where he became a key leader. During the reign of Domitian, John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he received the vision recorded in Revelation. He was later released and returned to Ephesus, where he lived to old age and likely died near the end of the first century.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN – THE SON OF GOD GIVES LIFE

OVERVIEW

- The Gospel of John was written about thirty years after the other three Gospels had been in circulation. John addresses a mature church that had experienced decades of life following Christ.
- John most likely wrote his Gospel between AD 85–95, while living in Ephesus. The Gospel implies Peter had already died (John 21:19).

- Over 90% of John's Gospel is unique, complementing the Synoptic accounts rather than repeating them.
 - Focus on Judea – John emphasizes Jesus's ministry in Judea and at Jewish feasts, while the Synoptics emphasize Galilee.
 - Personal Conversations – John highlights Jesus's private encounters (Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, man at Bethesda, blind man, Pilate).
 - Spiritual Meaning of Events – John often explains the significance behind miracles. For example, all four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000, but only John includes the Bread of Life discourse (John 6).

THEMES

- Purpose – John explicitly states his reason for writing: *“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”* (John 20:31). The Gospel is both evangelistic (calling unbelievers to faith) and pastoral (strengthening believers' confidence in Christ).
- Belief – The verb “believe” occurs over 100 times, showing that faith in Jesus is not just intellectual agreement but active trust. John emphasizes that belief brings new birth (John 3:3–7), eternal life (John 3:16), and adoption as God's children (John 1:11–13). Unbelief, on the other hand, leads to spiritual blindness and separation from God (John 12:37–40).
- The Deity of Christ – John begins not with Jesus's birth, but with His eternal existence: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). He consistently presents Jesus as one with the Father, the giver of life, and the final judge (John 5:21–22). This truth is beautifully expressed in the seven “I AM” statements, where Jesus applies divine titles to Himself: the Bread of Life, Light of the World, Door, Good Shepherd, Resurrection and Life, Way/Truth/Life, and True Vine. Each of these reveals Christ's divine nature while showing how He meets humanity's deepest needs.

I JOHN – TRUTH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE

OVERVIEW

- John wrote his first letter sometime between AD 85–95 to churches very close to his heart. He repeatedly calls them his “*dear children*” (2:1, 13, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), showing a pastoral tone of affection as he writes to warn against false teachers.
- The letter addresses the infiltration of false teachers who denied that Jesus had truly come in the flesh. Some promoted asceticism, while others turned grace into license for sin. John responds by urging his readers to test the spirits and remain anchored in the truth of Christ (4:1).
- The letter is full of contrasts—light vs. darkness, love of God vs. love of the world, children of God vs. children of the devil, Spirit of God vs. spirit of Antichrist.
- John emphasizes that faith produces visible fruit—a believer’s life will bear marks of love, obedience, and truth. To help his readers, he provides “tests of assurance” (using the phrase “by this we know”) to confirm authentic faith (2:3; 2:5–6; 3:18–19; 3:24; 4:2; 4:6; 4:13; 5:2).

THEMES

- Love (3:11, 14, 16–18; 4:7–10; 5:2): Genuine faith is proven by love expressed in deeds, not words alone.
- Truth (1:6; 2:4, 21; 4:6): The believer must hold to the truth of who Christ is and discern between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
- Obedience (2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3): Keeping God’s commands is evidence of knowing Him and abiding in Him.

II JOHN – WALKING IN TRUTH & LOVE

OVERVIEW

- Written around AD 85–95, this short letter parallels 1 John and was likely composed around the same time. Unlike 1 John, which reads like a sermon or tract, 2 John follows the typical features of a letter with a salutation, greeting, and closing.
- It is addressed to “*the chosen lady and her children*” (v.1). This could refer to an individual Christian woman and her household or metaphorically to a local congregation and its members. Either way, John writes with pastoral care to the people he loves, speaking the truth.
- Like 1 John, the letter warns against false teachers who deny that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. John exhorts believers to remain steadfast in the teaching of Christ and to avoid supporting or extending hospitality to those spreading error (vv. 7–11).

THEMES

- Truth and Love Together — John repeatedly emphasizes walking in truth and love as the essential marks of Christian life (vv. 4–6). Truth anchors love, and love demonstrates the truth.
- Guarding the Faith — Believers must watch themselves, persevere in the teaching of Christ, and not compromise by aiding those who oppose the gospel (vv. 8–11).

III JOHN – WALKING IN TRUTH WITH HOSPITALITY

OVERVIEW

- John wrote this letter to commend Gaius for his hospitality to traveling missionaries, in contrast to the opposition of a domineering church leader named Diotrephes, who refused to welcome them and even threatened excommunication. John also commends Demetrius, who likely carried the letter and was worthy of support.

THEMES

- Walking in the Truth — John rejoices that Gaius lives out the truth in both belief and practice (vv. 3–4).
- Hospitality in Ministry — The letter highlights the importance of supporting gospel workers, showing that hospitality is a vital expression of faith (vv. 5–8).

- The Danger of Prideful Leadership — Diotrephes serves as a warning against self-centered leadership that rejects apostolic authority and hinders gospel mission (vv. 9–10).

REVELATION – THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB

- John wrote Revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos during a time of persecution (1:9). Two dates are suggested: under Nero (AD 54–68) or Domitian (AD 81–96). The later date, during Domitian’s reign, is better supported by early church tradition.
- Revelation is apocalyptic literature, filled with vivid symbols, visions, and cosmic battles. It is also a letter addressed to real churches, reminding us that interpretation must first consider the needs of its original audience.
 - John addressed it to seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These churches were experiencing persecution, compromise, or complacency. Revelation both rebukes and encourages them.
- The book of Revelation has fascinated and intimidated readers throughout history. Few portions of Scripture have been as controversial or widely interpreted as the Apocalypse of John. For that reason, it is crucial to understand its original context to apply its message today rightly.
 - Four major schools of interpretation have developed:
 - Preterist — Revelation primarily describes events of the first century, such as Roman persecution and the fall of Jerusalem.
 - Historicist — Revelation maps the course of church history from the apostolic age until the end.
 - Futurist — From chapter 4 onward, Revelation describes future end-times events still to come.
 - Idealist — Revelation symbolically depicts the ongoing struggle between good and evil, relevant for all ages.
 - Hermeneutical Applications
 - For both the first-century church and believers today, Revelation insists:
 - Christ is worth dying for.

- Allegiance belongs to Christ alone, not to earthly powers.
 - God will bring justice; evil and compromise will not have the last word.
 - The church must endure faithfully, living with hope until Christ returns.
- Revelation closes the Bible by bringing together the storyline of Scripture in a dramatic vision of God's victory. Several themes dominate the book.

THEMES

- The Supremacy of Christ – Jesus is the central figure of Revelation. He is the Alpha and Omega (1:8), the Lamb who was slain and yet reigns (5:6–14), and the King of kings who will return in glory (19:11–16). Revelation emphasizes that history is under Christ's authority, and his victory is certain.
- Perseverance in Persecution – Revelation calls believers to endure suffering and remain faithful, even to the point of death (2:10). It assures the persecuted church that their trials are temporary, while their reward is eternal.
- Judgment and Justice – Revelation vividly portrays God's judgment against sin, evil, and all who oppose him (6:12–17; 20:11–15). This judgment is both terrifying and hopeful—terrifying for the wicked, but it provides optimism for believers who long for God's justice to prevail.
- The Reality of Spiritual Conflict – The book unmask the powers of evil behind earthly persecution. The dragon (Satan), the beasts, and Babylon represent forces of deception, violence, and idolatry. Revelation reminds believers that their struggle is not merely against flesh and blood but against cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12).
- Worship of the True King – Scenes of worship fill Revelation, showing heaven's response to God's sovereignty and Christ's sacrifice (ch. 4–5; 7:9–12; 15:3–4). Worship is central: it sustains the church and declares that God, not Caesar or any earthly power, is Lord.

- New Creation Hope – Revelation ends with one of the most breathtaking promises in Scripture: God will dwell with his people, wipe away every tear, and make all things new (21:1–5). The curse of Eden is reversed, and the redeemed enjoy eternal fellowship with God in the New Jerusalem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does knowing John’s background (his closeness to Jesus, his exile on Patmos, his leadership role) influence the way you read his Gospel and Revelation?
2. In 1 John, the three recurrent themes are Truth, Love, and Obedience. Where do you see tension between these in today’s church, and how can we live them out in balance?
3. Revelation promises that Jesus will return and consummate His kingdom. How should that assurance shape our daily priorities and attitudes toward suffering, compromise, or mission?

HOMEWORK – Choose one assignment from below.

1. Read Revelations 2-3 and fill in the chart for the seven letters to each church.

| Church | Description of Jesus | Evaluation of the church | Blessing | Threat of Curse |
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2. Read John 6:25–71 (Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life).
- Write a short reflection (1–2 paragraphs) on what Jesus meant when He said, "*I am the bread of life*" (John 6:35).
 - Consider: How does this shape your understanding of belief in Jesus? How might it strengthen you in daily discipleship?