

BIBLE 1206

THE EPISTLES OF JAMES AND JOHN

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II. JOHN'S EPISTLES

You have studied in this **LIGHTUNIT** that James was used by God to write the first book of the New Testament. John was used by God to write the last books of the New Testament. In this section of the **LIGHTUNIT**, you will study three of five books of the New Testament written by the Apostle John.

This study of these books of the Bible will begin with the background of the writer and the purpose of his writing. You will then complete a topical study of the three Epistles and consider areas of truth and doctrinal matters developed by John.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able:

11. To describe the life of John.
12. To tell about the false doctrine of Gnosticism.
13. To describe the ways of fellowship with God.
14. To tell about the Christians in the early church.
15. To describe some of the problems that faced the early church.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.



advocate
attest
catholic

discrepancy
propitiation
unpremeditated

THE MAN

The Bible records more than ten men who had the very common Hebrew name *John*, or *Johanan* in Hebrew, meaning "Yahweh has been gracious." The man who wrote the three Epistles you will study in this section of the **LIGHTUNIT** as well as the Gospel of John and the Revelation was John the Apostle. To gain a greater understanding of this Apostle, you will study his background and his ministry.

His background. John was probably a disciple of John the Baptist. When Jesus came into the Jordan valley, John followed Him. John, along with his brother James, soon abandoned the fishing business they shared with their father, Zebedee. Together with Peter and Andrew, John and James went with the Lord to become fishers of men.

While participating in the ministry with Jesus, John became one of the more prominent disci-

ples. He was selected by Jesus as one of the Twelve (Matthew 10:2). He was one of the three disciples present who saw Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from death (Mark 5:37). John was with Jesus on the mountain during the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2). He was chosen to participate in the arrangements for the last Passover meal (Luke 22:8). John was near Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane during our Lord's agony (Mark 14:33). John is the only one of the Twelve recorded as seeing the Lord, our Saviour, when He was dying on the Cross (John 19:25-27).

As a disciple of Christ from the beginning, and as an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ, John became a leader in the early church. He was probably one of the younger disciples, but age was no barrier as he boldly served the Lord. Peter and John are mentioned many times by Luke in the Book of Acts because of their zeal in proclaiming Christ as Saviour. John was a pillar

of the Jerusalem church, at least until A.D. 49 (Galatians 2:9). Following Acts, Chapter 15, the Book of Acts is silent concerning John's activities.

Later history relates that John became the pastor of the church at Ephesus. He was known as a leader of sound Biblical interpretation and was strong in his fight against heresy. He was exiled by the Roman authorities to the island of Patmos in A.D. 90 because of his boldness for Christ. He later returned to Asia to continue his ministry to the seven churches of that area, having either founded or assisted them. He died near the end



John the Apostle

of the first century A.D., and was the last Apostle to go to be with the Lord. The circumstances of his death are uncertain, but he may have died of natural causes, rather than through martyrdom.

His ministry. Besides the Apostle Paul, no other New Testament writer has given us so much truth and doctrine as John. In his Gospel, his Epistles, and the Revelation, almost every area of theology is examined. Johannine (jō ha' nīn) theology, that doctrine given by the Holy Spirit to John, shows great care and concern for a clear, Scriptural, and well defined theology. He wrote of simple things and simple events, yet he used these things to explain deep truths.

John is often referred to as the *Apostle of love*. Although he wrote a great deal about the love of God for Christ, the love of God for those in Christ, and the love of believers for one another, he displayed a stern manner against those who would distort his Saviour's teaching. Christ called John a *son of thunder*, and thunder he did as he called men liars for their pride (1 John 1:6) and deceivers of themselves (1 John 1:8). In II John 10 he told the elect lady not to receive a false teacher and not even to wish him a good day. In John is seen the balance of one who understands the love of God and also the righteousness of God. He would love those who loved the Lord, and condemn those who would dare to teach false doctrine or act in a hypocritical manner (III John 9-11).



Complete these statements.

- 2.1 The meaning of the name *John* is _____.
- 2.2 John was probably a disciple of _____.
- 2.3 John was present when Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of _____.
- 2.4 John was a pillar in the church at _____.
- 2.5 Sometime after A.D. 49, John became pastor of the church at _____.
- 2.6 John was exiled by the Roman government to the island of _____.



Answer true or false.

- 2.7 _____ John and his brother, James, were fisherman.
- 2.8 _____ John's brother, James, was the author of the book of Revelation.
- 2.9 _____ John was not one of the disciples present with Jesus on the mountain during the Transfiguration.

- 2.10 _____ John was the only one of the Twelve recorded as seeing Jesus on the Cross.
- 2.11 _____ John was one of the oldest disciples.
- 2.12 _____ John met his death by stoning.



Answer these questions.

- 2.13 What is John's theology called? _____
- 2.14 What two names are given to John?
 a. _____ b. _____

THE AUTHENTICITY

The three Epistles written by the Apostle John received early and strong recognition among Christians. Formal recognition of the divine inspiration of John's letters came during the Third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. The canonicity of the letters was clearly supported by both external and internal evidences.

External evidences. No question existed in the minds of the early church leaders that John the Apostle wrote these three letters. Polycarp, bishop or overseer of Smyrna, quoted accurately from I John 4:2, 3 in an epistle to the Philippians. Papias, bishop at Hierapolis, was thought to have known John, as perhaps did Polycarp.

Interesting fragments of John's first Epistle have been discovered. The Muratorian fragment refers to two letters of John, but does not name them. Clement of Alexandria referred to John's larger Epistle, probably in reference to I John. Others who quoted I John include Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Dionysius.

External evidences regarding John's shorter letters are less clear than those regarding I John, but they are still helpful. Because of their brevity, these letters did not enjoy a wide circulation. Irenaeus quoted from II John. Cyril of Jerusalem accepted all of John's letters as inspired.

Internal evidences. The strongest support for the authenticity and canonicity of John's letters is found in their internal evidences. Not only can all three letters be shown to have been written

by the same man, but the internal evidences also prove that the same writer was used by God to write the Gospel of John.

In I John the writer claims his closeness to Jesus (I John 1:1-4; 4:14). He is familiar with his readers as one who was their pastor (I John 1:2-3). The shorter letters of II and III John follow the style of the longer Epistle of I John. Correlation can be drawn between the content, language, vocabulary, logic, thought, and style of the three Epistles. The title *elder*, used in both II and III John, closely unites these brief letters with a single author.

John's Gospel was widely accepted as part of the inspired Word of God by the end of the second century. Little doubt ever existed that this account of the Saviour was not written by John, the disciple (John 19:26) "... whom Jesus loved. ..." Definite Johannine authorship of these Epistles can be concluded from a comparison of these letters with the Gospel of John.

In both the Gospel of John and these Epistles, numerous parallel passages can be found (compare John 1:1 with I John 1:1). Parallel phrases, such as *only begotten* and *born of God*, are used to describe the Saviour. Both writings use conjunctions rather than subordinate clauses. Common themes occur throughout the Gospel and the Epistles of John. The Scriptures themselves **attest** to John's authorship of the Gospel of John, I John, II John, and III John.



Write the correct letter on each line.

- 2.15 John's Epistles were accepted into the canon at the Third Council of Carthage in the year, A.D. _____.
 a. 347 b. 367 c. 397 d. 497

- 2.16 Second and Third John did not receive a wide circulation because of their _____.
 a. brevity c. difficulty to understand
 b. lack of authenticity d. doctrinal errors
- 2.17 The strongest support for the authenticity of John's letters is found in _____.
 a. their being quoted by early church writers
 b. their acceptance by the Gentiles
 c. their style of writing
 d. their internal evidences



Answer these questions.

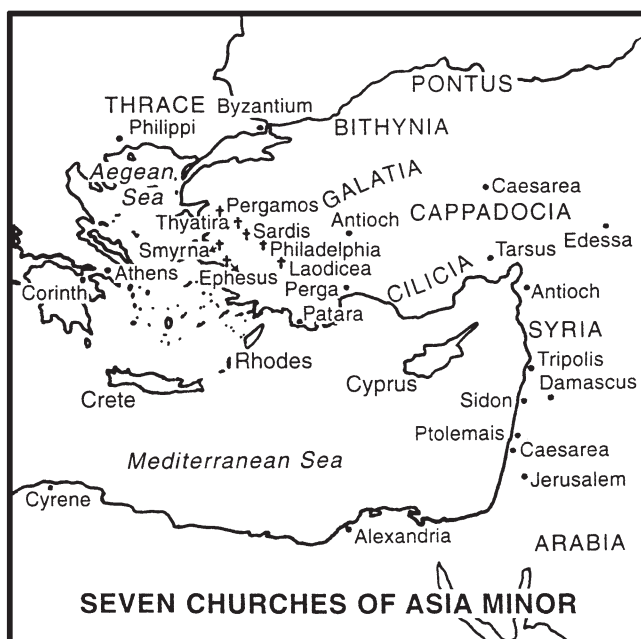
- 2.18 What two early-church writers quoted from the First Epistle of John?
 a. _____
 b. _____
- 2.19 What are three ways we can tell that the three Epistles of John were all written by the same author?
 a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____
- 2.20 What are two phrases John used to describe the Saviour?
 a. _____ b. _____

THE OCCASION

Throughout the history of the Christian faith, scholars have investigated the books written by John to determine their original order. Many authorities believe the Johannine Epistles were written in reverse order beginning with III John, then II John, and finally, I John. The scholars who observe this reverse order place the Gospel of John between II John and I John. The book of Revelation is commonly regarded as the last and final writing of the Apostle John as well as the last writing of the New Testament.

Many have questioned the apparent change in style between John's Epistles and the Revelation. The style of Revelation seems less formal. When considering the place of writing, however, this **discrepancy** is resolved. While ministering in Ephesus, John used assistants and secretaries to finalize his Epistles; but while in exile on Patmos, where the Revelation was written, John was alone. The Revelation, perhaps, better reveals John's own style than does his other writings. In any case we may be sure that God's inspired control of the writing also contributed to the style.

Date of the Epistles. John does not mention



persecution as a problem affecting his readers. This absence might indicate a date preceding the reigns of Domitian and Trajan, who, as Roman emperors, instituted persecutions against Christians. The lack of any reference to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem might place the writing of these letters before that date, but such conclusions are mere supposition.

Through internal evidence, especially in I John, many believe the Epistles to have been written between A.D. 85 and A.D. 95.

Destination of the Epistles. Little doubt exists that the recipients of the Epistles of John were people with whom the Apostle had been closely related in his ministry. Third John is addressed to Gaius, of whom little is known. He was perhaps a leader in one of the churches of Asia Minor to which John had ministered. First John was written to an entire congregation of God's people and was addressed to believers of various levels of maturity. The identity of the elect lady of II John has stirred the most controversy. Many believe that this letter was addressed to a Christian woman who had extended hospitality to John. Others think that the term *elect lady* refers to a church. The Greek term for *church* is of the feminine gender and would be compatible with the term *elect* or *chosen lady*. If this term were used as a figure of speech, the *sister* referred to in Verse 13 would be a sister congregation.

Origin of the Epistles. John has been traditionally associated with the church of Ephesus. With his ministry centered in Ephesus, the Epistles were written to teach and encourage the other congregations in the area of Asia Minor. From the Revelation, one can

recognize John's close association with six churches other than the one in Ephesus. A desire to teach the believers in his area and to warn them of heresy would give John a purpose for writing these three letters.

Purpose of the Epistles. The Gnostics were a religious organization that rejected much of the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Although they did not come to full strength until the second century, the influence of their false teachings became a concern to the early churches of Asia Minor. One Gnostic named Cerinthus was an opponent of John's Ephesian ministry. John's first Epistle dealt with an accurate understanding of the truth of God and dispelled Gnostic tendencies. Clearly, John had a pastor's heart as he wrote to keep believers away from the Gnostic error.

Second John was written to warn of entertaining those who taught false doctrine. Christians then, as now, were being distracted through their association with heretics. In strong terms, John tells his readers to have nothing to do with these false teachers.

Because of the numerous mention of personal names in III John, one can determine the purpose clearly. John was writing to Gaius to encourage him and to warn him of Diotrephes, a fellow laborer, who had allowed his pride to interfere with God's work and purpose for him. John also took the opportunity to praise Demetrius who had upheld the Word of God.



Match these words.

- | | | | |
|------|-------|------------|-----------------------------|
| 2.21 | _____ | I John | a. possibly written first |
| 2.22 | _____ | II John | b. Epistles written |
| 2.23 | _____ | III John | c. emperor of Roman Empire |
| 2.24 | _____ | Revelation | d. possibly written second |
| 2.25 | _____ | Domitian | e. destruction of Jerusalem |
| 2.26 | _____ | Gaius | f. opponent of John |
| 2.27 | _____ | A.D. 70 | g. possible church leader |
| 2.28 | _____ | A.D. 85-95 | h. possibly written third |
| 2.29 | _____ | Gnostics | i. rejected truth |
| 2.30 | _____ | Cerinthus | j. place of exile |
| | | | k. last writing of John |