

The endless love of God

Part 1: The writer

The first chapter of the book of Revelation lays the foundation of what follows, and that foundation is all about the incredible love of God. This three-part study focuses on chapter 1, the introduction to that endless love. In Part 1 the focus is on the writing ([The Revelation ... the words of this prophecy](#)) and the writer ([John](#)).

Question to consider:

The book of Revelation is prophetic. Although some prophecy is about fore-telling the future, mostly it involves forth-telling, in which God warns of the consequences of covenant violations. For example, Jonah prophesied destruction and when there was repentance, the destruction did not happen – he was not a false prophet even though what he predicted did not happen, because the intention of the prophecy was fulfilled. What then is the purpose of prophecy?

Revelation 1.1-3, 9-10 (NKJV)

[The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.](#)

[⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day](#)

[v1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him ... His servant John](#)

It is 'The Revelation', singular. The whole book is one revelation, not multiple revelations. The word "Revelation" comes from the Greek 'apokalupsis' (apocalypse) which means: "a revealing, an unveiling". Woven through this book from chapter 1, through to 22, we see that the end is not an event but a person. The revealing/unveiling is all about Jesus, who he is, what he has done for us, his character, his nature, what he is like (John 5.39). To whom was this revelation given? Not to John, but to Jesus!

Jesus is the author and John was merely the writer. In other books of the Bible the human author's style is quite evident. For instance, the language in the book of Ruth is similar to the speeches of the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel, which is one reason why many scholars believe that book was written by Samuel. But Revelation lacks similarity to the expressions used by John in his gospel and letters. Why? Revelation is different in origin, because no person decided to write it. John wrote it down but it did not come from him. He never intended to write this book. He was told to write down what he saw and heard. Nonetheless, John's style does come through because he described what he saw and heard in his own language and manner.

Imagine that you are in a cinema watching a film and you are told to write down everything you see and hear in the cinema. Can you imagine what your writing would be like? Is every sentence complete, is the grammar good, is the spelling alright? No. John was having to write whilst being overwhelmed with the visions he was seeing and what he was hearing. Many times he forgot to write it down, which we know because 11 times in the book an angel says, “You are not writing it down. Write this down for these words are worthy and true”. So poor John has to keep going. It is scrappy, the grammar is bad, and some sentences are not even complete. But why did he not take the notes and polish them to produce a nicely written book? The answer is simple. One of the last things he was told to write down was that anyone who tampers with this book will be cursed, anyone who takes away from what he had written or adds something to it (Revelation 22.19). So he did not dare to touch what was written.

v2 [who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ](#)

We sometimes wonder if the human authors of books of the Bible knew they wrote Holy Scripture. At least in this case, John knew, as we see by him calling this “[the word of God](#)” and “[the testimony of Jesus Christ](#)”.

v3 [Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it](#)

Here is further evidence that John believed this book was Holy Scripture. In the Jewish world, such a blessing could never be pronounced on a merely human book. The book of Revelation is the only book of the Bible that promises a special blessing to the reader/hearer (Revelation 1.3; 22.7). The blessing is not just to those who read and hear, but to those who ‘keep’, indicating that there is an obedience factor (this connection of hearing, keeping and blessing is also seen in James 1.22-25).

v10 [I was in the Spirit](#)

This verse demonstrates what is clear about prophecy throughout the Bible, namely that the source of prophecy is the Spirit of God (Numbers 11.25; 1 Samuel 10.6, 10; 2 Samuel 23.2; 2 Chronicles 15.1-7; 20.14-17; 24.20; Ezekiel 11.5; Micah 3.8; 2 Peter 1.21). Revelation 19.10 makes this explicit:

[Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus](#)

The Spirit “[will testify of Me](#)” (John 15.26). v1 tells us that the whole book is a revealing of Jesus. It is his Spirit who is revealing Jesus to us. Because the Spirit testifies about Jesus, and he is the source of prophecy, the purpose of prophecy is to draw us closer to God. Prophecy shows God’s love for his people. He disciplines those he loves. He warns those he loves. Prophecy serves to ignite faith so that God’s intended blessing and preferred mercy/grace can be revealed.

v9-10 [I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation ... on the island that is called Patmos ... ¹⁰ ... on the Lord’s Day](#)

One of the repeated titles of Jesus in Revelation is that of the Lamb who was slain (5.6, 8, 12, 13; 6.16; 7.9, 10; 12.11; 13.8, 11; 14.1, 4, 10; 15.3; 17.14; 19.7, 9; 21.9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22.1, 3). God overcomes the world not through a show of force, but through the suffering and

death of Jesus. He is our role model. John mirrors this. He describes himself as our brother and companion in suffering. Here he is an old man and humble. There is no claim to his apostolic authority.

Think about it. At this time he was the only apostle still alive and perhaps the only person still alive who had personally conversed with Jesus. Christians at that time probably revered him more than anyone else living. But he described himself simply as John, brother, and companion.

Contrast this to Matthew 20.20-23 when as a young man he wanted a seat of honour. As a young man he wanted to be side-by-side with Jesus at his throne. As an old man he humbly stood side-by-side with his brothers and sisters in Christ in their suffering.

The emphasis throughout the Revelation is on suffering Christians. John himself was exiled on a tiny island, imprisoned in a horrible place. Patmos was a rocky, desolate island about 13 km long and 6½ km wide. It had neither trees nor rivers, nor any land for cultivation, except some little nooks between the ledges of rocks. The island was rich in marble, and most of the prisoners were forced laborers in marble quarries; the prisoners were in chains and made to chip away at the marble blocks used for building. It was a place for political prisoners who were traitors to the Roman Empire.

v10 the Lord's Day

Some see this as the Sabbath, but that was called the first day of the week (Matthew 28.1). Others see this as the day of the Lord (Jehovah), which appears in many places in the Old Testament and is connected with darkness and judgment (for example: Isaiah 13.6; Amos 5.18). Still other people see it as the 'this day' and 'that day' of the New Testament (Mark 13.32; 2 Timothy 1.12; 2 Timothy 4.8), which tends to be associated with a positive period following a darker period. However, this is the only place in the New Testament where this particular expression is used, suggesting that it is uniquely different from those other 'days'.

Caesar worship was the one religion which covered the whole Roman Empire. The essence of Caesar worship was that the reigning Roman emperor, as embodying the spirit of Rome, was divine. Once a year everyone in the empire had to appear before the magistrates in order to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead Caesar, and to say: "Caesar is Lord." Domitian, the brother of Titus who destroyed Jerusalem, was the first Emperor who required this while he was alive. He enforced this through official documents, and all Roman governors in their proclamations had to begin with "Our Lord God Domitian commands". In AD 96 Domitian put to death Florius Clemens (his own cousin) and exiled his wife (Domitian's niece) Flavia Domitilla (both of whom were probably Christians), because they would not proclaim him 'Lord and god'. The Lord's Day was the annual day on which everyone in the Roman empire had to worship the emperor by standing before a statue of the emperor, where there was an altar with a fire on it, and they had to take a pinch of incense, burn it on the altar, raise their hand and say 'Caesar is Lord'. Not to worship the emperor as god was a death sentence, although for some, like Flavia Domitilla it was commuted to exile. This is probably why John was exiled to Patmos. At that stage Christians had a simple creed: 'Jesus is Lord'. Many were martyred because they refused to say 'Caesar is Lord' on the Lord's Day. It was on that day, that John got this Revelation.

Church history:

- Hippolytus and Tertullian, early Christian writers, claimed that first authorities tried to kill John by plunging him into burning oil, but when that did not kill him, he was exiled. However, Bible scholars dispute this, claiming it was myth, not reality.
- Irenaeus, Clement and Eusebius claimed that after Domitian died John returned to Ephesus, travelled between the churches there, appointed leaders, and set things in order.
- When Polycarp (AD 69-156) was young, he was discipled by John and ordained by John to lead the church in Smyrna (one of the seven churches of Revelation 1). He died as a martyr rather than call Caesar “Lord”. The church hid him in the country when they got word that the authorities were looking for him. But he was betrayed by a church member. When the authorities came, he cooked a meal for them, then he asked that they give him 2 hours, which they did. In that time he prayed, preparing himself for what was to come, and then went with them. The Proconsul said all Polycarp had to do was renounce Christ and say that Caesar is Lord (god), and he would be set free. But his reply was that he had served Christ all his life and Christ had never done him any wrong, how then could he renounce his saviour? They ordered him to be burned on a stake. When the fire was lit, none of the flames touched Polycarp because a strong wind came and blew the fire away from him. So the Proconsul ordered him to be put to death by the sword and that’s how he died.

The divinity of the Roman emperor was also reinforced on their currency. The Denarius was a silver coin that proclaimed the deity of Caesar. This was the coin used in the time of Jesus. Matthew 18.28; 20.1-16; Luke 20.24-25:



Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?” They answered and said, “Caesar’s.”²⁵ And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Back then everyone knew of John (the writer). We gain insights into what he was like through things recorded about him in the New Testament:

Salome

From the passages about Salome we learn that John was her son and was the younger brother of James. John came from a family that was well off, and his mother and brother believed in Jesus.

- The 120 disciples of Jesus. When, after the death of Jesus the Apostles met to seek a replacement for Judas, they restricted the choice to the 120 who had been eye-witnesses to everything Jesus had done (Acts 1.12-26 “of the men ...” so the 120 included women).

Salome was one of those. Salome appears to have been one of Jesus' disciples from the outset of his public ministry.

- Matthew 27.55-56; Mark 15.40-41; 16.1, 2. Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Mark alone gives her name. Matthew designates her as “[the mother of Zebedee's children](#)”.
- Mark 15.41 She was a “follower” of Jesus as seen in the references to the women who “followed” and “ministered” to Jesus.

Think about it. Jesus needed to buy clothes and food. His clothes needed to be washed and mended. His food needed to be prepared, and dishes washed. He had needs and these were met by his disciples; the 120, not just the 12.

- She was the wife of Zebedee, the prosperous fisherman who had hired servants, which makes sense in that several of the women in those 120 also supported Jesus' financial needs. Salome could have spent the money on herself, but she invested into Jesus. She partnered with him in his ministry.
- Matthew 20.20-23 She requested seats of honour for her sons in Jesus' new kingdom. Notice that Jesus did not rebuke her. She felt free to approach him in that male dominated society. This tells us that she clearly had a relationship with Jesus and felt free to approach him, to discuss things with him. She was not afraid to speak her mind in front of him. Nor was Jesus seen to have a problem with the fact that she came and spoke with him.
- Luke 23.27-28 Salome was present at the crucifixion. Along with the other women “[stood afar off](#)” with tear-filled eyes looking at Jesus as he hung there in death. She remained a faithful disciple of Jesus up to the very end. She is not named, but given the other passages about his death, she was there.
- Mark 16.1-8; Luke 24.10 Salome is among the women who went to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body with spices. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away, and a young man in white (an angel) then told them that Jesus is risen, and told them to tell Jesus' disciples that he would meet them in Galilee. Salome was amongst the first to share in the joy of his resurrection.

Zebedee

From the passages about Zebedee we learn that John was his son. Zebedee and his sons fished in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus then called Peter (Zebedee's partner), Andrew and these two sons of Zebedee to follow him. James and John are later listed among the 12 Apostles.

- Matthew 4.21-22; Mark 1.19, 20 The only glimpse we have of him is in his boat, mending his nets when Jesus came upon him and called his two sons to follow Him. He was not a poor fisherman, eking out a bare existence. Instead he had hired servants, suggesting he ran a profitable business. That Zebedee shared his wife's devotion to Jesus is evidenced by the fact that there was no action on his part to detain his sons from leaving his fishing

business to accompany Jesus. Just as Jesus followed Joseph's trade of carpentry, Zebedee would have expected that his sons would take over his business. Yet an indication of the family of faith in which John grew up is that Zebedee did not object to Jesus' call of not one, but both of his sons. Reading between the lines, it is not difficult to detect the harmony in that family, concerning the call and claims of Jesus.

- Mark 1.19-20 He had servants. That and the fact that Salome was a financial supporter of Jesus' ministry, says that John grew up in a well-off family.
- Luke 5.4-11 Zebedee and Simon Peter were partners, and had at least two boats. John 1.35-42 Zebedee's partner Peter and both of his sons followed Jesus.

John

- Crowds, 120, 12, 3 and 1. Most of us only have 1-3 people who are REALLY close. Think about what it means. For example, my closest friend has been my friend for 40 years. I have been in his home many times and he in mine. So too, Jesus would have been a frequent visitor to the home of John and James. Similarly, Peter was not only one of the three closest friends of Jesus, but the business partner of Zebedee, so he too would have been a frequent visitor to John's home.
- Luke 9.51-6 The brothers wanted to call down heavenly fire on a Samaritan town, but Jesus rebuked them. In paintings of the last supper from the middle ages, John is often depicted as effeminate and weak. But that is not how the Bible shows him. Jesus referred to the John and James as "[Sons of Thunder](#)" (Mark 3.17). He also worked with his father and brother hauling nets full of fish, mending nets, etc. Likely he had strong, callused hands and fingers, typical of most tradesmen.
- Mark 5.37; Luke 8.51 Peter, James and John were the only witnesses of the raising of Daughter of Jairus. Matthew 17.1-12 All three also witnessed the Transfiguration. Matthew 26.36-46 These same three witnessed the agony in Gethsemane more closely than the other disciples did. Luke 22.8 Jesus sent only John and Peter into the city to make the preparation for the Last Supper.

These passages show a pattern of Jesus taking Peter, James and John to special events. Therefore there were likely other events that are not recorded in the gospels.

- Imagine the dinner conversations in their home after such events! For example, after James and John witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8.51).
- John 13.23-25 At the meal itself, the "[disciple whom Jesus loved](#)" sat next to Jesus. It was customary to lie on couches at meals, and this disciple leaned on Jesus.
- John 18.16 and 19.26 After the arrest of Jesus, Peter and the "other disciple" followed him into the palace of the high-priest. John alone among the disciples remained near Jesus at the foot of the cross, alongside myrrh bearers and numerous women. There Jesus assigned his own mother into the household of John.

- There are indications that John was well connected. He was “[known to the high priest](#)” (John 18.16). The repeated references to Nicodemus which only occur in this gospel (John 3.1-21; 7.50-51; 19.39-42), a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. The reference to Joseph of Arimathea, who is mentioned in all four gospels (Matthew 27.57-60; Mark 15.43-46; Luke 23.50-56; John 19.38-40), a respected member of the council.
- Acts 3.1-3 After Jesus’ ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, John, together with Peter, took a prominent part in the founding and guidance of the church. He was with Peter at the healing of the lame man at Solomon’s Porch in the Temple (Acts 3.11).
- Acts 4.3, 13 John was also thrown into prison with Peter.
- Acts 8.14-15 John went with Peter to visit the newly converted believers in Samaria.
- Galatians 2.9 Paul, in refuting those who opposed him in Galatia, recalls that John explicitly, along with Peter and James, were referred to as “[pillars of the church](#)” and refers to the recognition that his Apostolic preaching of a gospel, free from Jewish Law, was received from these three, the most prominent men of the messianic community at Jerusalem.

Church history:

When he was very, very old John used to be carried into Church every Sunday, on a chair with poles. They would ask him to speak. He would sit there and say “Little children, love one another”. Then, after a long silence, they would take him back to the pew.

The next Sunday they would ask “Have you got a word for us for today?” And he would say “Yes, I have a word for you today”. So they would carry him up to the front and he said “Little children, love one another”. After waiting for more him to say more but him remaining silent, they would take him away again. And the next Sunday they again asked “Have you got a word for us for today?” And he said “Yes, I have a word for you today”. So they carried him up to the front and he said “Little children, love one another”.

They began to think he was getting senile. It was always the same word. Finally they got weary of it, and said “Master, why do you always say this?” John replied “**Because it is the Lord’s command and if this only is done, it is enough**”.

Mary

Following the instruction of Jesus from the cross, John took Mary, the mother of Jesus, into his care. At the cross Jesus consigned his mother to John. It is surprising that Jesus did not assign her to one of her other four sons. Jesus was raised among a family of at least seven (Matthew 13.55-56/Mark 6.3 Four brothers, plus sisters, plural). Two of them (James and Jude) later each wrote a book in the New Testament, but Bible scholars surmise that they were not believers at the time of Jesus’ death and that Jesus wanted his mother in the home a believer. John 19.25-27:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

- When John wrote 2 John to the “elect lady,” it was to Mary.
- How did John know about the water that was turned into wine? Because Mary was in his house. Only Mary knew the details. John 2.3-5:

And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.”

- In a sense, if Mary was in John’s house, as his mother and he as her son, that sort of made him a step-brother of Jesus.

To conclude, we have gained some insight into the writer of the book of Revelation. John was from a devout, believing family. He lived more than half a century after the martyrdom of his brother James, who was the first Apostle to die a martyr’s death. He was the closest earthly

friend of Jesus, a leader amongst the disciples, the only disciple at the cross, and a leader and ‘pillar’ of the early Church.

Imagine the dinner conversations with Mary. Being a leader, the other apostles would frequently have been to his house and he to theirs, praying together, sharing stories, helping each other to carry out ministry tasks. His brother was an Apostle. With Mary living in his house her sons and daughters would have been visitors to his house too. Two of Jesus’ brothers and perhaps all his brothers and sisters became believers after his death, further suggesting that many dinner and wider family get-togethers would have involved discussions of faith. John wrote all his New Testament books decades after the death of Jesus, after many years of reflection, of discussion and of leading the Church. His depth of insight into Jesus was unparalleled amongst the apostles.

My closest friend has been my friend for 40 years. We have frequently been in each other’s homes, I am god-father to one of his daughters and he is to one of my sons. We have gone on holidays together with our respective families. We have been together in good times and bad. How is it with you and your closest friend? Clearly Jesus would have been a frequent visitor in the home of Zebedee, Salome, James and John. Not only were Peter, James and John the three closest to Jesus, but even before Jesus called them, they were close – Peter was the business partner of the father of James and John, and they had worked together on a daily basis probably for years. These three became the pillars of the early Church.

Moses as a prophetic pattern for John

In Exodus 6.2-8 God told Moses that he would bring him to the promised land and yet he was of the generation that died without setting foot on it. Decades after that prophecy God fulfilled his promise to Moses as seen in Deuteronomy 34.4:

Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.”

We find a similar prophetic pattern with John in John 21.21-23

Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”²² Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”²³ Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”

Decades later this was fulfilled on the Island of Patmos. Like Moses seeing the promised land from far off, so John lived to ‘see’ the return of Jesus!

The writing in this book is prophetic (v3), and the writer is John (v1, 9). The book is focused on revealing Jesus (v1), and his endless love for us.