

People of the Bible

John

John was born 6 A.D. in Bethsaida of the Judean area. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome. His brother was James who also was one of the Twelve Apostles. John died near the age of 94 in Ephesus. He was the youngest of the disciples and the only one not to die a martyr's death. He identifies himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," in his Gospel (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24).

John and his family had many connections with Jesus' family and some of Jesus' other disciples. Zebedee, John's father likely worked out of Capernaum or Bethsaida, on Galilee's north shore. Zebedee's fishing business prospered and was able to afford servant labor. (Mark 1:20) That prosperity may have also led to John be known by the high priest and had access to his household during Jesus's trial (John 18:15). The closeness to Jesus' family and the wealth of John's family probably made John the best choice to assume Jesus' family responsibility for His mother. (According to church historian Eusebius, John took care of Mary for 15 years.)

Details about John's mother show a devoted upbringing of her children. She followed Jesus and ministered to Him when He taught in Galilee (she may be Salome; cf. Mt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40-41). She saw Jesus die on the cross and brought spices to His tomb on Easter Sunday morning. (Based on John 19:25 some think she was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. That would make John and Jesus first cousins) She was probably a protective and forceful personality in John's life.

John and his brother James were first disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus called Peter and Andrew and then James and John to follow Him. All four were fishermen. John and James were by nature were calm and gentle. Their patience was pushed to its limit over a Samaritan town because the residents did not welcome Jesus. They asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven upon this city. That earned them the name of "Sons of Thunder." (Luke 9:51-56) Paul in Galatians 2:9 names John, Peter and James (brother of Jesus) as the pillars of the church at Jerusalem. James was the first of the Twelve to be martyred. (Acts 12:2)

John and sometimes also James shared experiences with Peter. Peter, James and John were the only witnesses of the raising of Daughter of Jairus. All three also witnessed the Transfiguration, and these same three witnessed the Agony in Gethsemane more closely than the other Apostles did. Jesus sent only John and Peter into the city to make the preparation for the final Passover meal (the Last Supper). (Luke 22:8) After Jesus' Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, John, together with Peter, took a prominent part in the founding and guidance of the church. He is with Peter at the healing of the lame man in the Temple. (Acts 3:1 ff) With Peter he is also thrown into prison. (Acts 4:3) He is also with Peter visiting the newly converted in Samaria. (Acts 8:14)

John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison Island of Patmos. This tradition is credible because banishment was a common punishment used during the Imperial period for a number of offenses. Among such offenses were the practices of magic and astrology. Prophecy was viewed by the Romans as belonging to the same category, whether Pagan, Jewish, or Christian. Prophecy with political implications, like that expressed by John in the book of Revelation, would

have been perceived as a threat to Roman political power and order. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos.

John was later freed and returned to Ephesus. He served as the leader of the church at Ephesus even being given the title "Bishop of Ephesus." From there he wrote the three epistles attributed to him. His Gospel was also written in Ephesus.