

# The first letter of John



**The letter doesn't say who the author is.**

But we can say that:-

the writer must have been well known to the recipients

the style and language of the letter has many similarities to the fourth gospel – written by the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’.

The early church fathers in the early part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century all attribute the three letters to the apostle John.

# The first letter of John – Who?

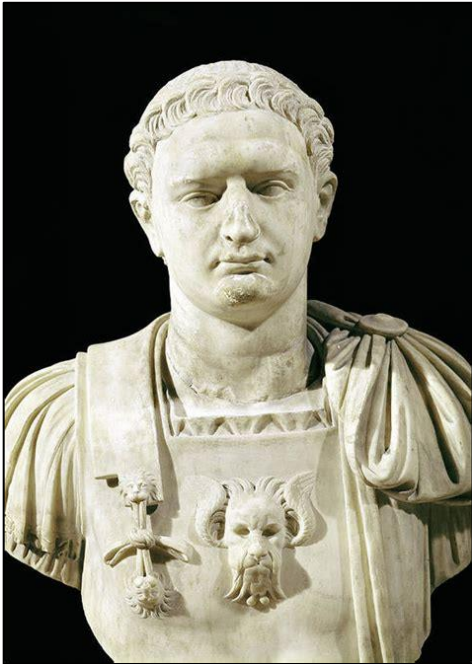
What do we know about the apostle John at the time of his writing this letter?

He was an old man in his late eighties, and probably the last surviving member of the 12 apostles.

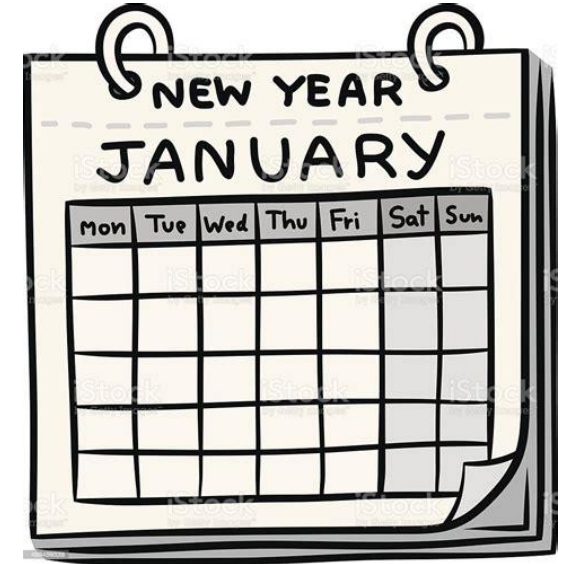
He had left Jerusalem with the believers just before its destruction by the Romans in 70AD. From there he settled in Ephesus as a senior elder of the church, in communication with the surrounding churches mentioned in the book of Revelation



# The first letter of John - When?



During the time of John's ministry at Ephesus the emperor Domitian came to power (81 -96 AD.) It was during his reign that there was very fierce persecution against the believers.



We can assume that this letter was written during the early 90s. since Polycarp, one of John's followers quotes the letter.

# The first letter of John – Why?

This letter is addressed to believers to help us know our God and stay true to Him.

By the early 90s, the church had become a predominantly gentile membership, and the church's disconnection from its Jewish roots encouraged some strange teachings to develop.

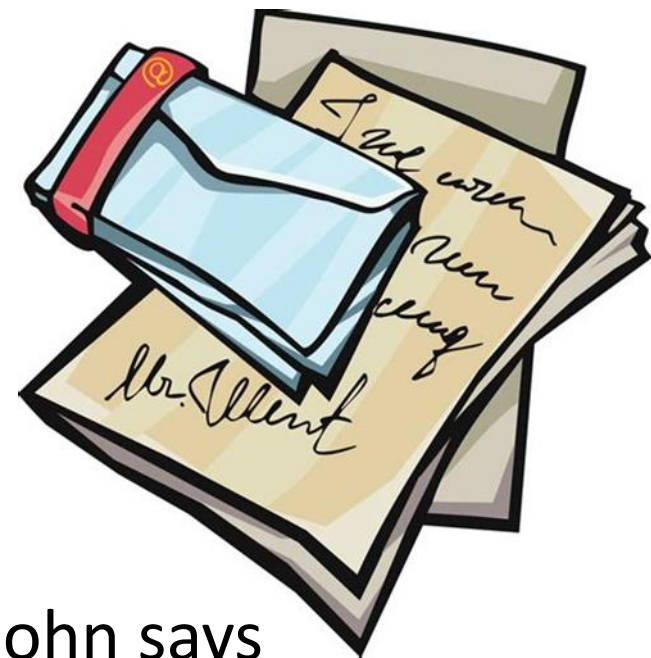
(Things became really bad by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries!)  
Antinomianism, Gnosticism, Docetism to name a few.

John foreseeing what was coming, wrote to address these issues before they took hold and perverted the faith preached by the apostles.



## The first letter of John – Style?

The letter doesn't have the usual format a first century letter would take – name, address, greetings etc. cf. many of Paul's letters.



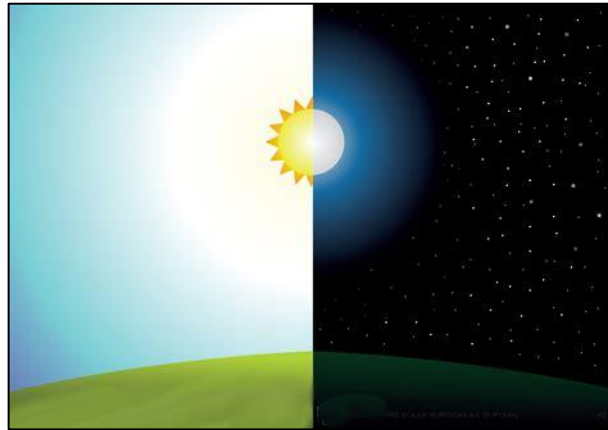
There is no simple structure to the themes in the letter. John says something, moves on to something else and comes back to repeat in some form what was stated before.

To use technical terms his letter is not 'linear' ie. A to B to C to D etc. but is more 'circular' ie A to B to A to C to B to D etc.

His repetition of themes is more in line with rabbinic methods than the Greek teaching style.

# The first letter of John – Style?

The letter contains many phrases and words and ideas that are found in John's gospel – contrasts of 'light' and 'darkness', 'truth' and 'false'.



The letter is intensely practical, calling believers to a clear understanding of the faith, godly living and fervent worship.



# The first letter of John – verses 1 to 4

(English Standard Version)

1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

1:2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—

1:3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1:4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

That which was from the beginning,

John, just as he does in his gospel, starts at the very beginning of time. His aim is to show that Jesus is God's unique Son and existed with the Father before time began.



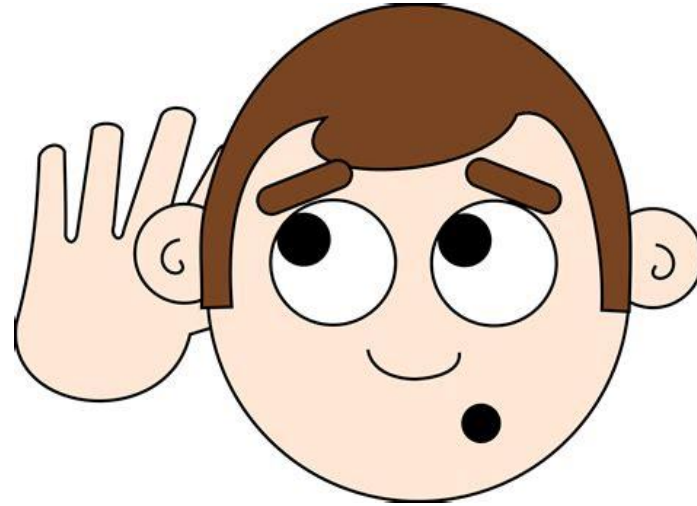
The 'Big Bang theory' has only one correspondence with the Biblical account – there was a beginning!

The existence of this person continues right up to the present.



which we have heard,

The Messiah's entrance into our world to teach the truth of God was heard by his followers, and particularly by his chosen apostles.



This is not a human invention – made up by us - we are to pass it on.  
Cf. Paul's testimony in Galatians 1:11-12.

which we have seen with our eyes,

He was a real visible person – John says  
“We were eye-witnesses.”

The living Word was not just an idea but  
became incarnated.



which we looked upon

There is a great difference  
between 'seeing' and 'looking'

They had spent time with Him and  
carefully observed what he said and did.

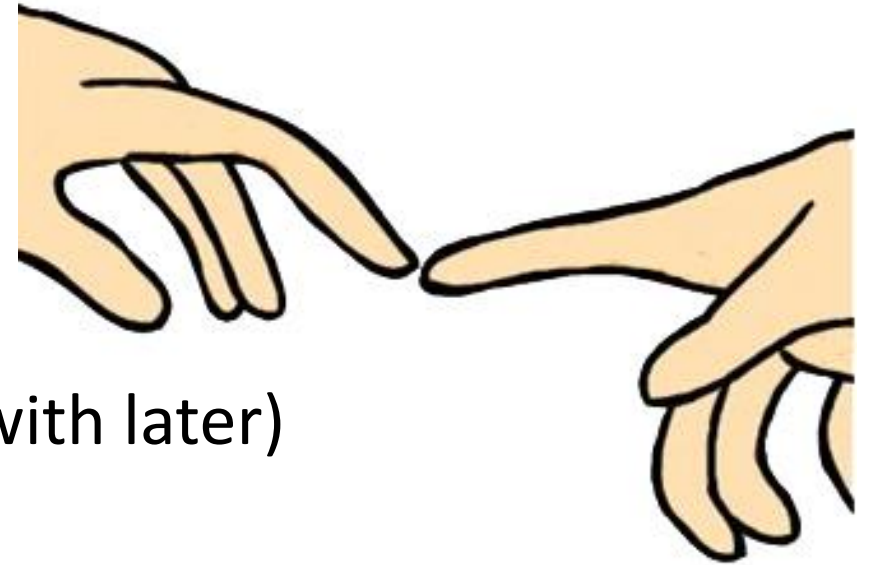


and have touched with our hands,

He is not some remote deity –  
He is a real person with a physical body  
(this will have impact on the errors he deals with later)

Perhaps there is a hint too of Thomas's doubt turned to  
faith in the risen Lord.

Jesus made himself available to encourage, guide and help.



concerning the word of life—

Note John's special use of the 'word'

The creative Word that gives life

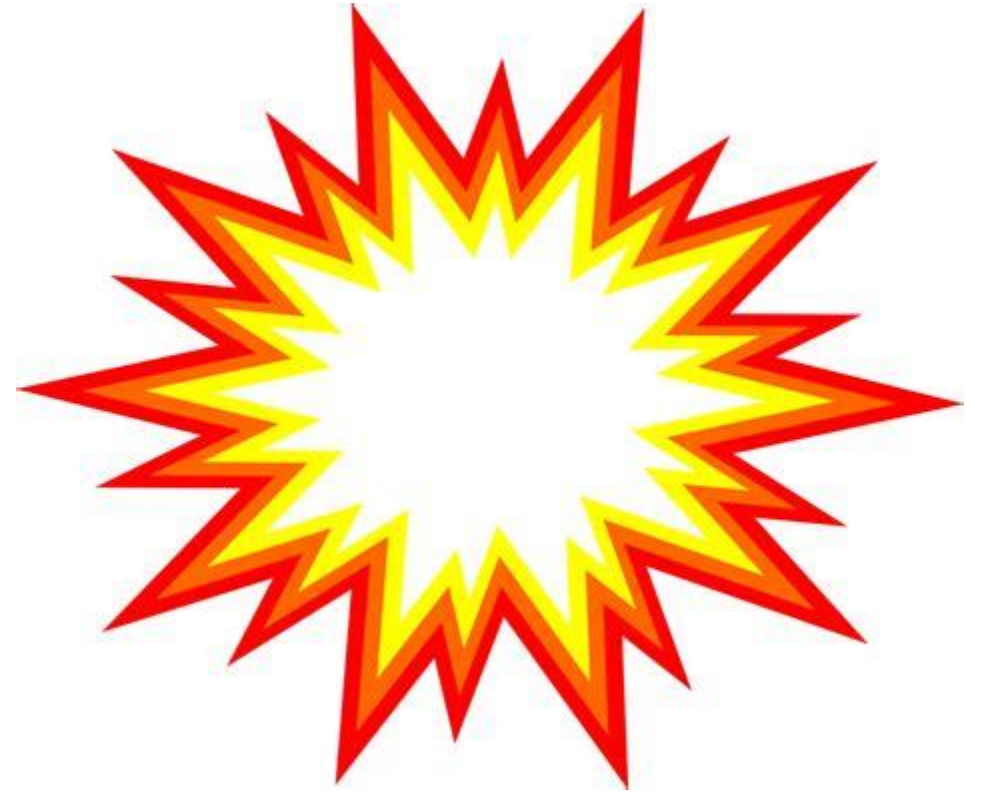
It's about this very special person.



the life was made manifest,

Although he existed in glory before time began, He has now appeared – publicly seen and made known.

This was a true revelation of Glory (although veiled at the time we now realise this because God has revealed Him to us) cf. Mark 4:41 Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him.



and we have seen it,

The 'we' is John speaking as an apostolic representative



This is the truth.

But remember flesh and blood on its own has not given us this understanding

Cf. Matthew 16:17

and (we) testify to it

This is not some make-belief story

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

WE are presenting legal evidence – this is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.





and (we) proclaim to you



The word proclaim has the idea of an official announcement. This is not an apology!  
Cf Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed...


**To you** – it's personal. This is Good News for you(pl) – ie many individuals.



the eternal life,

He is without beginning or end  
And we through faith can become partakers of this life.

2 Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

JESUS  
  
IS THE KEY TO  
ETERNAL LIFE

which was with the Father

Cf. John's gospel prologue –  
Present WITH God the Father

God is a relational God  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



and was made manifest to us—

John is repeating the wonder of this revelation of God's Son

To us – what a privilege they were given!  
And now for us also...

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

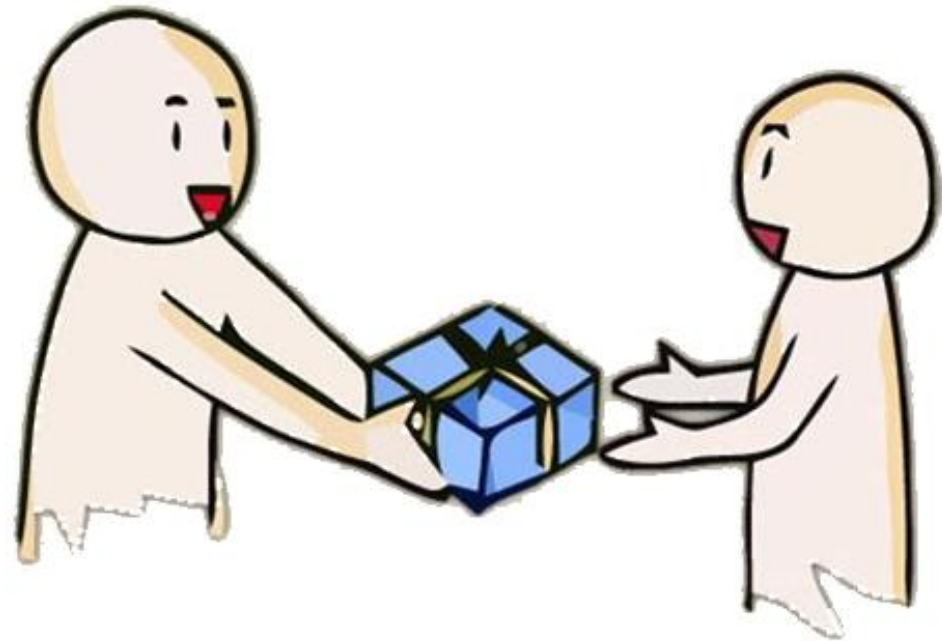


that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you,

John says they were honoured to pass on this wonderful revelation – that we have really seen and heard.

We declare it now to you - it is treasure for you to receive.

Good news is worth sharing.



so that you too may have fellowship with us;

The great benefit is that you can enter into what we have experienced and have that deep sense that we share (koinonia) together this relationship with each other.



and indeed our fellowship is with the Father

More amazingly this 'koinonia' is with God as our Father – an amazing truth and a glorious reality.

'I dared to call Him 'Father'



and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus is God's Son and our fellowship is with Him also (by his Spirit in us)

**John gives Jesus his titles**

**God's Son** - His Deity (Lord)

**Jesus** – his human name - Saviour

**Christ** (Anointed – Messiah) – God's appointed Deliverer, Ruler and King





And we are writing these things

John cannot visit them all personally so he puts it in writing. -  
Praise the Lord!- In God's sovereign purposes this letter has  
become our treasure also in the Scriptures.

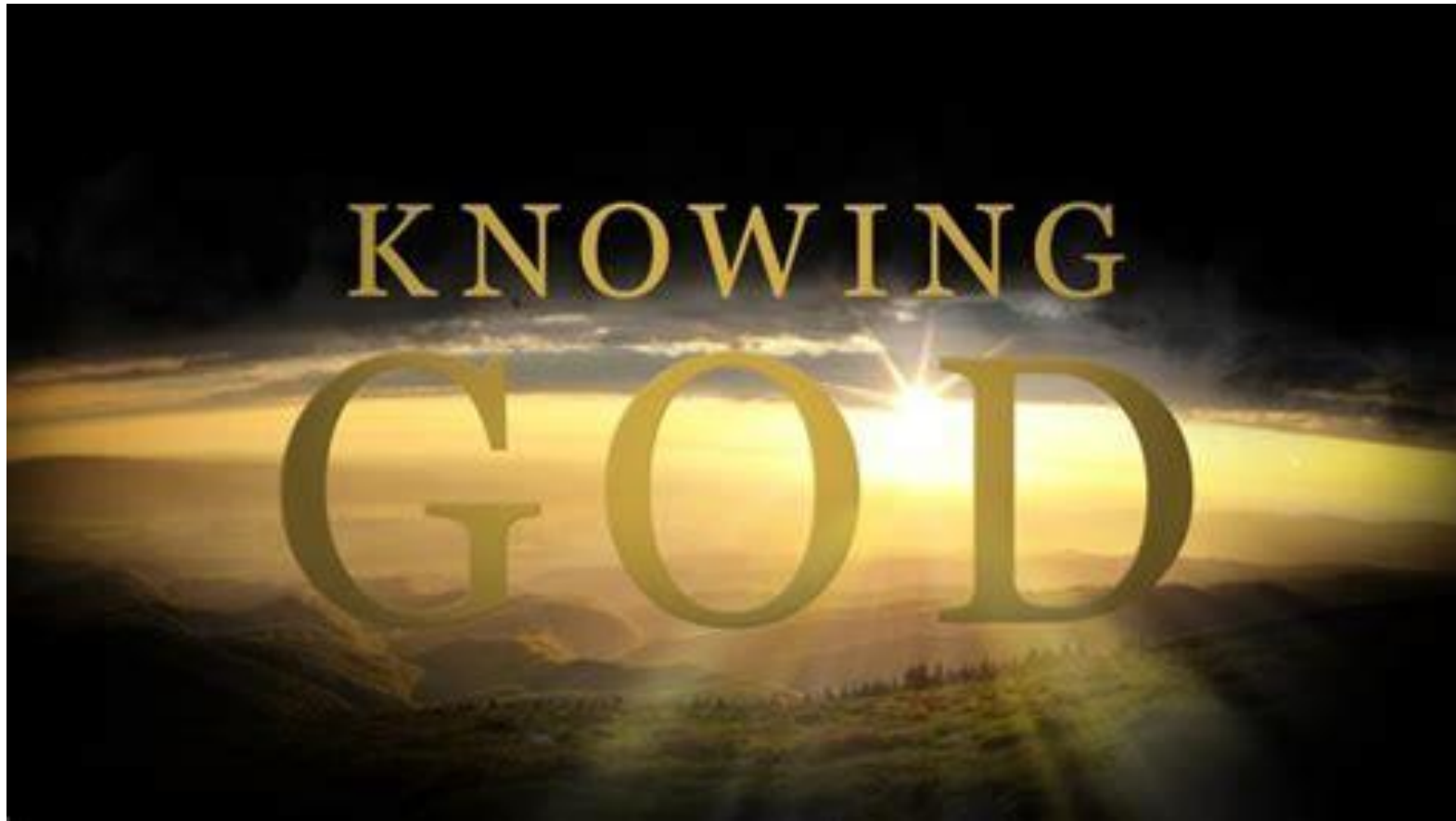


And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Joy is for sharing – and the more brothers and sisters experience it the more we are blessed too.

The word ‘our’ in some manuscripts is ‘your’ – ‘our’ includes both ‘you’ and ‘us’.





The greatest privilege any person can know.  
We were created for this.