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How the First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians Understood the Book of Revelation

Book of Revelation – 2. Overview – f. Who was the Apostle John?

We know that when we receive a letter, the meaning changes completely when we know who it's from. We could be ecstatic about a letter from a special friend, but maybe not so with a letter from our boss. Understanding the Apostle John (Yochanan) will help us to understand how the Asia-Minor Christians in the seven churches may have received his apocalyptic letter. We will also understand the impetus behind his writing. So, who was John? What was he like?

John wrote his letter while in exile on the Greek island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. By then, John was most likely in his 80s or 90s. He may still have been strong having been a fisherman in his youth, hauling in nets of fish from the Sea of Galilee each day and walking hundreds of miles with Jesus (Yeshua) and the disciples during their ministry.

John's scribing of this lengthy letter on papyrus and sending it in a sealed scroll would have required the utmost passion, faith, love and perseverance. Revelation 1:9 tells us he was on the island "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." John leads the way for us as a bold and faithful witness. He meticulously wrote the words he heard from His Master no matter what the cost.

His excitement over this Jesus he had seen and known defied any persecution he would receive. In his eagerness, he writes in another letter (the Epistle of 1 John):

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, **so that you too may have fellowship with us**, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." (1 John 1:1-4)

Once called one of the *Sons of Thunder* as a young man, John's zeal matured into a steady love for others to know Who he had known. He passionately chased and shaped his world with the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit as his compelling force.

His account of Jesus' life, the Gospel of John, as well as his three epistles, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John reveal a poetic ability to convey brilliant pictures of light and dark, life and death, and love and hate.

This beloved disciple who broke bread with Jesus and sat with Him by a fire at the Sea after His resurrection, stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother, Mary (Mir'ym), when Jesus declared John to be Mary's new son. Strong and zealous yet tender and compassionate, John would be Mary's comfort in the days ahead. Jesus knew no one could quite do the job like John.

What stands high above all John's traits is his love for His Master and his love for his brothers and sisters in the family of the Messiah. His admonitions in 1 John tell the believers how important the intensity of love among the elect should be. Their love for Jesus and each other would be their comfort and encouragement to face the storms; their love would be a protecting foundation and enable them to live lives set apart for His Kingdom purpose.

So, what does this love look like that John so passionately promoted? Passages like 1 Corinthians 13, Philippians 2:1-7, Colossians 3:12-17, and Romans 12:9-21 come immediately to mind. But one Hebrew word, *hesed*, defines this love of God in all its magnitude. To gain more insight into the love John embraced, please read *Living in God's Undeserved Love* at ShaleFragments.com

When we meet other Christians along the path of our lives, we must sense the profound truth of our bond in Jesus as John did. We are blood brothers and sisters – bound in the blood of the Lamb, our Savior.

John communicated this love in the book of Revelation in a language that would not be readily understood by outsiders but that was understood by the intended recipients. His love drove him to comfort, challenge, warn, and give hope to his beloved brethren whom he had fathered and nurtured in the faith. They would receive his words as from a faithful, tender father. To the seven churches in Asia, he gives this salutation (Revelation 1:4-7):

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To Him Who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. **Behold, He is coming with the clouds**, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So, it is to be. Amen.

To Him Who loves us, to the One Who is coming again for us, John writes in a previous letter,

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. **We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.** And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:1 -3)

Dear friends, He loves us and He is coming again for us! I'm so excited to be a part of John's family, God's family! Aren't you?!