

FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Approximate date: anywhere from 70-90 C.E.

Time period: period of transition in the *ekklesiā* from Apostolic to post-Apostolic, with Believers facing threats from (proto-)Gnostic errors

Author: the Apostle John

Location of author: Ephesus or Asia Minor

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Asia Minor

One can usually find that conservative examiners are in general agreement that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, is the author of the Epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John. The author communicates in an authoritative manner consistent with the Fourth Gospel, and it is detected that he was extremely close to the Lord (cf. John 13:23). The author well fits the description of the John we see in the Gospels as being a “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). As is asserted, “When the Gospel and the letter [of 1 John] are compared, the conclusion is well-nigh irresistible that the two books are by the same person” (*NIDB*).¹ Yet, there are thoughts expressed that with John (*Yochanan*, יְחֻזְכָּיָהוּ or *Iōannēs*, Ἰωάννης) being such a common name among First Century Jews, that a certain John the Elder/Presbyter might have instead been the author of 1 John, or at least 2&3 John. Widely speaking, the authorship issues surrounding the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John have been tied to those of the Fourth Gospel. While these texts, and the Book of Revelation, are traditionally held to have been written in the late First Century, in Asia Minor, and all bear indicators of common authorship—was the Apostle John really the author, or at least chief compiler (possibly with a secretary), of all these Biblical books?

The author of 1 John says how, “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (4:14, NASU), which may be regarded as him being an eyewitness of Yeshua the Messiah,² possibly also implied by 1:1-4. This would be an internal indicator that John the son of Zebedee could very well be the author of 1 John, and given the size of this letter, the authorship questions of 2&3 John are understandably connected to 1 John. Furthermore, the same basic proofs offered for

genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, tend to also be provided for the Fourth Gospel.³

Usages or allusions to the material of 1, 2, and 3 John are witnessed in the early Christian works of Clement of Rome (1 *Clement* 49:5; 50:3; cf. 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17-18), the *Didache* (10:5-6; cf. 1 John 2:17), and the Epistle of Barnabas (*Epistle of Barnabas* 5:9-11; 12:10; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).⁴ “[F]rom very early times the epistle was not only treated as Scripture but was assumed to be Johannine, in spite of the fact that no specific claim to this effect is made by the writer himself” (Guthrie).⁵ The Church Fathers of the Second Century C.E. all bore testimony to genuine Johannine authorship of 1 John. Most notable would be the works of Polycarp, who was a successor of the Apostle John from Asia Minor. He specifically quoted from 1 and 2 John, saying,

“For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist [cf. 2 John 2; 1 John 4:2-3];’ and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan” (*Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 7:1).⁶

By the late Second Century C.E., we see an explicit attestation of 1 John and 2 John being products of the Apostle John, as they are all quoted by Irenaeus:

“...These are they against whom the Lord has cautioned us beforehand; and His disciple, in his Epistle already mentioned, commands us to avoid them, when he says: ‘For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Take heed to them, that ye lose not what ye have wrought [2 John 7, 8].’ And again does he say in the Epistle: ‘Many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come

³ *Ibid.*, 861, especially pp 871-879 for a discussion on 1 John’s relationship to the Gospel of John.

⁴ Cf. Carson and Moo, pp 670-671.

⁵ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 859; cf. Carson and Moo, pp 670-672.

⁶ *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.*

¹ Steven Barabas, “John, Letters of,” in *NIDB*, 536.

² Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 860.

in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which separates Jesus Christ is not of God, but is of antichrist [1 John 4:1, 2].’ These words agree with what was said in the Gospel, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.’ Wherefore he again exclaims in his Epistle, ‘Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God [1 John 5:1];’ knowing Jesus Christ to be one and the same, to whom the gates of heaven were opened, because of His taking upon Him flesh: who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, revealing the glory of the Father” (*Against Heresies* 3.16.18).⁷

As Carson and Moo conclude, “Never is any of the three Johannine epistles attributed to anyone other than John the son of Zebedee.”⁸ Understandably, due to the size of 1 John (5 chapters), in comparison to 2 John (13 verses) and 3 John (14 verses), the latter two are rightfully concluded to somehow be connected to the composition and theological themes of 1 John. The addresses of 2 and 3 John are somehow aware of the issues addressed in 1 John (discussed further in the entries for **2 John** and **3 John**), and possibly even those in the Gospel of John.

Many liberals doubt genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, and a few conservatives are not totally convinced that the Apostle John wrote them, either. But if John the son of Zebedee is not the author of these letters, then who would it be? Some liberals do think that the author of 1 John is the same as the Gospel of John, and the author of 2&3 John is in all likelihood the same person.⁹ It is also thought by some that rather than the Apostle John being the author of 1, 2, and 3 John, that these letters are the product of some kind of a Johannine school or community, which continued his theological legacy by authoring or producing these materials.¹⁰ In this regard, though, a writing like 1 John is not to be taken as an epistle or a letter, but rather some kind of sermon or tract, possibly linking several messages together¹¹ to address problems present among the early Believers. Liberals do not necessarily think that their not knowing who the author of 1, 2, and 3 John definitely was, means that their contents are to be ignored, or that these writings do not encourage proper living for people of faith.¹²

Of the specific, alternative candidates who are often considered for the authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John, or at least 2&3 John, is the proposal that there was a specific John the Elder/Presbyter. The Fourth

Century Church historian Eusebius does attest to how “there were...two tombs in Ephesus, and that both are called Johns even to this day, which it is particularly necessary to observe,” noting the presence of a “presbyter John” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.6, 7).¹³ It has been suggested that if there were indeed a John the Elder, who was a leader within the Body of Messiah in the late First Century C.E., that he could have been the author of at least the latter two of the Johannine letters.¹⁴ At the same time, the existence of an independent John the Elder has been challenged or doubted¹⁵ (even by Eusebius who noted, “...it if be not allowed that it was the first...” [*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.6]),¹⁶ most especially because the Apostles themselves were described to be elders (cf. 1 Peter 5:1). “[T]here is nothing anomalous about an apostle designating himself as an elder...If the author is John the son of Zebedee, the last of the apostles, it is [surely] not inappropriate” (Carson and Moo).¹⁷ While an independent John the Elder, who probably personally knew John the Apostle, being the author of 1-3 John is surely preferable over these letters being anonymous, Morris points out how “It cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt that a John the elder, distinct from John the apostle, ever existed” (*NBCR*).¹⁸

Whether one is conservative or liberal, it is very difficult to separate out the writing style and theological themes of 1 John from the Gospel of John. A liberal resource like *IDBSup* indicates, “the Johannine letters, especially 1 John, stand closer in language, style, and conceptually to the Fourth Gospel than to any other extant document or body of literature.”¹⁹ A more conservative interpreter like Marshall is apt to direct us, “There is no doubt that Revelation is closely related to both the Gospel and the Epistles by a wealth of theological concepts which mark the five Johannine books as a distinct group. The theory of common authorship of all five books has found some powerful support...” (*ISBE*).²⁰

Some have claimed that John, as a Galilean fisherman, would not have had the ability to compose a piece like 1 John (and by extension 2 and 3 John). However, the testimony we see in the Gospels (as well as ancient Christian history)²¹ is that

¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, 104.

¹⁴ Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:951; cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 862-863.

¹⁵ Cf. I.H. Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1097.

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, 104.

¹⁷ Carson and Moo, 674.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, “1 John,” in *NBCR*, 1259.

¹⁹ D.M. Smith, “John, Letters of” in *IDBSup*, 487.

²⁰ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1097.

²¹ As Eusebius attests, “What shall we say of him who reclined upon the breast of Jesus, I mean John? who has left one gospel, in which he confesses that he could write so many that the whole world could not contain them. He also wrote the Apocalypse, commanded as he was to conceal, and not to write the voices of the seven thunders. He has also left an epistle consisting of very few lines; suppose, also

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Carson and Moo, 671.

⁹ David Rensberger, “John Letters of,” in *EDB*, 725; John Painter, “1, 2, and 3 John,” in *ECB*, 1512.

¹⁰ Cf. Robert Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:907-908.

¹¹ Ibid., 3:902.

¹² G.B. Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:946; Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:911-912.

he was a man strongly empowered by the Spirit to deliver a powerful word to the faith community. According to Church tradition, John the Apostle spent time in Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.23; 3.31.3; 5.24.2-4), having relocated there during the time of the Jewish War in Jerusalem (66-70 C.E.). Irenaeus records that “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon [Jesus’] breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).²² In the estimation of a theologian like Burge, “While the early church was well-known for its fanciful traditions about the apostles...many scholars do not count this story of John among them. John was a leading pastor whose memory of Jesus and whose recollection of his teachings gave him unique stature in antiquity.”²³ We should see no quantitative reason to deny genuine Johannine authorship of 1, 2, and 3 John.

A broad dating for the composition of 1 John, and also 2&3 John, would likely fall anywhere from 70-90 C.E., with 85-90 C.E. being a bit more likely. Some, though, have placed these letters as late as 96-110 C.E.²⁴ Much of this is obviously dependent upon whether genuine Johannine authorship is believed, or if someone else wrote these letters. It is also debated, by both conservatives and liberals, whether or not 1 John, and also 2&3 John, were written before or after the Gospel of John. Many are in agreement that 1 John was probably written after the Gospel of John.²⁵ The author of 1 John (and 2&3 John) could very well be of advanced age, as he addresses his audience as “children” (2:1, 28; 3:7). This points us in the direction of genuine Johannine involvement.

No Hebrew or Aramaic origin for 1 John has ever been proposed by scholars. An intended audience in Asia Minor, non-Jewish *and* Jewish, would have been Greek speaking,²⁶ even though one finds both Hellenistic and Jewish ways of communicating in the letter.²⁷

Assuming that the Apostle John wrote this letter from Ephesus, or at least somewhere in Asia Minor, this would have meant that his initial audience included Believers living in the Roman province of Asia.²⁸ 1 John should not be regarded as a literary “epistle,” employing the basic functions of

an ancient letter.²⁹ Instead, it is most likely that even with genuine Johannine involvement present for 1 John, that it was “a general treatise aimed at wide distribution. Some prefer to call it a sermon or an address. Perhaps it is a pamphlet, a brochure or an encyclical. Some prefer to think of it as a tractate engaged in some sort of polemic, a kind of manifesto that addresses specific theological issues across a general front” (Burge).³⁰ 1 John has even been proposed as a kind of introduction or explanation to the Gospel of John, as Burge notes how “it is widely accepted that the problems addressed in the letters are reflected in the Fourth Gospel itself.”³¹ He goes on to detail, “A common compositional theory argues that an early edition of the Fourth Gospel was followed by a theological crisis in the community. The crisis prompted a revision of the Gospel and the writing of 1 John...Finally, 2 John and 3 John were penned to address a subsequent local problem.”³² Carson and Moo, though, simply prefer 1 John to be viewed “as a pastoral letter to a congregation or to a number of congregations,”³³ without trying to specifically classify it.

Readers can certainly detect a pastoral theme to 1 John, although this letter was also intended to answer claims issued against the author’s authority, as well as some significant problems that had erupted within, or were at least known by, the audience. Many of these problems doubtlessly included significant sin and disobedience to God’s commandments, even including the ever-imperative requirement to love (1:5-2:2; 2:28-3:10; cf. 5:16-18). Also detailed was a failure on the part of many to confess Yeshua the Messiah as having come in the flesh (2:18-27; 4:1-6). A general conclusion seen about the thrust of 1 John is that this piece combated “An aberrant Christianity, which teaches salvation by esoteric knowledge, excites an enthusiasm devoid of moral concern, and nourishes a spirituality contemptuous of all things material” (*IDB*).³⁴

1 John was a text written to answer claims against the Apostle’s authority, and was composed in a very pastoral manner. Whether 1 John is considered by interpreters to be an epistle, a letter, or a tract—it was not written to the opponents of true teaching, but rather *to affirm* true teaching to the faithful. Trying to reconstruct the events behind the text, examiners are in widespread agreement that there was a group of sectarians which had seceded from the mainstream of the Johannine

that a second and third is from him...” (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.9-10; *Ecclesiastical History*, p 215).

²² BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, *Early Church Fathers*.

²³ G.M. Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 588.

²⁴ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 880; Carson and Moo, pp 676-677.

²⁵ Cf. Barabas, “John, Letters of,” in *NIDB*, 536; Robert Kysar, “1 John,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2195.

²⁶ Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.

²⁷ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 875-876.

²⁸ Gundry, “The Catholic, or General, Epistles,” in *A Survey of the New Testament*, 448.

²⁹ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1092; Kysar, “John, Epistles of,” in *ABD*, 3:900.

³⁰ Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 596.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 588.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Carson and Moo, 669.

³⁴ Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:947.

assembly its author taught, nurtured, and served.³⁵ This letter was written to denounce a false teaching which promoted strange beliefs. The false teaching is believed to compose elements of (proto-)Gnosticism, antinomianism, a docetic Christology, and possibly even the views of the ancient heretic Cerinthus. Yet, whether a concentrated and definitive false teaching, or an assortment of varied false teachings and ideas are addressed, can probably be debated.

Whether the false teaching(s) encountered in 1 John was promoted by ancient Jewish Messiah followers or not has also been rightly debated. While arguments have been made favoring some kind of Jewish-promoted false teaching, noting how by the late First Century the Believers were being distanced from the Synagogue, it is instead more probable that non-Jewish outsiders “interpreted [John’s teaching] tradition from the context of their own religious experience, which was influenced by the mystery cults” (ECB).³⁶ It is important for us to be aware that “there is nothing to lead us to suppose that the readers generally were Jewish Christians” (Guthrie),³⁷ as by the late First Century C.E. the majority of Yeshua Believers would not have been Jewish. Jewish Believers would have been a part of a broad audience of those who would have encountered 1 John.

What were the errors encountered in 1 John?

In the Second Century, the philosophy of Gnosticism would advocate a radical separation between a person’s body and spirit, which did affect much of emerging Christianity. One of Gnosticism’s underlying currents was the errant belief that what one did physically did not affect a person spiritually, and vice versa. 1 John, in all probability, refutes teachings that had their roots in what would develop into Gnosticism, which were gaining ground in the late First Century C.E. Purported Believers who adhered to this bad form of dualism were not obeying God’s commandments as they should have been, leading to immoral and inappropriate behavior. The author of 1 John has been said by a few radical liberals to actually be influenced by Gnostic ideas of light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies, and love and hate, as these themes are common in Gnostic literature and the Nag Hammadi writings.³⁸ However, as more studies have been conducted in Rabbinical literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls, these were common terms also used throughout the Jewish world.³⁹

The material in 1 John addresses a more developed errant ideology, which is not present in

Paul’s refutations to mystical ideas seen in his letter to the Colossians (cf. Colossians 2:8) or Timothy (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20). Whether this is the full-blown Gnosticism of the Second Century C.E. can be contested. Marshall directs our attention, though, to how “The false teachers appear to have been forerunners of the heretics who were responsible for the developed Gnostic systems of the 2nd century. The seeds of Gnosticism were already to be found in the NT period, although it is a confusing use of terminology if we apply the actual term ‘Gnosticism’ to the incipient Gnosticism or pre-Gnosticism of this period” (ISBE).⁴⁰ While one is likely to find conservative theological works that refer to the Apostle John refuting “Gnosticism” in 1 John, it might be safer to describe the false teaching as warning against incipient proto-Gnostic ideas.

A second problem countered in 1 John was to address those who promoted a docetic Christology, which held Yeshua to *only* be God, or at least some kind of supernatural entity, but not be authentically human as well.⁴¹ (The term “docetic” is derived from the Greek verb *dokēō*, δοκέω meaning “to seem.”) As 1 John 4:2 says, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God” (NASU; cf. 2 John 7; John 1:14). Any false teachers refuted in 1 John did not deny that Yeshua was the Messiah, per se. They did, however, deny that He was come in the flesh (4:2), that He was pre-existent as the Son of God (1:1; 4:15; 5:5, 10), and consequently that He was the Savior (4:9). A docetic Christology stands against the doctrine of Incarnation, meaning that God could never take on human form.

A third problem probably countered in 1 John is discernible from the late Second Century writings of Irenaeus (i.e., *Against Heresies* 3.11.1). The error of Cerinthianism was taught by John’s major rival in Ephesus, Cerinthus. Irenaeus records, “John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, ‘Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within’” (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4).⁴² The Cerinthians did not believe in the full Divinity of the Messiah, but rather that when Yeshua was immersed by John the Divine Messiahship fell on Him, but then left Him at the time of His death (cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1.26.1).⁴³

1 John refutes the positions of doceticism and Cerinthianism, by asserting that one must confess that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh from

⁴⁰ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*; cf. Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, pp 592-593; Carson and Moo, 780.

⁴¹ Burge, “John, Letters of,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 591.

⁴² *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.*

⁴³ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 865-866; Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 3:1092.

³⁵ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1092.

³⁶ Painter, “1, 2, and 3 John,” in *ECB*, 1513.

³⁷ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 866.

³⁸ Cf. Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:947.

³⁹ Caird, “John, Letters of,” in *IDB*, 2:948; Glenn W. Barker, “1 John,” in *EXP*, 12:300.

God (4:2, 14), and the fact that if one is to spiritually overcome the Adversary, a person must believe that He is the Son of God (5:5). As Yeshua is the “Son of God” coming in the flesh *from God*, He must be regarded as God (cf. John 1:18). An incarnational Christology is necessary in order to affirm the reality of the gospel. Holding Yeshua to be supernatural alone, while extremely important, is not enough. Yeshua came into the world as a human being to die for human sinners, and also to show all of us how to love others and obey the Father. 1 John is a masterful defense of both Yeshua’s Divinity *and* His humanity.⁴⁴

Another significant problem confronted in 1 John is antinomianism. Antinomianism is the denial of the place of any Divine law in the life of a person. Adoption of antinomianism within the false teaching(s) addressed, which could definitely be one of the results of seeing proto-Gnostic views promoted among the Believers in late First Century Asia Minor.⁴⁵ John refutes this idea by telling his readers, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8, NASU). Such unacceptable behavior is plainly identified: “sin is lawlessness” (3:4).⁴⁶ John also says that “the one who practices sin is of the devil” (3:8, NASU). At the same time, while the extreme error of actively sinning is addressed in 1 John, the need to obey the Lord (2:6) is true of *any group* of Believers, regardless of how much error may be circulating at any given time. Much of 1 John is spent addressing the reality that Believers who are truly abiding in the Lord are not to sin, and their nature must be in the process of being conformed to His nature, especially in terms of love (4:8-10).

For today’s Messianic movement, the Epistle of 1 John, very similar to the Epistle of James, has a great deal of importance as it includes many proof texts which support a life of Torah obedience for followers of Yeshua. When John talks about the commandments of God (2:3) and living in the truth (2:4), he writes about the commandments of God contained in the Torah. When he writes that “sin is lawlessness” (3:4), John is talking about the disobedience to the Torah or Law of Moses. When John writes about light and darkness (2:8-10), and truth and lies (1:8; 2:4), he makes a reference to worldly teachings that lead to lawlessness, and the high standard of the Creator God laid forth in His Instruction. 1 John is highly geared to those who

need to be put on the appropriate path, conducting themselves properly according to what God considers acceptable and unacceptable—not any errant human teachings.

It is, of course, most imperative for Messianic readers to know that the main commandments John is concerned for his audience to always be observing, surround the imperative to love God and to one another (2:10; 3:14; 4:20-21; 5:2), something naturally manifested by good deeds (3:10, 18). As the emerging Messianic movement improves in its relationship with the text and message of 1 John, we will need to learn to similarly improve ourselves with demonstrating *more and more* good deeds via the power of God’s love within us. Also incumbent upon us will be a need to fairly join in with those past voices in history, which have taken 1 John (as well as 2&3 John), extremely seriously in their Christian faith practice—and have always held what it has considered the so-called “moral law” of the Old Testament to be valid for all time.⁴⁷

In terms of the variety of errors confronted by the Epistle of 1 John, the Messianic community today, sadly, has some of those who promote similar ideas that are encountered. There are definitely fringe Messianic teachers who promote aberrant ideas about the Father and the Son, and largely dispense with the morality and ethics of the Torah. These people do not concern themselves with the good deeds required from the Torah, relating to loving and helping others. Even in more of what might be considered the “mainstream” of the Messianic movement, there are more and more questions being asked about the nature of Yeshua. 1 John and its message against a docetic Christology and Cerinthianism will undoubtedly have to be consulted for future theological analyses, and how the Apostolic Scriptures present the Savior as being *both* Divine and human.⁴⁸

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⁴⁴ Barker, “1 John,” in *EXP*, 12:293; Carson and Moo, pp 679-680.

⁴⁵ Marshall, “John, Epistles of,” in *ISBE*, 3:1092 informs us, “They may have thought of sin as a spiritual matter, and hence saw no inconsistency in claiming sinlessness while at the same time indulging in selfishness and lovelessness. A [later] Gnostic would have argued that, since the body (composed of matter) was evil and only the spiritual part of man was ultimately important, bodily behavior was irrelevant to Christian belief.”

⁴⁶ Grk. *hē hamartia estin hē anomia* (ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία); “sin is violation of Torah” (CJB).

⁴⁷ A popularly written Messianic commentary is Joel Liberman, *Letters from the Beloved: Studies in 1, 2 & 3 Yochanan (John)* (San Diego: Tree of Life, 2014).

⁴⁸ This will include an evaluation of the textual witnesses surrounding 1 John 5:7-8a, or what is commonly regarded as the Johannine Comma.

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1

The Word of Life

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life—

² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and declare to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Yeshua the Messiah.

⁴ And these things we write, so that our joy may be made full.

God is Light

⁵ And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

⁷ but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Yeshua His Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2

Messiah Our Advocate

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Yeshua the Messiah the righteous;

² and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*.

³ And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same way as He walked.

The New Commandment

⁷ Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you were having from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

⁸ Again, a new commandment I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

⁹ The one who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

¹⁰ The one who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the Evil One. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the Evil One.

¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

¹⁷ And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

The Antimesiah

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antimesiah is coming, even now have many antimesiahs have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out*, that they might be manifested that they all are not of us.

²⁰ And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.

²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Yeshua is the Messiah? This is the antimesiah, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

²⁴ As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

²⁵ And this is the promise which He promised us: the eternal life.

²⁶ These things have I written to you concerning those deceiving you.

²⁷ And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in Him.

Children of God

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

²⁹ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

3

¹ Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it does not know Him.

² Beloved, now are we children of God, and it has not yet manifested what we will be. We know that, when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him just as He is.

³ And everyone who has this hope *set* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.^a

⁵ And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not sin; whoever sins has not seen Him or knows Him.

⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

⁸ the one who practices sin is of the Devil; for the Devil sins from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil.

⁹ Whoever is born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the Devil are manifested: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother or sister.

Loving One Another

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;

¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the Evil One, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers and sisters. He who does not love abides in death.

¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters.

¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother or sister in need and closes his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or tongue, but in work and truth.

Confidence before God

¹⁹ By this we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him,

²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

²³ And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us.

4

The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Antimesiah

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God;

^a The standard rendering of *anomia* (ἀνομία) as "lawlessness" is followed here; a Messianic version like the CJB has, "Everyone who keeps sinning is violating *Torah*—indeed, sin is violation of *Torah*."

³ and every spirit that does not confess Yeshua is not from God; and this is the *spirit* of the antimessiah, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

⁴ You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.

⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

God is Love

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him.

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Yeshua is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

¹⁶ And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us.

²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother or sister also.

5

Faith is Victory over the World

¹ Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God; and whoever loves the One who has begotten^a loves also the one who is born of Him.

² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments.

³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

^a Grk. *ton gennēsanta* (τον γεννήσαντα); "the one having given birth" (Brown and Comfort, 839); this is more commonly just rendered as "the Father."

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

⁵ And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?

The Witness concerning the Son

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Yeshua the Messiah; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.

⁷ And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.

⁸ For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood: and the three agree in one.

⁹ If we receive human witness, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son.

¹⁰ The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because He has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.

¹¹ And the witness is this, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

The Knowledge of Eternal Life

¹³ These things have I written to you, so that you may know that you have eternal life—to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.

¹⁴ And this is the confidence which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked of Him.

¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother or sister committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not to *leading* death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin; and there is a sin not *leading* to death.

¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not sin; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the Evil One does not touch him.

¹⁹ We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of* the Evil One.

²⁰ And we know that the Son of God is come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Yeshua the Messiah. This is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.