

Three Persons Named John?

Many scholars identify three individuals named John in early Christianity, all of whom are associated with different New Testament writings.

John the apostle (the son of Zebedee): He and his brother James were called to be among Jesus's first disciples (Mark 1:19–20). He ministered alongside Peter (Acts 3–4) and came to be known as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Some people believe he may be “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” whose testimony is incorporated into the Gospel of John (John 21:24).

John the elder (author of the three epistles?): We hear of this person in writings from the early church, including Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. He is said to have belonged to the same community as John the apostle and to have been the apostle's disciple (such that the two were often confused by later generations). He is probably the “elder” responsible for at least two of the Johannine epistles (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Most scholars think he also wrote the first of those letters (1 John), which is officially anonymous. He may have served as the editor or final author of the Gospel of John.

John the seer (visionary author of Revelation): We know nothing about this person except what he tells us, that he wrote the book of

Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1, 9).

Though he is often identified with the two persons mentioned above, most scholars think he was probably a completely different individual who just happened to have the same name.

For a contrasting view, see 30.13 “Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books.”