

## Part 1 – 1 John 1:1-4

### I. BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK:

**A. Who wrote it? – The author is not addressed in the book, but early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian looked to John the Apostle as the author.**

1. He was an eyewitness of Christ – 1 John 1:1-2
2. The style of the Gospel of John and 1 John are similar – ex: John 20:31 with 1 John 5:13.
3. The Muratorian Canon gives John the Apostle as the author. One of the earliest listings of NT books, it included 1 John.

**B. Who was it written to? – The letter itself gives no hint as to who would be receiving it.**

1. Since early church tradition ties John to the Roman province of Asia (in Western Turkey), he was possibly writing to Christians located there. Revelation 2 and 3 hint at his association with the churches of that area.
2. Irenaeus states John wrote it while living at Ephesus in Asia.
3. He may have been writing to the churches in the city of Ephesus.

**C. Date – Possibly around 90 A.D., though some believe as early as 60-65 A.D.** The later date I believe is the most accurate and fits timeframe.

**D. Why was it written? – The following are some of the reasons for the writing of 1 John:**

1. 1 John 5:11-13 tells us a vital reason for why it was written. John wrote this letter to show what true Christian experience was about. This book can be looked at in two ways:

A. Some see this book as showing whether a Christian is walking in fellowship with God in the child-Father relationship. The tests mentioned in the book are thus seen as tests of fellowship for the believer to determine where they are in their walk with God.

B. Another view is that this book deals with the question, “What is the evidence of genuine salvation?” This would tie in also with the thought that false teachers are addressed in the letter, as well as false believers. Thus the tests mentioned in the book deal with salvation, not fellowship.

C. Your viewpoint regarding letters A and B will determine how you approach the book.

1. It was written to combat false teachers, probably those teaching what was known as “Gnosticism.” With this in mind a couple of things need to be noted:

A. Some feel that John had in mind the teachings of Cerinthus, an opponent of John’s and the Gospel. Cerinthus taught that Jesus was not Virgin born but was the natural child of Joseph and Mary. He was, according to Cerinthus, more righteous, prudent, and wiser than any man. After His baptism, the “Christ” spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler (God), and that Jesus then proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. Last,

according to Cerinthus, “Christ” departed from Jesus, and then Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, while the “Christ” remained impassable, inasmuch as He was a spiritual being.

B. It may have been written to combat “Docetism”, a belief that Jesus’ humanity was not real, and that He only appeared to have a physical body, but in reality, did not. It may have also been a type of Gnosticism that distinguished between the spiritual and the material, claiming that all material substance was evil. Thus the idea developed that man could sin in his body without effecting his spirit.

1. There are references in 1 John 2:19-23 and 1 John 4:1-3 to antichrists and false prophets.
2. Unsaved individuals had arisen in the church and had led people astray – 1 John 2:18-19.
3. Some characteristics of unbelievers will be seen in this book. For example:
  - A. They denied that Christ had come in the flesh. They denied what is known as the “Incarnation”, Jesus coming to earth and being clothed in humanity – 1 John 4:1-3; 5:1.
  - B. They stated that they did not have a sin nature and had not sinned – 1 John 1:8-10.
  - C. They denied that love was the “signpost” of Christianity – 1 John 2:9 with John 13:34-35.

**\*\* Now to the letter itself:**

## **I. The validity of the person of Jesus Christ – 1:1-4**

**A. Vs. 1 – Note that John tells us that he had personally seen and heard the One known as the “Word of Life.”**

1. Note four things that John states regarding this encounter – they heard, seen, saw, and touched. Who or what is he referring to? Our next point answers that question.

2. The Word of life – this has a reference to one of two things. John is either describing the concept of eternal life as taught in Scripture, or he is specifically describing a person.

- A. John’s use of “Word” specifically speaks of Christ – John 1:1,14; 1 John 5:7; Rev. 19:13.
- B. Eternal life is embodied in the person of Christ. He is the author and giver of life.
- C. Though some may see this phrase “Word of life” as dealing with Scripture (Rom. 10:17), the context, most likely, is referring to a person, that being Jesus.

1. With that in mind, the four descriptive words John uses thus describe an active participation by John and others with the Word of life.

A. Heard – They listened to what the Word said and they came to understand over time what had been said to them.

B. Seen – Though the word can mean “to see with the mind” or “to perceive” something with our mind, it also carries the meaning of “seeing with the eyes”, a physical seeing (John 1:51). B and C are similar but John uses two different words for emphasis.

C. Saw – This means “to look upon” something, to “contemplate” to “view something” attentively. It has the idea of seeing something with our eyes and contemplating it.

D. Touched – This means “to handle, feel.” The disciples, including John, ate with Jesus, probably shook hands with Him. They had a personal relationship with the “Word.”

\*\* The “Word of Life” was from the beginning, a word denoting eternity. The Word existed from eternity, and the disciples had met Him and talked with Him.

**B. Vs. 2 – Here the case for Who the “Word” is continues. The “life” was “revealed to us” John writes, and they had “seen” Him. They also “testified” Who He was.**

1. The One Who is “life itself”, as we have stated, is embodied in Christ. Jesus gives us eternal life – John 3:15-16; John 3:36; John 5:24.

2. John and the other disciples testified to what they had seen and heard about Christ and they told of their encounters with Him. Remember they spent over three years with Him.

3. It is the goal of the author to “testify” and “proclaim” (to make openly known) to us all they know about Christ.

4. The life had been with the Father, and then had come to earth and had been known by the Apostles. This is a strong case for the Incarnation (defined above).

**C. Vs. 3 – For the third time, John reiterates what he has seen. He also reminds us of what he has heard.**

1. True fellowship can only be found in sharing similar beliefs. In this instance here, the fellowship is based on what people think about the Word (Jesus) and eternal life. If we are in agreement on Who Jesus is, we can have true fellowship, a true spiritual bond.

2. In vs. 7 we will look more closely at the concept of “fellowship” and get us thinking about the traditional teachings of what “true fellowship” with God and others is.

**D. Vs. 4 – John’s writing is for a purpose, that those he is writing to may experience a “joy” that is full. That is what he is aiming for:**

1. Three things John has pointed out:

A. The visible fact of the Word in vss. 1-2. He argues for the physical existence of the Word, Whom John defines in John 1:1, 14 as eternal God come to earth.

B. John shares what he has seen. He speaks out regarding Who Jesus was.

C. John writes down what he had seen and heard and then passed it on to us. He wants to make sure everyone understands Who Jesus is and what He offers – eternal life.