

PATMOS

Patmos is only mentioned one time in the whole Bible, in Revelation 1:9: “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

The writer identified himself as “John” four times in the book (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). No doubt, he was the apostle John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, who also wrote the Gospel of John and the Letters of John. Second-century Christians, who were not far removed from the writing of Revelation, claimed that the author was the apostle John. Justin Martyr stated that “there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him . . .” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 81.4). Irenaeus introduced Revelation 1:12-16 with these words: “John also, the Lord’s disciple . . . says in the Apocalypse” (*Against Heresies* 4.20.11). The testimony of other second and third-century witnesses agree. These include the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 3.14), Clement of Alexandria (*Who Is a Rich Man?* 42), Hippolytus (*On Christ and Antichrist* 36.1), Origen (*Commentary on John* 14), and Victorinus (*Commentary on Revelation* 10.3).

In the third century, however, some rejected the inspiration of Revelation, claiming that “it is not the work of John, nor is it a revelation, because it is covered thickly and densely by a veil of obscurity.” They contended that it was a pseudepigraphal work and that the real author was the heretic Cerinthus (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.2). Taking a more moderate approach, Dionysius of Alexandria affirmed the book’s inspiration but attributed it to another John. He had no concrete evidence that this other John wrote the book; it was simply his personal deduction. He reasoned that Revelation was so different in style and vocabulary from the Gospel of John and the Letters of John that it could not have been written by the apostle (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.7-27; see 3.39.4-5). His arguments are generally followed today by those who do not believe that the apostle John wrote Revelation.

Nevertheless, those differences can be explained by the visions that John experienced when writing Revelation, indicated by the frequently repeated phrase “I saw.” His visions were awe-inspiring and sometimes terrifying, causing the apostle to be overwhelmed emotionally (Rev. 1:17; 19:10; 22:8). Further, the repeated command to “write” suggests that John himself penned Revelation (Rev. 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 12, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5), whereas he may have used a scribe for his Gospel and Letters. Although the circumstances and style of Revelation are different from John’s other writings, they still have many similarities. For example, Jesus is portrayed as the “Word” (*Logos*) (Jn. 1:1; 1 Jn. 1:1; Rev. 19:13) as well as the sacrificial “Lamb of God” (Jn. 1:29, 36; Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 7:14; 12:11). John’s writings also emphasize his eyewitness testimony to the truth (Jn. 21:24; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Rev. 22:8). Indeed, “testimony” (*martyria*) is a key word in these books, as is “overcome” (*nikaō*). In fulfillment of

Zechariah 12:10, Jesus' side was pierced by the Roman soldiers at the conclusion of his crucifixion, as both the Gospel of John and Revelation indicate (Jn. 19:34; Rev. 1:7). Moreover, the casting out of Satan is linked to the death of Jesus in both works (Jn. 12:31, 32; Rev. 12:5, 9-11). These two writings also picture Jesus as offering living water to those who would follow him (Jn. 7:37, 38; Rev. 7:17; 22:17).

Church tradition uniformly associates the apostle John with Ephesus and the province of Asia in the latter part of the first century. While the other apostles reportedly suffered martyrdom at various places, John lived to an old age (see Jn. 21:18-23) and carried out his ministry at Ephesus. Obviously, the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4) were familiar with John and would have viewed his writing as authoritative. The apostle identified with his readers as one who was also persecuted for his faith. As citizens of Christ's "kingdom," they had experienced "suffering" and were called to "patient endurance" (Rev. 1:9). The implication is that John had been banished to Patmos by the Roman government. The phrases "because of the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus" appear later in the book where Christians were punished for proclaiming the gospel and maintaining their confession of faith (Rev. 6:9; 12:17; 20:4). John's testimony about Jesus, which included his kingship and deity, was no doubt viewed as treason (see Acts 17:7) against the emperor Domitian, who claimed to be "lord" and "god."

Why was John exiled to Patmos, instead of being executed like the Christian martyrs mentioned in Revelation (Rev. 2:13; 6:9; 20:4)? One possibility is that he was shown some mercy due to his old age. According to church tradition, the apostle was exiled in the fourteenth year of Domitian's reign (A.D. 81-96) to Patmos, where he wrote Revelation (A.D. 95). Other Christians were also banished during this period for their confession of Christ. After Domitian died the following year, Nerva became the new emperor and reversed many of Domitian's acts of cruelty; this reversal included returning people from exile and restoring their property. During Nerva's brief rule (A.D. 96-98), John himself was released from exile, and he returned to Ephesus. He died early in the reign of the next emperor, Trajan (A.D. 98-117) (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.1-5; 3.20.10-11; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5; 5.30.3; Jerome *Concerning Illustrious Men* 9; see Dio Cassius *Roman History* 68.1).

The text of Revelation does not indicate who sentenced John to exile, whether the Roman emperor Domitian or the governor of the province of Asia. The former is supported by early church writers, whereas many modern scholars favor the latter. Two types of exile were primarily used under Roman rule. (1) The first was known as *deportatio in insulam*. This type could only be imposed by the emperor, and it was typically carried out against prominent citizens who fell from his favor. These individuals were permanently banished, and they lost their civic rights as well as their possessions. (2) The second was referred to as *relegatio ad insulam*. This type could be carried out by the emperor, the Senate, or a provincial governor. While this sentence could be temporary or permanent, it did not usually include the loss of citizenship or property (Mark Wilson, "Revelation," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 4, *Hebrews to Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 255; *Digest of Justinian* 48.22).



The Isle of Patmos, Viewed from the Monastery of St. John the Theologian

Patmos is a small Greek island located off the western coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea (more specifically, the Icarian Sea). It is one of the northernmost islands among the Dodecanese (also known as the “Southern Sporades”). Patmos is crescent-shaped and thus has a good natural harbor. It is composed of three sections of land that are connected by two narrow isthmuses. At its farthest points, the island is about 7.5 miles long and 5 miles wide (along the northern coast). It is approximately 40 miles west-southwest of Miletus and 60 miles southwest of Ephesus. Mount Elias is the highest point of the island, rising to about 885 feet.

Small islands near Italy and Greece were commonly used as places of exile by the Roman government. Regarding the Greek islands, ancient sources specifically mention exiles being sent to Gyarus, Cythnus, Donusa, Amorgus, and Seriphus (Tacitus *Annals* 3.68; 4.30; Juvenal *Satires* 1.74; 10.170). While Patmos is not mentioned as a place of exile in Greco-Roman sources (outside the New Testament and later Christian literature), it is comparable to those that are listed. The Aegean island of Patmos was small, rocky, and sparsely populated.

By relocating dissidents to such locations, Roman rulers removed them from their spheres of influence, where they were no longer perceived as a threat. Exiles were separated from their families and homelands, which produced feelings of loneliness and isolation. This was no doubt John’s experience, as he missed the fellowship of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Further, he must have felt unproductive, not having the opportunity to teach and encourage them in person. John was separated from his Christian family by the Aegean Sea that surrounded Patmos. The word “sea” (*thalassa*) is prominent in the visions of Revelation, appearing 26 times. The disappearance of “the sea” relates to the heavenly reunion (Rev. 21:1).

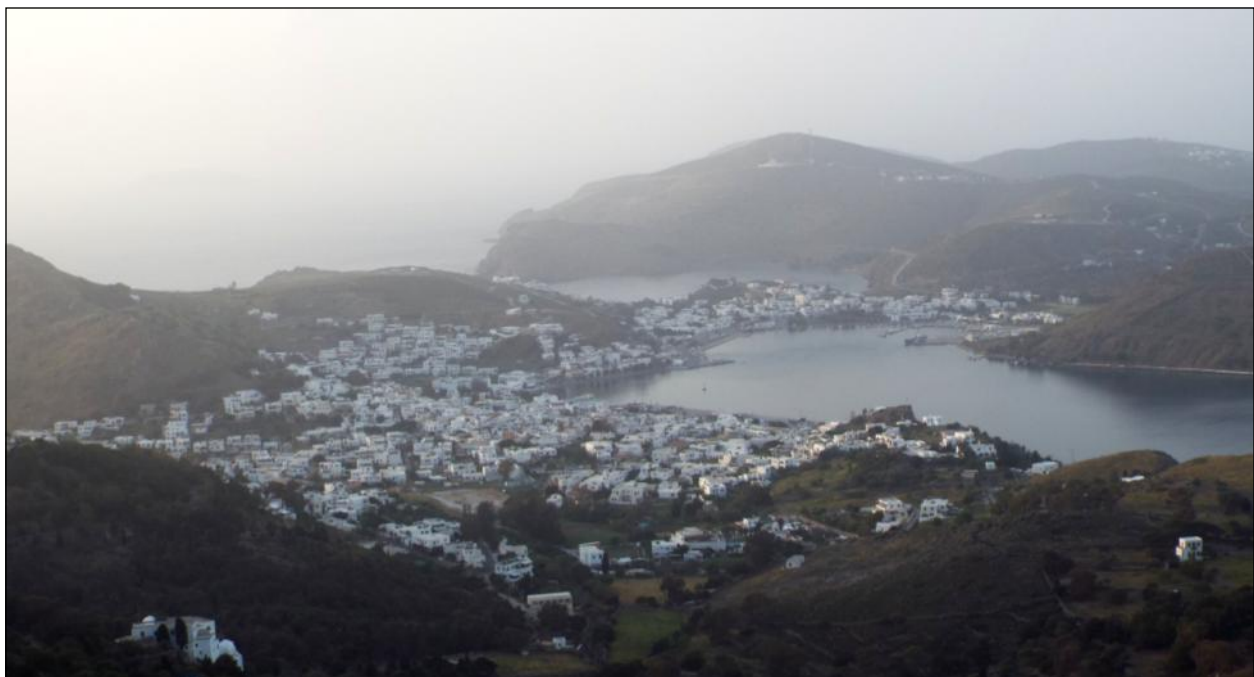
In some cases, exiles to remote rocky islands were flogged before being sent away (Suetonius *Lives of the Caesars: Titus* 8.5). However, nothing in the biblical text suggests that John was beaten; as a very old man, it would have been difficult for him to survive such a punishment. According to Tertullian, John was plunged into boiling oil but miraculously survived unharmed before being sent into exile (*Prescriptions Against Heretics* 36). Nevertheless, this account appears to be legendary—as do many other uninspired traditions that developed in the second and third centuries concerning the apostles.

Not much is known about the ancient history of the island of Patmos. Excavations at the acropolis of Skala, the hill of Kastelli, suggest that it was inhabited at least by the Bronze

Age. It is generally believed that the island was settled by the Dorians and later inhabited by the Ionians. Archaeological evidence indicates that Patmos had temples to Apollo and Artemis. The foundations of the Apollo temple have been found on the hill of Kastelli above Skala, whereas the Patmos Vera Inscription indicates that a temple to Artemis existed at Chora (also called “Hora” or “Patmos Town”). Patmos is only briefly mentioned by a few ancient writers, either as a point of reference or in a list of Greek islands (Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 3.33.3; Strabo *Geography* 10.5.13; Pliny *Natural History* 4.12 [69]).

According to Greek myth, Patmos was originally located at the bottom of the Aegean Sea. Although the original source of this myth is difficult to locate, it is generally told with these details: While the goddess Artemis was visiting her sanctuary at Mount Latmos in Caria, the mainland across from where Patmos was buried underwater, the moon goddess Selene cast her light on the sea and revealed the island. Artemis had her twin brother Apollo convince their father Zeus to bring the island to the surface, and it came to life by the rays of the sun god Helios. Then, it was inhabited by peoples from the Mount Latmos region. They called the island Letois, another name for Artemis, the daughter of Leto. The Patmos Vera Inscription from the second or third century A.D. calls Patmos “the most venerable island of the daughter of Leto” and says it “emerged from the depths of the sea to be [her] throne.”

The main town in the New Testament period was located in the center of the island. This port was built around the large eastern harbor. Today, the town is known as “Skala.” In ancient times, a mule path (which is now a paved road) ascended the height to the south two miles, where the temple of Artemis was located. The modern town at that location is called “Chora” (McRay, 274).



Skala, the Port of Patmos

The origin of the name “Patmos” is uncertain. One possibility is that it derives from Mount Latmos, which is named in the myth about Patmos’ origin. Another links it to the Greek word for “tread” (*pateō*) or “path” (*patos*). Today, Patmos is also known as “the Island of the Apocalypse,” because of the Revelation that John received there. Since so many Christian pilgrims have visited the island over the centuries, it is sometimes called “the Jerusalem of the Aegean.”

The Cave of the Apocalypse is the traditional place where John received his visions. Even if the cave is not the actual site, it serves as a reminder of John’s reception of the Revelation on Patmos. It is surrounded by the Monastery of the Apocalypse, with chapels dedicated to St. Nicholas, St. Artemios, and St. Anne. Nevertheless, the site no longer functions as a monastery. The cave is located halfway between Skala and Chora.



The Cave of the Apocalypse

The mosaic above the entrance to the cave, which is based on Greek Orthodox tradition, portrays “St. John the Theologian” dictating the Revelation to his scribe Prochorus. As previously mentioned, the apostle John was repeatedly told to “write” in Revelation. This fact would suggest that he did *not* use a scribe for this book, whereas he may have done so for his Gospel and Letters. Prochorus was one of the “proto-deacons” in Acts 6:5; John’s supposed scribe was thought to be the same man. The later pseudepigraphal work *Acts of John (by Prochorus)* was written in the fifth century A.D., being falsely attributed to John’s scribe.

In Greek Orthodox lore, several features of the cave have been tied to John's presence there. A hollow area low in one of the walls is said to be the place where John would rest his head while lying down. A small cavity nearby was supposedly used by the apostle to put his hand in and pull himself up; some think that he also used the cavity for balance when he knelt to pray. Another feature in the wall is a natural ledge, which would have been suitable for writing on a scroll. A triple fissure in the rock ceiling, taken as symbolizing the Trinity, is thought to have allowed God's voice to reach John in the cave.

Located on the hillside above the Cave of the Apocalypse is the Patmian Ecclesiastic School. The religious school was originally founded by Makarios Kalogeras in 1713. It ceased operation during the Italian occupation in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1948, it reopened as a Greek seminary and is still in operation today.



The Monastery of St. John the Theologian

At the top of Chora is the Monastery of St. John the Theologian. In 1088, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus granted Christodoulos the island of Patmos and the right to build a monastery. This man, whose name means "slave of Christ," was a monk from Nicea (modern Iznik, Turkey). The official document from Alexius I is known as a "chrysobull"—that is, a "golden bull." A few years later, Christodoulos began construction on the monastery, whose walls resemble a medieval fortress. It was built in this fashion to protect against pirates and other invaders. The building site previously had a fourth-century Christian basilica, which had apparently been built over the ruins of the ancient Temple of Artemis. The monastery offers a panoramic view, which is both breathtaking and suitable for meditation.



Bell Tower at the Monastery of St. John the Theologian
(Exterior Above / Interior Below)





Mosaic Above the Entrance—"St. John the Theologian" with the Greek Text of John 1:1-3



A long wooden beam, known as a "semantron" (or "simandron") hangs from the columns in the courtyard. On special days, monks strike it as well as a smaller iron semantron rapidly and rhythmically with wooden mallets in order to call people to prayer. The bells are rung too.



Fresco of Mary, Jesus, John, and Christodoulos Outside the Main Chapel

The monastery features numerous chapels, which are dedicated to various “saints.” The chapel dedicated to Christodoulos, who died in 1093, reportedly contains his remains. The monks also claim to possess important relics from the New Testament period, such as the skull of the apostle Thomas and a piece of the holy cross of Christ. While it is likely they have the remains of Christodoulos, it is doubtful that the other relics (from more than a millennium before the monastery existed!) are genuine. Even if the relics were authentic, they would not contain any miraculous power.

Various frescoes and icons decorate the monastery walls, displaying scenes from the inspired Scriptures as well as legendary accounts from the *Acts of John* (by Prochorus). In addition to numerous chapels, the monastery has an old refectory (dining hall) with a long marble table, where the monks once shared their common meals. An old bakery has a long wooden trough in which the monks used to knead their dough, as well as two large stone ovens where they baked their bread. The monastery has many cells where present-day monks reside.

Considering both the Library and the Treasury, the monastery contains many valuable historical items, including thousands of old manuscripts and books, vestments, icons, and silver decor. Most notably, it houses 33 leaves of the Gospel of Mark from the sixth century A.D. that consist of silver letters written on purple vellum. These are from the “Codex Purpureus Petropolitanus,” or the “Purple Codex.” The monastery has an illuminated copy of the book of Job from the eighth century A.D. The Patmos Vera Inscription from the second or third century A.D. is also kept there; it relates to the Temple of Artemis and was found on the site. Finally, the monastery contains the eleventh-century chrysobull, the official document in which the emperor Alexius I granted control of Patmos to Christodoulos.



Arches of the Monastery Courtyard (Above) and Frescoes Outside the Main Chapel (Below)





The Three Windmills

Three iconic windmills are located at Chora, east of the monastery on top of a hill overlooking the harbor where it is extremely windy. Two of them date back to 1588; the third was not added until 1863. The mills were originally designed to grind wheat, thus supplying the island with flour. They fell into disuse in the 1950s when industrial milling replaced traditional methods. Restoration work on the mills took place in 2010 in an attempt to regain their original appearance. However, the plan was to use each mill for a different purpose: one to grind wheat, another to generate electricity, and still another to extract water from the air. The goal was for the mills to serve as a “living museum,” educating both islanders and tourists alike. While the grain mill is functional, the others have not yet been completed.

Over the past millennium, the island of Patmos has been controlled by many peoples: Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Venetians, Russians, Italians, and Germans. In 1948, it came under the authority of Greece. Today, the main towns on the island are Skala (the port), Chora (the capital), Kambos, and Grikos. Around 3,000 residents live on the island, and most of their economy is derived from tourism.