

John 21 (HCSB)

Jesus' Third Appearance to the Disciples

21 After this, Jesus revealed Himself again to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.^[a] He revealed Himself in this way:

² Simon Peter, Thomas (called "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of His disciples were together.

³ "I'm going fishing," Simon Peter said to them.

"We're coming with you," they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore. However, the disciples did not know it was Jesus.

⁵ "Men,"^[b] Jesus called to them, "you don't have any fish, do you?"

"No," they answered.

⁶ "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," He told them, "and you'll find some." So they did,^[c] and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. ⁷ Therefore the disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer garment around him^[d] (for he was stripped) and plunged into the sea. ⁸ But since they were not far from land (about 100 yards^[e] away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. ⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.

¹⁰ "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus told them. ¹¹ So Simon Peter got up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish—153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² "Come and have breakfast," Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish.

¹⁴ This was now the third time^[f] Jesus appeared^[g] to the disciples after He was raised from the dead.

Jesus' Threefold Restoration of Peter

¹⁵ When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John,^[h] do you love^[i] Me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.”

“Feed My lambs,” He told him.

¹⁶ A second time He asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.”

“Shepherd My sheep,” He told him.

¹⁷ He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

Peter was grieved that He asked him the third time, “Do you love Me?” He said, “Lord, You know everything! You know that I love You.”

“Feed My sheep,” Jesus said. ¹⁸ “I assure you: When you were young, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹ He said this to signify by what kind of death he would glorify God.^[j] After saying this, He told him, “Follow Me!”

Correcting a False Report

²⁰ So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them. That disciple was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, “Lord, who is the one that’s going to betray You?”²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord—what about him?”

²² “If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow Me.”

²³ So this report^[k] spread to the brothers^[l] that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?”

Epilogue

²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books^[m] that would be written.

Footnotes:

- a. [John 21:1](#) The Sea of Galilee; *Sea of Tiberias* is used only in John; [Jn 6:1,23](#)
- b. [John 21:5](#) Lit *Children*
- c. [John 21:6](#) Lit *they cast*
- d. [John 21:7](#) Lit *he girded his garment*
- e. [John 21:8](#) Lit *about 200 cubits*
- f. [John 21:14](#) The other two are in [Jn 20:19-29](#).
- g. [John 21:14](#) Lit *was revealed* (v. 1)
- h. [John 21:15](#) Other mss read *Simon, son of Jonah*; Mt 16:17; Jn 1:42
- i. [John 21:15](#) Two synonyms are translated *love* in this conversation: *agapao*, the first 2 times by Jesus (vv. [15-16](#)); and *phileo*, the last time by Jesus (v. [17](#)) and all 3 times by Peter (vv. [15-17](#)). Peter's threefold confession of love for Jesus corresponds to his earlier threefold denial of Jesus; [Jn 18:15-18,25-27](#).
- j. [John 21:19](#) Jesus predicts that Peter would be martyred. Church tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down.
- k. [John 21:23](#) Lit *this word*
- l. [John 21:23](#) The word *brothers* refers to the late first century Christian community.
- m. [John 21:25](#) Lit *scroll*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

John 21

21:1-25 This epilogue narrates Jesus' third and final resurrection appearance recorded in this Gospel and contrasts the callings of Peter and "the disciple Jesus loved."

21:1 With the week-long festival of Unleavened Bread now past, the disciples left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee (see note at [20:26](#); cp. [Lk 2:43](#)). On the **Sea of Tiberias**, see note at [6:1](#).

21:2 The names of **Zebedee's sons** are given in the Synoptic Gospels as James and John ([Mt 4:21](#)). Luke mentioned that they were "Simon's partners" in the fishing business before they were called to follow Jesus as disciples (see note at [Jn 1:40](#)).

21:3 **Night** was the preferred time for **fishing** in ancient times ([Lk 5:5](#)). This schedule allowed fish caught at night to be sold fresh in the morning market.

21:7 The **disciple... Jesus loved** must be one of the seven mentioned in [verse 2](#), which included Zebedee's sons, and was almost certainly John the son of Zebedee, author of this Gospel (see note at [v. 24](#)).

21:9 On the **charcoal fire**, see note at [18:18](#).

21:11 Various attempts have been made to interpret the number **153** symbolically, but most likely it simply represents the actual number of fish. Large numbers elsewhere in John are meant literally as well ([2:6](#); [12:3](#)).

21:13 By taking the **bread** and **fish** and giving them to His disciples, Jesus acted as a Jewish host pronouncing the blessing at a meal ([6:11,23](#)).

21:15 On **Simon, son of John**, see note at [1:42](#). Jesus' question **do you love Me more than these** probably meant, "Do you love Me more than these disciples do?" rather than, "Do you love Me more than these fish [i.e., his profession]?" or "Do you love Me more than you love these men?" though each of the three meanings is possible.

21:15-17 Peter had denied Jesus three times ([18:15-18,25-27](#)); now Jesus asked him three times to reaffirm his love for Him before recommissioning him for gospel service.

21:18 **Stretch out your hands** refers to crucifixion, where a person's hands and arms are spread out and nailed to the crossbeam. Tradition says Peter chose to be crucified upside down because he felt himself unworthy of dying in the same exact manner as Jesus.

21:19 The reference **to signify by what kind of death he [Peter] would glorify God** echoes the reference "to signify what kind of death He [Jesus] was about to die" in [12:33](#). This verse therefore establishes a connection between the deaths of Jesus and Peter. As God's Lamb, Jesus died for the sins of the world ([1:29,36](#)); Peter died a martyr's death, giving his life as a witness to his faith in Jesus.

¹ Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 21".

phileo

Greek Pronunciation [fihl EH oh]

HCSB Translation love

Uses in John's Gospel 13

Uses in the NT 25

Focus Passage [John 21:15-17](#)

Although *agapao* (verb) and *agape* (noun) are normally considered the Greek words for divine *love*, the verb *phileo* can be used in the same way. The *phileo* word family has over 30 terms in the NT, including *philos* (*friend*), *philadelphia* (*brotherly love*), and *philema* (*kiss*). But *phileo* is also used to describe the Father's *love* for the Son ([Jn 5:20](#)), the Father's *love* for believers ([Jn 16:27](#)), Jesus' *love* for believers ([11:3](#); [20:2](#); [Rev 3:19](#)), and believers' *love* for the Lord ([1Co 16:22](#)) and for each other ([Titus 3:15](#)). Both *agapao* ([Jn 13:23](#); [19:26](#); [21:7,20](#)) and *phileo* ([20:2](#)) are used to describe "the disciple Jesus loved," and the meaning is the same. Thus, it is better not to make a sharp distinction in [John 21:15-17](#) between *agapao* (Jesus' term in [vv. 15,16](#)) and *phileo* (Jesus' term in [v. 17](#) and all three times by Peter). Peter's threefold confession of his *love* for Jesus, which corresponds to his earlier threefold denial of Him, should not be understood as a secondary form of *love*.

[21:20](#) On the disciple Jesus loved, see note at [13:23](#).

[21:21-23](#) Like the final chapter of Matthew, the closing verses of John's Gospel dispel a rumor. Matthew denied that Jesus' disciples stole His body ([Mt 28:11-15](#); cp. [Mt 27:62-66](#)) while John sought to lay to rest the rumor that Christ had promised to return during John's lifetime.

[21:24](#) **This is the disciple** is a third-person authorial self-reference. Again, this is "the disciple Jesus loved" (cp. [v. 7](#); see note at [13:23](#)), one of the Twelve (cp. [21:20](#)), John the son of Zebedee, the apostle John, who referred to himself by the epithet "the beloved disciple." **We know** represents an instance of the authorial "we," by which the author included himself along with his audience.

[21:25](#) John acknowledged that he had to be selective, choosing from a vast amount of material about Jesus (specifically, the "signs"; cp. [20:30-31](#)).

The Apologetics Study Bible²

John 21

21:1 Why do we suddenly find the disciples back north in Galilee? One week after the beginning of Passover in Jerusalem, the Feast ended. They were heading home. Matthew and Mark described resurrection appearances only in Galilee; Luke, only in Judea. John recognized that Jesus appeared to His followers in both locations.

21:4-14 Is this a doublet (two stories created from one incident) of [Lk 5:1-11](#)? Both were miraculous fish catches, but it makes sense to see them as two separate events. The disciples had abandoned Jesus, so He needed to "recall" them. What better way than via a miracle resembling the one that led to the original call of several of them? [Verses 15-19](#) are, after all, clearly about reinstatement.

21:14 But John already narrated four appearances! Presumably the one to Mary didn't count as "to the disciples," which leaves three—on Easter Sunday night ([20:19-23](#)), one week later ([20:24-29](#)) and now later still in Galilee ([21:1-14](#)).

21:18-19 Jesus' cryptic prophecy seems to have been fulfilled when Peter was martyred by crucifixion during Nero's persecutions of A.D. 64 and 68, as attested by early church tradition.

21:22-23 The dominant early church tradition attests that John was the one disciple who did not die a martyr's death but lived out his life in old age to virtually the end of the first century, ministering in and around Ephesus (including a brief exile in the mid-90s on the island of Patmos, during which he wrote the book of Rv). It is possible that John died shortly after completing a draft of his Gospel and that, because of the misinterpreted report described here, his followers added this closing information by way of clarification.

21:24-25 These verses also read most naturally as an addition of John's followers—note the first person singular and plural pronouns versus the third-person reference to the beloved disciple. At the same time they attribute the book itself to John and certify its accuracy. If this reconstruction is accurate, it means merely that God inspired multiple authors, no differently than with the books of Ps or Pr or with the addition of the account of Moses' death to Dt.

² Ted Cabal, ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1616-1618.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

John 21

21:1ff This chapter tells how Jesus commissioned Peter. Perhaps Peter needed special encouragement after his denial—he may have felt completely worthless. [Verses 1-14](#) set the scene for Jesus' conversation with Peter.

21:7 Only John ("the disciple Jesus loved") recognized Jesus in the dim morning light, undoubtedly because Jesus had performed a similar miracle earlier ([Luke 5:1-11](#)).

21:15-17 In this beach scene, Jesus led Peter through an experience that would remove the cloud of his denial. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. When Peter answered yes, Jesus told him to feed his sheep. It is one thing to say you love Jesus, but the real test is willingness to serve him. Peter had repented, and here Jesus was asking him to commit his life. Peter's life changed when he finally realized who Jesus was. His occupation changed from fisherman to evangelist; his identity changed from impetuous to "rock"; and his relationship to Jesus changed—he was forgiven, and he finally understood the significance of Jesus' words about his death and resurrection.

21:15-17 Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. The first time Jesus said, "Do you love (Greek *agape*: volitional, self-sacrificial love) me more than these?" The second time, Jesus focused on Peter alone and still used the word translated into Greek, *agape*. The third time, Jesus used the word translated into Greek, *phileo* (signifying affection, affinity, or brotherly love) and asked, in effect, "Are you even my friend?" Each time Peter responded with the word translated into Greek as *phileo*. Jesus doesn't settle for quick, superficial answers. He has a way of getting to the heart of the matter. Peter had to face his true feelings and motives when Jesus confronted him. How would you respond if Jesus asked you, "Do you love me? Do you really love me? Are you even my friend?"

21:18, 19 This was a prediction of Peter's death by crucifixion. Tradition indicates that Peter was crucified for his faith—upside down because he did not feel worthy of dying as his Lord did. Despite what Peter's future held, Jesus told him to follow him. We may be uncertain and fearful about our future. But if we know God is in control, we can confidently follow Christ.

21:21, 22 Peter asked Jesus how John would die. Jesus replied that Peter should not concern himself with that. We tend to compare our lives to others, whether to rationalize our own level of devotion to Christ or to question God's justice. Jesus responds to us as he did to Peter: "What is that to you? As for you, follow me."

21:23 Early church history reports that after John spent several years as an exile on the island of Patmos, he returned to Ephesus where he died as an old man, near the end of the first century.

21:25 John's stated purpose for writing his Gospel was to show that Jesus was the Son of God ([20:31](#)). He clearly and systematically presented the evidence for Jesus' claims. When evidence is presented in the courtroom, those who hear it must make a choice. Those who read the Gospel of John must also make a choice—is Jesus the Son of God, or isn't he? You are the jury. The evidence has been clearly presented. You must decide. Read John's Gospel and believe!

³, *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*, 1801-1802.