



JOHN'S EPISTLES

**LIVING** WITH  
**ASSURANCE**

# BACKGROUND

- Who wrote these letters?
- When were these letters written?
- To whom were these letters written?
- Why were these letters written?
- What issues were addressed in these letters?

- Anonymous, other than ***The Elder***
- Genre of 1 John differs from 2 and 3 John
- 2 and 3 John addressed to different people

**1. Internal evidence**

**2. External evidence**

WHO WROTE  
THESE  
LETTERS?

# Connecting 2 John to 3 John

- 2 and 3 John verse 1:
  - **The Elder** (ὁ πρεσβύτερος)
  - **whom I love in the truth** (οὓς/ὄν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ)
- 2 John 12; 3 John 13-14:
  - **paper/pen and ink** (χάρτου/καλάμου καὶ μέλανος)
  - **face to face** (στόμα πρὸς στόμα)
- 2 John 4 & 3 John 3-4 **walking in the truth**

# Connecting 1 John to 2 and 3 John

- 1 Jn. 2:7-10 and 2 Jn. 5-6 speak of the commandment to love (ἐντολήν ἀγαπῶμεν)
- In 1 Jn. 4:1-3 and 2 Jn. 7 false teachers are branded as false prophets/deceivers and antichrists (ἀντίχριστος)
- 1 Jn. 4:2 and 2 Jn. 7 speak of Christ as **has come/coming** (ἔρχομαι) in the **flesh** (σαρκὶ)
- “Walking” as descriptive of living a Christian life noted in 1 Jn. 1:6-7 (**walking in the light** 1:7), 2:6,11 and 2 Jo. 4; 3 Jo. 4

➤ *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life (1 Jn. 1:1)*

WHO WROTE  
THESE  
LETTERS?

**Apostle John**

# Connecting the Gospel of John to 1,2,3 John

The similarities (terminology and ideas) linking the epistles are reminiscent of the Gospel of John, suggesting common authorship of all four writings.

- Claim of being eye witnesses to Jesus (Jn. 1:14; 19:35; 21:24; 1 Jn. 1:1-3)
- **The Word** is identified as **the life** in John and 1 John, both unmistakably identifying **the word** and **the life** as Jesus.

- The coming of Christ in the flesh (Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 1:1-3, 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7).
- The contrast between walking in the light and walking in the darkness (Jn. 12:35; 1 Jn. 1:5-6).
- The new commandment of love (Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 2:7-8; 2 Jn. 5-6).
- There are differences as well (no quotations from the OT, no statements of disapproval with the Jews) but may be explained by the brevity of 1,2,3 John.

## External Evidence Supporting the Apostle John

Early evidence (church fathers) supports John's authorship of the Gospel and 1,2 John.

- Eusebius [313] (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.17) “But of the writings of John, not only his Gospel, but also the former of his epistles, has been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times.”
- 2,3 John authorship was “disputed” (3.25.3).

- The Muratorian Fragment [175] identifies the author of the Gospel and the epistles (plural, but not mentioning how many) as “of the disciples” but describes John as an eye witness and hearer of the wonderful works of the Lord (quoting 1 John 1:1).
- Irenaeus [165] quoted from 2 John and identified the author as “John the disciple of the Lord” (*Against Heresies* 1.16.3).
- Jerome [331-420] fully accepted Johannine authorship.

- While modern scholarship remains in disagreement, we may observe from our brief review that both internal and external evidence exists to support the authorship of all three texts as John:
- Many of the early church fathers supported Johannine authorship for all three, even the Gospel as well
- Regarding the use of ***The Elder*** in 2,3 John, Papias referred to all the apostles as elders (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39).

- The dating would have to be in John's lifetime
- Early church fathers:
  - Polycarp (ca. 110) – quoted 1 John 4:2-3
  - Papias (ca. 140) – alluded to 1 John
  - Clement, Origen

WHEN WERE  
THESE  
LETTERS  
WRITTEN?

A.D. 85-95 IS BEST

➤ To believers he knew well: ***My little children; Beloved*** (2:7; 4:1,7,11); ***little*** children (1:18,28); ***Children*** (2:18); ***the chosen (elect) lady and her children*** (2 John); ***beloved Gaius*** (3 John)

TO WHOM  
WERE THESE  
LETTERS  
WRITTEN?

- ***The chosen (elect) lady and her children*** to whom the second epistle is addressed, could certainly describe a church.
- Even though addressed to ***beloved Gaius***, it was probably intended to be read to the church of which Caius was a member or perhaps pastor.
- It may be that these letters were to the same churches named in Revelation 1:11 and chapters 2 and 3.

- To make his joy complete (1:4)
- To warn his readers not to fall into sin (2:1)
- To assure the faithful among his readers that they possessed eternal life (5:13).

WHY WERE  
THESE LETTERS  
WRITTEN?

1 JOHN

- To warn against showing hospitality to those traveling missionaries bearing the heresy of repudiating the doctrine of Christ (9-10)

WHY WERE  
THESE LETTERS  
WRITTEN?

2 JOHN

- To encourage hospitality to traveling missionaries (5-6).
- He emphasized this purpose by chastising Diotrephes (renounced John's teachings) and commended Demetrius.

WHY WERE  
THESE LETTERS  
WRITTEN?

3 JOHN

1. John wrote to warn against false teachers
2. John wrote to share his joy of his marvelous experience of personally knowing Christ.
3. John wrote to set forth some important tests of discipleship.
4. John wrote to express his interpretation of the love he experienced in Christ.

WHAT ISSUES  
WERE  
ADDRESSED IN  
THESE LETTERS?

## Warn Against False Teachers

- Their heretical ideas threatened to disrupt the fellowship. In the beginning of 1 John, he declares that the foundation of the fellowship is the true understanding of the incarnation:
  - . . . *the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us . . . so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:2-3).*

- John lived up to his title, Boanerges, when he described these false teachers:
- **liar and the antichrist** (2:22)
- **false prophets** who are possessed **of the spirit of antichrist**; those possessing such a spirit don't confess **that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** (4:1-3)
- They were **antichrists** who **went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us** (2:18-19)

○ ***Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son (2:22).***

➤ Who were these false teachers?

○ Denied the humanity of Jesus, refused to believe that the Christ had come in the flesh.

○ Also, there were those who denied his deity—they declared that the man Jesus was not Christ the Son.

○ Forerunners or continuance of Gnosticism.

- What did these Gnostics/pre-Gnostics teach?
  - Based on the premise that matter is evil.
  - Their deadliest perversion of Christian doctrine was with respect to the person of Christ:
    - a) since matter was evil it was impossible that God, who was pure spirit and wholly good, could in any way be involved in matter
    - b) one group argued that Jesus was not a man but only appeared to be (Doceticism)
    - c) another group argued that Jesus couldn't suffer

- Also, they were divided on morals:
  - One group taught that the way to overcome the evils of the flesh was by strict asceticism.
  - The other held that the soul (or spirit) and body were separate, once the soul was saved it was above contamination by the body and sin (antinomianism).
- ✓ Balaamites and Nicolaitans at Pergamum (Rev. 2:14f.)

- ✓ followers of Jezebel in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20-25)
- ✓ These were the people who had **learned what some call the deep things of Satan** (Rev. 2:24).
- Because of this knowledge, they thought could enjoy the lusts and pleasures of the body without committing sin or involving the soul.
- Perhaps this is the basis for John's attack on those saying **we have no sin** (1 Jo. 1:8)

➤ We also see the same idea in 2 John when they are warned not to receive as guests any traveling evangelists who **will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh** or refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ (7,9,10).

## To Share His Joy of His Marvelous Experience of Personally Knowing Christ

- John was an older man at this time. He and the others had heard, seen, and touched Jesus! In the years remaining, all he wanted to do was to share the experience he had had with Jesus.
- It was more than just warning them about false teachers. He wanted them to experience that true joy!

***And we are writing this that our joy may be complete!*** (1 Jo. 1:4; 2 Jo. 12)

## Tests of Discipleship

- This criteria helped his readers to be assured of their salvation and eternal life.
- 1. walking in the light (1:7; 2:3-6)
- 2. love the brethren (2:9-11; 3:10-16; 4:7,20; 5:1-2)
- 3. having faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (2:23; 4:15; 5:1,5,10,12,13)
- 4. living a life of victory over sin (3:4-10; 5:18)
- 5. recognizing the presence of God's Spirit in the life ( 3:24; 4: 13).

## The Love He Experienced in Christ

- The Greek noun for love (**ἀγάπη**) occurs 18 times in 1 John (more than any other book of the New Testament), two times in 2 John, and once in 3 John.
- The unique phrase **God is love** (1 Jo. 4:8) identifies God as the source of perfect love in that He sent His Son for the atonement of our sins.