

# Letters of John

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# Author of the Letters

- Traditionally John the Apostle
- Some moderns claim it was “John the Elder”
  - They claim evidence from the titles of 2 and 3 John
  - And from a statement of the early church father Papias, preserved in Eusebius’ *Church History*, 3.39.3-4

# John the Elder?

And I shall not hesitate to append to the interpretations all that I have learnt well from the presbyters and remember well, for of their truth I am confident. For unlike most I did not rejoice in them who say much, but in them who teach the truth, nor in them who recount the commandments of others, but in them who repeated those given to the faith by the Lord...; but if ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice.

# John the Elder?

- Eusebius concludes from this that Papias refers to 2 people named John:
  - John the Apostle
  - John the Elder
- Eusebius suggests that the Apostle wrote the Gospel and Letters, and the Elder wrote Revelation.

# John the Elder?

- This is the best evidence Eusebius has.
- Modern liberals usually reverse his assignment:
  - Revelation by the Apostle
  - Gospel & Letters by the Elder

# John the Elder?

- Eusebius' reading is possible, but hardly necessary.
- Notice Papias consistently calls the Apostles “presbyters” and “the Lord’s disciples.”
- He switches verb tense between lists:
  - Perfect for long list
  - Imperfect for short list

# John the Elder?

- Looks like Papias is citing two sources rather than two persons:
  - What people remember those on the first list as having said;
  - What they reported those on the second list as currently saying.

# John the Apostle

- Personal testimony makes it hard to get around the Apostle as author of the Gospel, particularly his position at the Last Supper.
- Connection of Letters and Gospel:
  - Style of all very similar.
  - 1 John has strong thematic connections to Gospel.
- Conclusion: the Apostle is author of all.





First John

# Genre of 1 John

- Does not follow letter format
  - Sender, recipient, greeting, closing
- Looks more like a ...
  - Tract, discourse
  - Sermon

# False Teachers in 1 John

- They have left the church(es) John is writing to (1 Jn 2:18-19).
- They are trying to lead others out (2:26).
- They claim superior knowledge (2:20,27).
- They show little love (4:20).
- Perhaps they are forerunners of later Gnosticism.

# They have left the churches

1John 2:18-19 (NIV) Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

# Trying to lead others out

1John 2:26 (NIV) I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

# Claim superior knowledge

1John 2:20 (NIV) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

1John 2:27 (NIV) As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

# Show little love

1John 4:20 (NIV) If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

# False Teachers in 1 John

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# Their Teachings

- Christology: They deny...
  - Messiahship of Jesus (2:22)
  - His pre-existence (1:1)
  - His sonship (4:15; 5:5, 10)
  - His incarnation (4:2; cp 2 John 7)
  - His saving work (4:9-10, 14)

# Deny his Messiahship

1John 2:22 (NIV) Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son.

# Deny his Pre-existence?

1John 1:1 (NIV) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched— this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

# Deny he is Son of God

1John 4:15 (NIV) If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

1John 5:5 (NIV) Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1John 5:10 (NIV) Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

# Deny he comes in flesh

1John 4:2 (NIV) This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

Compare 2John 1:7 (NIV) Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

# Deny he saves?

1John 4:9-10 (NIV) This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1John 4:14 (NIV) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

# Their Teachings

- Soteriology:
  - Teachers claim to be sinless (1:8, 10).
  - They are morally indifferent (2:4, 15; 3:4, 7-8).
  - Gnostic duality between spirit (good) and matter/body (bad)?

# Teachers claim to be sinless

1John 1:8-10 (NIV) If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.



# Moral indifference

1John 2:4 (NIV) The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1John 2:15 (NIV) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1John 3:7-8 (NIV) Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

# Content of 1 John

- Purpose (1:1-4)
- God is Light (1:5-2:6)
- New Commandment: Love (2:7-17)
- False Teachers (2:18-27)
- Abide in Christ (2:28-3:3)
- Character & Christianity (3:4-10)
- Love & Hatred (3:11-18)
- Our Confidence (3:19-24)

# Content of 1 John

- Test of the Spirit (4:1-6)
- God is Love (4:7-12)
- Grounds for Assurance of Salvation (4:13-5:4)
- True Christian Faith (5:5-12)
- John's Purpose in Writing (5:13-21)



Second John

# Genre of 2 John

- Format is standard for a letter:
  - Sender – the Elder
  - Recipients – the chosen lady & her children
  - Greeting – Grace, mercy & peace
  - Body
  - Closing – children of your sister send greetings
- Length is about right for one sheet of papyrus.

# Recipients of 2 John

“Elect lady & her children”

- Specific woman?
  - Unnamed?
  - Named “Kyria”?
  - Named “Eklekte”?
- Symbolic for church & members?
  - See 1 Peter 5:13
  - Cities often pictured as women.
- Protection if letter intercepted?

# Occasion of 2 John

- Similar to 1 John (cp 2 Jn 7 & 1 Jn 4:3)
  - 2John 1:7 (NIV) Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.
- False teachers
- Traveling from church to church
- Denying real incarnation of Son of God

# Content of 2 John

- John warns against such teaching.
- Those who go on to such “higher” teaching actually leave Christ and God behind!
- Don’t extend hospitality to false teachers.
- Follow the truth you already have.
- John hopes to see them soon.





Third John

# Genre of 3 John

- Like 2 John, standard letter format
  - Sender – the Elder
  - Recipient – Gaius
  - Body
  - Closing – Peace, greetings
- Here, a private letter

# Recipient of 3 John

- Gaius, a leading member in some church
- Perhaps he is an elder or pastor.
- Don't know whether he is in the same congregation as Diotrephes (below) or not.

# Occasion of 3 John

- Diotrephes is seeking leadership in some congregation.
- He is aspiring to be the local “bishop” and resents any outside interference.
- Perhaps this illustrates one of the tensions raised by the development of a settled local leadership alongside itinerant workers.

# Content of 3 John

- Gaius is commended for (1-8):
  - Holding to the truth
  - Practical love to traveling workers
- Diotrephes is condemned for (9-11):
  - Seeking leadership
  - Resisting John's authority
  - Withholding a previous letter?
  - Refusing to welcome traveling workers
  - Excommunicating those who do

# Content of 3 John

- Gaius commended (1-8)
- Diotrophes condemned (9-11)
- Demetrius commended (12):
  - Not told who he is
  - Most likely he is:
    - Bearer of the letter
    - Traveling Christian worker
- Closing (13-14)

# That's All Folks!

May, we too, care about truth and about lifestyle, as John did.