

First John Introduction

Author: Apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James

- Church history never suggested anyone other than John wrote 1 John.
- Overwhelming evidence credits John with writing 2 and 3 John, though at some point an unknown elder also named John was suggested.
- Claims to be an eyewitness of Christ in 1 John 1:1-3
- The author separates himself from the readers by using “I” and “you” language which shows apostolic authority, but at other times speaks of himself as a man on the same level as his readers using “we” to refer to their similar humanity.
- In 2 and 3 John the author is the “elder” which can easily be consider an apostolic reference.
- The similarities between the Gospel of John and First John are numerous including theology and vocabulary.
- The word *parakletos* is found in Scripture 5x, but are all only in John’s letters.
- The word *monogenes* which is used to identify the Son’s unique relationship with the Father is also only found in John’s letters: John 1:14, 18; John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9
- Others:
 - “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” in 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2
 - “deceiver” and “antichrist” in 2 John 7 and 1 John 2:22
 - “those who love and do good are “from God” in 3 John 11 and 1 John 3:10; 4:4, 7
- In early church history John was assumed to be the author, even by those who knew John and knew John’s disciples
 - Didache (90-120 AD) mentions 1 John 2:17 in Didache 10:5
 - Clement of Rome (96 AD) mentions 1 John 2:5 and 4:12, 17, 18 in 1 Clement 49:5 and 50:3
 - Epistle of Barnabas (130 AD) mentions 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7 in 5:9-11 and 12:10
 - Polycarp (135 AD) mentions 1 John 2:22; 4:2-3 and 2 John 7 in his letter to the Philippians 7:1
 - Papias (born 60 AD and wrote 130 AD) knew John and makes reference to one of John’s letters and credits John the apostle as the author.
 - Irenaeus (wrote 180 AD) refers to both 1 and 2 John and credits John the apostle as the author.
 - Clement of Alexandria (180 AD) indicates that he knew of one letter of John’s and recognized John the apostle as the author.
- Papias does recognize the author of 2 and 3 John to be the “elder” (most likely indicating the apostle John. But Eusebius writing during the days of Constantine and desiring to reject the Millennial reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation used Papias’ reference to “elder” to discredit 2 and 3 John and Revelation.

Date and Location

- Not clear, but logically inferred to be around 85 AD (85-100 AD) from Ephesus to Asian churches (for example the seven churches of Revelation)
- This is based on the content of the letter, the issues addressed in the letters and early church history records.
- Church history provides strong evidence that John finished his years in Ephesus overseeing the churches of Asia.
- Irenaeus wrote (180 AD), “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” AND John was at Ephesus “remaining among them permanently until the time of Trajan.” (Trajan reigned the Roman Empire from 98-117 AD.)

- Most scholars believe the Gospel of John was written first, but at a very close time to the three letters.

Reason for Writing Letters

- First John is sent to a group of churches (likely a circular letter like Revelation) that had been infiltrated with false teaching by people who were trying to adjust the Christian Truth to match their culture and philosophy. (2:18-28 and 4:1-6 and 5:6-7)
- People (leaders, elders, pastors, speakers?) involved in the church(es) (Christians? Believers?) had accepted heretical doctrine concerning the person and work of Jesus (Christology and Soteriology). These “leaders” had left the church and started their own “church” or “organization”. (2:19)
- The leaving of these “leaders” upset the apostolic church in several ways:
 - Members of the church left to follow leaving behind people who wondered if maybe they should also follow to the new meeting place with the improved doctrine.
 - Those that left actually organized, trained and sent out teachers/preachers/evangelist/philosophers to promote their teaching among the believers and the Pagans. The goal was to convert not only individuals, but entire churches that John was overseeing. (2:26; 4:1-3; 2 John 7)
- John responded by writing First John (and likely sending it to several of the churches) to contest, refute and diffuse the false teachers influence on the true church.
 - Doctrinally the false teachers had attacked the person and work of Jesus.
 - John is extremely (but accurately) critical of teachers who did not confess
 - the man Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Messiah) (2:22)
 - the man Jesus, the Christ, had come in fullness of the flesh of man (4:2-3)
 - The false teachers were influenced by Greek philosophy and attempted to compromise the Christian truth. This is early Gnosticism in some form which accepted the Christian concepts with several adjustments which included Jesus was a spirit or a man whom the spirit of the Christ had come and left at his baptism and crucifixion.
 - This error would have drastically changed the work of atonement on the cross (2:2 and 4:10)
 - Morally
 - False teachers erred concerning the seriousness of sin (1:6-10)
 - Fellowship with God, they taught, could be maintained even while practicing sin (1:6). John contradicts this teaching with 2:3-6 and 5:3
 - Relationship
 - The false teachers did not have brotherly love (2:9-11). John insisted that love for other believers is a manifestation of genuine faith (3:14 and 4:7-21)
- John writes to reassure believers that they have the Truth. He provides them several tests for their assurance. There was confusion and doubt in the churches, but John writes to provide them a means of testing themselves and confirming their true faith. (5:13). The tests include:
 - 1 John 1:5-2:2
 - 1 John 2:3-11
 - 1 John 3:7-10, 14-15
 - 1 John 4:4-6, 7-8, 13-15
 - 1 John 5:13, 18-20