

New Testament Foundations: Session Twenty-Two

John's Epistles: The Last Letters to the Church

I JOHN

Authorship

1. John wrote this letter sometime between 85-95 AD.
2. It was written to a church (or churches) infiltrated by false teachers.

I John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Purpose

1. John states five reasons for writing the letter.
 - For fellowship. *We report to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. (1:3)*
 - For joy. *And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1:4)*
 - For holiness. *My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. (2:1)*
 - For truth. *These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (2:26)*
 - For assurance. *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (5:13)*
2. The three primary themes are:
 - Love (3:11, 14, 16, 17, 18; 4:7, 10; 5:2).
 - Truth (1:6; 2:4, 21; 4:6).
 - Obedience (2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3).
3. He gives eight tests for knowing the truth (using the verb *ginoôskoô* [to know] each time.

I John 2:3

And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

I John 2:5, 6

By this we may be sure that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.

I John 3:18, 19

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth.

I John 3:24

Whoever keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in them. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

I John 4:2

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

I John 4:6

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

I John 4:13

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

I John 5:2

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

II JOHN

1. This letter was written around the same time as I John: 85-95 AD. It was addressed to “the chosen lady and her children.”
2. This letter was warning against the insidious influence of false teaching.

II John 1:7-11

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

III JOHN

1. This letter was written around the same time as I John: 85-95 AD. It was addressed to Gaius who was probably a convert of John's and someone he loved very much. Four times John refers to him as “beloved.”

III John 1:3, 4

For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to truth that is in you, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

2. The events associated with III John can be pieced together from the textual evidence.
 - John sent a group of ministers to the church where Gaius was, but the domineering leader Diotrephes did not receive them.

III John 1:9, 10

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.

- Gaius showed hospitality to them in spite of the excommunication threats of Diotrephes. When the

ministers returned to Ephesus, they reported Gaius' hospitality to John.

III John 1:5-8

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.

- A second group, led by Demetrius, the bearer of the letter, was then sent from John with a request to Gaius for hospitality.

III John 1:12

Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and you know that our witness is true.

- John planned an upcoming visit to deal with the factious Diotrephes.

III John 1:10

For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words...

3. This letter presents a brief glimpse into the intricate relationships between apostolic leaders and local church leaders.