

2 John 1:1

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Introduction to 2 John & 2 John 1:1

Introduction

- This letter is written about the same time as 1 John, sometime in the late first century. The early church fathers, (Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, and Eusebius who wrote the first history of the church in the early 300's in particular) all agree that John is author and that he wrote from Ephesus. The problem is that he does not identify himself outright as Paul does, only as “the elder”. Further complicating the matter is that there was another fellow known as John the Elder who lived in the vicinity of Ephesus about the same time. So you may run across some modern scholars who will say that though the letter was written in the last of the first century in Ephesus, that either the letter was written by the other John or that we simply don't know. But Irenaeus in his treatise “Against Heresies” quotes 2 John and its author “John the disciple of the Lord” and no one, not even his opponents questioned him. So if a leading bishop writing in 180 AD, who was a student of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who himself had been a disciple of John, says that John the disciple of Jesus wrote 2 John, that's good enough for me.
- The first problem John is writing to address here is similar to the problem in 1 John: itinerate preachers were coming into the church and causing trouble because they were not preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and people were being led astray. Many of the same admonitions concerning Truth found in 1 John are to be found here as well.
- The second problem is not overtly addressed, but is there between the lines. Why would John not simply give a standard opening to his letter as Paul does, where he identifies himself outright. The surviving Apostles were never questioned and had all authority. Identifying himself would have only added punch to the letter. The only answer can be that the church was enduring persecution, likely the same persecution that ultimately put John on the prison island of Patmos. This is why the opening address had to be in code, otherwise the Roman authorities could use the letter to go after John and the whole church as well.

- One thing does need to be said about the brevity of the letter. As with virtually all first century letters, this one was surely written on a piece of parchment. While there was no standard size or uniformity of first century parchment, generally they were all close to being 8 x 10 inches. Therefore if you were to write out the letter in John's typical manner of Greek the letter would take up exactly one page.

Vs. 1

- "The elder" may be an ecclesiastical title as elders were officers in the church (1 Timothy 5:17; Acts 20:17). But the Greek word here, **presbuteros**, is older than the church and originally meant ancient or aged. When used to refer to a person it carried with a sense of honor. This seems to be more the meaning here. Just as John referred to the people of his churches as "little children" in 1 John (4:4, etc.), here too it seems he is speaking as the Father who is head of the family. Thus he is able to claim authority over a church where he is not actually a resident member.
- "to the chosen lady": It has been suggested that the two Greek words for "chosen lady" could possibly be proper names, so that this letter, like the third could be written to a specific person. The problem here is that where the Greek in vs. 1 is singular, throughout the letter the terms are used in the plural. Just as "church" in English is singular, when referring to the people of the church it is plural. Given that a person cannot be plural, then the chosen lady cannot be a person. The greeting here is very similar to what we see in 1 Peter 5:13, "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you..." Also written in code (Babylon substituted for Rome), the passage literally reads, "The Chosen One at Babylon" and it is written in the feminine. Remember that the church is the Bride of Christ, so the church is always *SHE*.
- The Greek word for "lady" here is **kuria** and it means more like a noble lady, the mistress of the household. Further, it carries with it a sense of affection, as you would write to a lady who is a member of your family. Vs. 13 concludes the letter by saying "The children of your chosen sister greet you", so the wording is chosen to represent a letter between two loving sisters.

- The letter is not written only to “the lady” but also to “her children, whom I love in truth”. Throughout the letter Love and Truth are inseparable, the same as we saw in 1 John. Remember, the love John is speaking of here is the **agape** love of Christ. This is not an emotion that ebbs and flows. This love is The Way. It is a lifestyle, a steady means of day to day living. Paul likens it to the lifestyle of an athlete who is in constant training (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The Truth of Christ gives us the reason why we love, why we live a disciplined lifestyle of love. 1 John 4:11 tells us, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another”. The Truth of Christ tells us that we are to live and love like Him, that we are to thus be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. We cannot accept God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness without offering that same love, mercy, and forgiveness to others.

- Verse 1 concludes that the greeting comes not simply from The Elder, “but also all who know the Truth”. We are all in this together. The Church of Jesus Christ is not limited to national borders, nor a single race, ethnicity, or language. There may now be more professing Christians in mainland China than any other country in the world. I recently had a ZOOM meeting with a pastor in Kenya. His church has satellite congregations all over the country and in about 6 other countries as well, including Romania and Washington DC! Altogether they have about 45,000 members. Pastor Cho in South Korea recently passed away, but at the time of his death his congregation was recognized as the largest in the world with over 800,000 members. Both of these congregations are sending missionaries to the US! John said, “For God so loved the world” and it is the followers of Jesus all over the world who greet “The Chosen Lady”.