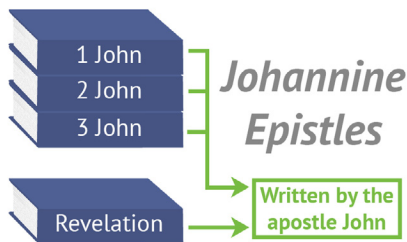




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### Introduction



## Introduction

In this lesson we will survey 1, 2, and 3 John and the book of Revelation.

### I. 1 John

Although the author of the three Johannine epistles doesn't identify himself, the available evidence points to John the apostle, the son of Zebedee. The first-century fathers identified him as the author, and the writing style of all three epistles is similar to that in John's gospel. These observations and others point to John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23), as the author of these three epistles.

John wrote his first epistle in the late 80s or early 90s. The contents of the letter (especially statements in 1 John 2:12–14; 3:1; and 5:13) are clearly written to believers. But since no individuals or places are named, it may be a circular letter sent to Christians in various locations. John wrote the letter with two purposes in mind. First, to help his readers know they have eternal life, and second, to confront the gnostic teachers who were confusing the believers and to expose their false teaching and immoral lifestyle.

John had to combat what the false teachers were promoting in order to help his readers know with confidence that they were Christians. These false teachers were undermining the believers' confidence in their relationship with God; and John provided a series of checks to help them resolve their doubts. These checks gave his readers a way to confidently assert that they were genuine Christians. In 1:6 John wrote, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie" (ESV). Then in 2:4, "Whoever says, 'I know him,' and does not do what he commands, is a liar" (NIV). In 2:6 he wrote, "Whoever claims to live in him must live

### I. 1 John

WHO   WHERE	
WRITER	John
AUDIENCE	Probably a circular letter written to believers in various locations
TIME PERIOD	Sometime in the late AD 80s or early 90s

I. 1 John

How to Know You're a Genuine Christian



as Jesus did.” And in 2:9, “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother or sister is still in darkness” (NIV). In 4:20 he wrote, “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar” (ESV). John’s point was that the evidence Christians need to assure them that they are genuinely Christian is the quality of their life.

John used some strong language here. But consider the fact that he had a very intimate relationship with Jesus. He is called the beloved disciple and was a member of Jesus’s inner circle. As we read John’s gospel and his epistles, we almost hear him saying, “You know, I really love Jesus. I am completely devoted to the mission He gave us. And when I see someone claiming to be His follower and then living contrary to His teaching, I don’t like it. It disturbs me deeply.” His clearly stated and repeated point was that if you’re claiming to walk with Christ, walk with Him. If you’re not going to walk with Christ, have enough integrity to admit it. To John this was life-and-death stuff, and he didn’t pull any punches.

I. 1 John

How to Know You're a Genuine Christian



First John’s big idea is that only Christians who live in fellowship will live with conviction. John’s point was that the only way to know Christianity works is to live it. Paul made a similar statement in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is . . .” John taught that if people want to be convinced they are in Christ, they have to live the way Christ taught them to live. Only believers who live in fellowship with Jesus and do what He teaches will be believers who are convinced that Christianity is the real deal. Only they can say with conviction, “Yes, I confidently know I’m a genuine follower of God’s Son.”

A couple of passages from 1 John give us a flavor of how John approached his message. His opening statement is “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” (1:1 NIV). In 1:3–4, he restated the same facts and explained why they matter: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete” (NIV). John wanted his readers to know that the content of his letter was real and they could believe it with confidence. He saw Jesus. He heard Jesus.

**1 John 1:3-4**  
*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.*

## I. 1 John

WHAT   WHY	
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>KEY STATEMENT or VERSE</b>
To help his readers know that they have eternal life To confront the gnostic teachers and expose both their false teaching and their immoral lifestyle	<b>1 John 5:13</b> <i>These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.</i>
<b>BIG IDEA or THEME</b>	
Only Christians who live in fellowship live with conviction.	

John stated his purpose for writing in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (NIV). John’s message in 1 John is that you can only know you have the eternal life God gives by living that life. If you’re not living it, you probably don’t have it. It’s this balance of knowing what you believe and living what you believe that gives you the conviction that it is real.

First John is difficult to outline. He repeats his themes as he builds his case for his two major points: First, that you may have fellowship with us; and second, that you may know that you have eternal life. First John adds to our understanding of the doctrinal doubts and struggles confronting the early Christians. But John also teaches us how important it was then—and is now—to affirm the gospel’s reality by living it. He emphasized over and over again in this short epistle how essential it is to live an active Christian life.

## II. 2 John

WHO   WHERE	
<b>WRITER</b>	John
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	“The lady chosen by God and to her children whom I love in the truth”

## II. 2 John

Second John is attributed to John the apostle because of the similarities of its style to 1 and 3 John and with John’s gospel. He introduced himself as “the elder” and addressed the recipients as, “the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth” (1:1 NIV). The consensus among New Testament scholars is that the “chosen lady” was a house church in Asia Minor and “her children” were the church’s members. John’s purpose was to instruct the church in how to discern which teachers to support. There were both true and false teachers who traveled from church to church, and there was some question about which ones they should welcome and which ones to guard against. In verses 9–10 John made his advice clear: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them” (NIV).

## II. 2 John

WHO   WHERE	
<b>WRITER</b>	John
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	“The lady chosen by God and to her children whom I love in the truth”
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	A house church in Asia Minor and its members

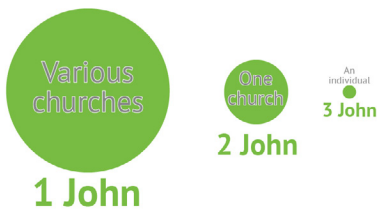
But this warning to not accept false teachers is balanced in verses 5–6, “And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love” (NIV). The tension John deals with in 2

## II. 2 John

HOW	
ORGANIZATION	
1. Verses 1-4 Walk in the truth.	
2. Verses 5-6 Walk in love.	
2. Verses 7-13 John gives instructions for dealing with false teachers.	
CONTRIBUTION	APPLICATION
2 John illustrates how truth and love balance each other.	2 John reminds us that we must be committed to both truth and love when we deal with false teaching in the church.

## III. 3 John

## John's Narrowing Focus



## III. 3 John

WHAT   WHY
KEY STATEMENTS or VERSES
3 John 1:11 <i>Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.</i>

John is how to balance truth and love. We must not compromise God's truth, but as we confront error, we must do so in a way that exhibits God's love.

John's big idea in 2 John is that truth and love are complementary truths of the Christian faith. The book has a simple outline. John introduced his theme of walking in the truth in verses 1–4. Then he reminded his readers of God's command to walk in love in verses 5–6. Only then did he address the problem of dealing with false teachers in verses 7–13. Second John's contribution to the New Testament is that it illustrates how truth and love balance each other. We use it today to remind us that we must be committed to both truth and love when we deal with false teaching in the church.

## III. 3 John

Third John continues John's theme of addressing the problem of false teachers but does so in a loving manner. We see a narrowing of focus in John's three letters. First John was a circular letter to a number of churches to combat false teaching. Second John was written to a church congregation helping them know how to deal with false teachers who wanted the church's support for their ministry. Third John is written to an individual, "My beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth" (3 John 1:1). John was commending this faithful servant of God because he supported those who teach the truth. Then in verses 9–10 he confronted a man named Diotrophes who was opposing God's messengers who were teaching the truth. John promised to deal with this difficult man when he visited the church where he was causing trouble. So John didn't just write about the importance of confronting false teachers, he promised that he would do so himself.

In verse 11 John repeated an emphasis he made in both 1 and 2 John, "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God" (NIV). John then commended Demetrius, one of God's faithful teachers. In closing the letter, John expressed his hope that he could come soon and speak with his friend Gaius face to face. The big idea of 3 John is that we must support those who are faithful in ministry and confront those who are not. John's outline follows that theme. In verses 1–8 John commended Gaius, and in 9–10 he condemned Diotrophes. He closed the letter in verses 11–14 with personal greetings and

comments.

Both 2 and 3 John teach us that God’s truth is worth fighting for. But as we do so, we must be guided by its teaching on love.

#### IV. Revelation

Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. Unlike his three letters and his gospel where he didn’t introduce himself, John identified himself four times as the writer in the book of Revelation. John had been exiled on Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea during the Domitian persecution of the church. He received a vision from God, which he described in 1:9–20, and he was told to write what he saw. The book was addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor and was a cyclical or circular letter. After it was read in one church, it was passed along to the next one.

The Christians were being persecuted during this time and John addressed their suffering a number of times in the book. He made references to imprisonment and tribulation in 2:10, to the hour of testing in 3:10, to martyrdom in 2:13 and 6:9, and to his own exile in 1:9. Rome was beginning to enforce emperor worship, and the Christians’ refusal to worship anyone other than God required open confession of their faith. This “Revelation of Jesus Christ” was written as a reminder that although it may appear to a suffering Christian that God has lost control of His universe, He is still on the throne, He still controls events, and He will, in His time, overtly establish His kingdom and reign over it as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The book’s purpose is to reveal God’s sovereignty as a basis of encouragement and strength for the persecuted church. Most scholars date the book around AD 95.

The book’s outline is given in 1:19 where the angel tells John to “write . . . what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.” In chapter 1, John describes the vision he received from God and later recorded in this book of Revelation. The seven letters to the seven churches recorded in chapters 2 and 3 describe “what is now” and give us glimpses of the church’s condition during the latter years of the first century. The rest of the book, chapters 4–22, is a record of what is yet to come.

Revelation is written as prophecy and describes future events. The extensive use of apocalyptic literature makes it difficult to

#### IV. Revelation

WHO   WHERE
WRITER John
AUDIENCE The seven churches of Asia Minor
TIME PERIOD Around AD 95

#### IV. Revelation



IV. Revelation

Revelation describes future events.



*We must use caution if we attempt to interpret the events recorded in Revelation in light of current realities.*

IV. Revelation

<b>Preterist</b>	Events in chapters 4–22 (except Christ’s return) occurred during the Domitian persecution (ca. 81–96).
<b>Futurist</b>	All events after chapters 1–3 are yet to occur.
<b>Historicist</b>	Events in Revelation identify various phases of church history.
<b>Idealist</b>	Events in Revelation describe the timeless struggle between good and evil and should not be related to specific events.

Revelation 1:3

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

identify exactly what some sections of the book refer to. But most of what is bizarre and opaque to the modern reader was, to its original reader, more obvious. Their association with the Old Testament and with the events going on around them in their Greco-Roman world gave them insight into much of what is mysterious to us. We must use caution if we attempt to interpret the events recorded in Revelation in light of current realities. Our first concern is with what John was communicating to his original readers. Because the large amount of imagery in the book often makes it difficult to identify what John is describing, there are various theological approaches to interpreting the book.

The *Preterist* view teaches that while the events in chapters 4–22 were future to the original reader, most of them, with the exception of Christ’s triumph recorded in chapters 19–22, occurred during the Domitian persecution in the first century. The *Futurist* view teaches that all the events after chapters 1–3 are yet future. The *Historicist* view believes the events of Revelation identify various phases of church history. And the *Idealist* view believes that the events describe the timeless struggle between good and evil and should not be related to any specific events. Combining the Preterist and Futurist views is recommended because it focuses on what the original reader would have understood the contents to mean in the time it was written. On that basis, we can more confidently interpret how the contents describe the future.

The book of Revelation is difficult to understand and is often avoided because it is hard to read. But the book opens and closes with a promise to those who read it. Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (NASB). And the book closes with an affirmation of its truth and another promise to those who read and obey it: “The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place Look, I am coming soon!” ” Then he added this promise, “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll” (Revelation 22:6–7 NIV).

But to “keep” the words of this book, we have to *know* the words of this book. Difficult or not, the book of Revelation is not optional reading. The image of our exalted God in chapter 4 is an enormous

source of strength and perspective for Christians when we become discouraged by the evils the book of Revelation says characterize our world. The story of the Lamb who was slain and is worthy to open the book in chapter 5 refreshes our admiration and praise for what Jesus has done for us. The seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3 provide warning, instruction, and encouragement to the church of any age. And Jesus's victorious return, recorded in chapters 19–22, lifts the believer's heart to a new plain of worship. We will never completely understand all the places and events and creatures in Revelation. But to let our inability to grasp these difficult sections keep us from reading all that this book offers us is a tragic error. Read it. See our Lord and God in it! And exclaim with John, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes! I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20).