

Background Information on 1, 2, and 3 John

Who: “The elder” as he refers to himself in 2 John and 3 John. There is controversy over whether the author was John, the apostle and one of the twelve disciples, or if he was John, a disciple of the apostle John.

What: 1 John – a sermon or tract

2 John – a personal letter written to a specific church community, called “the chosen lady”

3 John – a personal letter written to Gaius, a leader in a church

When: In the later half of the first century.

Where: Written to communities in Asia Minor.

Why: 1 John – It addressed the specific problem in this church community where people were believing in false teaching, namely that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah, he wasn’t the Son of God, and didn’t come in the flesh (vs. 2:22; 4:2; 5:1-5)

2 John – Written to a church warning them against deceivers who say that Jesus did not come in the flesh, and encouraging them to abide in the teaching of Christ (vv. 1:7-9)

3 John – Written to Gaius to intercede on the writer’s behalf with Diotrephes, a leader in the church who was “spreading malicious nonsense about [them]” (vv. 1:9-10).

Information taken from: *The Epistles of John* by I. Howard Marshall; Michigan: The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1978.