

NAME

The epistle is named "Iōannou B" (Ἰωαννου Β) after the traditional author, John the apostle. The letter is called "Second John" to distinguish it from John's two other canonical epistles.

AUTHOR

The author's name is not recorded in the text of the epistle. He is simply identified as "the elder." The word "elder" is "presbyteros" (πρεσβύτερος) which can mean an old man, a senior person deserving respect, or a senior official of a local church (cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:17). A special use of the word in the early church was to designate a church officer who had been a personal follower of one of the apostles. The author of this brief letter must have been so well known to those he was writing to that the title "elder" immediately identified him.

Eusebius ranks the epistle among the Antilegomena (Greek (αντιλεγόμενα), are those Christian writings that were "disputed", or literally those works which some have "spoken against". This group is distinct from the *notha* ("spurious" or "rejected writings") and the *Homologoumena* ("accepted writings" such as the Canonical gospels). The Antilegomena or disputed writings were widely read in the Early Church and included the Epistle of James, the Epistle of Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, the Apocalypse of John, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Didache.) with James, Jude, and 2 Peter (Historia Ecclesiastica 3:25) because of the question as to the author of the work. Irenaeus (c. 170 A.D.) does quote from the epistle and its authenticity is attested by the Muratorian Canon (c. 170 A.D.). Johannine authorship is accepted as well by Athanasius (367 A.D.) and Hippo (419 A.D.). i.e. the earliest church fathers exhibited no doubt that the apostle John wrote it.

Laney:

The self designation of the author as "the elder" has cause some to conclude that the epistle was authored by someone other than John the apostle. The simple title, however, denotes unique preeminence. The title "elder" was especially fitting in the case of John the apostle, for he was advanced in years at the time of writing.

Internal evidence would also point to Johannine authorship. The second epistle bears a close resemblance in language and thought to the first. Compare 2 John 9 with 1 John 2:23, 4:20 and 3:6. The references to truth (1-4), love (5,6), obedience (6), antichrist (7), and abiding (8) are certainly Johannine. All would indicate that 2 John was authored by the apostle John.

DATE

No hint is given in the book itself. The false teaching mentioned in the epistle links it closely with the circumstances of the writing of 1 John. The references to the new commandment (5) and the antichrist (7) depend upon the fuller development of these concepts in 1 John. Quite possibly it was written after 1 John had been sent, around 90 A.D.

THEME

Halley (page 44): "*Caution against false teachers*"

Laney: "*Walking in Truth*"

The purpose of the epistle is to warn the readers of the dangerous error infiltrating their community

by setting forth in clear terms the nature of the false teachers and their doctrine. John also intends for the letter to challenge the readers to brotherly love (5) and self examination (8).

Mitchell: *“Christian love and truth must be balanced”*

A Christian’s life must be characterized by love. However, love must not be perverted into giving encouragement to heretics. Love must always be balanced by truth. True love will never compromise fundamental doctrines. True love will at times be intolerant.

John wrote this epistle to encourage a mother’s heart as to the conduct of her children (1-4), to exhort people to right living (5,6), and to warn against false teachers (7,8). As with 1 John, error was prevalent and so John re-emphasizes the need for Christians to walk in the truth. The “chosen lady” to whom this letter was addressed, apparently sponsored meetings with visiting preachers in her home. The apostle warns her not to sponsor anyone who teaches less than the full deity and humanity of Christ.

Key Word (Nelson’s): Avoid fellowship with false teachers - the basic themes of this brief letter is steadfastness in the practice and purity of the apostolic doctrine that the readers *“have heard from the beginning”* (6).

Key Verses (Nelson’s):

“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching 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 or give him any greeting.” (2 John 9,10)

Outline:

- I. Salutation 1-3
- II. The Walk of the Christian 4-6
 - A. In truth 4
 - B. In love 5,6
- III. The Warning to the Christian 7-11
 - A. Against false teachers 7-9
 - B. Against false charity 10,11
- IV. Conclusion 12,13

RECIPIENTS

John addresses his epistle to the “chosen lady and her children.” It is the only epistle so addressed.

Laney:

It is debated as to whether the enigmatic address has reference to a church or an individual. The use of the second person plural rather than the singular (8,10,12) might suggest that a community of believers is in mind. The personification of the church in a feminine form would be in harmony with the feminine “ekklesia” and the idea of the church as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:29-32). However, such an involved metaphor that is carried through the epistle (cf. 13) seems out of

harmony with the simplicity of the message.

It may be best to understand the addressee to be an individual Christian lady and her family. Perhaps the local body of believers met in her home and would have benefited from the letter. She apparently had a sister whose children were in Ephesus and had contact with John's ministry there.

Historical Setting:

Laney:

In Ephesus John had apparently become acquainted with the children of the chosen lady and was pleased to find them walking in the truth. From them John must have learned of the false teachers who, as in first John, were denying the humanity of Jesus (7). These false teachers were itinerating among the churches and were taking advantage of the hospitality of the Christian people (10,11). John warns of such men and their ideas (7,9) and forbids the believers to extend hospitality to such deceivers.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Mitchell:

Peculiarities

1. The only epistle addressed to a lady in the New Testament.
2. Several words and expressions are identical with 1 John
3. This letter contains classic instruction pertaining to the treatment of heretics (which is often ignored)

RESOURCES

Alexander, David and Alexander, Pat, Editors. *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS - [especially those of Dr. J. Carl Laney]), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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