

Book of 2 John

Title:

The epistle's title is "2 John".

It is the second in a series of 3 epistles that bear the Apostle John's name.

2 and 3 John present the closest approximation in the New Testament to the conventional letter form of the contemporary Greco-Roman world, since they were addressed from an individual to other individuals.

The two epistles are the shortest epistles in the New Testament, each containing less than 300 Greek words.

Each letter could fit on a single papyrus sheet (compare 3 John 13).

Author – Date:

Although the author does not give his name, evidently the same hand that penned 1 John wrote 2 John as well.

This conclusion follows from study of literary style, vocabulary, and basic outlook in each of the two letters.

Ancient tradition also support this conclusion.

The very tone of the letter suggests that the author knew himself to possess acknowledged spiritual authority.

This would also be in keeping with the calling, responsibility, and ministry of John as implied by the fourth gospel and expressed in the pungent admonitions of 1 John.

2 John is traditionally dated near the end of the first century A.D, when John would have been near the end of his life.

Nothing in 2 John gives clear indication of a particular year or even decade of composition.

A reasonable date is about the same time as 1 John was written, or any time in the final third of the first century.

Many conservative authorities would be more specific and opt for dating in the A.D. 90's.

The author describes himself in 2 John 1 as “The Elder”, which conveys the advanced age of the apostle, his authority, and status during the foundational period of Christianity when he was involved with Jesus’ ministry.

The precise date of the epistle cannot be determined.

Since the wording, subject matter, and circumstances of 2 John closely approximate 1 John (verse 5, compare 1 John 2:7; 3:11; verse 6, compare 1 John 5:3; verse 7, compare 1 John 2:18-26; verse 9, compare 1 John 2:23; verse 12, compare 1 John 1:4), most likely John composed the letter at the same time or soon after 1 John, ca. A.D. 90-95, during his ministry at Ephesus in the latter part of his life.

The ancient church historian Eusebius records that the aged apostle John ministered in Asia Minor and died in the city of Ephesus.

For the same reasons that 1 John may be linked with John’s years in Asia Minor and Ephesus, 2 John may also be thought of as having its origin in that locale.

Background – Setting:

2 John deals with the same problem as 1 John (see the introduction to 1 John: Both background and Setting).

False teachers influenced by the beginnings of Gnostic thought were threatening the church (verse 7, compare 1 John 2:18-19, 22-23; 4:1-3).

The strategic difference is that while 1 John has no specific individual or church specified to whom it was addressed, 2 John has a local group or house-church in mind (verse 1).

The focus of 2 John is that the false teachers were conducting an itinerant ministry among John’s congregations, seeking to make converts, and taking advantage of Christian hospitality to advance their cause (verses 10, 11; compare Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

The individual addressed in the greeting (verse 1), inadvertently or unwisely may have shown these false prophets hospitality, or John may have feared that the false teachers would attempt to take advantage of her kindness (verses 10-11).

The apostle seriously warns his readers against showing any hospitality to such deceivers (see verses 10-11).

Although his exhortations may appear on the surface to be harsh or unloving, the acutely dangerous nature of their teaching justified such actions, especially since it threatened to destroy the very foundations of the faith (verse 9).

Historical – Theological Themes:

In the first three verses, John greets the recipients of the letter and then expresses thanks that they are “walking” (1:4), living, and serving in faithfulness to the truth of God as revealed in Scripture and in Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Five times John uses the Greek word *aletheia*, “truth.”

The other key word, “love,” appears some four times.

John addresses the dangers of spiritual deception by warning of deceivers, antichrists, and transgressors who abide not in the true “doctrine” (1:9), of Christ.

Those not biblically and doctrinally correct on the incarnation, the person, and work of Christ are not to be bidden “Godspeed” (1:10).

John intends to visit his readers soon (verse 12).

He takes pleasure in their spiritual progress thus far (verse 4), but feels that special words of admonition are necessary to assure continued progress (verses 5-11).

The overall theme of 2 John closely parallels 1 John’s theme of a “recall to the fundamentals of the faith” or “back to the basics of Christianity” (verses 4-6).

For John, the basics of Christianity are summarized by adherence to the truth (verse 4), love (verse 5), and obedience (verse 6).

The apostle, however, conveys an additional but related theme in 2 John: “the biblical guidelines for hospitality”.

Not only are Christians to adhere to the fundamentals of the faith, but the gracious hospitality that is commanded of them (Rom. 12:13), must be discriminating.

The basis of hospitality must be common love of or interest in the truth, and Christians must share their love within the confines of that truth.

They are not called to universal acceptance of anyone who claims to be a believer.

Love must be discerning.

Hospitality and kindness must be focused on those who then are adhering to the fundamentals of the faith.

Otherwise, Christians may actually aid those who are attempting to destroy those basic truths of the faith.

Sound doctrine must serve as the test of fellowship and the basis of separation between those who profess to be Christians and those who actually are (verses 10-11; compare Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10).