

A Survey of the Letters of John

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Author:

The letters of John are favorites among the General epistles, especially I John. Traditionally these three books are assigned to the apostle John the son of Zebedee. Early church leaders like Eusebius, Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and many others taught that John wrote these books. The style, vocabulary, and concepts are all very similar and can also be compared to the gospel of John

I John doesn't start like a letter or end like a letter, but it is a very personal writing. II and III John are short, one chapter letters that are obviously written to individuals and congregations. The fact that these books are written from the perspective an "elder" is evidence that the churches and individuals who read them knew John very well and genuinely appreciated his pastoral work.

Date:

It is generally accepted that these books were written in the late 80's or early 90's AD. John lived until about 100 AD and died of natural causes, therefore, these books would have been written later in his life. Most scholars believe these letters were actually written from Ephesus.

Theme:

I John is about loving one another. He talks about forgiveness, the need for loving our brethren, and avoiding those who teach false things. There is a great contrast between truth and falsehood.

II John is about avoiding false teachers. They should not be greeted or encouraged. He also encourages the church to remember what he said about "loving one another"

III John is about the contrast between good and evil. There is a comparison between Diotrephes (bad) and Demetrius (good). We need to emulate good and encourage those who practice it.

Audience:

All of the letters are for Ephesian Christians. I John was written to the Christians in the Ephesian church and surrounding area. II John was written to a church near Ephesus. III John was written to Gaius, who was from the church at Ephesus.

Key Verses:

I John 1:3, 1:5-10, 2:1-2, 2:7-11, 2:18-19, 2:22-23, 2:26-29, 3:1-3, 3:7-9, 3:16-18, 3:24, 4:1-3, 4:7-16, 4:20-21, 5:1-5, 5:12-18, 5:20

II John 4-6, 8, 10

III John 2-4, 9-10, 11

Outline:

I John

- I. *The Test of Obedience (1)*
- II. *The Test of Love (2)*
- III. *The Test of Character (3)*
- IV. *The Test of Spirituality (4)*
- V. *The Test of Assurance (5)*

II John

- I. *Introduction (vs.1-3)*
- II. *Practicing the Truth (vs.4-6)*
- III. *Protecting the Truth (vs.7-8)*
- IV. *Professing the Truth (vs.9-11)*
- V. *Benediction (vs.12-13)*

III John

- I. *Introduction (vs.1-2)*
- II. *Commendation of Gaius (vs.3-8)*
- III. *Condemnation of Diotrephes (vs.9-10)*
- IV. *Comparison to Demetrius (vs.11-12)*
- V. *Benediction (vs.13-14)*