

2 JOHN

Truth and Love

AUTHOR

He calls himself the elder. Most of the early church said John the apostle. A few think it was John the Elder, a man Papias names; see What Papias Wrote.

WRITTEN FROM

Probably Ephesus, where early writers say John spent his last years.

DATE WRITTEN

About AD 85 to 95, around the same time as 1 John.

WRITTEN TO

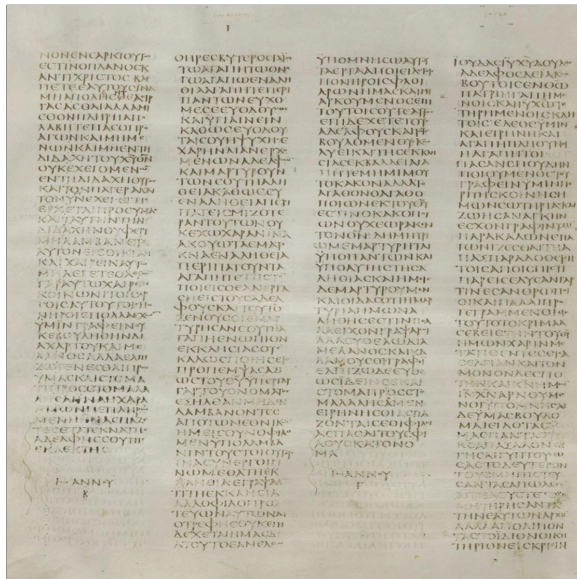
The chosen lady and her children. Most think that means a church and its members. Some think it was a real woman and her family.

WHY HE WROTE

Traveling teachers were spreading a Jesus who did not really come in the flesh. John says keep loving, but do not give them a home base, verses 7 to 11.

KEY VERSE

2 John 1:6. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.



2 JOHN IN CODEX SINAITICUS

Codex Sinaiticus, copied about AD 330 to 360. The first column picks up in verse 7, at the words in the flesh: this is the deceiver and the antichrist, and runs to the end of 2 John. Then come all of 3 John and the start of Jude. An even older piece exists: a small parchment leaf called O232, from about AD 300, with verses 1 to 9. Kept at the British Library, London. Public domain.

Historical Setting

In the first century Christian teachers traveled from town to town, and churches met in homes. A traveling teacher needed a bed, a meal and a room full of people to listen. That was a good system until the wrong teachers showed up. Some had walked out of John's

churches, 1 John 2:19, and were going around saying Jesus the Christ did not really come in a human body. John sends this short note ahead of a visit, like a phone call before he drives over: keep loving each other, but do not hand your living room to a fake Jesus.

What Was Going Wrong

- DECEIVERS.** Many had gone out into the world denying Jesus Christ came in the flesh, verse 7.
- RUNNING AHEAD.** Some claimed to move past the teaching of Christ into something newer, verse 9.
- OPEN DOORS.** House churches could end up hosting and funding false teachers, verses 10 to 11.
- LOSING GROUND.** Believers could lose what they had worked for, verse 8.

The Idiot Proof Summary

2 John is the shortest book in the Bible by verse count, 13 verses, and it fits on one sheet of papyrus. It holds two things together that people usually pull apart: truth and love. Love without truth opens the door to anyone. Truth without love slams the door on everyone. John wants a church that loves one another and also knows who Jesus really is.

2 John at a Glance

- CH 1:1 to 3** **IN THE TRUTH**
The elder greets the chosen lady and her children.
- CH 1:4 to 6** **WALK IN LOVE**
Love one another, and love means obeying His commands.
- CH 1:7 to 11** **WATCH OUT**
Deceivers, the teaching of Christ, do not host false teachers.
- CH 1:12 to 13** **FACE TO FACE**
Not with paper and ink; greetings from your sister.

Where Jesus Shows Up

- 2 JOHN 1:3** Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, the source of grace, mercy and peace.
- 2 JOHN 1:7** Jesus Christ came in the flesh, a real human body.
- 2 JOHN 1:9** Stay in His teaching and you have both the Father and the Son.

What to Watch for in 2 John

- DEMONIC** 1:7
- NOTABLE** 1:6, 1:9-12
- JESUS SPEAKING** Words in red are Jesus speaking, or God the Father speaking from heaven.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

- THE SHORTEST**
13 verses, the fewest of any book. 3 John has more verses but fewer Greek words.
- TRUTH FIVE TIMES**
The word truth shows up five times in the first four verses.
- A LETTER TO A LADY?**
It may be the only New Testament letter written to a woman, unless the lady is a church.

PAPER AND INK

Verse 12 is the only place the New Testament mentions paper. See Paper and Ink.

TWIN LETTER

2 John 7 sounds almost exactly like 1 John 4:2 to 3.

What Happened Next?

Little letters were easy to lose. In the 300s Eusebius still listed 2 and 3 John among the books some churches questioned, but they were widely accepted, and in AD 367 Athanasius listed both in his list of the 27 New Testament books. About AD 180 Irenaeus quoted verses 7 and 8 against the false teachers of his own day; see What Irenaeus Wrote.

DEMONIC NOTABLE

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

The elder writes to a chosen lady and her children. He is thrilled that some of them walk in the truth. His one request is old news: love one another, and love means obeying what He commands. Then a warning: deceivers deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Do not run ahead of the teaching of Christ, and do not open your home to men who spread a fake Jesus. He has more to say, but he would rather say it face to face.

A GREETING FROM THE ELDER // 3 JOHN 1:1-4

¹The elder,

To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I alone, but also all who know the truth—²because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

³Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, will be with us in truth and love.

WALKING IN THE TRUTH // JOHN 8:30-47

⁴I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father has commanded us. ⁵And now I urge you, dear lady—not as a new commandment to you, but one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. ⁶And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the very commandment you have heard from the beginning, that you must walk in love.

BEWARE OF DECEIVERS

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world, refusing to confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be fully rewarded. ⁹Anyone who runs

ahead without remaining in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever remains in His teaching has both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰If anyone comes to you but does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home or even greet him. ¹¹Whoever greets such a person shares in his evil deeds.

CONCLUSION // 3 JOHN 1:13-14

¹²I have many things to write to you, but I would prefer not to do so with paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come and speak with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

¹³The children of your elect sister send you greetings.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

PAPER AND INK

2 JOHN 1:12 · 3 JOHN 1:13 · ROMANS 16:22 · GALATIANS 6:11



Top: reed pen, Roman Egypt, Metropolitan Museum of Art 97.4.100. Bottom: clay inkwell, Roman, 1st to 2nd century AD, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Both public domain, CC0.

WHAT IT IS

Top, a real pen from Roman times: a reed cut to a point and split at the tip, the way a quill or a fountain pen nib works. Bottom, a clay inkwell with little faces around the rim. The hole in the middle kept the ink from spilling.

HOW OLD IT IS

The pen is from Egypt in Roman times, between about 30 BC and AD 364. The

- **2JN 1:1 [NOTE] THE ELDER.** The Greek is presbyteros, an older man and a church leader. Most of the early church said this is John the apostle; some think John the Elder, see What Papias Wrote. **THE CHOSEN LADY.** Most think she is a church and her children its members, see verse 13. Some think a real woman, maybe named Kyria or Electa.
- **2JN 1:6 [NOTABLE]** John defines love by what you do, not how you feel.
- **2JN 1:7 [DEMONIC]** Many deceivers deny Jesus Christ came in the flesh: the deceiver and the antichrist
- **2JN 1:7 [NOTE] IN THE FLESH.** The same warning as 1 John 4:2 to 3. Polycarp echoes it, and Irenaeus quotes this verse; see What Irenaeus Wrote.

- **2JN 1:9 [NOTABLE]** New teaching that leaves Jesus behind is not progress. Stay in His teaching and you have the Father and the Son.
- **2JN 1:10 [NOTABLE]** Not about being rude to unbelievers. It means do not give a traveling false teacher a base for his work.
- **2JN 1:10 [NOTE] YOUR HOME.** Churches met in homes, and traveling teachers stayed with believers. John means do not host or back a false teacher's work, not be rude to everyone who disagrees. Greet means the welcome that wishes him well in his mission.
- **2JN 1:12 [NOTABLE]** Some things are better said in person. Letters are good; being together is better.

inkwell is from the first or second century AD, the century of John's letters.

PAPER

The Greek word in verse 12 is *chartes*, a sheet of papyrus. Strips of the papyrus reed from the Nile were laid in two layers, pressed and dried into a sheet. A whole letter like 2 John fit on one sheet.

INK

The Greek word is *melan*, black. Ink was soot mixed with gum and water. It could be washed off with a wet sponge, so a scribe could fix mistakes.

PEN

3 John 13 says pen and ink. The Greek for pen is *kalamos*, a reed. It is the same word used for the reed the soldiers put in Jesus' hand, Matthew 27:29.

WHO HELD THE PEN

Paul often used a scribe and signed at the end, Romans 16:22 and Galatians 6:11. John may have done the same.

WHY IT MATTERS HERE

John says, I have much to tell you, but I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, face to face, verse 12. Even the man tradition says wrote five books of the Bible preferred to talk in person.

FROM HISTORY

WHAT PAPIAS WROTE

The Elder John

EUSEBIUS, CHURCH HISTORY 3.39.3 TO 7 · 2 JOHN 1:1 · 3 JOHN 1:1

WHO PAPIAS WAS

Papias was bishop of Hierapolis, near Colossae in what is now Turkey. About AD 110 to 130 he wrote five books called *Explanations of the Sayings of the Lord*. They are lost. We only have bits that later writers copied.

WHO KEPT HIS WORDS

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, wrote his *Church History* in the early 300s. He copied part of Papias's preface and then gave his own opinion about it.

WHAT THEY WROTE

Here is the whole passage, book 3, chapter 39, sections 3 to 7, in the English translation by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, 1890. The quote marks hold

Papias's own words. After that, Eusebius is speaking.

CHURCH HISTORY 3.39.3 TO 7

He says: "But I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself. If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders,— what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." It is worth while observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist; but the other John he mentions after an interval, and places him among others outside of the number of the apostles, putting Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him a presbyter. This shows that the statement of those is true, who say that there were two persons in Asia that bore the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day, is called John's. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second, if one is not willing to admit that it was the first that saw the Revelation, which is ascribed by name to John. And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them, but says that he was

himself a hearer of Aristion and the presbyter John. At least he mentions them frequently by name, and gives their traditions in his writings. These things we hope, have not been uselessly adduced by us.

One John or Two?

2 JOHN 1:1 · 3 JOHN 1:1 · 1 PETER 5:1 · JOHN 21:24

THE SAME WORD

Presbyter is the Greek word presbyteros, an elder. It is the word John uses for himself in 2 John 1:1 and 3 John 1:1: the elder.

TWO JOHNS?

Papias names John twice: once with Peter, James and Matthew, and once as the presbyter John, with Aristion. Eusebius says that means two different men named John lived in Asia.

ONE JOHN

Many scholars think Papias meant the same man both times: John the apostle, who was also an elder. Peter called himself a fellow elder, 1 Peter 5:1. Irenaeus, about AD 180, said Papias heard John and was a friend of Polycarp, Against Heresies 5.33.4, and he never mentions a second John.

WHY EUSEBIUS CARED

Eusebius had doubts about the book of Revelation. A second John gave him someone else to credit it to. He says so: it was probably the second John who saw the Revelation, if not the first.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR 2 JOHN

Most Christians through history have read the elder as John the apostle, an old man writing to churches he loved. Some modern scholars think the elder was Papias's presbyter John. Either way the letter was written by a leader who knew the eyewitnesses.

WHY IT MATTERS

Papias shows that around AD 100 Christians wanted the living voice of men who had walked with Jesus, and that the title the elder belonged to one of them.

FROM HISTORY

WHAT IRENAEUS WROTE

The Oldest Quote of 2 John

IRENAEUS, AGAINST HERESIES 3.16.8 · 2 JOHN 1:7 TO 8 · 1 JOHN 4:1 TO 3

WHO IRENAEUS WAS

Irenaeus heard Polycarp, John's student, teach when he was a boy in Smyrna. Later he was bishop of Lyons in France. About AD 180 he wrote Against Heresies.

WHAT HE WROTE

Here is the whole of book 3, chapter 16, section 8, in the English translation by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, Ante Nicene Fathers, 1885. Words in [square brackets] were added by the translators.

AGAINST HERESIES 3.16.8

All, therefore, are outside of the [Christian] dispensation, who, under pretext of knowledge, understand that Jesus was one, and Christ another, and the Only-begotten another, from whom again is the Word, and that the Saviour is another, whom these disciples of error allege to be a production of those who were made Æons in a state of degeneracy. Such men are to outward appearance sheep; for they appear to be like us, by what they say in public, repeating the same words as we do; but inwardly they are wolves. Their doctrine is homicidal, conjuring up, as it does, a number of gods, and simulating many Fathers, but lowering and dividing the Son of God in many ways. These are they against whom the Lord has cautioned us beforehand; and His disciple, in his Epistle already mentioned, commands us to avoid them, when he says: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Take heed to them, that ye lose not what ye have wrought." And again does he say in the Epistle: "Many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which separates Jesus Christ is not of God, but is of antichrist." These

words agree with what was said in the Gospel, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Wherefore he again exclaims in his Epistle, "Every one that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God;" knowing Jesus Christ to be one and the same, to whom the gates of heaven were opened, because of His taking upon Him flesh: who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, revealing the glory of the Father.

WHAT IT TELLS US

His disciple means John, the disciple of the Lord. The first quote is 2 John 7 to 8, and the next is 1 John 4:1 to 3. Irenaeus calls both the Epistle, so he may have thought of them as one letter, or just not kept them apart. Either way, about 90 years after John wrote, 2 John was being quoted as Scripture against the same kind of fake Jesus.