

The Epistles of St John

Theme verse: 1 Jn 4:7,11

These epistles (or letters) are concise and are written with real warmth.

They were written by St John probably late in the first century A.D (after Christ), to encourage and guide the churches.

Each letter calls Christians to live lives of love and obedience and two of the epistles warn against false teachers or antichrists.

Background

By the end of the first century, Christian congregations were established in cities throughout the Roman Empire. They were linked by epistles (letters) which were circulated among them – these were written by the apostles.

Some travelling teachers unfortunately promoted heresy (false teaching). This serious problem is reflected in St John's epistles as well as those of Timothy and Jude. Some believe that St John was particularly concerned with the spread of Gnosticism (this philosophy dismissed the idea that sin existed and denied the deity of Jesus Christ).

St John writes these letters. This is clear in their similarity to his gospel. Like the Gospel, 1 John contrasts light and darkness, truth and error, God and the devil, righteousness and sin, love and hate, life and death.

St John's letters were probably written during the last 15 years of the first century A.D. (John lived in Ephesus until he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos in the late 90's A.D).

2nd and 3rd John are smaller than 1 John; They are personal letters and would have been just long enough to fit on a single sheet of papyrus.

1 John

St John's emphasis is clear in his first epistle. The first chapter encourages the confession of sins, and rejects the notion that human beings can be sinless. The book then goes on to show that the true believer will seek to obey God's word and will show love for other believers. St John warns against false teachers, who can be recognized by their denial of Christianity's essential doctrine – that Jesus is the Son of God, God came in the flesh (1 John 2:22, 4:2, 3, 15: 5:5).

In this 1 John reflects the emphasis of John's Gospel which sets out to demonstrate the divinity of Jesus Christ through emphasis on His many miracles.

Main Themes

Chapter

Content Summary

(Main themes are underlined)

1 John

1. John is eager for Christians to experience fellowship with God. This requires them to walk in the light and to confess sins to God, claiming Christ's forgiveness.
2. Obedience and love for the brethren are evidence that a person has come to know God. Antichrists (false teachers who deny Jesus will try to lead believers astray).
3. True believers will not keep on sinning because they have been born again of God. Love for others gives us confidence in our relationship with God, but love must be practical.
4. Those who deny Jesus Christ has come in the flesh are not from God. We love God because He loved us first.
5. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born of God and have eternal life. Believers are to restore those who sin

2 John

1. The “elect lady” is to love and follow truth and be on guard against deceivers.

3 John

1. Gains should follow the truth and continue to show hospitality to travelling teachers, but be on guard.

Notes on the Author St John

- Name means “Yahweh is gracious”.
- Was especially close to the Lord
- Author of five New Testament books (Gospel of St John, 1-3 John, Revelations)
- Brother of James
- One of the twelve original disciples selected by Jesus
- Mentioned as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23; 19:26, 20:2, 21:7).
- Shared several special experiences with Jesus (Mt 17:1; 26:37; Mark 5:37; 14:33; Luke 8:51).
- John was the only disciple to die of old age (the rest were martyred).
- Was sent into exile on the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote revelations.
- Is known as the “apostle of love” because of his emphasis on love in his writings.