

# 2John

## INTRODUCTION

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The second and third epistles of John show a marked contrast in their style when compared with his first epistle. 2John and 3John display the common characteristics of a letter, including the title of the sender, the addressees, the greeting, a personal message, and the salutations or closings of the letter at the end. Even though they do not include information about the place and date of the letter, they do conform in literary style with epistles written by Paul and Peter.

When 2John is compared with 1John, the differences are marked. 1John is obviously much longer, it offers no title of the sender nor designations of the recipients, nor does it include a greeting, or final salutation, and it lacks any reference to the place from which the epistle was written nor the destination to which it was sent. These things tend to mark 1John as a kind of theological treatise, but in reality is a lengthy letter or epistle, noted by the fact that John regularly address the recipients as “dear/little children,” a personal way for a leader or elder to address close friends within the community.

The point is simply that both 2John and 3John come down to us as letters written to particular individuals who apparently had leadership responsibilities within a believing community known by John. And it appears obvious that John is writing these letters to warn and encourage these leaders in their responsibilities to the messianic community of which they were part.

### *Author*

There are modern scholars who have questioned whether the author of 2John and 3John is the same author as 1John and the Gospel of John, but the vast majority of evangelical scholars clearly affirm that John was the author of all three epistles.

The internal evidence supports the view that John, the author of 1John was also the author of 2John and 3John. First, he identifies himself as “The Elder” (Ὁ πρεσβύτερος, *ho presbuteros*) both in 2John and 3John. This is not simply a designation denoting the author as old in age, for the fact that it includes the article, The Elder, indicates both a position of authority (we will discuss this in more detail below) as well as one who is senior. In fact, Papias, 60–130 CE (as quoted by Eusebius)

uses the designation “elder” to refer to a number of the Apostles.

If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the Elders (τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις), I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων), — 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.<sup>1</sup>

Here we see Papias using the term Elder (*presbuteros*) as denoting Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, and Matthew, and adding the description “disciples of the Lord,” and even specifically designating John as “the elder/presbyter” (ὁ πρεσβύτερος), the exact title that identifies the author in 2John and 3John.

It seems very probable that the term *presbuteros* is used in the Apostolic Scriptures to denote the broad spectrum of “leaders” within the local messianic community. Thus the word “elder” during the Apostolic era could encompass Apostles, evangelists, overseers, and deacons, for each of these were responsible for leadership roles in specific areas pertaining to the local community.

Some have questioned why John would not have identified himself by name as the author of 2John, since the letter does involve a matter of authority, for in v. 10 he warns the recipients not to receive someone into their house who has denied Yeshua to be the true Messiah, and not even to give that person a common greeting (which most likely involved a greeting specific to fellow believers). But as Guthrie notes:

Yet it is surely intelligible that the aged apostle, in writing more intimate letters, would prefer the more affectionate and less formal title than the more official one, particularly as by this time he was no doubt the last surviving of the original apostles.<sup>2</sup>

Some, who argue that there is not sufficient evidence to affirm that John the Apostle is the author of the epistles, point to the words of Dionysius who mentions that there were two tombs in Ephesus, both naming the deceased as John, and some have suggested that the quote

1 Eusebius, *Eccl Hist*, ii.25.3.

2 Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1970), p. 887.

from Papias differentiates between these two. But the evidence for such a position is entirely lacking, and the evidence for John being the author of the Gospel as well as 1 & 2John, is far better substantiated.

This conclusion is further buttressed by noting the similarities between 2John and 1st John, which give further proof that both were written by the same author. For instance, in 1John we find the title “Son of God,” referring to Yeshua seven times (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12–13, 20) and in 2John v. 3, we read “Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Yeshua Messiah, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” Consider as well these parallels.

1John	2John
2:7 - Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning	5 - not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning
4:10-11 – In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.	5-6 – ... that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.
2:22, 26 – Who is the liar but the one who denies that Yeshua is the Messiah? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.	7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Yeshua Messiah as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.
2:23 – Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.	9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Messiah, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

These internal parallels offer further corroboration that the author of 1John is likewise the author of 2John. In addition, though 2John is listed among the disputed books by Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> it is included as one of the received (canonical) books in the Muratorian Canon, which conservative scholars have dated to the 2nd Century CE.<sup>2</sup> By the 2nd Century CE,

1 Eusebius, *Eccl Hist*, ii.25.3.

2 See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford,

we see Hipolytus (170-235) recognizing 2John as received Scripture, as did Athanasius (296-373) in the 4th Century CE. Origen (185-254) lists it among the books still being disputed by some.

In conclusion, the authorship by the apostle John has very strong external support and is likewise in concert with the internal evidence of the epistle. The idea put forward by some that the author was a person other than the apostle but having the same name, has very little if any real evidence to support it. Further, to speculate that an “unknown elder” wrote the epistle “has even less ancient testimony and cannot be considered as probable.”<sup>1</sup> All of the evidence, then, points to the conclusion that John, the Son of Zebedee, the Apostle of Yeshua, was the author of 2John. And given this conclusion, the fact that 2John was held to be the work of the Apostle John continued to give it importance until it was finally received by the broader Christian Church as fully canonical and thus the inspired word of God.

### *Date*

There is no internal data within the epistle of 2John that gives any clear indication of the time of its writing. But since the verbal parallels between 2John and 1John are obvious, it is most likely correct to hold that it was written close to the time of John’s first epistle. And, since both 1John and 2John focus upon false teaching, one would be correct in placing them both within a similar time frame. Some have considered that 1Jn 2:26 may actually be referring to what we know as 2John as having been written first, and that our 1John came afterward, since the verb “written” (ἔγραψα, *egrapsa*) is in the aorist (past) tense.

These things I have written (ἔγραψα, *egrapsa*) to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (1Jn 2:26)

But the aorist verb does not need to refer to a letter John wrote previously, but simply the letter was in the process of being written, which when it reached the recipients would be something he “had written,” which was a common literary custom.<sup>2</sup>

Most conservative scholars place the writing of 1John between 80–90 CE, and this would therefore also be the date for the writing of 2John as well as 3John. Thus, all of the Johannine epistles would have been

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1987), pp. 191ff.

1 Guthrie, *Op. cit.*, p. 890.

2 Guthrie, *Op. cit.*, p. 894.

written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, a time of upheaval within the wider Jewish communities, and a time of growing persecution against the Jews. This likewise impacted the followers of Yeshua who were, by and large, viewed by Rome as within the general circle of Jewish communities. Thus, when followers of Yeshua were increasingly being dismissed from synagogues, and when the early emerging Christian Church sought to find its own identity apart from the synagogue in which it had begun, an increase of persecution ensued.

Such upheaval and uncertain times inevitably gave way to errant doctrines and teachings, which John seeks to combat by warning his readers to remain firm in their faith. This faith is in Yeshua, in confessing both His divine and human natures, in showing genuine love for each other, and in affirming that salvation and eternal life are possible only through the person and work of the Son of God, Who is Yeshua.

### *Outline*

The second epistle of John is very short in comparison with the first epistle, comprising only 13 verses. It deals with the same general problem as 1John, i.e., that false teaching existed that sought to draw people away from faith in Yeshua, perhaps with the idea that denying Yeshua would protect a person from Roman persecution against atheists. In ancient Rome, while the Jewish communities were given an exemption,<sup>1</sup> all others who refused to give worship to the Roman pantheon were labeled as atheists for which the death penalty was prescribed. When followers of Yeshua were dismissed from the synagogue and disowned by the Jewish community, they would have found themselves in a position to receive severe persecution at the hands of Rome so long as they refused to denounce Yeshua and give worship to the pagan gods and goddesses of Rome. It may well be within this scenario that John writes his epistles in order to strengthen and encourage the believers to remain firm in their confession regardless of the cost.

Since 2John is comprised of only 13 verses, the outline of this short but powerful epistle is quite straight-forward.

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1 The status of a *collegia*, which allowed special privileges, was established for the Jewish community and apparently remained in place even when other *collegia* were abolished. See Peter Richardson, "Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome" in Donfried and Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 81.

**I. Opening salutation, vv. 1-3**

- A. Identity of the author and recipients
  - 1. Author = the elder
  - 2. Recipients = chosen lady and her children
- B. Relationship of the author to the recipients
  - 1. loved in the truth
  - 2. loved by all who know the truth
- C. Purpose of the Epistle
  - 1. for the sake of the truth, i.e., to reaffirm and establish the truth
  - 2. the truth abides in us and with us forever.
- D. Concluding Opening Salutation
  - 1. Grace, mercy, and peace
  - 2. The Father and Yeshua, His Son, the source, in truth and love

**II. John's Relationship with and Exhortation to the Recipients, 4-11**

- A. Children are walking in truth which brings John joy
- B. Admonition to love one another
- C. Beware of deceivers who deny Yeshua
  - 1. Such deceivers are partners with the Deceiver and anti-Messiah
  - 2. Guard yourselves from the deceitfulness of the Deceiver
- D. Anyone who denies Yeshua also denies the Father; those who confess Yeshua have both the Son and the Father.
- E. Those who have denied Yeshua are to be excommunicated
  - 1. removed from the community
  - 2. excluded from being invited to homes of community members
  - 3. to welcome those who have denied Yeshua is to participate in their evil deeds

**III. Closing Salutation**

- A. Personal note: John plans to visit this community in order to have face-to-face fellowship with them
- B. Greetings extended from the community with which John is presently fellowshiping

# 2John

## COMMENTARY

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**1–2 The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:**

Immediately upon reading the first line of this epistle, we are confronted with a significant question: Why does John identify himself as “the elder” (ὁ πρεσβύτερος) rather than identifying himself as an “Apostle”? While many answers have been given to this question by scholars, it seems to me that by John referring to himself as “the elder,” using the definite article, he is doing two things. First, and perhaps most importantly, he is identifying himself as one together with other “elders” who have accepted the duties of leadership within a local assembly<sup>1</sup> of believers in Yeshua. In other words, John is not seeking to usurp authority over the established, designated leaders or elders in the community to which he is writing.

But secondly, in referring to himself as “the elder,” it appears he is at the same time reminding them that he is the last living Apostle who walked with Yeshua, and that as such, his words are to be received as having the authority with which Yeshua Himself sent out His disciples (Matt 28:18-20).

The very fact that John chooses to refer to himself as “the elder” opens up the question of how the leadership in the early assemblies or synagogues of The Way were structured. This is an important question to be asked within the current “Messianic movement,” for if we are seeking to align ourselves with the Scriptures, then this ought also to determine how our local assemblies function, including the structure of leadership within our local communities.

We know that there were primarily two offices designated in the Apostolic Scriptures: the office of the Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*), and that of the Deacon (διάκονος, *diakonos*). But there was a general term for older men or women, answering to the Hebrew word זָקֵן / זָקֵנָה (*zākein*, masc. / *zīqnah*, fem.), which was πρεσβύτερος / πρεσβύτερα (*prebuteros*, masc. / *presbutera*, fem.), generally translated by the English

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1 The English “assembly” is actually the meaning of the Greek word “synagogue” (συναγωγή).



word “elder.” This word, in the masculine form, is found in the Apostolic Scriptures as a general designation for leaders within the believing community. Interestingly, wherever it is used this way, as leaders in a local assembly (*ekklesia*), it is always in the plural form. Note the following examples:

When they had appointed elders (πρεσβυτέρους) for them in every *ekklesia*, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders (πρεσβυτέροις), with the whole *ekklesia*, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas — Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders (πρεσβύτεροι), to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.” (Acts 15:22–23)

The elders (πρεσβύτεροι) who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1Tim 5:17)

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders (πρεσβυτέρους) in every city as I directed you, (Titus 1:5)

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders (πρεσβυτέρους) of the *ekklesia* and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; (James 5:14)

We find the same phenomenon when the Apostolic Scriptures refer to the office of “overseer” within the Messianic assembly. Always, when referring to overseers in a given assembly, the word is in the plural and always referring to men, never women. Note these examples:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπισκόπους), to shepherd the *ekklesia* of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Messiah Yeshua, to all the saints in Messiah Yeshua who are in Philippi, including the overseers (ἐπισκόποις) and deacons: (Phil 1:1)



Only when Paul is giving the qualifications for an overseer is the word found in the singular.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer (ἐπίσκοπός), it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer (ἐπίσκοπον), then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (1Tim 3:1–2)

For the overseer (ἐπίσκοπον) must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:7–9)

The point that I want to emphasize in John's referring to himself as "the elder" is that the positions of leadership in the original communities of The Way, the followers of Yeshua, were always a group of leaders in each community. There is not a single example of a single "pastor," "elder," or "overseer" having a position of leadership and authority within a given local congregation or community. The fact that the majority of Messianic congregations currently have a leadership model that has one leader / rabbi / pastor (by whatever name he or she is designated) shows that while there has generally been a concerted effort to recover the perspective of the Torah, there has been no similar enterprise seeking to recover the Apostolic teaching regarding God's design for leadership within the local community.

Given the fact that the Apostolic Scriptures are clear about having a plural leadership, i.e., a united group of leaders who function together to provide leadership for the local community, it seems very likely to me that the reason John identifies himself as "the elder" is to emphasize that even though he was the last remaining Apostle, he viewed himself as one of the elders and not as someone who held authority over the existing leadership of the local community to which he was writing this epistle. Surely the existing leadership would have looked to John for his instruction, and would have considered him to be the very voice of Yeshua, having walked with Him and being an eyewitness of His teachings and miracles. But John does not take to himself a title different than those leaders to whom he is writing. He does not put himself above them, but numbers himself with them, and in so doing gives full credence to their authority within their own local assembly.

If we, as a Torah movement, expect that our efforts will be used of the Lord in a “generation to generation” way, we must reconsider our leadership model and do whatever it takes to align ourselves with the Scriptures. For it is in putting to practice what Yeshua and His Apostles taught that we will realize the fuller blessing of God upon our work, and will experience the value that comes from the wisdom given to us by our Lord’s Apostles.

*to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth;* – Typical of letters (epistles) written in the early centuries of the common era, John opens this epistle by identifying himself and then the recipients of the letter. In this case, both the author’s identity as well as that of the recipients are veiled by using designations other than personal names.

Commentators, both ancient and modern, have generally taken one of two views as to the identity of the designations “chosen lady” (ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ, *eklektē kuria*) and “her children” (τέκνοις αὐτῆς, *teknois autēs*).

Some have considered that John is addressing this epistle to

...a particular family consisting of a woman and her offspring. The broader family, of course, includes the children of the woman’s sister (v. 13).<sup>1</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE), in his *Hypotyposes*, apparently took this interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Plummer notes that the name of the woman may have been *Kyria*, since this Greek feminine name does occur in ancient documents, but he discounts this on the fact that if John is writing to a woman named *Kyria*, he would have written “to *Kyria*, the elect” rather than “to the elect *Kyria*.”<sup>3</sup> Others consider the term “*elect Lady*” not to designate an individual but that the phrase would simply be a “natural expression of Christian courtesy.”<sup>4</sup>

But a number of things make this interpretation unlikely. First,

The fact that ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ appears without a definite article indicates that, if an individual is involved at all, she is not named.<sup>5</sup>

Further, the epistle is clearly addressing a community and its problems

1 Kistemaker, *2John*, p. 374.

2 See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vi. xiv. 1; Plummer, *2John*, p. 57.

3 Ibid.

4 Brooke, *2John*, pp. 166–67.

5 Smalley, *2John*, p. 318.