

Background and Greeting

Week One

- Who wrote this letter?
 - “Elder” can refer to age.
 - “Elder” can refer to a person in authority.
 - The author uses the article “the” elder and not “an” elder.
 - There is a clear assumption that the recipient of the letter knew the author well.
 - These things, along with extra-biblical literature, suggest that John the Apostle penned the letter late in life.
 - The early church ascribed authorship to the Apostle John and there were no other alternatives.
 - There is no extra-biblical evidence for another person who would have been identified as “John the Elder”.
 - The language and themes of the letter are similar both to the Gospel of John and to 1 John.
- When was this letter written?
 - Content seems dependent on 1 John.
 - Situation involving false teachers seems to have developed beyond 1 John (i.e. many deceivers have gone out and are traveling about).
 - “Elder” can mean old age.
 - These things, along with extra-biblical sources, suggest the letter was written in the nineties.
- To whom was the letter written?

Options:

 1. The letter is addressed to “an elect lady” and to her children.
 - This means that she was a prominent woman who was well known for a strong faith and for hospitality?
 - In this case, her name could have been Electra or Kuria or both.
 - She must have had a rather large family since only “some” of her children were walking in the truth (v 4).
 - Her children were also well known and involved in her hospitality.
 - She had other nieces and nephews who were known believers and who knew the author (v 13).
 2. The letter is addressed to a local church known by the Apostle.
 - The church is frequently addressed in a feminine manner and even as a bride.
 - This would better explain the children and would not require a large, well known family with only some faithfulness.
 - This would explain why John could so confidently say that they were loved by all who had come to know the truth. This makes less sense if it is a mother and children.
 - This explains why there is no mention of a husband or father.
 - The church at this time would have been under persecution, and a relatively obscure way of addressing the congregation may have been a protective measure. This also helps explain the lack of more specific identification of the author.
 - This better explains the use of the term “elect” or chosen both in the address and in the salutation (v 13) and why it is only used of the lady and not the children in either case.
 - This better explains what John would have meant by “bringing teaching” and what the nature of the “greeting” and hospitality were.
 - This also better explains the plural command “watch yourselves”. A reference to biological children would likely imply younger children in the home in which case this command is confusing. So, either her children were all grown and of an age of expected personal responsibility, or the children are simply the members of the congregation.

- What was the occasion for writing?
 - Many deceivers had gone out into the world and were leading many astray (v 7).
 - These deceivers were itinerate and in need both of hospitality and introduction into the church community in order to engage in their work (v 10).
 - Their teaching was destructive to the gospel and to gospel community and led to disobedience and discord.
- What are the key themes?
 - Love and truth are inseparable and reciprocal. Truth produces love and love obeys the truth.
 - Deception is to be expected and the gospel must be guarded against the lies of the enemy.
 - Making space for false teaching is partnership with the devil's schemes of destruction and a sharing in their evil.
- What is the purpose?

To protect the church against the schemes of the enemy by teaching her to cling to a pure gospel and by exhorting her to refuse to help, support, or otherwise encourage false teachers or false teaching.