

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 01

Narrator: Barnabas

Primary Scriptures: 2 Timothy 1:15-18, 4:9-22; Hebrews 1

Story Summary: Gaining a realistic view of the growth of the early Church

Location: Roman Empire

Time: AD 30 Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48 Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50 Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 53 Start of Third Missionary Journey
AD 67/68 Paul probably killed in Rome

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:2, 4:10

Parts of this video are extremely satirical in order to make a point. It is easy to believe the Church grew at a smooth, rapid pace, resulting in millions and millions of Christians by the end of New Testament times. Acts 2:41 says 3,000 were baptized on the first day, and Acts 2:47 says the Lord added people daily to the early church. At some point later (we do not know whether it was weeks, months, or longer), the number of Christian men was about five thousand, so the total number of Christians was much larger.

The book of *Acts* is full of stories of the successful establishment of churches and conversions of people. It is natural to blithely assume a huge growth rate during the Church's early years, but that may not be true. How many churches are mentioned in the New Testament? Can you name thirty? How many Christians were in each church? Thirty? One hundred?

Upon reflection, you might conclude there were maybe a few tens of thousands of Christians when Paul finished his ministry. If that's the case, then why weren't there more?

The Parable of the Sower has always described reality. When times get hard, people walk away from Jesus. When times are affluent, people become distracted from Jesus. When people get bored, they find something more entertaining than Jesus. When people are born into cultures without Christianity, they are not easily swayed from their early beliefs. Other people are easily swayed by false teachers. The exit doors of churches are as large as the entrances, and just as busy.

Nonetheless, God had a different vision for the early Church than a quick demise. The early apostles and leaders established a very firm base of true believers who were intent on making more true believers. History shows that, by the early 300s, a great number of the citizens of the Roman Empire were Christians.

That is good news for modern Christians. If we make disciples who make disciples who make disciples, Christianity will spread across the world once again.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you perceive the Church grew in its first fifty years? What factors helped it grow? What factors worked against it?
 2. Christianity seems to be in retreat in North America. Why do you think that is? Can that trend be reversed?
 3. According to statistics, the larger, traditional denominations in America are declining in attendance, while community and evangelical churches are growing. Why is that?
 4. According to polls, increasingly more Americans believe it is not important to attend church. Do you and your friends feel the same way? Why?
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1. The Church grew quickly in Jerusalem early on, but that church body declined and was essentially eliminated in 70 AD by the Romans. Churches grew in Antioch, Rome, Ephesus, and other population centers throughout the Roman Empire. The rapid growth of the Church began after New Testament writings began spreading. Other helpful factors were the Roman highways, the common Greek language, and the Pax Romana. Persecution both inhibited the growth of the church and helped it spread. Lack of commitment and false teachings were big inhibitors.

Application Questions:

1. How can you help your church make more dedicated disciples? How can you be more dedicated yourself?
2. What questions would you ask someone to see if they are growing as a disciple?
3. How important is it to attend church regularly? Are you penalizing other people at your church when you do not attend?
4. How do you know if you are a dedicated Christian or if you are just going through the motions of being one?
5. Should a focus on growth be an important part of a church's mission? If so, why? If not, what should?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Do you think it is more important to convert people to Christianity or to work with them to be highly dedicated to Jesus? How does your theology impact your answer?
2. How can you tell if someone is a dedicated Christian? Is that even up to you to decide?
3. What is one thing you could do to help the Kingdom of God grow?
4. Name some things to do that are more important than going to church.
5. Should a focus on growth be an important part of a church's mission? If so, why? If not, what should?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 02

Narrator: Apollos

Primary Scriptures: Hebrews 1-6

Story Summary: Overview of the first six chapters of *Hebrews*.

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 60-70 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Hebrews 1:3, 1:14; 2:1, 2:18; 3:13-14; 4:12-13, 4:14-16; 6:4-6

The letter known as *Hebrews* is written anonymously to an undeclared audience. The letter is saturated with references to the Old Testament, so the author was probably highly trained and educated like Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, or Apollos. Although the audience is not declared, it was likely written to Jewish Christians who spoke Greek (note: Jews were also called Hebrews).

It seems likely that some in the target audience were being tempted to revert to Judaism with its magnificent Temple and ceremonies. The author demonstrates repeatedly that Jesus and his teachings are the full completion of Judaism. The author demonstrates that many aspects of Judaism are shadows, destined to disappear. In fact, this is exactly what happens in 70 AD when the Romans destroy the Temple and ravage Jerusalem.

The opening sentence indicates that the letter is written to people with a Jewish background. Hebrews 1:3 is a very powerful declaration that Jesus is the exact representation of God... He *is* God. This is a point the Jewish leadership continually dispute. By starting with this declaration, all the author's following points will be obvious.

Jesus is superior to the angels. Angels are merely ministering spirits according to Hebrews 1:14. They are created by God, and worship Him, but are clearly inferior to Christ. The Jews of that time seem to have been fascinated with angels and may have created a significant theology around them, so this was the author's first attack against false teachings.

Jesus is superior to Moses. Moses was the greatest of all prophets and was the lawgiver to the Jews. No person was greater than Moses. However, the author shows that, not only is Jesus greater than Moses, but He is also greater than the *laws* of Moses.

Jesus is the Great High Priest. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, and so did not qualify to be a priest. However, because He is the Son of God, Jesus is the perfect high priest, capable of being the perfect sacrifice for the people.

After showing that Jesus is the better choice for people to make, the author warns against falling away from Jesus. Hebrews 6:4-6 includes some of the harshest warnings in the Bible. However, the author demonstrates that God is just and will fulfill His promises to those who are faithful to Him. The author insists that the hope of Christians is based on God's unchangeable character.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Hebrews 1:1-2, how did God change the way He communicated with humans?
2. According to Hebrews 1:3, explain the nature of Jesus.
3. How is everything sustained?
4. Why does the author of Hebrews compare Jesus to the angels?
5. Why does the author of Hebrews compare Jesus to Moses?
6. Why does the author of Hebrews compare Jesus to the high priest?
7. How does Jesus compare to everything?

1. God had communicated through prophets in various ways, but then He communicated through Jesus. 2. Jesus is the exact representation of God's being. 3. According to Hebrews 1:3, everything is sustained through the powerful word of Jesus. 4. It is likely that false teachers were teaching the importance of angels in the salvation process of mankind. 5. Moses was the great lawgiver to the Jews, and he led them out of slavery. To the Jews, there was nobody greater, and nobody else that needed to be obeyed. 6. The high priest was the intermediary between the Jews and God, and he gave sacrifices to God to cover the sins of the people. 7. Jesus is above all and is the better choice.

Application Questions:

1. Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus is the exact representation of God's being. How can you move toward being a more exact representation of Jesus?
2. In Hebrews 6:1, the writer instructs his readers to move beyond the "elementary teachings about Christ." Are there elementary teachings you haven't moved beyond? What types of things keep you from moving forward to more mature teachings? Do you have access to a teacher that can help you move forward?
3. Hebrews 3:13 says to encourage other Christians on a daily basis. How can you do that? According to that verse, why is it so important to encourage one another?
4. Hebrews 2:1 warns against "drifting away," while Hebrews 6:6 uses the term "fallen away." What do those terms mean?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Hebrews 1:14 indicates that all angels are spirits that minister and serve those who will inherit salvation. Does that description match what media portrays? Do you think an angel has ever helped you? Why or why not?
2. Hebrews 2:17-18 says Jesus was fully human in every way, and that He was tempted. Can you trust Jesus to understand your situation because He was tempted and suffered in the midst of that temptation?
3. Hebrews 3:12 gives stern warning about having a sinful, unbelieving heart. Do you have any friends or acquaintances who have that type of heart?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 03

Narrator: Barnabas

Primary Scriptures: Hebrews 7-13

Story Summary: Overview of the last seven chapters of *Hebrews*.

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 60-70 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Hebrews 7:25-26; 8:1, 8:10; 9:14, 9:27-18; 10:24-25; 11:1-3, 11:19; 12:1-2, 12:11; 13:1-3, 13:5

The main theme of the first six chapters of Hebrews is to show that Jesus is always the better choice for people to make. The author then warns against falling away from Jesus while demonstrating that God is just and will fulfill his promises to those who are faithful to Him.

Chapter 7 returns to the theme of Jesus being the better choice. The author talks about the mysterious Melchizedek, the priest who took an offering from Abraham, long before there were priests in the line of Aaron. Chapter 8 talks of Jesus being the Great High Priest because he serves in the true temple, Heaven. The author continues by showing Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant, which completes the Old Covenant. Rather than having a covenant written on stones, the New Covenant will be written in the minds and hearts of God's people.

The author continues by showing that Jesus provided the perfect one-time sacrifice, which brings salvation. Since we have the perfect high priest and perfect sacrifice, the author contends we should hold fervently to the hope of eternal life and spur on each other to love and good deeds. On the other hand, we should dread the thought of continuing to sin instead of persevering in the faith of God.

The first ten chapters lay the basis for understanding what faith is and what faith means. Hebrews 11:1 is one of the clearest definitions in the Bible: faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. Chapter 11, the "faith in action chapter," shows numerous examples of Old Testament characters who demonstrated their faith through their actions and their endurance of persecution. However, even with their faithfulness, they did not receive the promise... the promise fulfilled through Jesus.

Jesus is the Founder and Perfecter of our faith. With this in mind, nobody should become tired or give up. Jesus provides the endurance and strength to continue in faith.

Returning to an Old Testament analogy, the author shows that God wants a new kind of sacrifice and obedience. Followers of Jesus are to show love to everybody, keep their lives free from sexual immorality and the love of money, and to stay true to the teachings of Jesus.

The ending of the book shows a little irony: even though we do not know the author or the target audience of *Hebrews*, it is clear the author and his audience knew each other well.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Genesis 14:1-20, with special attention to Genesis 14:18-20. What details might you notice through a careful reading and study of those three verses?
 2. Discuss what Hebrews 9:28 means.
 3. What does Hebrews 11:6 mean?
 4. According to Hebrews 11:19, what was Abraham able to reason? How many people had been raised from the dead before Abraham's test?
 5. Hebrews 13:23 says that Timothy was released? What does that indicate?
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1. Salem is probably the same place as Jeru-salem. This occasion might be the first communion, along with an offering. The tenth given by Abraham might be a prefigure of the tithe commanded by Moses. Melchizedek was a king and priest, just like Jesus. Melchizedek was a priest of God long before God established Aaron and his descendants as priests. 4. That God could raise the dead. 5. That Timothy had been in jail. Other than this verse, there is no record in the New Testament that Timothy had been in jail.

Application Questions:

1. Does Hebrews 10:24-25 give you good reason to attend church regularly? Should you only consider yourself when evaluating whether to attend church?
2. According to Hebrews 11:1, do you think you have faith in God? According to Hebrews 11, is faith typically tied to some type of action?
3. Why was Abram considered righteous according to Genesis 15:6? According to Hebrews 11:17, how did he show his faith? How would you prove your righteousness and faith?
4. Do you read Hebrews 13:5 as being tied to Hebrews 13:4, or are the two verses independent of each other?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Does Hebrews 10:26-27 mean you can never sin, or does it mean that you should avoid sinning on purpose?
2. Understanding that science is not meant to answer why, but what: does Hebrews 11:3 conflict with current scientific understanding of the beginning of the universe?
3. Hebrews 12:1 says to throw off everything that hinders you or sins that cause you to be entangled. What sort of things keep you from having a closer relationship with God?
4. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines those He loves. Does discipline always include punishment? How are some ways you can be disciplined?
5. Do Hebrews 12:4 and 13:1 describe the way you and your friends interrelate?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 04

Narrator: Silas

Primary Scriptures: 1 Peter 1-5

Story Summary: Overview of *1 Peter*

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 60-64 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:7-9; 2:1, 2:9, 2:12; 3:1-2, 3:7, 3:17; 4:7-8; 5:8-9

The letter was addressed from Peter the apostle. You can quickly see why some scholars wonder how the uneducated Peter of the gospels attained the language and theological skill to write this letter. Perhaps 1 Peter 5:12 provides part of the answer.

This letter was sent to faithful Christians in various areas of modern-day Turkey, but was likely meant for much wider dissemination. They had apparently been going through various trials, and Peter encouraged them to stay faithful, thereby obtaining salvation. Peter reminds them that Christ suffered, too.

Holiness is an important outcome of faithfulness and suffering. Peter tells them that they are to be holy because God is holy, and because God will judge each of them according to their deeds. He reminds them that they are specially chosen by God who called them. They are to behave honorably so that even unbelievers will glorify God.

Like Paul and James, Peter calls for believers to have submissive attitudes so they can bring others to Christ. They are also to have a desire for unity and a loving spirit. Over and over, Peter stresses the need for right behavior.

1 Peter 4:7 reflects one of the reasons why Peter is so forthright and urgent that people behave rightly. He says the end of all things is near. With that insight, Peter knows people need to change now, not at some point in the future when it might be too late. 1 Peter 4:8 shows just how much Peter has developed his thought process. He says to love each other deeply. Not just love each other, but love deeply. Why? Because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Another reason Christians are to behave rightly is that they are representatives of God. Peter urges his hearers to speak as if God is speaking, and serve with all the strength God provides. The end goal of this is one thing: that God is praised through Jesus Christ.

As Peter moves to conclude the letter, he reminds the elders to be good shepherds of their flocks. Although it happened nearly forty years earlier, you can be sure Peter remembers Jesus telling him to take care of Jesus' sheep.¹

¹ John 21:15-18

Discussion Questions:

1. Name some reasons why this letter portrays a writer much more mature and educated than the Peter found in the gospels.
 2. To whom did Peter write this letter?
 3. What is the result of having faith in Jesus?
 4. Where is Jesus living now?
 5. Will people have to account to God for their deeds?
 6. Explain what it means to be humble as commanded in 1 Peter 5:5-6.
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1. *1 Peter* was written nearly forty years after Peter was with Jesus, so Peter had surely matured; the Holy Spirit inspired this writing; 1 Peter 5:12 says that Silas helped Peter write this letter. 2. To the mostly Jewish Christians who lived throughout modern Turkey. Many of them had left Israel due to persecution from the Jewish leaders. 3. 1 Peter 1:9 says the end result of your faith is salvation of your soul. 4. 1 Peter 3:22 says he is at the right hand of God. 5. According to 1 Peter 4:5-6, people will have to give account for their deeds.

Application Questions:

1. 1 Peter 1:14-15 says to be holy and not to conform to the evil desires we had before becoming believers. In your life, what does it mean to be holy and not follow evil desires?
2. 1 Peter 2:9 says you are chosen and are God's special possession. According to 1 Peter 2:8-10, why is that so?
3. Can you submit yourself to all human authorities for the Lord's sake? Which ones are you not willing to submit to? Why?
4. Are you willing to follow 1 Peter 3:9? Who has offended you that need to repay with a blessing?
5. What are some lessons you can you infer from 1 Peter 4:10?
6. What kind of foe is Satan according to 1 Peter 5:8-9?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. 1 Peter 1:17 says to live on earth as if you are a foreigner. What does that mean in your life?
2. 1 Peter 2:1 gives a list of behaviors to be rid of. What other kinds of behaviors should you rid yourself of?
3. Can you fulfill 1 Peter 2:12 and achieve the predicted results?
4. It is very hard to keep from sinning. According to 1 Peter 4:8, what covers a multitude of sins?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 05

Narrator: John Mark

Primary Scriptures: 2 Peter 1-3

Story Summary: Overview of *2 Peter*

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 60-68 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 2 Peter 1:3-4, 1:5-8, 1:10-11, 1:20-21; 2:19; 3:8-10, 3:13

According to 2 Peter 3:1, this was the second letter Peter wrote to these dear friends. Assuming this was the same audience as *1 Peter*, these friends were located in modern-day Turkey. Peter wrote both of these letters to stimulate them to think wholesomely.

One major theme of *2 Peter* was to encourage his friends to behave as Christ-followers should. A major theme of *2 Peter* is to warn his friends about false teachers. These themes tie together because the false teachers seemed to have been encouraging unwholesome behavior.

2 Peter 1:3-9 states that God enabled them to live a godly life, and how to progress toward that life, with a final goal of being effective and productive. Following those clear verses, 2 Peter 1:10-11 have been controversial among some Christians through the ages. Those two verses are certainly worth studying.

1 Peter 1:12-21 are Peter's personal assurance of the truth of his witness and the witness of other apostles. These verses set the stage for him to have the authority to berate the false teachers who are teaching dangerous things to his friends. These false teachers are self-condemned, but they are dangerous because they may drag others along with them.

Peter says false teachers are greedy, follow corrupt desires of the flesh, are bold and arrogant, are blasphemers, and seduce the unstable. In an important and timeless proverb, Peter says that people are slaves to whatever has mastered them. He knows the messages of the false teachers have the power to enslave people.

Peter also describes some of the false teachings as denying that the Lord will return and judge people. The false teachers say that, since Jesus hasn't come back yet, He won't come back at all. As an encouragement to his friends to follow good teaching, Peter reminds them of the rewards of being faithful and wholesome when Jesus does return. He says one reason Jesus hasn't come back is that God is patiently waiting for everybody who might possibly repent to do so. What seems like a long time to people on earth is a very short amount of time to God.

Peter tells them the end will surely occur one day. On that day, the earth and heavens will be destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and new earth where righteousness rules. Because of that, they need to be very careful not to fall under the sway of false teachers, but be true to the Lord.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have what it takes to live a godly life? Why?
 2. Explain the nature of prophets and prophecies.
 3. What is a primary motivation of a false teacher?
 4. Why is it important to remain faithful to Christ?
 5. Why did Peter write 1 and 2 Peter?
 6. Was Peter familiar with some of Paul's writings? What did Peter think of them?
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1. Yes, you do if you are a follower of Jesus. He gives you everything you need, according to 2 Peter 1:3-4. 2. According to 2 Peter 1:20-21 they are carried along by the Holy Spirit, not powered by human will. 3. Greed, according to 2 Peter 2:3. 4. According to 2 Peter 2:20-21, it is better to have never known Christ than to have known him and become unfaithful. 5. To stimulate his readers to think wholesomely, 2 Peter 3:1. 6. According to 2 Peter 3:15, Peter was familiar with at least some of Paul's writings; Peter felt that Paul was given wisdom from God; Paul is consistent in what he writes; Paul addresses extremely complex issues; Paul's letters are hard to understand; some people distort the teachings of Paul; Paul's letters had the same level of authority as Scripture.

Application Questions:

1. Do you want to have the attributes listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7? What does it mean to have them in increasing measure? Do you want to have those attributes for your personal good or to be effective and productive for Jesus?
2. According to 2 Peter 2:19, how does someone become a slave?
3. It has been two thousand years, and Jesus has not returned. Does that make you think He is not coming or that He is still coming? How do you feel when people look down on you for your Christian beliefs?
4. According to 2 Peter 3:10, the Lord will come back in a devastating event. According to 2 Peter 3:11, this future event should affect how you act now. Does it?
5. Even though you have a secure position, what can happen to you? How can you guard against those things happening so that you don't fall from your secure position?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. According to 2 Peter 3:3-4, Peter knew there would be people who would laugh at Christians who expect Jesus to return. Name some reasons that people make fun of Christians. Is there some truth in their comments?
2. Does 2 Peter 3:8-9 possibly explain some differences in how you see the world and how some of your friends or teachers see things?
3. Do you want to have the attributes listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7? What does it mean to have them in increasing measure? Do you want to have those attributes for your personal good or to be effective and productive for Jesus?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 06

Narrator: Jude

Primary Scriptures: *Jude*

Story Summary: Overview of *Jude*

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 60-68 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Jude 1:3, 1:16, 1:20-23

This letter is addressed from Jude, a servant (slave) of Jesus and a brother of James. James is very likely the half-brother of Jesus, so by extension Jude is also a half-brother of Jesus. There is no evidence Jude was a believer in Jesus until after His death and resurrection.

Portions of Jude's letter are very similar to portions of *2 Peter*. One of the purposes of both letters was to strongly condemn false teachers and false teachings. The false teachers were teaching that Jesus did not come in a true human form, but just seemed to be doing so. They were promoting certain sexual perversions and immorality to satisfy their own greed and lust.

The empty messages of the false teachers included dangerous teachings about spiritual beings. The false teachers did not realize the seriousness of their slander. Jude reminded his hearers that the apostles warned of false teachers who would divide the Christians in an effort to get personal benefit.

Jude's recommendation was for Christians to protect themselves by clinging to the truth and to the Holy Spirit. He wanted the strong Christians to be merciful to the weaker ones by teaching truth and snatching them from destruction. They should do all this through the power of God and Jesus.

Any reader of *Jude* or *2 Peter* comes face-to-face with the fact that spiritual matters are far too important to treat casually. The penalties for treating such things incorrectly are not just hurtful; they're deadly.

Discussion Questions:

1. Many scholars believe Jude was a half-brother of Jesus. Why would Jude open his letter by saying he is a servant (slave) of Jesus and a brother of James?
 2. To whom did Jude write his letter?
 3. What was Jude's main purpose for writing his letter?
 4. What is one thing the false teachers were teaching?
 5. According to Jude, what is one reason people will suffer eternal fire?
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1. Jude probably felt it was a sign of humility not to put himself on any kind of level with Jesus. James was known as the brother of Jesus, so people would have made the association that Jude was also the brother of Jesus. It should be noted that the other New Testament writers often called themselves servants (slaves) of Jesus. It appears that Jesus had finally taught them the high position of being a servant. 2. It appears to have been written to all Christians rather than to a specific church or group. 3. To urge people to contend for the faith. It seems that he wanted people to resist false teachings and cling to true teachings. 4. That God's grace could be used to justify immoral actions. 5. Sexual immorality and perversion.

Applications Questions:

1. What are some ways you can contend for true teaching and fight false teaching? How well do you need to know the Bible in order to contend effectively?
2. Jude describes some traits of ungodly sinners: defiance, grumbling, finding fault, self-centeredness, boasting, and flattering of others for their own advantage. What other traits do you find in ungodly people? How can you keep these traits from finding their way into your life? Does Jude 20-21 give you some answers to this? What do you make of high-profile Christians who exhibit one or more of these traits?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Sexual immorality and perversion are often celebrated by celebrities and the media. How did Jude feel about those subjects? (Jude 7) Is there any reason to believe God has changed his mind about the penalties of sexual immorality?
2. How can you be merciful to those about you? How can you talk to people in a merciful manner?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 07

Narrator: Mary, the mother of Jesus

Primary Scriptures: 1 John 1-5

Story Summary: Overview of *1 John*

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 85-95 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 1 John 1:5-7, 1:8-9; 2:5-6, 2:15-16, 2:25; 3:1, 3:17-18, 3:23-24; 4:7-10, 4:16, 4:20-21; 5:2-3, 5:11-12

Love. That is the main theme of *1 John*. Minor themes include obedience, warnings against false teachings, and life. Make no mistake, though: this book is about love.

It is generally accepted that the Apostle John wrote this book, along with *2 John* and *3 John*. He also wrote the *Gospel of John* and *Revelation*. There is no confirmation on the date he wrote this book, but scholars suspect it was written very late in John's life, between 85 and 95 AD.

The letter is not addressed to a particular group, but late in the letter, John says he wrote it to those who believe in the name of the Son of God... so that they may *know* they have eternal life. It is possible that John was writing to Christians under persecution from Rome or to those being influenced by false teachers.

The letter opens with John's personal witness of being with Jesus. He describes God as being light, and verifies that the blood of Jesus cleans people of their sin. Jesus is the Advocate and the atoning sacrifice for people and their sins. John wants people to know, beyond any doubt, that they have eternal life if they follow Jesus.

Love is light. If you love, you are in the light. If you hate someone, you are in the dark. If you love the world, you don't have the love of the Father in you.

If you accept Jesus, and abide in him and the Father, you receive the promise: eternal life. The Father loves His people so much He calls them His children... and incredible promise and reward. John wants everyone to receive this promise and not be led astray by false teaching and sinning.

Like James, John insists the love of God is shown by helping people in need. Like James, John insists his hearers love with actions and truth, not just words.

1 John 3:23 is an eye-opening verse. John commands people to believe in the name of Jesus, and to love one another. These are not recommendations from John, but commands.

1 John 4:16 is the summation of everything John teaches: God is love, and whoever lives in love, lives in God and God lives in them. John follows a few verses later with the demand that anyone who loves God must love their brother and sister.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do the first verses of *1 John* have in common with the first verses of *Genesis* and *John*?
 2. What is one characteristic of God?
 3. Where did John learn to write things like 1 John 3:15?
 4. 1 John 5:11 says that God gives eternal life. What does that mean? Can you know you have eternal life?
 5. Why did John end his letter with a sentence that seems out of synch with the rest of the letter?
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1. They talk about the beginning, the nature of God, and the existence of Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit. 2. He is light (1 John 1:5). This may have some interesting implications from a scientific viewpoint since time has no defined meaning when traveling at the speed of light. 3. From Jesus. 4. John wrote this letter so people would know they have eternal life.

Application Questions:

1. Modern culture often denies the existence of sin. According to 1 John 1:8-10, you deceive yourself if you claim to be without sin. How does that statement impact your thoughts on the existence of sin, as well as your propensity to sin? Will Jesus forgive you from your sins if you do not acknowledge them?
2. According to 1 John 2:3-5, how do you know if you know Jesus? Can you know the commands of Jesus without having a good understanding of the Bible? According to 1 John 4:8, how can you know if you know God? How does 1 John 4:21 impact your understanding of knowing God?
3. 1 John 2:22 says that anyone who denies Jesus is a liar. Do you deny Jesus by any of your actions or words? How can you protect yourself from ever denying Jesus?
4. Explain how you can fulfill 1 John 3:18.
5. What does 1 John 3:19 mean to you?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. 1 John 2:15 says not to love the world or anything in the world. What does that mean? Are there areas of your life where you love the world? How can you root those out?
2. Do the lusts listed in 1 John 2:16 seem wrong to you? Where have you learned to evaluate things like the lust of the eyes?
3. What does it mean to be a child of God? What are the privileges and responsibilities? (1 John 3:1-10) How does your own relationship with your parent(s) affect your views on God as your parent?

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 08

Narrator: Gaius

Primary Scriptures: *2 John* and *3 John*

Story Summary: Overview of *2 John* and *3 John*

Location: Roman Empire

Time: 85-95 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: *2 John* 1:5-6. *3 John* 1:8, 1:11

It is traditionally thought that *2 John* and *3 John* were written by John the apostle. He is thought to have also authored the *Gospel of John*, *1 John* and *Revelation*. It is likely the audience for these two letters is the same as for *1 John*. John was probably much older than eighty when he wrote these letters.

Both *2 John* and *3 John* demonstrate John's love for his audiences and his warnings against false teachers. These letters are probably written about a half-century after the death of Jesus. They demonstrate that the Church has made a lot of progress but still faces a multitude of problems.

The church has many members who have stayed true to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. These faithful members treat each other with hospitality and love. *2 John* 1:5 seems to be a clear reference to the command of Jesus to love God and to love your neighbor.

John shows the importance of protecting the fellowship of Christians from false teachers, warning against inviting them into homes or even greeting them. Such things align believers with false teachers, which quickly taints true teaching.

Unfortunately, the Church was already infiltrated by false teachers. Rooting them out would not be easy. The false teachers told falsehoods about the person of Jesus. One such falsehood was that Jesus only *seemed* to have come in the flesh but that this was only an illusion. One word for this type of false teaching is Docetism, and this type of belief may have been an early form of Gnosticism.

Apparently, John had heard of difficulties caused by a man named Diotrephes. John wrote to Gaius to confirm Gaius' faith, and to instruct him about dealing with Diotrephes. Diotrephes was refusing to show hospitality to traveling missionaries and had refused correction from John. His actions threatened to disrupt the harmony of the Asian churches and could threaten the very way the Gospel was shared.

John's solution is for Christians to remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and to show love to one another.

John shows us that it is important to be obedient to true teachings. Our disobedience affects many others than just ourselves.

Discussion Questions:

1. In modern society, it is often supposed there is no single truth. Based on 2 John 1:2-3, do you suppose John thought that truth is ephemeral or relative? What was truth for John?
 2. 2 John 1:5 says it is a commandment to love one another, and that this was a commandment from the beginning. What do you think John meant by the beginning? What does it mean to love?
 3. What were some of the false teachers teaching?
 4. What did John command his listeners to do with false teachers?
 5. Did John mean for 2 *John* to be a complete statement of his thoughts?
 6. What does 2 John 1:13 mean?
 7. What is the difference in the audiences for 2 *John* and 3 *John*?
1. Jesus is the truth and is the basis for all truth. 2. Possibly from the laws of Moses, in Leviticus 19:18, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." One aspect of loving is to follow the commands of God, including walking in love. 3. That Jesus did not come in the flesh. Apparently, they were saying that Jesus was spirit and absolutely pure, so he could not exist in a fleshly body. 4. Not welcome them or have anything to do with them, so as not to share in their wicked work. 5. It appears as if this letter is an introduction to the things he wanted to share in person with them. 6. That John is including the members of his church in his final words. 7. 2 *John* seems to have been written to a church or a group of Christians, while 3 *John* was written to an individual. We are not given any details about Gaius, but he may have been an influential church leader.

Application Questions:

1. Have you ever listened to a false teacher? How did you know it was a false teacher? What did you do?
2. Are you willing to love somebody just because it is commanded for you to do so? How easy or difficult is it for you to love others? Why?
3. Does it give you joy to have your children or close friends walk in the ways of Jesus, like Gaius did? What if they don't walk in the ways of Jesus?
4. How can you work with other Christians to spread the truth of Jesus? What kinds of hospitality can you show to people?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. 3 John 1:11 says to imitate good, not evil. What does that mean to you? What things do you recognize as evil?
2. Is truth relative or are there truths that exist throughout all time and places?
3. Do you think people are more influenced by your good actions or by your words? What can you do to increase your influence? Whom does God intend for you to influence? Why do you believe that?