

# I John – An introduction

## An epistle

1. Although it is considered an epistle (letter), it is atypical compared to other biblical epistles (no introduction, greeting or concluding salutation).
2. It is considered a “general epistle” since it doesn’t identify its recipients. (Although John definitely know who they were!)

## The author

1. Although not explicitly attributed to a specific author, the early church affirmed that it was from John (“the disciple that Jesus loved”). He may have neglected to add his name to this epistle as he may have been so well-known to its recipients. Also, some of the language in the epistle is very similar to some of the language in John’s gospel (similar in style, diction, and content)
2. John also authored the book of Revelation.
3. John was probably quite old at this time. (It has been estimated that the epistle was written roughly between 85 and 95 AD.) This was the post-Patmos days and church history believed him to be ministering in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (present day Turkey on the Aegean Sea). John also used the phrase “my little children” several times in this epistle, which may reflect the words of an older man (as well as endearment).
4. He was the last living disciple; a living eyewitness to Jesus’ life and miracles.
5. As the last living disciple, his testimony would have been “highly authoritative” (JMc).

## Paul’s warnings regarding Ephesus

1. In Acts 20:28-31, Paul warns the Ephesian elders of the “fierce wolves” that will creep in after he leaves them.
2. In 1 Tim. 1:3-3, Paul warns Timothy to stay in Ephesus to fight against false doctrines, myths, and endless genealogies.  
(Now John finds himself living in Ephesus. Though we don’t know who will be reading his epistle, we do believe that he is in the midst of the errors and the false teachers that Paul had earlier warned the church about.)

## Some Characteristics and Themes

1. The language is not difficult or technical, but the ideas are profound.
2. The gospel is under attack by heresies (Gnosticism and Docetism).
3. The antithesis (the world and the Church).
4. God’s love for us and our love for each other.
5. Testing the spirits.
6. Assurance

## **This week's challenge**

Read through 1 John this week. What word does he use with great regularity?

Answer: The word I was looking for was *abiding*, but we will see several other key words that John uses regularly as well.

## **Misc. Notes**

1. The Gnostics believed in special (higher) knowledge attained through such avenues as philosophy, mysticism, and metaphysics. They deemed the body to be evil and the spirit good. This view is heretical.
2. The Docetists believed that Jesus' body only *appeared* to be corporeal. (It couldn't be a physical body because the physical body was deemed to be evil, which ruled it out for Jesus in their eyes.) This view is heretical.
3. Cerinthianism: Its followers believed that the spirit of Christ came to Jesus at His baptism, led Him through life, and departed from Him at the crucifixion. Of course, this is another heretical view.