

Book of 3 John

Title:

The epistle's title is "3 John".

It is the third in a series of 3 epistles that bear the Apostle John's name.

3 and 2 John present the closest approximation in the New Testament to the conventional letter form of the contemporary Greco-Roman world, since they were addressed coming from an individual to individuals.

Both 2 and 3 John are the shortest epistles in the New Testament, each containing less than 300 Greek words, so as to fit on a single papyrus sheet (compare verse 13).

Author – Date:

The author is the Apostle John.

He describes himself (in verse 1), as "the elder", which conveys the advanced age of the apostle, his authority and his eyewitness status especially during the foundational period of Christianity when John was involved with Jesus' ministry (compare 2 John 1).

The precise date of the epistle cannot be determined.

Since the structure, style and vocabulary closely approximate 2 John (verse 1, compare 1 John 1; verse 4, compare 2 John 4; verse 13, compare 2 John 12; verse 14, compare 2 John 12).

Most likely John composed the letter at the same time or soon after 2 John, ca. A.D. 90-95.

Possibly written after his Patmos experience, John addresses this letter to Gaius, who may have been a pastor, but more likely was a layman.

John commends Gaius for his hospitality, a virtue much prized in the early church.

There were many itinerant ministers spreading the gospel in those days, dependent on churches and lay-Christians for missionary support.

Again one of John's favorite words, "truth" which appears five times in the first eight verses, as he commends Gaius for "walking in truth."

Evidence that places the aged apostle John in the Asia Minor city of Ephesus suggests that 3 John, like 1 and 2 John, had its origin in that city.

John tells Gaius (verse 1), that he hopes to see him soon (verse 14).

This implies that the two men were not separated by any great distance.

Certainly, it is safe to surmise that John writes from one city of Asia Minor to Gaius in another one not too distant.

3 John, perhaps the only extant letter of John to an individual, reflects a time when church organization was loose and when churches were united by authoritative letters from leaders.

Such letters were circulated by representatives of these leaders, in the case of 3 John probably Demetrius (verse 12).

Based on this evidence, however, a specific date for 3 John can hardly be inferred.

It is normally dated in the same period as is 1 and 2 John, or either in the latter part of the first century A.D.

Background – Setting:

3 John is perhaps the most personal of John's 3 epistles.

While 1 John appear to be a general letter addressed to congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor, and 2 John was sent to a lady and her family (2 John 1), in 3 John, the apostle clearly names the sole recipient as "the beloved Gaius" (verse 1).

This makes the epistle one of a few letters in the New Testament addressed strictly to an individual (compare Philemon).

The name "Gaius", was very common in the first century (e.g., Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14), but nothing is known of this individual beyond John's salutation, from which it is inferred that he was a member of one of the churches under John's spiritual oversight.

As with 2 John, 3 John focuses on the basic issue of hospitality but from a different perspective.

While 2 John warns against showing hospitality to false teachers (2 John 7-11), 3 John condemns the lack of hospitality shown to faithful ministers of the Word (verses 9-10).

Reports came back to the apostle that itinerant teachers known and approved by him (verses 5-8), had traveled to a certain congregation where they were refused hospitality (e.g., lodging and provision), by an individual named Diotrephes who domineered the assembly (verse 10).

Diotrephes went even further, for he also verbally slandered the Apostle John with malicious accusations and excluded anyone from the assembly who dared challenge him (Verse 10).

John strongly criticizes Diotrephes for rejecting his authority and refusing to welcome missionary evangelists.

John's message includes both the duty of hospitality in the church and the danger of dictatorial, arrogant leadership.

In contrast, Gaius, a beloved friend of the apostle and faithful adherent to the truth (verses 1-4), extended the correct standard of Christian hospitality to itinerant ministers.

John wrote to commend the type of hospitality exhibited by Gaius to worthy representatives of the gospel (verses 6-8), and to condemn the high-handed actions of Diotrephes (verse 10).

The apostle promised to correct the situation personally and then he sent this letter through an individual named Demetrius, whom he commended for his good testimony among the brethren (verses 10-12).

Diotrephes seems to have risen to such power in the church that he could repudiate the authority of the oldest surviving apostle, suppress a letter written by John, refuse to receive traveling missionaries, prevent other members from so doing, and even ventured to "cast out" or exclude those who did.

Following "that which is evil": Diotrephes contrasts with the well-loved and faithful Demetrius whose reputation appears unimpeachable.

The apostle indicates his intention to visit this church soon and set matters straight.

John commends and exhorts Gaius for his steadfastness and for his care of Christian missionaries (verses 3-8).

He uses Diotrephes as an example of how not to live as a Christian (verses 9-11).

John's words seem designed to encourage Gaius until John can see him personally, which he hopes will not be too far in the future (verse 14).

Throughout history and in churches today, men much like the three mentioned in this epistle may be found.

First, there is the consistent Gaius, to whom John wishes material prosperity, physical health, and spiritual prosperity.

Then there is the carnal, caustic church leader, Diotrephes, who loves to have preeminence, and finally, Demetrius, the quiet faithful believer who was loved and respected by all, including other spiritual leaders.

No specific prophecy is recorded within this book, nor are there any quotations that are from the Old Testament.