

3 John - Introduction & Background

Authorship

External evidence favors the view that the Apostle John wrote the letter. Irenaeus is among the sources favoring Johannine authorship. Irenaeus' testimony is persuasive on this matter since he was discipled by Polycarp who in turn was discipled by John. Other external sources favoring Johannine authorship include Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius of Alexandria, Cyprians, and Cyril of Jerusalem.

Internal evidence also supports the view that the Apostle John penned the book. The self-confidence of the writer (v10) would seem a bit presumptuous if John was not the book's author. Also, the letter shares a similarity of style, vocabulary, and phraseology with the Johannine literature that precedes it. The letter uses the following phrases that are found in the previous letters and Gospel of John: "love in the truth," "truth in you," "walk in the truth," and "hath not seen God." Also, the author describes himself as "elder." The writer of 2 John identifies himself with the same title. As indicated on the following chart, the length, style, mood, theology, structure, vocabulary, terminology, and content are similar to that of 2 John.

2 John	3 John
Love (4 times)	Love (2 times), beloved (4 times)
Truth (5 times)	Truth (6 times)
The elder...whom I love in the truth (1)	The elder...whom I love in the truth (1)
Expresses joy over the report of the readers	Expresses joy over the report of the readers
Walking in truth (4)	Walking in (the) truth (4)
Warns against hospitality to the enemies of the truth	Encourages hospitality to the teachers of the truth
Commendation followed by rebuke	Commendation followed by rebuke
Condemnation of bad doctrine	Condemnation of bad conduct
Short letter due to planned visit (12)	Short letter due to planned visit (13-14)

Thus, if it is concluded that the Apostle John wrote 2 John, then it must also be concluded that the Apostle John wrote 3 John.

Recipient

The recipient of the letter is Gaius (1). The name "Gaius" was popular in biblical times. The NT records three individuals having this name. First, there was one of Paul's Macedonian traveling companions (Acts 19:29). Second, there was Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4). Third, there was Paul's host in Corinth (Rom 16:23), who was one of the few Corinthians that Paul baptized (1 Cor 1:14). However, none of these men qualify as the letter's author because they were converts of Paul. John seems to indicate that the Gaius he addresses was one of

his converts. This becomes clear through John's description of Gaius as one of his children (v4). Just as Paul used the designation "son" to depict Timothy and Titus as his converts, John used the terms "child" to describe Gaius as his convert.

Although there is no evidence indicating where Gaius lived, it seems best to conclude that he lived within the Roman province of Asia, which was under John's ministerial supervision. Apparently, Gaius was not only known to John but he was also known to many other Christians (v1,3,5-6). Gaius was obviously an influential and hospitable member of one of the churches in Asia Minor. Although some have speculated that Gaius functioned in the role as a bishop or leader, this cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

Occasion for Writing

John commissioned traveling ministers to edify the churches under his supervision. These itinerant ministers were supported by the hospitality of the churches to which they ministered. Diotrephes, whose name means "nourished by Zeus," was a leader in one of these churches. He usurped authority, slandered John, refused to receive John's representatives, mistreated all who received these representatives, and disregarded a previous Johannine letter. Despite Diotrephes' presumed protestations, Gaius extended hospitality to John's representatives.

John learned of these events either through the return of these representatives (v10), a report from the brethren that had been entertained by Gaius (v3), or a report from Demetrius (v12). John was unable to make an immediate trip to rectify the situation (v10,14). Thus, John sent a letter via Demetrius to thank and encourage Gaius. It is possible that John wanted Demetrius to replace Diotrephes as the leader of the work after the latter had been defrocked. It remains unclear whether John ever had the opportunity to visit Gaius or the elect lady of 2 John for that matter.

Date, Place of Writing, Destination, Canonicity

According to Eusebius, John returned to Ephesus after he was released from Patmos after Domitian's death. During this time, he revisited the churches under his supervision (Rev 2-3). He may have also written his last two epistles during this time. If this scenario is accurate, then John could have written these letters after he penned the *Apocalypse*. However, it is equally likely that he wrote them before his incarceration on Patmos. For issues related to date, place of writing, and destination, see my 1 John argument. Also, the same discussion involving canonicity that was discussed in my 2 John argument is applicable to 3 John.

Purpose, Message, and Application

The *purpose* of the letter is to encourage Gaius to continue to show hospitality to John's representatives by contrasting his positive example of servanthood with the negative, self-serving example of Diotrephes. The *message* of the letter is that believers should fellowship with and show hospitality to fellow Christians and to full time Christian laborers

by following the positive example of Gaius' servanthood rather than the negative example of Diotrephese. The *application* of the letter can be framed in the following question: "will believers imitate the example of Gaius or Diotrephes?"

Sub purposes

In addition to this overarching purpose, John seems to have written the letter in order to accomplish several sub purposes. First, regarding Gaius, John wrote to inform him of his love and prayers on Gaius' behalf (v2), to rejoice over Gaius commitment to the truth (v3-4), to thank Gaius for his hospitality (v5-8), and to exhort Gaius to continue to show hospitality to John's ministers (v7-8). Second, regarding Diotrephes, John wanted to publicly expose his sin and reject his leadership (v9-11). Third, John wrote to commend Demetrius to Gaius (v12). Fourth, John wrote to inform Gaius of his imminent visit for the purpose of rectifying problems taking place within the assembly (v13-14).

Unique Characteristics

John's third letter boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, it continues the themes that are prevalent in John's other letters. For example, while 1 John deals with fellowship with God and 2 John deals with the avoidance of fellowship with false teachers, 3 John deals with fellowship among believers. In addition, while 2 John focuses upon the truth side of the love and truth equation, 3 John focuses upon the love aspect of this equation. Second, because the letter is only 208 Greek words, it is the shortest letter in the entire NT. It is even one line shorter than 2 John. Third, the letter represents a vivid development around three characters.

Fourth, the letter is personal. Unlike 2 John, which uses impersonal names such as "the elect lady and her children," 3 John contains three personal names. Moreover, unlike other letters that are addressed to a church or numerous individuals, this letter is addressed to a specific person. Fifth, the letter explains how Christians should treat traveling ministers. Sixth, the letter explains how believers can manifest hospitality in tangible ways. Seventh, the letter exemplifies how confrontation should be used to dethrone ecclesiastical tyrants. Eighth, the letter seems to include all of the elements of a secular epistle.⁴

Structure

The letter has five sections. The first section is the introduction (v1). The next three sections revolve around specific people. The second section pertains to Gaius (v2-8). The third section pertains to Diotrephes (v9-11). The fourth section involves Demetrius (v12). The fifth and final section represents the letter's conclusion (v13-14).

Outline

- I. Greeting (3 John 1a-b)
 - (1) Sender: Elder (1a)
 - (2) Recipient: Beloved Gaius (1b)
- II. Gaius (3 John 2-8)

- (1) Prayer for Gaius' well-being (2)
- (2) Rejoicing over Gaius' obedience (3-4)
- (3) Commendation of Gaius' love for the brethren (5-8)
 - (A) Hospitality to the layman (5-6)
 - (B) Financial support to missionaries (7-8)

III. Diotrephes (3 John 9-11)

- (1) Specific sins (9-10)
 - (A) Lust for preeminence (9a)
 - (B) Rejection of apostolic authority (9b)
 - (C) Slanders apostles (10a)
 - (D) Refuses to receive the brethren (10b)
 - (E) Forbids and excommunicates those who receive the brethren (10c)
- (2) General character (11)
 - (A) Not to be imitated (11a)
 - (B) Not right with God (11b)

IV. Demetrius: three witnesses favoring his spirituality (3 John 12)

- (1) All believers (12a)
- (2) The truth (12b)
- (3) John and the apostles (12c)

V. Conclusion (3 John 13-14)

- (1) Explanation of the letter's brevity (13)
- (2) Plans of John's imminent visit (14a)
- (3) Greetings (14b-15)
 - (A) To Gaius (14b)
 - (B) Asking Gaius to greet John's friends (15)

Introduction

The early Church in the 1st century was under attack from both the inside and the outside. So what has changed? It should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit has anticipated every conceivable form of attack and diversion, and these three epistles are full of insights that are timely for each of us—at the personal level as well as at the corporate.

Background

Who was John? Brother of James "the Greater" (Matt 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35). He was probably the younger of the sons of Zebedee and Salome and was born at Bethsaida (Matt 4:21; 27:56; 15:40). His father was apparently a man of some wealth (Mark 1:20; Luke 5:3; John 19:27). He was doubtless trained in all that constituted the normal

education of Jewish youth. When he grew up he followed the occupation of a fisherman with his family on the Sea of Galilee.

When John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, John, with many others, gathered around him and was deeply influenced by his teaching. There he heard the announcement, "Behold the Lamb of God," and on the invitation of Jesus, became a disciple and ranked among his followers for a time (John 1:36,37). He and his brother then returned to their former avocation (it is uncertain for how long). Jesus again called them and now they left all and permanently joined the company of his disciples (Matt 4:21; Luke 5:1-11). For their zeal and intensity of character, Jesus named him and his brother "Boanerges" ("Sons of Thunder"; Mark 3:17). This spirit of chutzpah broke out on a number of occasions (Matt 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41; Luke 9:49,54).

Insider Status

- He became one of the innermost circle, as at:
 - Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37)
 - Transfiguration (Matt 17:1)
 - Gethsemane (Matt 26:37)
 - Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:3)
- He was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20)

That Final Week

At the betrayal, he and Peter followed Christ afar off, while the others betook themselves to hasty flight (John 18:15). At the trial he followed Christ into the council chamber, and thence to the praetorium, and to the place of crucifixion (John 18:16,19,28; 19:26-27). Mary was consigned to John's care at the Cross (rather than to her other sons!).

To him and Peter, Mary first conveyed tidings of the resurrection, and they were the first to go and see what her strange words meant (John 20:2). After the resurrection he and Peter again returned to the Sea of Galilee, where the Lord revealed himself to them (John 21:1,7). We find Peter and John frequently together after this (Acts 3:1; 4:13).

The Later Years

John remained, apparently, in Jerusalem among the leadership (Acts 15:6; Gal 2:9). He apparently was not there, however, at the time of Paul's last visit (Acts 21:15-40). His subsequent history is unrecorded. He appears to have retired to Ephesus, but at what time is unknown. These three epistles were probably written from Ephesus. He suffered under persecution, and was banished to Patmos (Rev 1:9), whence he again returned to Ephesus, where he died.

This was probably about 98 AD, having outlived all (or nearly all) the friends and companions, even of his more mature years. There is some extra-Biblical evidence that he may have written his Gospel after the Patmos experience.

There are many interesting traditions regarding John's residence at Ephesus, but these cannot claim the character of historical truth (their unsuccessful attempts at his being boiled in oil, etc.).

The Writings of John

John wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel, Revelation, and three epistles. Most scholars assume that the epistles were written last, just before the close of the first century.

Distinctives of his Gospel: His purpose declared (John 20:30,31). As does his epistle, 7 times (1 John 5:13, et al.). Heptadic structure subtly evident. Distinctives of the Book of Revelation: Heptadic structure dominant.

Consistency of Designations

- "Friend of God": Abraham (James 2:23; 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8)
- "Shall I hide from him the what I am to do?" (Gen 18:17)
- Disciples: "Now my friends" (John 15:14-15)
- Upper Room disclosures (John 13-17)
- "Beloved": Daniel, Apocalyptic Visions; John, The Apocalypse

The Writings of John

- The Gospel of John: Distinctives
- The Book of Revelation: Heptadic Structure
- The Epistles of John:
 - 3rd John to Gaius
 - 2nd John - to "the Elect Lady"
 - 1st John - to the church at large

In Retrospect

- Matthew—The Promised One is here; see His Credentials
- Mark—This is how He worked; see His Power
- Luke—This is what He was like; see His Nature
- John—This is who He really was; see His Godship

Third John is the shortest (in the original Greek) and was written for the purpose of commanding to Gaius some Christians who were strangers in the place where he lived, and who had gone thither for the purpose of preaching the Gospel (v7). The 2nd and 3rd Epistles were probably written (soon after the 1st?) from Ephesus.

One of the key words is "witness": "Testified" (3 John 3). "Report, bear record, record" (3 John 6,12) ...not just words, but by the life we lead. Every Christian is a witness, either a good one or a bad one. We are either helping the truth or hindering it (v8).

3rd John

- Gaius, the Encourager
- Service in Truth and Love (v2-8)

- Diotrephes, the Dictator
- Five indictments (v9-11)
- Demetrius, the Exemplar
- Commendation (v12)
- Each of us has the opportunity to be part of the solution or part of the problem.