

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिंदी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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3 John

This short personal letter addresses leadership and conflict issues in the early churches. A man named Diotrephes was trying to control the church and rejecting the apostle John and his representatives. In contrast, Gaius and Demetrius remained loyal to the church and the apostle John.

Setting

The apostle John wrote this letter around the same time as 1 John and 2 John (see 1 John Book Introduction, “Setting”). Some teachers and leaders claimed to have spiritual authority but taught different ideas about Christ. They did not make the same rules for church members. They assumed their own authority and ignored John's authority.

They also distorted the teachings of the apostles. Diotrephes was one who left the unity of fellowship of the church of the apostles (compare [1 John 2:18-19](#)). As a leader in a local church, he rejected John's authority and refused to accept the teachers John sent. He even removed those in the church who welcomed and helped them.

John wrote this letter to Gaius, a loyal church member, urging him to keep welcoming John's messengers and remain true to John's teachings and community.

Summary

Among all the New Testament letters, 3 John is the most like personal letters from first-century Greece and Rome. Like other letters from this time, 3 John starts by identifying the writer, "The elder," and the recipient, "Gaius" ([3 John 1:1-4](#)). It then expresses a wish for the well-being of Gaius.

In this part of the letter, John praises Gaius and criticizes Diotrephes ([3 John 1:5-12](#)). Gaius did well by welcoming the traveling teachers from John. These teachers told John that Gaius was living according to the truth. This made John very happy, and he encourages Gaius to keep practicing this hosting of other Christians.

Unlike Gaius, a church leader named Diotrephes received John's strong warning ([3 John 1:9-10](#)). Diotrephes loved having power and honor, so he refused to accept John's authority. He also persuaded others to resist John. Diotrephes even forced out of the church those who did not follow him. John warned Gaius not to submit to Diotrephes' harsh leadership or copy his bad example.

John emphasizes the good reputation of a man named Demetrius ([3 John 1:12](#)). We do not know John's exact purpose today, but he might have been suggesting Demetrius as a leader for Gaius's community instead of Diotrephes.

John ends the letter by mentioning plans to visit soon and sends greetings ([3 John 1:13-15](#)).

Author and Date

The author of this letter calls himself, “The elder” (see [3 John 1:1](#)). This may refer to his age or his authority over his readers, or both. Church tradition identifies this elder as John the apostle. He was an old man and a leader of the churches in Asia Minor during the late first century (see 1 John Book Introduction, “Author”). Third John was probably written around the same time as 1 John and 2 John, around AD 85–90.

Meaning and Message

John's third letter addresses a problem mentioned in 1 John. Some church leaders followed false teachings and ignored the authority of the apostles.

We cannot say we love God and the truth if we do not follow the teachings of the apostles and unite ourselves to God's church, the members of his spiritual family.