

= Third Epistle of John =

The Third Epistle of John , often referred to as Third John and written 3 John , is the antepenultimate book of the New Testament and attributed to John the Evangelist , traditionally thought to be the author of the Gospel of John and the other two epistles of John . The Third Epistle of John is a private letter composed to a man named Gaius , recommending to him a group of Christians led by Demetrius , which had come to preach the gospel in the area where Gaius lived . The purpose of the letter is to encourage and strengthen Gaius , and to warn him against Diotrephes , who refuses to cooperate with the author of the letter .

Early church literature contains no mention of the epistle , with the first reference to it appearing in the middle of the third century . This lack of documentation , though likely due to the extreme brevity of the epistle , caused early church writers to doubt its authenticity until the early 5th century , when it was accepted into the canon along with the other two epistles of John . The language of 3 John echoes that of the Gospel of John , which is conventionally dated to around AD 90 , so the epistle was likely written near the end of the first century . Others contest this view such as the scholar John A. T. Robinson who dates 3 John to c . AD 60 ? 65 . The location of writing is unknown , but tradition places it in Ephesus . The epistle is found in many of the oldest New Testament manuscripts , and its text is free of major discrepancies or textual variants .

= = Content = =

There is no doctrine laid out in 3 John , which is strictly a personal letter , but the overall theme is the importance of hospitality , especially when it comes to men who were working to spread the gospel . Third John is the shortest book of the Bible by word count , though 2 John has fewer verses . It is the only New Testament book which does not contain the names " Jesus " or " Christ " .

= = = Greeting and introduction = = =

The letter is written to a man named Gaius . Gaius seems to have been a wealthy man , since the epistle 's author , who identifies himself only as " the Elder " , did not think it would impose unduly on him to host some traveling preachers for a short time . The Elder may have converted Gaius , since he calls Gaius his " child " in the faith . The Apostolic Constitutions VII.46.9 records that Gaius was made bishop of Pergamon , though there is no early support for this statement .

The name Gaius occurs three other times in the New Testament . First , a Christian Gaius is mentioned in Macedonia as a traveling companion of Paul , along with Aristarchus (Acts 19 : 29) . One chapter later , a Gaius from Derbe is named as one of Paul 's seven traveling companions who waited for him at Troas (Acts 20 : 4) . Next , a Gaius is mentioned residing in Corinth as being one of only a few people there (the others being Crispus and the household of Stephanas) who were baptised by Paul , who founded the Church in that city (1 Corinthians 1 : 14) . Lastly , a Gaius is referred to in a final greeting portion of the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 16 : 23) as Paul 's " host " and also host of the whole church , in whatever city Paul is writing from at the time (probably Corinth) . However , there is no reason to suppose that any of these men were the Gaius of 3 John .

Verse 2 , where the author wishes material prosperity upon Gaius similar to the prosperity of his soul , is a commonly used proof text within prosperity gospel teachings ; opponents of the prosperity gospel consider the verse to be little more than well @-@ wishing .

= = = Missionaries = = =

The Elder continues the letter by commending Gaius for his loyalty and his hospitality towards a group of traveling " brothers " . The " brothers " are brothers in the faith or missionaries , who in accordance with Jesus ' command in Mark 6 : 8 ? 9 have set out on a journey without any money . The Elder then goes on to request that Gaius provide for the brothers to continue their journey .

= = = Opposition of Diotrephes = = =

The Elder next describes his conflict with Diotrephes , who does not acknowledge the Elder 's authority and is excommunicating those , like Gaius , who welcome missionaries sent by the Elder . The Elder mentions a previous letter which he has written to the church which was suppressed by Diotrephes , and says that he intends to visit the church and to confront Diotrephes . " The church " is apparently known to Gaius , but he is likely not a member of it , since otherwise the Elder would not need to provide him with information about Diotrephes ' activities . The dispute between Diotrephes and the Elder seems to be based on church leadership and authority rather than doctrine , since the Elder does not accuse Diotrephes of teaching heresy .

Most scholars do not connect the letter the Elder mentions with 2 John , since 3 John does not contain any reference to the doctrinal controversy described in 2 John , and argue that the Elder is here referring to a previous letter of recommendation . John Painter , however , argues the Elder is in fact referring to 2 John , since there is overlap between 2 John 9 and the theme of hospitality in 3 John .

The Elder closes this section with an entreaty to Gaius : " Beloved , do not imitate evil but imitate good . Whoever does good is from God ; whoever does evil has not seen God . " This injunction is reminiscent of several passages in 1 John (2 : 3 ? 5 , 3 : 4 ? 10 , 4 : 7) .

= = = Final greetings and conclusion = = =

Verse 12 introduces another man named Demetrius , who according to the Apostolic Constitutions VII.46.9 was ordained by John as bishop of Philadelphia (now Amman , Jordan) . Demetrius was probably a member of the group of missionaries discussed earlier in the letter , and 3 John likely serves as a recommendation letter to Gaius about Demetrius . Recommendation letters were quite common in the early church , as evidenced by 2 Corinthians 3 : 1 , Romans 16 : 1 ? 2 , and Colossians 4 : 7 ? 8 .

The Elder , before ending the letter , says that he has many other things to tell to Gaius , and plans to make a journey to see him in the near future , using almost the exact language of 2 John 12 . The closing verse , " Peace be to you . The friends greet you . Greet the friends , one by one " , is typical of contemporary correspondence , with " Peace be to you " a greeting adopted by Christians from the Jews .

= = = Authorship = = =

3 John was almost certainly written by the same author who wrote 2 John , and likely 1 John as well . This individual may have been John the Evangelist himself or someone else , perhaps John the Presbyter , though according to scholar C. H. Dodd , " If we attempt to ... identify the anonymous author of these epistles with some known individual , we have little but surmise to go on . "

There are many similarities between 2 and 3 John . Both follow the format of other personal letters of the era ; in both the author self @-@ identifies as " the Presbyter " , a term which literally means " the elder " ; and both deal with themes of hospitality and conflict within the church . They are also extremely similar in length , probably because they were both written to fit on one papyrus sheet .

3 John is also linguistically similar to both 2 John and other Johannine works . Of 99 different words used , 21 are unimportant words like " and " or " the " , leaving 78 significant words . 23 of these do not appear in 1 John or the Gospel of John , of which four are unique to 3 John , one is common to 2 and 3 John , and two are found in both 2 and 3 John as well as in other New Testament writings . Approximately 30 % of the significant words in 3 John do not appear in 1 John or the Gospel , compared to 20 % for 2 John . These considerations indicate a close affinity between 2 and 3 John , while 2 John is more strongly connected to 1 John than is 3 John . A minority of scholars , however , argue against common authorship of 2 and 3 John , and Rudolf Bultmann held that 2 John was a forgery based on 3 John .

If 3 John was written by John the Apostle , however , it is strange that Diotrephes would oppose him since the apostles were highly respected in the early church . One possible alternative view of the epistle 's authorship arises from a fragment written by Papias of Hierapolis and quoted by Eusebius which mentions a man named " the Presbyter John " . However , since nothing else is known of this individual it is not possible to positively identify him as the author of 3 John .

= = = Date and location of writing = = =

All three letters of John were likely written within a few years of each other , and internal evidence indicates that they were written after the Gospel of John , placing them in the second half of the first century . This dating makes sense given their allusions and opposition to Gnostic and docetic teaching , which denied the full humanity of Jesus , and which was gaining ascendancy at the end of the first century .

Dodd argues for a date between 96 ? 110 A.D. , concluding from the absence of references to persecution in the letters that they were probably written after the harsh reign of the Roman emperor Domitian , whose persecution of Christians seems to have prompted the writing of the Book of Revelation . Dodd notes , however , that they could have been written in the pre @-@ Domitian era , which is likely if the author was a personal disciple of Jesus . Marshall suggests a date of between the 60s and 90s . Rensberger suggests a dating of around 100 , assuming that the Gospel of John was written in the 90s and the letters must have followed after . Brown argues for a date of between 100 and 110 , with all three letters composed in close time proximity . A date past 110 ? 115 is unlikely , as parts of 1 John and 2 John are quoted by Polycarp and Papias .

The letters do not indicate the location of authorship , but since the earliest quotations of them (in the writings of Polycarp , Papias , and Irenaeus) come from the province of Asia Minor , it is likely that the epistles were also written in Asia . Church tradition typically places them in the city of Ephesus .

= = = Manuscripts = = =

3 John is preserved in many of the old manuscripts of the New Testament . Of the Greek great uncial codices , codices Sinaiticus , Alexandrinus , and Vaticanus contain all three Johannine epistles , while Codex Ephraemi contains 3 John 3 ? 15 along with 1 John 1 : 1 ? 4 . Codex Bezae , while missing most of the Catholic epistles , contains 3 John 11 ? 15 in Latin translation . In languages other than Greek , the Vulgate and the Sahidic , Armenian , Philoxenian Syriac , and Aethiopic versions contain all three epistles . Between the different copies there are no major difficulties or differences , meaning that there is very little doubt over determining the original text .

= = Canonical history = =

There are some doubtful similarities between passages in the Johannine epistles and the writings of Polycarp and Papias , but the earliest definitive references to the epistles come from the late second century . Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* 3 @.@ 16 @.@ 8 (written c . 180) , quotes 2 John 7 and 8 , and in the next sentence 1 John 4 : 1 , 2 , but does not distinguish between 1 and 2 John ; he does not quote from 3 John . The Muratorian Canon seems to refer to two letters of John only , though it is possible to interpret it as referring to three . 1 John is extensively cited by Tertullian , who died in 215 , and Clement of Alexandria , in addition to quoting 1 John , wrote a commentary on 2 John in his *Adumbrationes* . All three Johannine epistles were recognized by the 39th festal letter of Athanasius , the Synod of Hippo and the Council of Carthage . Additionally Didymus the blind wrote a commentary on all three epistles , showing that by the early 5th century they were being considered as a single unit .

The first reference to 3 John is in the middle of the third century ; Eusebius says that Origen knew of both 2 and 3 John , however Origen is reported as saying " all do not consider them genuine " . Similarly , Dionysius of Alexandria , Origen 's pupil , was aware of a " reputed Second or Third

Epistle of John " . Also around this time 3 John is thought to have been known in North Africa as it was referred to in the *Sententiae Episcoporum* produced by the Seventh Council of Carthage . There was doubt about the authority of 3 John , however , with Eusebius listing it and 2 John as " disputed books " despite describing them as " well @-@ known and acknowledged by most " . Although Eusebius believed the Apostle wrote the Gospel and the epistles , it is likely that doubt about the fidelity of the author of 2 and 3 John was a factor in causing them to be disputed . By the end of the fourth century the Presbyter (author of 2 and 3 John) was thought to be a different person than the Apostle John . This opinion , although reported by Jerome , was not held by all , as Jerome himself attributed the epistles to John the Apostle . One factor which helps explain the late attestation of 3 John and the doubts about its authority is the very short nature of the letter ; early writers may simply not have had occasion to quote from it .