

Introduction to 3 John

Where is it in the Bible?

Third John is the twenty-fifth book in the New Testament and comes between 2 John and Jude. It is the last of the Johannine Epistles, which have much in common with each other and with the Gospel according to John. Like the Pauline epistles, these letters were arranged in the New Testament according to their length, from longest to shortest. The order does not indicate anything about order of composition.

Who wrote it?

As in 2 John, the first verse of 3 John says that the author as “the elder”. This person is often identified with the apostle John. There is also a possibility that he was another member of the community. “A popular theory holds that the letters may have been written by a person known ... from church history as 'John the Elder.' According to Eusebius, John the Elder was a disciple of the apostle John and was a member of his congregation. He may be the 'elder' responsible for 2 John and 3 John; he may also have been the author of 1 John and one of the final authors/editors of John's Gospel.”¹

When was it written?

This letter was probably composed in the 90s, around the same time or shortly after the Gospel according to John. Some scholars think it was written before 1 John. It is not clear whether it was written before 2 John or afterwards. One theory suggests that 2 John and 3 John were letters to be sent along with 1 John (see 3 John 9a); one was for the church as a whole and the other specifically for Gaius.

What is it about?

Third John was written from one Christian leader to another to ask for help in disciplining Diotrephes, a leader who is not submitting to authority.

How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1)
- II. Gaius Commended (2-8)
- III. Problems with Diotrephes (9-11)
- IV. Demetrius Commended (12)
- V. Final Greetings (13-15)

1 Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 495-496.

What are some things to look for?

- **Authority in the Church:** What gave the author of the letter his authority? Age? Experience? Association with the apostle John? What gives leaders in the Church today authority?
- **Hospitality:** Hospitality was important in the early Church. Gaius is commended for receiving strangers (3 John 5), and Diotrephes is condemned for not being welcoming. Being hospitable, especially to those who are different, is still an important mark of Christianity today.