

"THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN"

Introduction

What was the early church like? We know a lot about its early leaders, such as apostles Paul and Peter; but what about the average Christians themselves? Were they more spiritual than Christians today? Did they experience the kind of problems seen so often in churches today?

Several books of the New Testament reflect the life of the early church, and this is especially true of **The Third Epistle of John**. It is a private letter, between "The Elder" and a Christian named Gaius. It provides portraits of three different men, and in so doing gives us a glimpse of 1st century life in local churches.

When one examines the portraits found in this letter, we learn that there is not much difference between people back then, and in the church today. Therefore this epistle is very relevant, though we may live almost 2000 years later.

AUTHOR

"The Elder" ([3Jn 1:1](#)) is believed by most conservative scholars to be **the apostle John**. The **internal evidence** for the third epistle is similar to that of the second:

- * The **three epistles** of John utilize much the same language and ideas
- * All bear similarity to concepts and language to the **Gospel of John**
- * The term "elder" would be a fitting description of John as the author, writing in his old age

The **external evidence** is slight, but Dionysius of Alexandria, living in the third century A.D., credits John with being the author.

RECIPIENT

The epistle is addressed to "beloved Gaius". **Gaius** was a common Roman name, and appears five times in the New Testament ([Ac 19:29](#); [20:4](#); [Ro 16:23](#); [1Co 1:14](#); [3Jn 1:1](#)). Whether he is one of those mentioned by Luke or Paul cannot be determined. He was evidently a dear friend of John, known for his hospitality (more below).

PLACE AND DATE

Ephesus is usually suggested as the location from which John wrote this epistle, as he was known to live there in the later years of his life. Estimation of the date of writing varies widely, some placing it before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). Most however place it around **90-95 A.D.**

PURPOSE AND THEME

The **purpose** of the epistle is threefold, related to the three men mentioned by name:

- * To confirm that **Gaius** did right in supporting those teachers who came his way, encouraging him to continue this hospitality - [3Jn 1:5-8](#)
- * To express his condemnation of **Diotrephes** for rejecting John and others whom he should have received - [3Jn 1:9-10](#)
- * To encourage Gaius to imitate what is good, commending **Demetrius** as a good example - [3Jn 1:11-12](#)

As for the **theme**, with the examples of the three men preserved for us in this letter, let me suggest one based on the words of John in verse 11:

Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good

OUTLINE

Here is a simple outline of the book...

Greetings, with an expression of great joy (1-4)
 The confirmation of Gaius (5-8)
 The condemnation of Diotrephes (9-10)
 The commendation of Demetrius (11-12)
 Concluding remarks (13-14)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) **Who is author of The Third Epistle Of John?**
 - The Elder, likely John the apostle who wrote the gospel of John
- 2) **Who was the recipient of this epistle?**
 - The beloved Gaius, identity otherwise unknown
- 3) **When was it written? From where?**
 - Most date it from 90-95 A.D.; Ephesus
- 4) **What has been suggested as its threefold purpose?**
 - To confirm Gaius did right
 - To condemn Diotrephes for doing wrong
 - To commend Demetrius as a good example
- 5) **What has been suggested as its theme?**
 - Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good
- 6) **What are the main divisions of this epistle as outlined above?**
 - Greetings, with an expression of great joy (1-4)
 - The confirmation of Gaius (5-8)
 - The condemnation of Diotrephes (9-10)
 - The commendation of Demetrius (11-12)
 - Concluding remarks (13-14)