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### Introduction to "3 John"

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# 3 John

Whereas John's second epistle warned against extending hospitality to itinerant false teachers, in his third epistle, John encourages the church to show hospitality to their fellow Christian believers. While John commends a person named Gaius for his support of itinerant missionaries, he sharply rebukes a certain individual named Diotrephes for refusing to do so. While some have assumed Diotrephes was involved with the false teachings John had warned about in his other epistles, the problem does not appear to have been theological. John does not rebuke Diotrephes for his doctrinal views but for his desire for "preeminence" (lit., "loving to be first"). Thus the problem John addresses in this letter appears to have been a power struggle that was undermining the church and hindering the gospel.

## AUTHOR

Third John is the third epistle attributed to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. As in 2 John, the author identifies himself as the "elder" ("*presbyteros*"; 3 John 1; cf. 2 John 1). Similarities between this epistle and 1 John also support Johannine authorship (1 John 3:10; 3 John 11). Origen seems to be the first early church father to mention all three epistles of John, and Clement of Alexandria knew of the existence of more than one Johannine epistle. Significantly, no one ever regarded any of the three epistles as authored by anyone other than the apostle John.

## DATE

The third epistle of John most likely was written about the same time as the first two epistles, possibly even as part of a package, around the AD 80s or 90s (see *Date* in 1 John).

## AUDIENCE

The epistle is addressed to Gaius, whom the author knows personally (3 John 1-3, 13, 14). Since it was a common name in the Roman empire, this Gaius is probably a different person than the other individuals with this name who are mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). Possibly he was a leader in one of the churches to whom John wrote.

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

In writing to Gaius, John endeavors to ensure the delivery of his message to the loyal members of the church. He encourages Gaius to continue being faithful and endorses his acts of hospitality. At the same time, John may have also been worried that Gaius might be influenced by Diotrephes, who was spreading lies about the apostle



Date of writing  
the late  
first century AD

and did not acknowledge his authority. The apostle John may have also been preparing the church to accept a change of church elders when he should come and “remember” the deeds of Diotrephes (v. 10).

### **STRUCTURE**

Third John is the best example in the New Testament of a first-century letter. It follows the basic literary conventions that characterized private letters in the first century.

As you read through the epistle, consider what local churches can do to avoid appointing leaders whose hunger for prominence and power can lead the church away from following its true spiritual leaders.

### **OUTLINE:**

- I. Introduction (v. 1)
- II. Message (vv. 2-12)
  - A. Encouragement for Gaius (vv. 5-8)
  - B. A Scolding for Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)
  - C. Praise for Demetrius (vv. 11-12)
- III. Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

### **ARCHAEOLOGY**

Hospitality was an essential virtue in the ancient world. Travel conditions were difficult and inns usually either too expensive or had a bad reputation for being filthy and attracting thieves and prostitutes. Because of this, and for being an expression of generosity, the New Testament especially encourages the practice of hospitality (cf. Rom. 16:23; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 John 5-8). Traveling missionaries and preachers would stay in the homes of believers and afterward be sent off with food and other resources (cf. Acts 16:15; Phil. 4:10-20). This practice helped spread the gospel, but it also aided the circulation of heresies; hence, the importance of warning against abuses of hospitality and of false teachers.

# Jude

Although Jude had initially planned to write a letter about the glorious salvation in which the church shared (v. 3a), his plans changed when he learned about the growing influence of false teachers who were leading people away from the faith (vv. 3b-4). Concerned about this situation, Jude wrote urging the believers to “contend earnestly” for the Christian faith.

## AUTHOR

The author identifies himself as Jude, the brother of James (1). “Jude” comes from the Greek *Ioudas*, also translated as Judas. Of the five “Judas” mentioned in the New Testament, the most likely one to be the epistle’s author is Judas, the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; cf. Matt. 10:4; Luke 6:16; Acts 5:37; 15:22). His brother, James, became a prominent leader in the church, and the reference to James indicates that the readers knew and respected him (Mark 6:3; John 7:5; Acts 15:13-21; Gal. 1:19; 2:9). Evidence from the early church fathers corroborates Jude, the brother of James and Jesus, as the author of the epistle. The Muratorian Canon includes the letter, and among the church fathers who endorse its authorship are Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

## DATE

Scholars usually give a date in the late AD 50s or 60s for Jude. They commonly explain the strong similarities between 2 Peter and Jude as resulting from Jude having been written first and then influencing 2 Peter (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1-17; Jude 4-12). If 2 Peter was written around AD 63–65, Jude must have been composed sometime before that.

## AUDIENCE

Jude has a relatively elaborate style of Greek, which could imply that its intended readers were proficient in the language. The author presupposes that his audience was familiar with Old Testament people and events (5) and uses the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, which indicates that he most likely wrote to Jewish Christians. The fact that he addresses them in a general way as “those who are called” (1) suggests that he meant the letter to be read in more than one church.

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Jude reminds his readers of the importance of holding on to their faith and not giving heed to false teachings (3, 4). The people that Jude warns against were relying on their dreams and instincts and rejecting authority and revelation (8, 10, 18). It led to sexual and other immoral practices (6-8). Therefore he emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the truth of the gospel and transforming the character (19-21). An-



Date of writing  
before AD 65

other major theme is that the judgment is coming, and believers should live according to that reality (5-10; 14-16).

## STRUCTURE

Although Jude is one of the shortest documents in the New Testament, it is a carefully argued and elegantly constructed letter. Outside of its prologue (vv. 1-4) and closing doxology (vv. 24-25), the body of the letter consists of two main sections: (1) a warning against apostasy (vv. 5-19) and (2) an exhortation in which the author urges his readers to remain faithful (vv. 20-23). In issuing his warning about the danger of apostasy, Jude draws upon a wide variety of illustrations from the Judean world. He identifies individuals such as Cain, Balaam, Korah (vv. 11-13), and Enoch (vv. 14-16) and also alludes to extra-biblical texts like the Testament of Moses (v. 9) and 1 Enoch (v. 14).

Jude also makes use of rhetorical repetition through his letter. This style can be seen in his use of two triplets in his section on apostasy: (1) The story of the Israelites, fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 5-10) and Cain, Balaam, and Korah (vv. 11-13). It also occurs in the final section of the letter when he uses three modifying participles in 20-21 to describe how his readers are to keep themselves "in the love of God" (v. 21). His use of repetition is also apparent in the use of the demonstrative pronoun "these" (*houtoi*) in verses 8, 10, 12, 16, 19.

As you read through this little epistle, notice how Jude's denouncement of the false teachers resembles the prophetic ministry associated with Old Testament prophets (vv. 8-13).

## OUTLINE:

- I. Greeting (vv. 1-2)
- II. Reason for Writing (vv. 3-4)
- III. Historical Warnings Against Apostasy (vv. 5-19)
  - A. The Israelites, Fallen Angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 5-10)
  - B. Cain, Balaam, and Korah (vv. 11-13)
  - C. Enoch's Prophecy of the Judgment of the Ungodly (vv. 14-16)
  - D. The Apostle's Prediction of the Rise of False Teachers (vv. 17-19)
- IV. An Exhortation for the Faithful (vv. 20-23)
  - A. Personal Application to Believers (vv. 20-21)
  - B. Responsibility to Others (vv. 22-23)
- V. Doxology (vv. 24-25)

## ARCHAEOLOGY

Scholars debate the exact relationship between Jesus and those brothers mentioned in the gospels (James, Simon, and Judas/Jude; cf. Matt. 13:55). The most common theory is that they were Joseph's sons from a previous marriage, making them Jesus' stepbrothers. *The Protoevangelium of James* (second century AD) suggests that

Joseph was a widower when he betrothed Mary. Epiphanius of Salamis (fourth century AD) adopted this view, and it has remained as the understanding of the eastern church. While Jesus' brothers were skeptical of Him during His lifetime, it seems that they became believers after His resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 9:5; 15:7). The books of Acts and Galatians mention that James became a prominent leader in the church during the early days of the spreading of the gospel (Acts 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9). Early church tradition, however, attests that not only James but also Simon and Judas/Jude were leaders in the Jerusalem church, as found in the list of Epiphanius.

Furthermore, it seems that further generations of Jesus' family maintained leadership positions. Eusebius quotes from two sources who claim that Jude had two grandsons interrogated by the emperor Domitian about their lineage, which traced back to David and concerning Christ and the nature of His kingdom. Upon their release, they became leaders in the church until the reign of Trajan.