

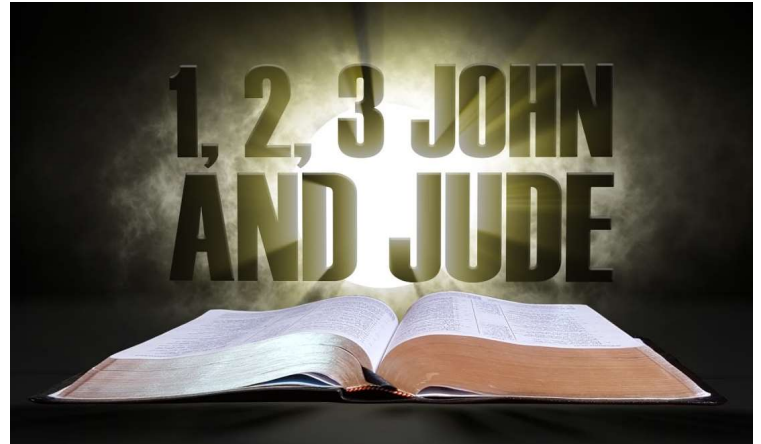
1, 2, 3 JOHN

JUDE

1 John

Date of composition: approximately A.D. 100

After Pentecost and the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, the struggle with the Jews of the synagogue was no longer a major issue. Rather, it was division among Christians that became a problem. Sparked by their different views of Jesus, Christians accepted that the Word was God, but disagreed about the importance of what Jesus had done in the flesh. Some felt that his actions set a moral standard to be followed; others thought that simply *believing* in the Word was all that mattered, and that what Christians did was of no more importance than what Jesus himself did.



Chapters 1-3:10

Dominating these issues were the traditionalists and the interpreters of the tradition who sought to preserve the witness of John the Beloved Disciple. For them, fellowship is the root of Christian joy and is an essential aspect of the Christian community. Moreover, as in the beginning of John's gospel, the author reiterates the view of the world as one divided into light and darkness. God is the light of the just, and walking in the light and acting in truth guarantees fellowship with one another and with the Lord.

True Christians acknowledge or publicly confess their sins, for which Jesus is their Savior. Therefore, to claim that one is sinless is to make a liar out of God. While the author does not wish to encourage sin, he reminds his readers that if they do sin, they have a Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) with the Father.

Specifically in this section the commandment to love one's fellow man is highlighted. Although this was an old commandment known to the Christian community when they were first converted to Christ, it is new in that it has yet to be fully practiced in a world liberated by Jesus from the power of darkness.

Considering the struggle against the Evil One, the author issues an impassioned denunciation of the world (2:15-17) and its attractions. Indeed, the transitory nature of the world introduces the theme of struggle with the agent of evil, the antichrist. Satan is the world's liar, and so is everyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

The author's use of the word "**children**" (1:18) may be a form of address to all the Christians of this community, for they had the anointing of the Holy Spirit when they became Christians. Therefore false teachers should have no sway over them. True believers have both the truth and the promise of eternal life; and their present union with Jesus enables them to face with confidence his return and judgment.

Chapters 3:10-5:12

Using the example of Cain in Genesis 3:15, the author argues that hatred is a form of murder. By contrast Christ lay down his life for us, and so we must be willing to lay down our lives for others.

The author invokes a test to discern the presence of false prophets with their claim of being led by the Spirit (3:10). For there is a Spirit of God, and a spirit of the antichrist. Everyone who acknowledges Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is led by the Spirit and belongs to God.

The author returns to the theme of love for one another with the proclamation, “**God is love**” (4:7). Christians know this not because of our initiative of loving God, but because God sent his only Son into the world so that our sins might be forgiven. This is God’s divine love for sinners. Here the clarity and beauty of this verse comes to a head, “**No one has ever seen God; yet, if we love one another, God remains in us and his love is perfected in us**” (4:12). Those who claims to love God while hating their brothers or sisters are liars.

Therefore everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God and will conquer the world – a victory won by faith. This emphasis on the salvific witness borne by Jesus shedding his blood corrects the notion of those who believed that Jesus was a mere man until his baptism; and that only *after* his baptism did he become the Son of God with the descent of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22). The author’s response is: “**This is the one who came by water (baptism) and blood (crucifixion)—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth**” (5:6-8)

Conclusion (5:13-21)

The author urges prayers that sinners may receive life; however, there is an important exception: the author does not urge prayer for those who commit “**deadly (mortal) sin,**” which was likely the sin of joining any form of apostasy (5:16).

Finally, three solemn “**we know**” proclamations are made as the writer returns to his view that God and those begotten by God are opposed to the Evil One. The author concludes with a clear affirmation of the divinity of Christ and an impassioned plea to guard against the false teaching that is idolatry.

2 John

Date of composition: approximately A.D. 100

1 John and 2 John are similar in that they stress the commandment to love one another, as well as condemn as the antichrist those who deny Jesus coming in the flesh. The author or “presbyter” addresses his letter to “**an Elect Lady and her children;**” that is, Christians of an unnamed local church who are to be instructed not to let such false teachers into the house—the Church (1:1).

The arrival of missionaries—some from the author himself and some from the “secessionists” (those who left the Church and were now promoting their beliefs outside of it)—must have been confusing for Christians. How were they to know who preached the truth until they allowed the missionaries to speak? And if their teaching was false, the damage was already done!

The author insists that Christians “**walk**” (or “follow”) his commandments” (2 John 6). In biblical language “walking” symbolized the way a person lives his life through daily behavior. This



way of living a life of faithful love and obedience to God's truth as handed on through the Apostles is the main ethical thrust of 1 John.

Similarly, 2 John acknowledges Jesus coming in the flesh as the key difference between those whom the author acknowledges as beloved children and the antichrist deceivers who have gone out into the world. Christians should look to themselves and not receive into their house (that is, the Church) those who bring another doctrine. Otherwise they might lose what they have worked for by sharing in such evil. Such adversaries are described as those who do not remain in the teaching of Christ: **"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those men do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh"** (2 John 7). This difference is seen as crucial, since whoever teaches falsehoods were never true believers at all.

In closing, the author apologizes for the brevity of the letter, and expresses the hope to visit soon so **"that our joy may be fulfilled"** (2 John 12).

3 John

Date of composition: shortly after A.D. 100

As the shortest book in the New Testament, 3 John offers no critique of the Christian's moral indifference or error, but only of the complicated church relationships that arose. For example, in one community of Christians, Diotrephes (a local church leader who was probably a former Gentile, for "Diotrephes" means "nurtured by Jupiter") decided to keep out all traveling missionaries—including those from the author. Diotrephes' refusal of hospitality prompted the author to write 3 John to Gaius. Gaius was providing temporary hospitality to the author; however the author wanted him to assume a larger responsibility toward helping the missionaries, including the well-known Demetrius who will soon arrive.

Thus the author holds up faithful Gaius in contrast with Diotrephes (vs. 9), and provides a picture of the early evangelists who **"set out for the sake of the Name and are accepting nothing from the pagans"** (3 John 7). In fact, such generosity was expected from local Christians, to **"support such persons, so that they can be co-workers in the truth"** (3 John 8).

The dispute between the author of 3 John and Diotrephes centers around two main issues: the rejection of Apostolic church authority and hospitality.

1. Diotrephes rejects John's authority: **"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to dominate, does not acknowledge us"** (3 John 9). Diotrephes is accused of refusing to acknowledge or even accept a previous letter from the author, which amounts to a rejection of his Apostolic authority. Moreover, Diotrephes is accused of **"spreading evil nonsense about us,"** possibly to undermine the credibility of both him and the other missionaries (3 John 10).

2. Diotrephes refuses to show hospitality: **"He will not receive the brothers"** (3 John 10). Hospitality toward traveling Christian missionaries was always expected in the early Church. However, Diotrephes goes even further by **"hindering those who wish to do so (that is, offer hospitality) and expelling them from the church"** (3 John 10).

Essentially this is a power struggle. Diotrephes likely had a position of leadership and wished to maintain control over who had influence and authority. Therefore he asserts the dominance of the local church and resists all outside (that is, Apostolic) influence. Diotrephes may also have feared that welcoming other missionaries would threaten doctrinal or organizational purity, or simply threaten his own authority.

In response, the author writes to Gaius and praises him for *his* faithfulness and hospitality, which is a subtle rebuke of Diotrephes. The author promises to deal with Diotrephes' behavior if he

is able to visit in person (3 John 10). As in 2 John, the author of 3 John closes with an apology for brevity as he hopes to see Gaius soon.

We cannot be sure of the reasons for the antagonism between the author and Diotrephes, but it seems that both were opposed to breakaway missionaries. If the author of 3 John is the same as 1 John, then he likely thought that there was no need for human teachers because those who have the anointing with the Spirit automatically speak the truth; one need only test the spirits to detect false prophets (1 John 2:27; 4:1-6). Diotrephes claimed that such “self-styled” missionaries (as he saw them) made it impossible for people to know who really was speaking the truth. In Diotrephes’ view, the author was naïve and impractical. Diotrephes insisted that one had to have the background to know what is erroneous, and the administrative authority to keep the false teachers away.

The Letter of Jude

Date of composition: between A.D. 55-100

At best it can be surmised that the author of the Letter of Jude identifies himself through a relationship with James, and that Jude was one of the four named brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3, **“James and Joses and Judas and Simon,”** and Matthew 13:55). By assuming such a family connection, Jude would have had the necessary authority to write a more general work **“about our common salvation”** (Jude 3). Although the author is not an apostle himself, he presents himself as someone with standing in the Church. We can assume that this is a letter sent in the name of Jude, “brother” or cousin of Jesus and of James.

Jude reveals how church leaders responded to dangers, real or foreseen, as Christians began to divide from within. To maintain unity, Jude regards the faith as a traditional body of teaching that was **“once for all delivered to the saints,”** while he himself has the right to expound on the faith (Jude 3). He plans to do so on a general level, but these plans are interrupted by the appearance of **“certain ungodly people”** who turned the grace of God into licentiousness and who deny the Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

The author assumes that the addressees know what is erroneous teaching, and so he concentrates on how God will refute it. In so doing he offers examples from Israelite tradition in which God punished disobedience: when the Israelites lacked faith in the desert; Sodom and Gomorrah. The author offers three more examples: Cain, Balaam, and Korah, and unleashes a colorful invective against these ungodly personages. One gets the impression that the false teachers had made their way into the very heart of the group of the people to whom Jude had addressed his letter.

The Christians are to **“build yourselves up in your most holy faith”** by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). They are to keep themselves in God’s love and wait for the mercy of the Lord. Those who doubt or hesitate are to be shown mercy. Others are to be shown mercy with extreme caution, all the while hating their corruption.

In conclusion, no personal messages are given by Jude. Rather, the author concludes with a solemn expression of praise of God adapted to the endangered state of the addressees. Jude blesses the one and only God who can keep them safe.

