

## **The Writings of John**

### **The Epistles and The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

Here, in 3 John, we have the same author as in the other writings of John which is indicated by the similarities and structure of this letter. Because there is no mention of any christological conflicts that appear in 1 and 2 John, it is possible that this letter was written before 1 and 2 John, possibly in the 80's of the first century A.D. However, because of the personal content of the letter, it is also a possibility that 3 John was written later, even in the 90's A.D. as we saw with 2 John, this letter follows the classic Greco-Roman style of letter writing, it has a standard letter opening (Vs.1-2), a body (Vs.3-12), and a conclusion (Vs.13-14).

#### *Verses 1-4*

Again the author identifies himself as "*the elder*" as he does in 2 John. He is writing to a beloved friend, Gaius to commend him for his hospitality. John opens the letter in a traditionally common way, with a prayer for well being. "*The truth*" John speaks of in Vs.3-4, is most likely the truth about Docetism which John confronted in 1 John.

#### *Verses 5-8*

John commends Gaius for his hospitality in receiving Christian teachers. The obligation to welcome teachers of the true gospel stands in contrast to 1 John 4:1-3; and 2 John 10-11; where he speaks of the need to avoid these false teachers. People who proclaim the truth and those who support them are serving God in the truth. In Vs.7, John makes reference to Gentiles. This is a clear indication that the early Christian community, which was made up of both Jews and Gentiles, had established itself as the new Israel.

#### *Verses 9-10*

In Vs.9, John refers to a previous letter which has not survived. John worked hard for Christian unity and love among the brethren but here we see a sharp conflict of these values by a man named Diotrephes. It is believed that Diotrephes was an elder in a congregation under John's care. Clearly this man disrupted the unity of the church by his behaviour. He abused his position of leadership by attacking other Christian workers. Evidently, Diotrephes saw other Christian teachers as a threat rather than as co-workers in the kingdom. His attitude indicates a proud and selfish man who turned away travelling evangelists and, in addition to this, he punished and excommunicated anyone who welcomed them. John's response to Diotrephes' behaviour in Vs.10, indicates his pastoral sensitivity. However, it also leaves us in no doubt that he will put a stop to Diotrephes' provocative behaviour. As an apostle John's physical presence was an extension of the authority and presence of Jesus Himself for both encouragement and correction (read 2 Cor. 13:1-3, 10).

#### *Verses 11-12*

This verse again spells out for the church that behaviour like Diotrephes' is in direct conflict and opposition to the love of God. We are to resist responding to situations using hostility, but must instead show the love and grace God has shown us. In Vs.12, we are introduced to Demetrius. He is the bearer of the letter and a faithful Christian. The inclusion of the letter bearer's name, along with the name of the addressee, was necessary to ensure that the letter was not suppressed or misused by those who, like Diotrephes, sought to disrupt the unity of the congregation. It is also possible that Demetrius was a travelling teacher himself, if so, John's letter would encourage Gaius to show him hospitality.

#### *Verses 13-15*

The conclusion to this letter is the same as in 2 John. Although the wording is different, the sentiment is the same, adding that personal touch.

## The Revelation of Jesus Christ

This last book of the N.T. completes the whole of God's intended revelation of His character, His will, His attributes, His gospel and His person and work of redemption found in the Bible. These Scripture give us a solid foundation upon which to build our relationship with God as they are the revealed will of God for our lives. As we know John received this revelation while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. While this book is commonly referred to as “revelation”, we must not forget that the whole title of the book is “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*”. The reason for the title is simple, it is because this book reveals to us a rich portrayal of Jesus as the Sovereign God and His ultimate defeat of Satan.

Unlike his previous writings, John clearly identifies himself as the author of this book (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). In addition to this, early church leaders such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and others of the second century also identify the author as the apostle John. However, in the third century Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, concluded that Revelation and the gospel of John have two different authors. Although it is difficult to be 100% certain, style, similarities and the Jewish character of the book, along with familiarity with the prophets continue to support the traditional view of John as the author.

The Revelation is addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor (1:4, 11), which was in the Roman province of Asia, now part of western Turkey. Each of the seven churches receive a rebuke or encouragement according to their condition (2:1-3:22). Heretical teachings and a decline in the popularity of Christianity had led some Christians to compromise their faith with a pagan society (2:2, 4, 14-15; 20-24; 3:1, 2, 15, 17). John wrote this Revelation to assure these churches that Jesus knew their condition and was calling them to stand firm in the faith. The victory had already been won by the blood of the Lamb (5:9-10), and Jesus would soon return to defeat Satan and all his demons. Then all God's people will enjoy everlasting peace in His presence. These truths were not only for the churches of the first century but still apply to Christians until Jesus returns.

The book of Revelation shares many characteristics of O.T. apocalyptic writings and is even titled the “Apocalypse of John” (the Greek word *apokalypsis* means to reveal or revelation). However, John refers to this book as a “*prophecy*” several times (1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18-19). Identifying this book as an apocalyptic prophecy helps us to determine whether it is meant to be taken symbolically or literally. O.T. apocalyptic writings are characterised by the use of highly figurative and symbolic language, likewise the use of this type of language in Revelation identifies it as an apocalyptic prophecy. This is supported in the opening words of the book which also indicate that this book is to be understood as a largely symbolic book. In Rev. 1:1, John uses the Greek word *semaino* which means “to give a sign, indicate”. In addition to this, Rev.1:1, is a reference to Dan. 2:28-29, 45, which confirms that John's work is symbolic. Overall, the reader is expected to see this means of divine revelation as symbolic.

This leaves us with the question, why did God use this possibly confusing way to speak His message? The answer is that John uses symbols in the same way Jesus used parables which, by their nature, are a form of symbolism and have their roots in visions and signs of the O.T. In fact, the phrase use to the seven churches, “*He who has an ear, let him hear*” is based on Is. 6:9-10. this repetition of the phrase functions in the same way as Jesus' parables in that it will open the eyes of true believer's and leave hardened unbeliever's in their darkness. The book of Revelation, uses present events, understood in a symbolic manner, to speak both a warning or encouragement to believer's who persevere in the faith. Just like the O.T., prophecy in Revelation uses both forth-telling for the present, and foretelling for future events. In short, this book uses visual imagery as well as verbal warnings and promises to weave together a poetic and colourful portrait of the whole of Scripture.

Like other writings by John, Revelation opens with a prologue (1:1-3), a greeting (1:4-5), a body (1:5-22:20) and a farewell (22:21). the main portion of the book consists of seven cycles of judgement. (4:1-8:1; 8:2-11:19; 12:1-14:20; 15:1-16:21; 17:1-19:10; 19:11-21; 20:1-15). However, the relationship between these cycles remains a matter of debate.

There are many themes to be seen in this Revelation and, taken together with the rest of Scripture they serve to show us the rich and colourful tapestry of a sovereign God, a redeeming Saviour and a sanctifying Holy Spirit. If we take Revelation in context with the rest of Scripture we find that it brings us around in a full cycle theologically, Revelation ends where Genesis begins. In Gen. 1-2, God is the sovereign Creator of the heavens and earth, and in Rev.21-22, He is the Creator of the new heavens and earth. All that is between these two statements show us God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in all their Sovereign splendour and majesty. We see the revealed character of our God whose love goes beyond human understanding, and a redeemer who willingly gave His life and took the full force of God's wrath to win eternal life for His people.

May, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen”*