

Key to III JOHN

1. BACKGROUND:

Writer is John, disciple, now bishop of Ephesus in Asia Minor.

Time is late, about A.D. 97, written from Ephesus.

Occasion: Evidently this letter is written to a wealthy man named Gaius (1:1) urging him to open his door for ambassadors of the true Gospel. The name Gaius is mentioned several times in the N.T. (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; I Corinthians 1:14), but we are uncertain if this is the same person.

2. THEME:

There was a problem in one of the local churches. It seems that a certain man named Diotrephes was usurping power and rejecting apostolic authority and letters. John evidently had written to the church (9) and now writes to a certain man in the church in an endeavor to correct the disorder. Probably this is one of many such letters written by the apostles. This one, however, the SPIRIT of GOD has preserved for our instruction.

3. MAIN DIVISIONS:

Personal greetings (1-4);
instruction (5-8);
two leaders contrasted (9-14).

4. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS:

Together with II John they disclose the life and character of the members of the early church. Even as now, the believers had their imperfections. Pastoral oversight was necessary to adjust the difficulties.

Some think that Diotrephes was one of the false teachers spoken of in I John. He had taken such power in his hands that he had refused to allow teachers or representatives who came from the Apostle John to minister in his church.

Paul had evangelized in this area some 40 years earlier. Later, John had come to be the leader of the community. Gathering round about him some preachers and teachers, he sent them into the surrounding countryside. Apparently in some areas, notably one in which Diotrephes lived, the evangelists of John had been refused. On their return, they told their story in John's home church (6). Now, they were going again to visit, taking with them this letter to Gaius.

5. OUTLINE:

Introduction (1-4)
Salutation
Thanksgiving
Hospitality Commended

(Gaius) (5-8)

Selfishness Condemned

(Diotrephes) (9, 10)

Exhortation

(Demetrius) (11, 12)

Conclusion (13, 14)

6. OUTSTANDING TEACHINGS:

The root trouble with Diotrephes was self-seeking, and rejection of apostolic authority. In this manner he becomes the dictator of the church, thus destroying the fellowship and communion with GOD's people everywhere.

Evidently in the church were good men too, among them Gaius who walked in the truth (3) and Demetrius who loved the truth and had a good report of all who knew him (12). These were exhorted to right the situation that existed.

That John purposed to come himself to the church is hinted in verse 14. Yet he hoped that the trouble would be past when he arrived.

In verse 2, John expresses a prayer that Gaius might prosper in "health" as well as in other things.

7. KEY:

A problem in one of the early Christian churches and GOD's answer for it.

~ end of III John ~

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