



Bite Size Books of the NT: 2 John & 3 John

Super Wednesday Bible Study: 10/31/18

1. Brain Starter: Images of Jesus

Christ taking leave of his Mother (1900) by Piotr Stachiewicz

2. The Basic Form of New Testament Letters

Opening Salutation

Authorship; Recipient; Greetings and Thanksgiving; Prayer

Body

Instruction in Doctrine and/or Practice; Correction and Call to Repentance; Travel Plans

Conclusion

Paul often included a summary/recap of the letter; Blessing; Further Greeting

3. The Basics of 2 John

Who: "The Elder" – someone of authority within the Christian community. Probably the same author as 3 John, and perhaps is the same author as 1 John and the Gospel of John, though experts are not united on that.

What: It is a letter with customary opening and closing formulas and is addressed to a congregation referred to as an "elect lady."

Where: Perhaps from Ephesus (modern day Turkey).

When: Approximately 100.

Why: The letter appears to address a doctrinal conflict regarding the nature of Christ and whether the human Jesus was identical to the divine Jesus.

**Second shortest book of NT, with 1126 letters and 245 words*

4. 2 John: Opening Salutation

- V. 1: "Elder" (Greek *πρεσβύτερος*) likely references the author's standing more so than physical age. "Elect lady and her children" is likely a metaphor for the recipient congregation.
- Vv.1-2: the emphasis on "truth" gives a clue to the letter's purpose and helps link this letter to 1 John.
- V. 3: What does this greeting remind you of?

5. 2 John: Body

- V. 5: "New Commandment" language echoes John 13:34-35 and 1 John 2:7.
- V. 7: The conflict centers on the identity of Christ and what appears to be Gnostic interpretations of a "fleshless" Jesus.
- V. 8: "What we have worked for" seems linked to John 6:27-29 and the notion of authentic faith in Jesus.
- V. 9: "Abide" is classic Johannine language. See 1 John 2:6; John 15:4-10.
- Vv. 10-11: What is an appropriate tension between hospitality and the need to appropriately preserve the faith?

6. 2 John: Conclusion

- V. 12: "our joy may be complete" is another phrase with Johannine fingerprints – see 1 John 1:4; John 3:29, 15:11, 16:24; 17:13.

7. 2 John: Assessment of Importance

- PRO: Potentially written by an important disciple
- PRO: Focused on Jesus's key question: "Who do you say that I am?"

- CON: "Readers have found little of note in 2 John; where it was quoted in the early church it was particularly for its usefulness in providing guidelines for relations with those rejected as heretics...Second John remains something of a mystery, offering a glimpse into a world and a reminder of the incompleteness of our knowledge of its time." Judith Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, p. 263-4

8. The Basics of 3 John

Who: "The Elder" is once more the author. Likely the same author as 2 John.

What: It is a letter with customary opening and closing formulas and is addressed to someone named Gaius, whose identity is unknown.

Where: Perhaps from Ephesus (modern day Turkey)

When: Approximately 100.

Why: Different in tone from 1 John and 2 John; appears to be very contextual in praising Gaius and condemning an opponent named Diotrephes.

**Shortest book of NT, with 1105 letters and 219 words*

9. 3 John: Opening Salutation

- V. 1: Gaius is a common NT name. Acts 19:29, 20:4; Rom. 16:23.

10. 3 John: Body

- V. 2: How do you assess the connection and importance of physical health and spiritual health? How do we measure each?
- V. 3: What does it mean to "walk in the truth"? Is it more than mere belief?
- V. 5: focus of faithful walking here is on hospitality to strangers who are "friends in the Gospel."
- V. 6: Church is mentioned three times in all of the Johannine books, and they all occur in this letter (vv. 6, 9 and 10).
- Vv. 6-8: "send them on" refers to provisioning the traveling evangelists, presumably so that the Way of Jesus can spread like the proverbial mustard seed. In 2018, what are we called to "send on" to help the Way spread?
- Vv. 9-10: We do not know who Diotrephes was, but experts do not think he was a bishop. What is the fight about? Doctrine? Power? Is it personal? In 2018 who has "authority" in our society, especially in faith?
- V. 11: Key verse; the Elder wants Gaius to select a path to imitate. Who is your role model?
- V. 11: "Whoever does good is from God" is an echo of 1 John 2:29 and 3:10. Do you agree? Who are the "hidden saints" or "unbaptized Christians" among us?

11. 3 John: Conclusion

- Similar to 2 John, but ultimately very "ordinary" and somewhat anticlimactic.

12. 3 John: Assessment of Importance

- PRO: Forces us to think about authority and our evangelism efforts.
- CON: "The elder's letter survived, perhaps as much because of who he was as of what he said...even so, it is difficult to imagine that it would have been preserved unless it was physically attached to 2 John, perhaps written on the same roll, probably not when sent...but highly likely when archived. Third John serves as a fragmentary record of one of the many controversies that troubled the nascent church..." Judith Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, p. 283

13. Next Week (11/7) Philemon