

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

THE EPISTLES OF THE DISCIPLES

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THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

II John 1:1

The Elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.

The Second Epistle of John was probably written in or about 85 A.D. This was during the reign of Domitian, the last of the Caesars.

Paul founded the church in Ephesus and after his death, the work was continued there by John. John's influence was so great, his converts so numerous and his works so powerful that Domitian summoned him to Rome. Legends state that he set forth, accompanied by some of his disciples, and even though he had traveled for seven days without food or rest he arrived altogether fair and radiant.

The elect lady to whom John addresses this Epistle is thought to be one of his disciples. Tradition states that she was a native of Asia Minor and a patrician who, upon a visit to Rome, contacted some of the neophytes of the Way and became a convert to the new religion. Her home was a center for the Christian teachings and a place of refuge for the persecuted. Her enthusiasm and extended activities brought her to the attention of the Roman authorities. So bitter was the current animosity that her wealth and influence were powerless to aid her. Upon her refusal to recant she was tried for heresy. The usual procedure in such a trial was to present the accused with a wooden cross. If the one on trial trod upon this cross the recantation was considered sufficient and

the person was set free. If, however, the accused refused to do this, he was declared a heretic and was put to death, usually by being hanged upon the cross which he refused to renounce.

This was the fate of the elect lady who, after her refusal to recant, was cast into prison for a time and afterward was crucified. Yet all the while she remained firm and steadfast in her loyalty to the Christ whom she had come to adore, and faithful to the teachings to which her life had been dedicated. Thus it is evident that she highly merited the confidence of John, her teacher, and the beautiful words of blessing which he bestowed upon her.

II John 1:5, 6

And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

The Third Epistle of John is addressed to one of his fellow Disciples.

III John 1:1-3

The elder unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

John is referred to in the Gospels as the Disciple whom Jesus loved. He is also mentioned as the apostle of love. It is said that in the last years of his life he ceased both to teach and to write. He devoted himself entirely to going about and blessing all whom he met and oft his repeated admonition to his disciples was "Little children, love ye one another."

Legend tells us that on his last night upon the physical plane, he gathered his disciples about him and spoke to them of the Christ whom he loved so well, and observed with them the sacred Eucharist. When his disciples took their leave he was standing in a great ray of light, holding out his hands in blessing. When they returned the next day they found only his cloak and a well of water in the place where they had last seen him. This is a mystic way of saying that his words and his works are eternal. John, the most spiritual of all the Disciples, symbolizes the power of love that gives to life a continuous unbroken consciousness; the love that so illumines and transforms life that there can be not even a suggestion of death.

John was the only Disciple, Judas excepted, who escaped martyrdom. When his work upon Earth was finished he was translated into a higher phase of being. The mystic Christian understands that he did not lose contact with his disciples, but that he was often near to guide and inspire them. His words to Gaius, his pupil, were applicable to his life here, and also after he had voluntarily laid down his physical body for a larger, wider work in the spiritual realms.

III John 1:4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

III John 1:13

I had many things to write but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee.

The deepest spiritual truths are not communicated by writing but only "passed on from mouth to ear," as the Masons express it. It is to these deeper truths that John refers.

Of the three Epistles of John the first contains teachings belonging to the Masculine Spirit; the second deals with the truths concerning the Feminine, the elect lady; and the third treats of the union of the two in that balance which brings immortal life. John closes this last Epistle with the admonition "Greet the friends by name" — that is, the new name of the soul which is given to the Initiate, the new name which possesses a great power and is known only to the disciple receiving it, to the Initiator and to lay brothers and sisters belonging to the same degree.

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

As previously stated, the Hebrew word translated brother also means cousin. James and Jude were sons of the sister of the Virgin Mary and Cleophas. They were not brothers but cousins of Jesus.

Names were often given to represent certain characteristics. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jude is called Lebbeus, a name signifying the possession of exceptional spiritual knowledge. In the *Vulgate* of Jerome the name is Thaddeus (courage); the name also means gentleness and sweetness, both of which are fruits of the awakened spirit. Jude, meaning praise, was the name used by his family and the other Disciples. He was one of the most earnest and devout of their number and one of the last to suffer martyrdom. He carried the work of the new religion into Edessa, thereby following the command of the Master to preach the gospel and heal the sick. While there he was beaten into insensibility with clubs by an infuriated mob. Artists portray him with a club as his symbol.

The Epistle of Jude is the shortest single Book in the Bible but despite its brevity it touches upon many phases of the Ancient Wisdom.