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## The Johannine Letters in the Christian Canon

Acceptance of the Johannine Letters as Scripture came in stages:

1 John met with universal, early acceptance; 2 John and 3 John came later.

- The Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210) says that two letters by John are accepted; most scholars think that this means 1 John and 2 John, but it could mean 1 John and 3 John.
- Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) mentions 1 John and 2 John, but not 3 John.
- Origen of Alexandria (ca. 215–250) says that the apostle John “left behind one epistle . . . and possibly a second and a third, but not everyone agrees that these are genuine”; the disputed works clearly are 2 John and 3 John, because Origen notes that “taken together, they do not contain a hundred lines.”
- Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 311) places “the epistle bearing the name of John” on his list of “acknowledged books”; he then offers a second list of “disputed books,” and on this list he places “those works called the second and third epistles of John.” The question regarding the latter two books concerns “whether they came from the evangelist or from someone with the same name.”
- Athanasius of Alexandria (367) says that “the three letters of John” are to be considered unequivocally among “the books of the New

Testament.” This was also the judgment of the Council of Hippo (393) and the Council of Carthage (397).

- The Syrian church was more cautious in its acceptance of 2 John and 3 John; they were not added to the New Testament in that part of the church until 508.

Note that in the modern church, 2 John and 3 John (like the Letter of Jude) are not used in the lectionary; thus for many Christian denominations, they are never read publicly in church.