

# Reading Through the New Testament

## 1 John

### Background to the Letter

- While there is no greeting to indicate who wrote the letter, there is compelling evidence that the Apostle John is the author.
- Verses 1-3 make it clear that the person who wrote these words was an eye-witness of the life and ministry of Jesus.
- The vocabulary, style, and themes of the letter are very similar to the Gospel of John.
- Several leaders of the early church identify John as the author, including Irenaeus (130-202 AD), and Tertullian (160-220 AD).
- Church tradition tells us that John left Jerusalem a few years before the city was destroyed by the Romans (70 AD), and that he continued his ministry in and around Ephesus (modern day Turkey).
- It was probably one of the last books of the NT to be written, in the late 80's or early 90's AD.
- The absence of personal references probably indicates it was written to believers throughout the region, rather than to one specific congregation.
- The book is difficult to outline, frequently changing subject, only to return later to pick up the same ideas. This is not to suggest it is haphazard, but intricately woven together. It's structure has been compared to a musical symphony (ESV Study Bible).
- John demonstrates fatherly care for his readers, affectionately calling them his "children."

### Outline:

- I. The Incarnate Word (1:1-4)**
- II. God Is Light (1:5-10)**
- III. Christ Our Advocate (2:1-14)**
- IV. Do Not Love the World (2:15-24)**
- V. Eternal Life (2:25-29)**
- VI. Children of God (3:1-24)**
- VII. Test the Spirits (4:1-6)**
- VIII. God Is Love (4:7-21)**
- IX. Overcoming the World (5:1-12)**
- X. That You May Know (5:13-21)**

- There had apparently been a group of people to leave the churches, who were not true believers (2:19). The letter offers assurance to those who remained.
- There are a series of contrasts made in the letter between: light and darkness, love of the world and love for God, children of God and children of the devil, the Spirit of God and the spirit of the antichrist.

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1. John makes several statements, throughout the letter, about the character of God:

- a.) God is L\_\_\_\_\_ (1:5)
- b.) God is R\_\_\_\_\_ (2:29)
- c.) God is L\_\_\_\_\_ (4:8, 16)
- d.) God is the F\_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3; 4:14)
- e.) God is the F\_\_\_\_\_ of believers (3:1)

2. Does God's nature ever change? If these qualities define Him today, do we ever need to fear that these attributes might somehow diminish or disappear at some later time? Is that comforting to know?

3. Read 1:5-10. **God is light.** He is pure, radiant, and reveals His salvation to humanity. How “bright” is God? Are there any imperfections? Does He ever have an off day?
  
4. God’s light exposes the sinfulness of our human hearts, which is why many rejected Christ during His earthly ministry. They wanted to believe they were righteous, and did not want to admit they were guilty of violating God’s Law. What does John say about those who claim to be without sin (v.8-10)?
  
5. Denying our sin will do nothing to help our condition. What does God promise to do for those who come to Him in repentance and faith?
  
6. Once we enter the light of Jesus Christ, how should we live? If we claim to know God, but walk in darkness (persistently dwell in the dark, continuously practice deeds of darkness), what does John say?
  
7. What else do we learn about God’s light, in the Gospel of John (John 1:9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:35-36)?
  
8. Read John 4:7-21. **God is love.** This is not merely one of His activities; it is an essential part of His nature. Everything that God does is done in love. There are many examples we could point to, but what is the greatest demonstration of God’s love in Scripture?
  
9. Did God wait around for our hearts to warm up towards Him, before He reached out in love?
  
10. Love is not the easiest word for us to define, because we use the same word in so many different ways. In Greek there are several words for love, and the highest form is “agape.” How would you describe this type of love? What does it do? What does it seek? How does it differ from human love?
  
11. What does John say about the person who claims to love God, but hates his brother (v.20)?
  
12. How do we learn to love like this? Do you think a person really understand the true nature of love, if they do not know God? How will this love manifest itself in our relationships with others (3:16-18)?
  
13. According to 5:12-13, is it possible to know for sure that we are saved, that our sins are forgiven, and that we will be with God in eternity after we leave this world?