

English Transcript

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 4: Prepare an Introduction/Overview of the Book

Welcome back to How to Study the Bible. We are continuing with Lesson 4 as we study through 1 John and apply some simple techniques for studying any book of the Bible. Turn to page 21 as we discuss the next step in our process.

We have completed the first two steps.

Step 1: Select the book to study – We selected 1 John as the book to study in this course.

Step 2: Master the general content of the book – you read 1 John at least 6 times and recorded your observations as part of learning activity #1.

In this lesson we will introduce the next step to prepare an Introduction or Overview of the Book. This introduction will evolve as you continue to study the book. Your initial introduction will look very different from the final edited version you will write at the end of your study process. This step is important because it begins to help you synthesize or pull together all of your observations from the prior step.

Remember that the first step in the process of studying the Bible is to make observations. We want to discover what we see in the Bible text. What does the text say. We are thinking about the following questions as we begin our study and make observations.

Who wrote the Book?

To whom did he write it?

Where did he write it?

When did he write it?

What was the occasion of his writing?

What was his purpose in writing this book?

What were the circumstances of the author when he wrote?

What was going on in the culture at the time of his writing?

How does the book provide a look into the life of the author?

What are the main ideas or themes of the book?

What is the central truth of the book?

What are the characteristics of the book?

With these questions in your mind, read through 1 John one more time and as you come up with an answer to one of the questions, write it down. When you have completed this process, you may consult a commentary to supplement your study. A short overview of 1 John is provided in this handout to help to facilitate this step. This will all provide you with the necessary information to begin writing your first draft of an introduction or overview to 1 John.

ACTIVITY #2: Prepare an Introduction/Overview of the Book

Turn to pages 29-30 for instructions to complete this activity. Since we have limited time in this class and limited access to other supporting resources, some background information on 1 John has been provided below from *Talk Thru the Bible* to help you develop your personal introduction/Overview for this book based on the culture and other events surrounding the time when this book may have been written. You may begin writing your introduction to 1 John on page 30 in your workbook.

Here is some background information that you may add to your observations and notes in Lesson 3.

1 John Background information

The external evidence for the authorship of 1 John shows that from the beginning it was universally received without dispute as authoritative. All of the Greek and Latin church fathers accepted this epistle as written by the apostle John. There is much internal evidence that points to John as the author as well. The style and vocabulary are similar to the Gospel of John with the limited Greek vocabulary and frequent contrast of opposites. John may have left Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 AD and he ministered near Ephesus. The believers in these congregations were well established in Christian truth and John wrote to them not as novices but as brethren grounded in apostolic doctrine (2:7, 18-27; 3:11).

This letter shows a personal touch that reveals his close relationship to the original recipients. John was advanced in years, and he wrote this fatherly letter out of loving concern for his “children” whose steadfastness in the truth was being threatened by the lure of worldliness and the guile of false teachers.

The Gnostic heresy at that time taught that matter was inherently evil, and a divine being therefore could not take on human flesh. Another variation of this false teaching was Docetism, the doctrine that Christ only seemed to have a human body. The result in both cases was the same – a denial of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Gnostics also believed that their understanding of the hidden knowledge (gnosis) made them a kind of spiritual elite, who were above the normal distinctions of right and wrong. This led in most cases to sinful conduct and complete disregard for Christian ethics.

The major theme of 1 John is fellowship with God. John wanted his readers to have assurance of the indwelling God through their abiding relationship in Him (2:28; 5:13). Belief in Christ should be manifested in the practice of righteousness and love for the brethren which in turn produces joy and confidence before God. John wrote this letter to encourage this kind of fellowship and to emphasize the importance of holding fast to Christian doctrine. 1 John was also written to refute the destructive teachings of the Gnostics by stressing the reality of the Incarnation and the emptiness of profession of faith in Christ without practical obedience. These “antichrists” failed the three tests of righteous living, love for the brothers and sisters, and belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Incarnate God-man.

As you consider this background information, review your observations from the prior activity. In your first draft, write down how you would summarize your observations from 1 John. It does not need to sound eloquent. You may just start with a list of bullet points and major themes. Once you have that draft, you can then begin to format these thoughts into a few paragraphs.

Pause the audio recording to begin Activity #2 by writing your Introduction to 1 John. You may write your introduction on page 30 in your handout. Keep your introduction to a few paragraphs. Once you have completed your introduction, restart the audio and we will summarize this activity before moving to the next step in this process.

Welcome back. I wish I could hear what you wrote for your introduction to 1 John based upon your observations from the first learning activity. On page 45 of your handout, you can see what I have written as an introduction to 1 John. I incorporated some background information from other sources plus my observations from my readings.

I saw noted a few general themes that I thought would be good to include in an introduction.

John was an older man at the time of this writing.
The tone was very pastoral or fatherly.
The church at that time was facing persecution and attacks from false teachers.
It seemed like John was looking to encourage and strengthen the church.
John wrote about the truths of who Jesus was.
He wrote about living a life of love.
He included various evidences of genuine faith.
John also emphasized the joy of fellowship with God and other believers.

Follow along as I read my introduction to 1 John.

This short letter written by the apostle John was intended to encourage the church in his day to find great joy in the fellowship they had with each other and the Father and His Son. False spiritual teachers were a big problem in the early church (as in our day). Many churches fell prey to pretenders who taught their own ideas and advanced themselves as leaders. John wrote this letter to set the record straight on some important issues, particularly concerning the identity of Jesus Christ.

John included four purpose statements throughout this letter:

1. Their joy in shared fellowship with Christ and each other would be overflowing (1:4).
2. They would not desire to sin but be secure in their relationship with Christ when they do sin because Jesus is our Advocate before the Father (2:1-2).
3. That they would be on guard for the false teachers of their day (2:26).
4. That they would know with confidence that they possess eternal life in Christ (5:13).

Because John's letter was about the basics of faith in Christ, it helped his readers reflect honestly on their faith. It helped them answer the question, Are we true believers? John told them that they could tell by looking at their actions.

John repeated three themes through this letter that serve as a test for Genuine Fellowship among believers with the Father and His Son. These deal with ...

- 1) the Theological/Doctrinal Test about Jesus Christ,
- 2) the Moral Test related to sin and the obedient life of the Christian, and
- 3) the Social Test related to love for one another.

John cycles through these tests of Genuine Fellowship four times in these five chapters (105 verses) demonstrating how our belief in Jesus, our view toward sin and obedience, and the way we love are interconnected in the life of a true believer.

This letter is not meant to place a heavy burden on Christians or create doubt in their minds, but rather encourage them and remind them of all that they can know to be true of their new life in Christ, to stand strong in the face of false teaching, and to boldly proclaim these truths to a world that needs to hear these truths and receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, alone!

How does your introduction compare with this?

What did you write that is similar and what was different?

Once again, my introduction evolved over the course of completing my study of 1 John. As you continue your study, your introduction will evolve as well.

The greatest benefit of this step is to synthesize your learnings, in your own words, into an overview. This step will help you prepare for the next step of the process which is to create an outline for the entire book of 1 John. We will introduce this next step in Lesson 5.