

THE BOOK OF 2 JOHN

ORIENTING DATA FOR 2 JOHN

- **Content:** “the elder” warns against false teachers who deny the incarnation of Christ
- **Author:** see 1 John
- **Date:** see 1 John
- **Recipients:** the “lady chosen by God” is either a single, local congregation or a woman who hosts a house church; “her children” are the members of the believing community
- **Occasion:** John is concerned that after the defection of the false prophets from his community, they might spread their teaching in another community of faith
- **Emphases:** see 1 John

OVERVIEW OF 2 JOHN

What happens today when someone is disfellowshipped from a local church? Most often they simply go down the street to another church, usually without accountability on the part of the leadership of either community—the one they left or the one that receives them. In the elder’s situation there are no other churches down the street for them to go to. But since those who have been disfellowshipped are “prophets,” they can be expected to go from town to town, bent on convincing others of their “insights.” These churches need to be warned.

Thus 2 John, a sort of miniature 1 John, presses the latter’s primary themes—love and the Incarnation. But while 1 John was written to assure the elder’s own community that they, not the false prophets, walk in the truth, this letter warns a house church in another town that these deceivers are on the loose. Notice also that 2 John 10–11 anticipate the concern over hospitality that will be raised in 3 John. Indeed, 2 and 3 John should probably be read together in order to see the two sides to hospitality that will be discussed in 3 John.

SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING 2 JOHN

Second and 3 John are both the size of ordinary letters in the Greco-Roman world, written on a single sheet of papyrus. Note how both letters close with a notice about John’s wanting to talk with the recipients “face to face” (which probably indicates that he was running out of space on his piece of paper).

Given its brevity, you should especially note significant repeated words, both *where* they occur and *how often*. In fact, you may wish to do this for yourself before you read further, using different colored pens for the different words.

Did you note in verses 1–6 the repetition of *truth* (5x), its companion *walk* (3x), the associated word *love* (5x), and love’s companion *command (ment)* (4x)? In verses 7–11, “the truth” is now *the teaching* (3x), which has to do with “Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” and thus with his being the true Son of the Father. Several words refer to those who reject this teaching: *deceivers* (2x), *antichrist*, *anyone*, *them*, etc. This exercise pretty well tells the story about this letter. For the teaching itself, review the comments on 1 John, pages 412–13.¹

¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 417–418.