

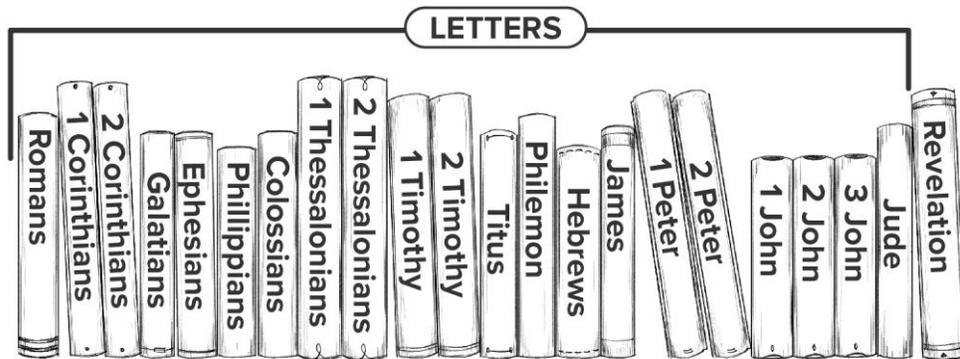
# Introduction to the Bible

## Week 5: The New Testament Letters & Revelation

### Introduction

### The New Testament letters

BOOKS INCLUDED:



TYPE OF LITERATURE: Similar to the normal letter structure in the first-century AD

TIME PERIOD: From around 48/49 AD to around 90 AD

HUMAN AUTHORSHIP: Apostolic and therefore inspired by God and authoritative

- Paul (13)
- Peter (2)
- John (3)
- James (1)
- Jude (1)
- Hebrews?

HISTORICAL ACCURACY: Though these letters are not historical narratives, they do sometimes make assertions about historical matters that can be confirmed.

EXAMPLES:

- The Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13)
- The chronology of Paul's conversion and early visits to Jerusalem (Gal. 1,2)

## WHY THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS ARE IMPORTANT:

- The letters contain the core of Christianity's message. We can divide this content into two categories:

- Central doctrines about who Jesus is and what He has provided for us, including:

Jesus' deity and humanity (Col. 2:9)

Jesus' supremacy over all other rulers and powers (Col. 1:16)

Jesus' death and resurrection, which provide complete forgiveness of sins and a new identity for those who believe in Him (e.g., Col. 2:13,14; 3:3,4)

The church as the people who believe in Jesus and are organically united with Him and one another (Col. 1:18)

The Holy Spirit as Jesus' Representative and Advocate for those who believe in Him

**Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"<sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.**

Jesus' future return to judge God's enemies and establish His kingdom in its fullness for His followers (e.g., 2 Thess. 1:7-10)

**2 Thessalonians 17 . . . when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,<sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.<sup>9</sup> These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,<sup>10</sup> when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed . . .**

- Central features of the Christian lifestyle, including:

Mind-set informed by and focused on what Jesus has provided for us (Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 12:2)

Ethical transformation by God's power (Col. 3:5-11)

Life in loving community with other Christians (Col. 3:12-16)

Representing Jesus accurately to the watching world (Col. 3:17-4:6)

Spiritual warfare (Col. 2:15)

Warning against false teaching/teachers (Col. 2:4,8)

NOTE: The New Testament letters say hardly anything about ritual observance, and when they do address this issue, it is usually to warn Christians not to focus on rituals (e.g., Col. 2:16,17).

- Both the *structure* and *grammar* of these letters emphasize that this transformed lifestyle is something that God accomplishes as we by faith receive Christ's provisions and respond to His love. What we are to do ("imperatives") is based on what God has done, is doing, or will do for us ("indicatives"):
  - STRUCTURE: Many letters begin with half or more of their material on what God has provided to us through Christ (e.g., Col. 1,2). On that basis the author calls his audience to embrace the Christian lifestyle (e.g., Col. 3,4).
  - GRAMMAR: In the passages which call us to embrace the Christian lifestyle, the authors often ground this call in what God has provided for us through Christ. EXAMPLES:
    - Col. 3:1-4
    - Col. 3:9,10
    - Col. 3:12,13
    - Col. 3:23,24

#### TIPS FOR READING:

- Spend a disproportionate time in the letters to churches if you are a young Christian. Get firmly grounded in this content, starting with whatever letters grab your attention – and then expanding from there. Memorize many of its promises!

- Remember that though these letters apply to all Christians, they were written to Christians in a specific historical and cultural context. Knowledge about this context is important for proper interpretation and application.
  - Since most of the letters are brief, it is easy (and advisable) to read them straight through in one setting, deliberately ignoring the theological material at first and focusing instead on the historical setting. EXAMPLE:

### Colossians

Author	Audience	Opponents
<b>Who wrote the letter?</b>  <i>Paul (1:1)</i>	<b>To whom is the letter written?</b>  <i>The Church at Colossae (1:2)</i>	<b>Are there any key 3<sup>rd</sup> parties? If so, who are they?</b>  <i>False teachers</i>
<b>What information does the author provide about himself?</b>  <i>1:24 1:29; 2:1 4:3,4,10,18</i>	<b>What information does the author provide about his audience?</b>  <i>1:7 2:4,5,8</i>	<b>What information does the author provide about the 3<sup>rd</sup> parties?</b>  <i>2:4,8 2:16,18,20,21</i>

- Then go back through each paragraph/passage and focus on its theological material, asking questions like:

What does it teach about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Christian life, the church, Satan, etc.?

How does this theological content contrast to beliefs and values in our culture?

How can I/we act on this theological content in our current relationships, situations, etc.?

- For the most comprehensive explanation of salvation by grace through faith, see Romans. For the most comprehensive treatment of the church, see Ephesians. For the most comprehensive treatment of how Christianity fulfills and is distinct from Old Testament Judaism, see Hebrews.
- The “pastoral letters” (1 & 2 Timothy & Titus) provide important principles of church leadership. These letters will become more relevant to you as you develop a personal ministry and/or become a church leader.

## Revelation

**TYPE OF LITERATURE:** Revelation has features of the New Testament letters (Rev. 2,3), but it is mainly a description of the four visions given to the author. These visions are “apocalyptic” in style, which means that they are highly symbolic (see below).

**TIME PERIOD:** Around 90-95 AD

**HUMAN AUTHORSHIP:** “John” (1:4,9), who early church writings identify as Jesus’ disciple, and who also wrote the gospel of John and the letters 1-3 John.

### WHY REVELATION IS IMPORTANT:

- Revelation concludes the Bible, appropriately, with a prophetic picture of the re-establishment of God’s rulership over all of the earth. The root problems of humanity that began in the Garden of Eden are resolved in the New Heavens and New Earth.
  - Instead of separation from God, there will be free access to the “tree of life” (22:2) and all who belong to Jesus will “see God’s face” (22:4).
  - Instead of loss of benevolent rulership, Jesus’ followers will “reign forever” (22:5). And the “Lion” who will rule humanity is also the “Lamb” who was first slain for the sins of humanity (5:5,6).
- Revelation’s original recipients were Christians facing persecution. Jesus exhorts them (and us) to remain faithful to Him, even to death, because He has conquered death and will bring us safely into His eternal kingdom (1:9-19a).
- Jesus’ letters to the seven churches (chapters 2,3) describe challenges that commonly face local churches and individual Christians. His counsel, warning, and encouragement is highly applicable to us today (e.g., Rev. 2:1-7).
- The visions of the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21,22) are the most comprehensive biblical picture of God’s eternal kingdom. The symbolic descriptions convey the literal reality of eternal life in God’s presence, relationships with God’s people, and the healing of all of the damaging effects of sin and evil.

### TIPS FOR READING:

- Notice the basic 3-part outline of Revelation given by Jesus in 1:19.
  - “The things you have seen”

- “The things which are”
- “The things which will take place after these things”
- Don’t let the symbols deter you. Their meaning is often explained in the following context (e.g., 1:20). Many of the symbolic visions are based on the prophetic visions given to Daniel, so familiarity with Dan. 2,7,9,11,12 especially is very helpful.
- Look for the main theme or lesson in each vision/passage, instead of obsessing on the symbols or speculating on how Revelation applies to current events.<sup>1</sup>
- It is likely that the various temporal judgments described in Rev. 6-16 refer to the Tribulation – the 3.5-7 year period immediately preceding the Second Coming of Jesus. As you read these judgments, remember:
  - These judgments are redemptive as well as retributive.
  - The One who judges is also the One who died (“the Lamb” – 28x) to offer forgiveness to all who will repent.

### **Building a life in God’s Word**

- Remember that the Bible is God’s love-letter to you, and that His Spirit will tutor you into understanding and applying it. So pray for His illumination whenever you expose yourself to God’s Word.
 

**Psalm 119:18** **Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your Word.**
- Remember that *no time in God’s Word is wasted* – even if you feel like you got nothing out of it at the time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful overview of these themes, see Gary DeLashmutt’s teaching series at: <http://www.xenos.org/teachings/?series=208>

<sup>2</sup> “In studying the Bible, never think that because you do not understand it, therefore it is of no use. A truth may be of no use to you just now, but when the circumstances arise in which that truth is needed, the Holy Spirit will bring it back to your remembrance. . . . It is foolish therefore to estimate only by what you consciously understand at the time. There may be much of which you do not begin to grasp the meaning, but as you go on storing your mind with Bible truth, the Holy Spirit will bring back to your conscious mind the word you need and apply it to you in your particular circumstances.” Oswald Chambers, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Discovery House, 1995), pp. 14,15.

- God is committed to imparting *motivation* for you to build a life in His Word (Phil. 2:13).
  - So ask Him to give you an ongoing and deepening hunger for this!
  - Over the course of our Christian lives, God imparts a variety of motivations to get into His Word.

- One key to building a life in the Word is to be a *doer* of the Word.

**James 1:22** **But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** <sup>23</sup> **For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;** <sup>24</sup> **for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.** <sup>25</sup> **But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.**

- So ask Him how He wants you to apply His Word every time you expose yourself to it, and be alert for His guidance on this.

- Be involved in a *learning community* where you receive and give biblical truth in the context of Christ-centered relationships.

**Colossians 3:16** **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another . . .**

- Develop the *habit* of regular reflective scripture reading.

#### READING PLANS:

“Discipleship Journal” Bible Reading plans

([www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/BibleReadingPlans.asp](http://www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/BibleReadingPlans.asp))

*The Original Discipleship Journal® Bible Reading Plan* – Readings from four places in the Scripture every day: a Gospel, the Old Testament, an Epistle and the Wisdom Literature.

*The Book-at-a-Time Bible Reading Plan* – Readings from two places in the Scripture every day: an Old or New Testament book and the Wisdom Literature.

### M'Cheyne Reading Plan

(<http://hippocampusextensions.com/mcheyneplan.html>)

Carson, D.A., *For the Love of God*, 2 Volumes (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998). Provides helpful explanation and application for M'Cheyne Reading Plan.

#### PRACTICAL TIPS:

Use a paper Bible and mark it up as you read.

Have a plan, but change plans from time to time.

If you get behind in your reading plan, don't waste time beating yourself up over this or feel like you have to catch up. Just thank God for His mercy and patience – and resume your reading.

If possible, do your reading plan with another person.

If God arrests your attention on a specific biblical truth, consider adjusting your plan to memorize and meditate on that passage, to read and ponder other passages about that truth, etc.