

# EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT

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# Matthew

Bill Bright

The Gospel of Matthew is the link between the Old and New Testaments. Matthew wrote to the Jews to prove that Christ is their promised Messiah and the eternal King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, Matthew is careful not to alienate his Jewish readers. Matthew also shows how Jesus fulfilled prophecy and how He is the Person who will bring in God's kingdom.

Because the "Kingdom of heaven" is found thirty-three times in this Gospel, it has been called the Gospel of the Kingdom. The book also shows that followers of Christ are the true people of God and the heirs of the coming kingdom.

Matthew records Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the Parables of the Kingdom, and Peter's confession of the deity of Christ.

It is Matthew's version of the Beatitudes that are memorized in childhood, and it is his form of the Lord's Prayer that we use the most in church today.

## **Genealogy**

Of the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke give Christ's genealogy. Compare Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. What differences do you find?

Keeping in mind that Matthew presented Christ as King, why do you think Matthew wrote the genealogy the way he did?

## **Sermons**

In presenting his record of the life of Jesus, Matthew is careful to record the major sermons that Jesus preached. The longest sermon on record is the "Sermon on the Mount," which is found in chapters 5-7. As you read this sermon, answer the following questions:

Give one reason Jesus considers it important for His disciples to live according to the moral standards of the Old Testament Law and Prophets. (Matthew 5:16)

What promise does Jesus give that helps the Christian overcome his desire for man's praise as he does good deeds (Matthew 6:1-18)?

What assurance does Jesus give to help the Christian overcome his anxiety over physical needs such as food and clothing (Matthew 6:25-34)?

Read Jesus' sermons recorded by Matthew in these chapters. Write in your own words the verse that means the most to you.

## **A Vital Question**

In Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks a question. Why is answering this question so vital?

Read Matthew 16:14-16. Why does Jesus say Peter's answer was revealed by the Father? How have you answered that question?

### **The Great Commandment**

Read Matthew 22:34-40. What does Jesus mean when He says that the whole Law and prophets depend on these two commandments?

How have you seen Jesus demonstrating the Great Commandment in Matthew's Gospel? Use specific examples.

### **The Great Commission**

Read Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus gave His friends one last commandment before He ascended into Heaven. Many call this commandment the Great Commission. How is Jesus' goal different from that of human rulers?

In your own words, paraphrase Christ's Great Commission. What does it mean to you?

## **Life Application**

Which instruction from Jesus' sermons in Matthew do you need to pay particular attention to?

How will you apply that teaching to your life?

To let Christ rule your life, what areas do you need to turn over to Him? Be specific.

Now ask Him to take control of each area.

List ways you can better apply the Great Commandment in your: Home Life; Workplace; Devotional Life.

How will obedience to Christ's command in Matthew 28:19,20 give your life purpose?

# Mark

Bill Bright

Although Matthew precedes the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament, Mark is considered the first of the four Gospels to be written. Possibly written and published in Rome between A.D. 60 and 70, Mark addressed his book to the Roman Christians. Romans were a practical people and did not care about Jewish history and beliefs. The Romans loved action. So, Mark writes a brief Gospel full of Jesus' miracles and deeds, not His sermons.

While Matthew described Jesus as a King, Mark tells of His servanthood. Therefore, Mark approaches his Gospel differently. Mark shows how Jesus first directed His public ministry to the Jews, but when their leaders opposed Him, He also went to the Gentile world. However, both Matthew and Mark record the Great Commission of our Lord to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Although Mark's Gospel is the shortest, it is brimming with the love Jesus showed for others and the mission He came to complete.

## **Jesus' Ministry**

Read Mark 10:45. State Mark's objective for writing his Gospel.

Read Mark 1:20 and 3:13-35. How did Jesus choose His followers? What do these passages say about the qualifications Jesus expects in His disciples?

In Mark 1:21-28, how was Jesus described as a teacher?

One of the most striking ways in which the Gospel of Mark differs from Matthew is that it places greater emphasis on what Jesus did rather than what He said. What were some of the things Jesus did that caused the religious scholars of His day to be so angry with Him (Mark 2:1-3:6)?

### **Jesus' Miracles**

Note the four miracles of Jesus, performed in Mark 4-5:43. List one characteristic of Jesus in each incident.

What one thing hinders Jesus from exercising His power and control in the lives of men (Mark 6:1-6)?

### **Jesus' Death and Resurrection**

Compare Matthew and Mark's accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection (Matthew 26-28; Mark 14-16). What differences did you find? How does having two accounts help you better understand Christ's sacrifice for you?

Describe how Christ the servant is exalted (Mark 16:1-20)? How does Jesus combine the qualities of both King and servant?

### **Life Application**

List several ways Jesus' example as servant has inspired you to serve others. How can you put these ideas into practice this week?

To what degree does unbelief hinder Christ from exercising His power and control in your life?

How can you best exalt Jesus through your life (Mark 16:15,20)? What are you going to do to implement this? How could you increase your efforts in this area?



# Luke

Bill Bright

The most comprehensive of the Gospels, Luke presents an accurate account of the life of Christ as the perfect Man and Savior. The writer portrays our Lord's concern for His followers and friends and shows His tenderheartedness toward the poor, despised, and sinful. Luke also shows how Christ lived in total dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Luke wrote his Gospel to the Greeks, a cultured people. Luke, an educated Greek himself, knew his readers would be captivated by Jesus as the perfect Man, an idea prevalent in Greek mythology.

Luke shows Jesus' human side -- with feelings and a love for people, and subject to circumstances. Yet Christ also stands out in this Gospel as being fully God.

As a physician, Luke gives the most detailed description of Christ's birth and His childhood. The writer also relates the stories of outcasts such as the good Samaritan, the prodigal, and the thief on the cross. And this Gospel also records more prayers of Jesus than any of the others.

## **Introduction**

Read Luke 1:1-4. To whom was this Gospel written?

What evidence is there that the recipient of this Gospel had been given some prior instruction on Christianity?

Why did Luke write this Gospel to Theophilus?

## **Jesus' Suffering**

One of Luke's great emphases is that Jesus, though He is the Christ, must nevertheless suffer and die at the hands of sinful men (Luke 2:33-35; 9:22-31; 13:31-35; 18:31-35; 24:7,25-27;44-47) Why do you think Jesus mentioned His death so many times?

Read Luke 20-24, the account of the last week leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. What are some qualities of Jesus' character that stand out prominently in these chapters?

What qualities of character in Jesus' enemies stand out in these chapters? Why then, did men seek to have Him crucified?

How were the disciples -- and thus Theophilus and all the readers of Luke -- assured that Jesus' suffering and death occurred according to God's plan, instead of accidentally, simply because of evil men's hearts? What difference does that make to you?

### **Jesus' Prayers**

Read the three parables on prayer in Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8; and 18:9-14. What qualities of prayer are described?

Now read about some of Christ's prayers (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28-29; 11:1; 22:32,44; 23:46). How did Jesus follow through on these qualities?

What elements of Jesus' prayers can you apply to make your prayers more effective?

### **Jesus' Humanity**

Since Luke writes about the humanity of Jesus, list people whom Jesus touched and the results of His ministry on them.

Luke 6:17-19

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 8:1-3

Luke 15:1-7

Luke 17:11-19

Luke 23:39-43

Where do you think Jesus would likely minister today if He were in your area?

## **Jesus' Resurrection**

Why do you think the women were the first to discover that Jesus was alive (Luke 23:26-27; 48-49, 55-56; 24:1-9)?

What does that mean to your faithfulness in service to the Lord?

What was the reaction of Jesus' friends after His ascension (Luke 24:50-53)?

## **Life Application**

Luke presented Christ as the Son of Man. What does this title mean to you?

Seeing the types of people Jesus ministered to, how will this affect your ministry? List several practical ways you can show the kind of compassion Jesus did.

How can Jesus' example of righteousness during suffering help you face crisis in your life?

Read I Corinthians 15:58. Considering the actions of the women during the crucifixion, name one way you can stand firm in your work for the Lord.

# John

Bill Bright

Called "The Gospel of Love," John has won the affection of Christians who turn to it first for inspiration. Because of its universal appeal, this Gospel is the first to be translated into a foreign language or dialect, and it is the most widely distributed of the Gospels.

John seeks to prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God and that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. John focused on the uniqueness of Jesus, portraying Him as the Creator who became flesh and dwelt among men as the Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

As we view the Gospels together, we see a progression of teaching in each book. Matthew, for example, ends with the Resurrection, Mark closes with the Ascension, Luke give the promise of the Holy Spirit, and in John our Lord breathes the Holy Spirit upon His disciples and speaks of His return.

## **Titles for Jesus**

Read John 1:1-18. Why is Jesus called The Word? Why is He called The Light? Why is He called the Son of God?

John also gave other names for Jesus. Write each name and a short explanation of what it means.  
John 6:35

John 8:12

John 11:25

John 14:6

## **Miracles of Christ**

Why did John take the trouble to relate the various signs, or miracles, found in his Gospel (John 20:30-31)?

Skim through this Gospel and see if you can list the seven miracles of Jesus that John recorded.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)

## **Representatives for Christ**

Read John 13 and 14. What attitude of the heart must you demonstrate if other people are to realize that you are Christ's representative in the world (John 13:34-35)?

What is God's provision for enabling Christians to be true representatives of Christ in the world (John 14:16-18)?

## **Christ's Deity**

John quotes seven witnesses to the deity of Christ. Who are they?

- John 1:19, 34
- John 1:49
- John 6:68-69
- John 11:24-27
- John 20:28
- John 20:31
- John 10:34-36

Why was each person qualified to testify?

### **The Holy Spirit**

John also teaches us about the Holy Spirit. How does the work of the Holy Spirit affect your life and ministry?

John 3:5

John 4:14

John 7:38-39

John 14-16

What is the promise given in John 14:15-31?

### **The Vine and the Branches**

Read John 15:1-8. Describe the relationship between the vine and the branches.

How can you use this picture to have a more fruitful ministry?

**Life Application**

According to John 15:16, 27, what was to be the disciples' function after Jesus left the Earth? How are you obeying that command?

What promises can you claim from these verses that will help you bear fruit?

Read John 21. Summarize what these verses mean to your ministry for Jesus.



# The Acts of the Apostles

Bill Bright

A sequel to the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts portrays the birth and growth of the Christian Church. Acts also is a theological work that builds a strong case for the validity of Christ's claims and promises.

Luke's record of the coming of the Holy Spirit shows that the church did not start or grow by its own initiative, but as the power of the Holy Spirit empowered the early Christians.

The Book of Acts also describes the opposition and persecution that the Christians suffered at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles. This opposition, however, became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity.

Acts is considered the connecting link between the life of Christ and the life of the Church, and is a glimpse into the Christian world that gave birth to the Epistles.

## **Empowerment of the Holy Spirit**

The Book of Acts begins by referring to the material presented in the Gospels as "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). It tells of the works that the resurrected and ascended Christ continued to do through the Holy Spirit poured out on His disciples at Pentecost. Acts 1:8 has often been considered the key verse of this book. Survey the book and answer these questions.

What chapters tell of the witness of the disciples at Jerusalem?

In Samaria?

To the ends of the earth?

## **Peter**

The following are some of the major messages that Peter gave as he witnessed for Christ: Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-26; 10:34-43. What was the most important point about the life of Christ that Peter was trying to get across?

Read Acts 10. What significance does Peter's experience with Cornelius have for the church?

## **Paul**

Of all the Apostles, Paul stands out most predominantly in Acts and other books of the New Testament. What kind of man was Paul before He was converted? (Acts 8:1-3; 9:2; 22:1-5; 26:4-12)

When Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, what did He tell Paul he was to do? (Acts 9:4-6)

To whom did Paul seek to minister first at Cyprus, Antioch, and at Iconium? (Acts 13:4-52; 14:1-7) To whom did Paul preach after this first group rejected the Gospel?

In preaching to the Jews, Paul was able to make a point of contact with them by referring to the Old Testament scriptures. What was the point of contact Paul used in speaking to the pagan gentiles at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18)?

What did Paul do to establish his converts in the faith (Acts 14:21-23)? Romans 15:20 tells us one more thing about Paul's evangelism strategy. What is it?

### **The Holy Spirit**

According to these scriptures, what are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit empowered the early church?

Acts 1:8

Acts 4:31

Acts 2:4-8; 10:46; 19:6

Acts 7:54-60

Acts 10:19-20; 13:2-4

Acts 11:28; 21:10-13

How did the Holy Spirit work through Paul as he ministered at the following places:  
Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12)

Iconium (Acts 13:52-14:3)

**Life Application**

What is the most important thing you now try to tell others about Christ? How does that compare with what Peter and Paul preached?

What can you learn from Paul to help in your discipling of others?

What are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is currently empowering you?

# Romans, 1 & 11 Corinthians, Galatians

Bill Bright

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 21 are letters, with 13 of these definitely written by Paul.

The man God used to write so much of the New Testament, Paul was a Roman citizen, a Jew of Tarsus, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was brought up at the feet of a great teacher, Gamaliel, but became a missionary to Jesus Christ. From the day of his conversion, Paul's very life was summed up in his own words, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

## **Romans**

This epistle was written from the city of Corinth to the believers in Rome shortly after Paul had finished his work in Ephesus. Rome was the center of the civilized world, the great metropolis of a vast empire. The city had already become the home of many Christians.

Paul is telling the Romans the good news concerning the ways in which God, in His infinite love, has provided free and full salvation for sinners. Paul's main insistence is that man's justification before God rests not on the Law of Moses, but on the mercy of Christ.

Read Romans 1:1-3, 16-17. What is the main theme of Romans? What is the gospel of Christ? What does it reveal?

Read Romans 3:9-18. Man is sinful and lives a life separated from God. Write the five characteristics of a sinful man listed in verses 9-11, 17-18. What righteousness does a man have that he can offer to God?

Read Romans 3:21-28 and 5:1-5. What has God declared to you? Therefore, how are you justified?

Being justified by faith, what is your spiritual resource (Romans 5:5)? What is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1)?

List five ways in which this sacrifice will affect your daily walk (Romans 12:6-13:10). Which area do you need to apply the most?

## **I Corinthians**

This epistle was written three years after Paul left Corinth. The Corinthian church sent a delegation of its leaders to Ephesus to consult with Paul about some serious problems that had arisen in the church.

Read I Corinthians 1:17-31. Paul makes it clear that God is wiser than men and chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty. How has God ordained that men should hear and believe? Whom has He chosen for this task? What happens, then, if you boast about what you are doing for God?

Read I Corinthians 9:22-24. Give in your own words definite proof that Paul had forsaken all that he had to follow Christ (verse 22). To what does he liken this task. Why is this so appropriate? What have you given up to help reach someone for Christ?

Read I Corinthians 13. In verses 4-8, insert your name in the place of "love" or "charity." Which verse does not fit you and what do you think God would have you do about it?

## **II Corinthians**

Soon after Paul had written 1 Corinthians, he met Titus on his way to Corinth. Titus brought word that Paul's letter had accomplished much good but some were still disloyal, and there were problems with people who put the law before the needs of people.

Paul was physically weak, weary, and in pain. His spiritual burdens were great: first, the maintenance of the churches; second, his concern about the legalists; and third, his anguish over the distrust of him by some members of the churches.

Read II Corinthians 4:1-6. Notice how carefully Paul handles the Word of God. Describe how Paul spreads the gospel of Christ (verse 2). Why did God shine into our hearts (verse 6)?

What is it that Paul fears and of which we all must be well aware (II Corinthians 11:3)?

Read II Corinthians 12:1-10. Paul prayed to be relieved of his "thorn in the flesh" (a physical disability). What was the Lord's answer to his prayer? What was Paul's attitude toward the final outcome? What lesson can you learn from his experience?

## **Galatians**

Some time after Paul left Galatia, certain Jewish teachers began to insist that Gentiles could not be Christian without keeping the Law of Moses. The objective of this epistle is the defense of the gospel of grace that Paul had received by revelation from Jesus.

Paul shows that the gospel was not of man, neither did he receive it of man, nor was he taught it of man. What was its true origin (Galatians 1:12)?

What was Paul's relationship with Christ (Galatians 2:20)? What effect does this have on his daily life?



Read Galatians 5:16-21. In this passage Paul lists the works of the flesh. How can we as Christians avoid doing the works of the flesh?

### **Life Application**

According to Galatians 5:22-23, what will be the result in your life of this type of walk? List the definite characteristics.

Which work of your flesh do you most need to surrender to the Holy Spirit's control today? Take the time to do it right now.

Which fruit of the Spirit is God trying to strengthen in your life? How?

What one attitude of Paul's do you desire for your life and ministry? How will you make it your own?

# Prison Epistles, Thessalonians, Pastoral Epistles

Bill Bright

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are called the "prison" epistles because they were written by Paul during his first imprisonment mentioned in Acts 28.

Paul wrote Ephesians to encourage the faith of the believers in Ephesus. In this Epistle, Paul explains the nature and purpose of the Church, the Body of Christ.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul emphasizes the true joy that comes from Jesus Christ alone. He wrote on the themes of humility, self-sacrifice, unity, and Christian living.

In Colossians, Paul presents Christ as God in the flesh, Lord of all creation, and the head of the Church. Paul also addresses the problem of false teachers promoting legalism.

In his letter to Philemon, Paul encourages forgiveness for Philemon's slave, Onesimus, who may have stolen from his master and run away. By writing this letter, Paul encourages believers everywhere to treat others with Christian love and fellowship.

In his Thessalonians Epistles, Paul assures believers at Thessalonica of the return of Christ and corrects their misconceptions about the resurrection and the timing of the second coming of Christ. His letters focus on courage in the face of persecution and being prepared for the coming of Christ.

From the time of his first missionary journey, Paul always had co-workers. The Pastoral Epistles - 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus - were written to those who were helping him to strengthen the churches he had founded.

Timothy was a young leader, an elder in the church at Ephesus. Paul's first letter to Timothy is a handbook of church administration and discipline. In his second letter, the apostle encourages Timothy to be bold in the face of opposition and persecution and to remain faithful in sound doctrine, loyalty, and endurance.

Titus, a Greek convert, was Paul's representative to the churches on Crete. Paul's letter to Titus tells him how to organize and oversee those churches.

## **Prison Epistles**

**Ephesians.** The purpose of this letter was to show the Gentiles that they were on an equal footing with the Jews in receiving the blessings of salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-22; 3:6). What had been the prospects of Gentiles receiving the blessings of salvation in previous times (2:11,12)?

Through what event were the blessings of salvation made available to all (2:13-18)?

From Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19, list the blessings of salvation that all Christians now enjoy. How can you use this information for encouragement?

**Philippians.** Paul wrote this letter to the church he had founded (Acts 16) to thank them for the money they sent him for his support while in prison. In writing it, he also sought to overcome the disunity in the church between two women, Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2). With this disunity overcome, the church could stand firmly together in preaching the gospel without fear to those around them (Philippians 1:27-28).

Read Philippians 1:12-30. What had Paul been doing in Rome that would encourage the Philippians to be bold in proclaiming the gospel (1:13,14)?

How did Paul's attitude regarding the future help to encourage the Philippians to stand fearlessly for Christ (1:18-26)?

What was Paul's chief reason for being happy about the gift the Philippians had sent him (Philippians 4:10-19)?

Take time to thank God for the gifts (spiritual and material) that Christians have given you this past week.

**Colossians.** Paul had never visited the church at Colosse, but reports regarding the increase of false teaching there had reached him in Rome. Since he was an apostle to all the Gentiles, he felt it necessary to write and warn that church.

The false teaching stated that instead of Christ being the only mediator between God and man, there were certain angelic beings through whom man must also go in order to know God. Consequently, Paul's main emphasis in this Epistle is the deity and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

List at least three things Paul says about Jesus Christ that show it is unnecessary to seek any additional ways to reach God (Colossians 1:12-22).

Since Christ is all-sufficient, what is the Christian to do (Colossians 2:6-7)?

What practical effect will submission to the Lordship and uniqueness of Christ have upon the Christian's life (Colossians 3:1-11)? What evidence of submissiveness do you find in your life? Where do you need to improve in this area?

**Philemon.** While in prison at Rome, Paul had led Onesimus, a runaway slave, to the Lord. He discovered that this slave's master was Philemon, a personal friend of Paul's living at Colosse. In those days, the penalty for a slave who had run away was either death or brutal punishment. Paul wrote Philemon asking him to forgive Onesimus for what he had done and to receive him as a Christian brother.

This Epistle stands as a great example of the profound change for good that Christ makes in all human relations.

State in your own words at least three arguments Paul used to persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus in love. Who do you know that needs this kind of forgiveness?

### **The Thessalonian Epistles**

The first epistles Paul ever wrote were those to the church he had founded at Thessalonica in Macedonia. These were written from Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) soon after Paul had left Thessalonica.

**1 Thessalonians.** Paul had had to leave Thessalonica very hastily because of persecution (Acts 17:10). The enemies of the gospel there had tried to disillusion the newly won Christians by charging that Paul was only a fair-weather friend who had left them alone because of difficult circumstances. To answer this charge Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

What effect had the Thessalonian's conversion had on the Christians of the surrounding area (I Thessalonians 1:7-10)?

The lives of those to whom Paul wrote had been changed. How did this prove that those who had preached the gospel to them were godly men (I Thessalonians 1:5-6)?

Give two ways in which Paul's ministry at Thessalonica made it impossible for him to be an insincere person (I Thessalonians 2:1-10). Think of someone who exemplifies qualities that Paul had. What can you learn from that person's example?

**2 Thessalonians.** Some questions regarding the circumstances of Christ's second coming had arisen after the Thessalonians received Paul's first epistle. They were troubled because they had to unjustly endure great sufferings and persecutions for Christ (II Thessalonians 1:3-12). Some also had become slack in doing their work because they thought Christ's second coming would occur at any moment.

What do you think the Christian's attitude should be toward persecution? (2 Thessalonians 1:3-12)

What is to be his attitude toward work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)? How can you apply this to your life?

### **The Pastoral Epistles**

These letters were written in the period between Paul's first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60-62 (Acts 28) and his final martyrdom under the emperor Nero in A.D. 66. He wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to help Timothy in his work with the church at Ephesus. Titus was written to Paul's co-worker on the island of Crete.

**1 Timothy.** Read I Timothy 6. What are the two things that are necessary for contentment in life (1 Timothy 6:6-8)?

What great danger confronts those who seek after riches (verses 9-12)? What attitude should Christians who are wealthy have toward money (verses 17-19)? How does money tempt you? Which verse will help you overcome this wrong desire?

**2 Timothy.** Paul wrote 2 Timothy just before he was martyred. He writes as though it may be his last word to Timothy.

What are the last commands Paul gave him (II Timothy 4:1-5)?

What two means will help Timothy remain true to his calling after Paul has gone (II Timothy 3:10-11; 14-17)? List several ways this Bible study has helped you remain true.

**Titus.** Paul wrote this Epistle after his first imprisonment in Rome to encourage Titus and strengthen his ability to minister under opposition. Paul instructed Titus to admonish the people to be "sound in the faith" and hold to "sound doctrine."

What are some of the things a Christian should be careful to do in the unbelieving world in which he lives (Titus 3:1-2)?

How can you apply verses 1 and 2 to a situation in your life? What reason does Paul give for a Christian living this way (Titus 3:3-7)?

### **Life Application**

Name two things you have learned from Paul's character in this study.

From Philippians 3:1 and 4:4, what approach to life do you think Paul would advise for you?

Is that always possible? How?



# The General Epistles

Bill Bright

The term "general" is at best an imperfect way to characterize the last eight epistles of the New Testament. It has been selected because, unlike the majority of Paul's epistles that are written to specific churches, most of the recipients of these eight epistles are either churches of some large area or are all Christians (the exceptions are Hebrews and 2 and 3 John).

Also, with the exception of Hebrews, these epistles are named for their authors.

## Hebrews

The early church called this book "Hebrews" because it was originally addressed to Jewish Christians. In the early days following their conversion through the preaching of some of Jesus' original disciples (Hebrews 2:3), they had become exemplary Christians and had helped supply the needs of other Christians (Hebrews 6:10). They had taken cheerfully the loss of their own possessions as they were persecuted for Christ's name (10:32-34).

However, at the time this letter was written their original teachers and leaders had died (Hebrews 13:7). Now they were on the verge of slipping back from a confession of Christ into the Judaism out of which they had been converted (Hebrews 13:13-14). The writer of Hebrews exhorts the readers to remain true to Christ even at the price of having to shed their own blood (Hebrews 12:3-4).

That writer had to have been an outstanding leader in the early Christian church, but his identity is unknown. Many believe it was written by the apostle Paul, but this cannot be confirmed.

What four things must a Christian do, according to Hebrews 10:22-25?

Summarize in your own words the two lines of argument that the writer uses to support these commands.

Hebrews 10:26-31

Hebrews 10:32-34

What attitude did the original readers of this Epistle need to remain true to Christ in the midst of persecution (Hebrews 10:35-39)?

How did the Old Testament believers acquire this necessary quality (Hebrews 11:1-40)?

In view of the way these Old Testament believers lived, what should you do (Hebrews 12:1-3)?

### **James**

The writer of this Epistle is thought to have been the half-brother of Jesus. Though not counted as one of the twelve apostles, James became a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Because the name "James" was so common in those days, it is felt that only this James, who figured so prominently in the early church, would have announced himself to the readers of this Epistle without going into any detail as to who he was (James 1:1).

James wrote this Epistle to remind Christians about the qualities of heart and life that should characterize true Christian devotion in contrast to dead orthodoxy. In so doing, he made it clear how a Christian can find joy in Christ even when suffering for Him.

Why should the Christian consider adversity a reason for the greatest happiness (James 1:2-4, 12)?

In what way does the Christian receive the necessary resources to stand for Christ while suffering greatly (James 1:5-8)?

What two things should the Christian always remember when he feels tempted to do wrong?  
James 1:13-16

James 1:17-18

Instead of simply hearing what God has to say in His Word, what should the Christian do  
(James 1:21-25)? What should we do instead of simply talk about being Christians (James 1:26-27)?

Read James 5. List several commands that you will apply this week.

### **Peter**

**1 Peter.** Peter addresses the various churches scattered throughout Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). But like James, Peter's purpose in writing was to strengthen Christians so they could stand firm against the terrible persecutions by the Roman Empire. He begins by pointing out the wonders of the salvation that his readers possess (1 Peter 1:3-12). Then he gives certain commands that when obeyed will help a person to realize the wonders of this salvation.

List the five commands Peter gives in 1 Peter 1:13-2:3.

When one fulfills these commands, how does his attitude toward Christ differ from that of those who do not believe and obey him (I Peter 2:4-10)?

How, in general, does the Christian witness to those around him by his life (I Peter 2:11-12)?

How, in relationship to the government, does the Christian demonstrate the praises of Christ (I Peter 2:13-17)?

How, in his relationship with an employer, can a Christian demonstrate the praises of Christ (I Peter 2:18-25)?

How can a Christian wife best testify of Christ to an unbelieving husband (I Peter 3:1-6)? How about a Christian husband (1 Peter 3:7)?

**2 Peter.** As 2 Timothy records Paul's last words before martyrdom, so 2 Peter was Peter's last message before his martyrdom (2 Peter 1:14; see also John 21:19). This Epistle is a continuation of the theme of 1 Peter. The sufferings that his readers had just begun to endure when that Epistle was written have continued unabated, and Peter's purpose in writing this second Epistle is to encourage his readers to endure steadfastly to the end.

From what two sources have the readers heard of God's grace?  
2 Peter 1:12-18

2 Peter 1:19-21

However, there have always been those whose teaching would keep God's people from the truth. Name three ways to recognize those who are false prophets (2 Peter 2:1-22).

What great event should determine the present conduct of Christians (2 Peter 3:10-14)? How does Christ's return help you live daily?

## **John**

**I John.** During his later years, the apostle John settled at Ephesus among Christians who had found Christ through Paul's ministry. While he was there, a certain false teaching became popular which declared that God did not become truly incarnate in Jesus Christ and that a life of actual holiness was not essential to the Christian life.

The first Epistle of John was written to counteract this heresy. However, it is more than a mere refutation; it is one of the most beautiful and inspiring documents of the New Testament.

The key verse is I John 5:13: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

See if you can find at least five tests of this assurance of eternal life in the material leading up to 5:13.  
I John 1:7

1 John 2:3

1 John 15

1 John 3:6

1 John 4:7

**II John.** It is not clear whether the recipient of this brief Epistle is an individual, or whether the term "elect lady" figuratively denotes a church whose members are her "children" (verse 1).

Summarize in your own words the burden of the message John gives to this church. How can you better demonstrate love for those walking in truth?

**III John.** The principal characters of this Epistle are Gaius and Diotrephes. As church leaders went from town to town establishing new congregations, they depended on the hospitality of fellow believers. Gaius was one who welcomed them into his home. John wrote this Epistle to thank Gaius for his hospitality and faithfulness and to encourage him in the faith.

What example is Gaius to continue to follow in the future (verses 2-8)?

What is there about Diotrephes that Gaius is to avoid imitating (verses 9-11)? What do you think an attitude like Diotrephes' can do to church unity?

## **Jude**

Many biblical scholars believe that Jude was another one of Jesus' brothers who was converted after His earthly ministry. He calls himself "the brother of James" (verse 1), and in verse 17 he indicates that he was not himself an official apostle.

What was Jude's reason for writing as he does in this Epistle (verses 3,4)?

What are two things that Jude wants his readers to remember?  
Verses 5-16

Verses 17-19

What is the Christian's responsibility in view of the many false teachers that exist (verses 20-23)?

Praise God for His qualities found in verses 24 and 25.

## **Life Application**

Determine one main truth from each book that is particularly helpful to you and list it here. Describe how you will apply each to your life.

**James**

**I Peter**

**II Peter**

**I John**

**II John**

**III John**

**Jude**



# The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Bill Bright

The last book of the New Testament is the record of the revelation that the apostle John received during his imprisonment on the island of Patmos for being a Christian (1:9 and following). Many of the chapters of this book are difficult to interpret. Some of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church have felt unequal to the task of expounding these Scriptures. For example, John Calvin, one of the great reformers, wrote a commentary on every book of the Bible except Revelation.

Despite the fact that the meaning of every part of this book may not be immediately apparent, there is the promise that those who read (not necessarily understand) it will be blessed (1:3).

Though some parts may be obscure, certain ideas do stand out with unquestioned clarity. Chapters 1 through 3 describe Jesus as He appeared to John and record the messages to be sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor. These messages are quite clear in their meaning. Chapters 4 through 18 are more difficult, but chapters 19 through 22, which concern those events by which God brings final redemption to the world, are clear for the most part. These four chapters are extremely important to completing the history of redemption outlined since Genesis.

## **Jesus Christ**

Write in your own words your impression of Jesus Christ as John describes Him in Revelation 1:9-20.

How is this picture of Jesus different from the one of Him as Savior?

## **The Churches**

Name the seven churches to whom John was commanded to write, and tell the one main message he was to give to each. (Revelation 2-3)

What qualities do you see in your church that are like the ones you read about?

## **Final Events**

What great events are described in Revelation 19:1-21?

What will be the fate of the devil at the beginning of Christ's thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:1-3)?  
What will be his fate at the end (Revelation 20:7-10)?

What will be the fate of all unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15)?

List three ways in which the Christian's ultimate destiny will differ from this present existence (Revelation 21:1-7).

### **Life Application**

How can you prepare spiritually for Christ's coming and the events that will be taking place?