

KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

What makes the New Testament new? What does it tell us that the Old Testament does not? Why is it so controversial? Why is the New Testament still able to speak so forcefully after almost 2,000 years of circulation? Where do we begin so that we can grasp its purpose and place in the world and in our own lives?

This booklet was written by David Egner to help you understand the New Testament, its purpose, its people, its times, and its places. But most important, the purpose of this booklet is to give you a better understanding of God and yourself through the greatest book ever written—the Bible.

Martin R. De Haan II

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A BOOK LOVED AND HATED

The New Testament completes the story begun in the Old Testament. It tells about the coming of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Even though He didn't write a word of it, the New Testament is His book. It records His teachings and the story of His life, death, and resurrection. His followers claimed to write and speak with an authority granted by God. This book has had a more profound and controversial impact on the world than any other book ever written.

Millions Have Loved It. Down through the centuries, people imprisoned by sin have found life and freedom through faith in the One the New Testament was written to proclaim. Those who have been held captive by bars and walls, such as Fyodor Dostoevski in Siberia and the inmates of concentration camps, have found freedom of mind, heart, and soul through its words. People enchained in broken bodies, or shackled by physical suffering, or tortured by the unseen enemy, or enslaved in spiritual darkness, or bound by relentless legalism, or crippled by a fearsome self-doubt have responded by faith to its message of freedom. They have stepped into the light of God's liberating, never-changing love, as expressed in the New Testament.

Millions Have Hated It. Emperors like Nero and Diocletian tried to destroy the New Testament. Philosophers like Voltaire have proclaimed it to be a dead book of lies. Social scientists have scoffed at the solutions to man's problems set forth by the humble Galilean. Modernists and futurists have labeled its morals as hopelessly outdated and proclaimed it to be a book for the past—a book without the power to

make an impact on the world in the 21st century.

Even so, the New Testament lives on. The same burning message that conquered the Roman world, lit the fires of the Reformation, and ignited the great revivals of the 19th century continues to burn with liberating brightness. In our day, the message of the New Testament has sparked great revivals that have swept through Indonesia and Korea. Current reports are that 27,000 Chinese per day are placing their trust in Christ. Romania is spiritually alive. And even the Soviet Union must grudgingly admit that despite its atheism and its stern efforts to quench the church, the number of Christians within its borders continues to grow.

Why is this collection of 27 books written in the last half of the first century by a few zealous followers of the Jewish Messiah having such an impact? Because it is part of the Bible, the one book in all the world that can bring us to God. The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to break every chain that binds us. Yes, the New Testament brings God to us and it can bring us to Him. Through it, we can know Him in a personal, liberating, growing way.

THINGS NEW IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A new covenant (Mt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 9:15)
- A new commandment (Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 2:7-8)
- A new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15)
- A new life in the Spirit (Rom. 6:4; 7:6)
- A new man (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10)
- A new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1)
- A new name (Rev. 2:17; 3:12)
- A new song (Rev. 5:9; 14:3)

THE BACKGROUND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

God had been silent for 400 years. The devout of Israel had waited in vain for God to speak again and for their anticipated Messiah to come. But nothing had been revealed since the prophet Malachi put down his pen, finishing the Old Testament. Then in sudden, bold broad-sweeping strokes, God revealed Himself in two ways: (1) through the coming of Jesus Christ, His Son, and (2) through the writing of the New Testament.

The world had changed greatly during those 400 years of silence. Palestine itself was vastly different from those struggling days when Jewish zealots returned from Babylon to reconstruct their temple and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

To understand the impact of Christ's coming and the background of the New Testament, we need to acquaint ourselves with political, social, economic, and religious forces that were alive in the world into which the Lord Jesus was born.

The Roman World. Rome was the dominant force in the first-century world. Its armies had marched with power and precision across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, bringing nation after nation under its control. Palestine had fallen to General Pompey in 63 BC. Though taxed heavily, Israel benefited from Roman rule:

- **Peace.** The world was at peace in the days of the New Testament.
- **Government.** The emperor had the power to force reigning governors to rule well. In many cases this kept them from amassing great private wealth at the expense of the people.

- **Travel.** Because of the Roman peace, people could travel freely from country to country.
- **Communication.** The flow of information was the best the world had ever known.

Because of these factors, Christianity got a firm foothold and grew rapidly under Roman rule.

Greek Influence. Although the Greek Empire had collapsed before New Testament days, it was still a powerful world influence in the following ways:

Language. Alexander the Great's lightning-fast conquests (331–322 BC) made Greek the dominant language of the civilized world. When the Romans conquered territory, they encouraged its continued use. This benefited Christianity because: (1) a common language made the spread of the gospel easier, and (2) the New Testament was written in Greek and could be understood by everyone.

Culture. The Greek mind confronted basic questions about man, life, and the supernatural. The Greek poets, dramatists, and philosophers had thereby prepared the way for the satisfying answers Christianity brought to a searching and dissatisfied world.

Jewish Background. The Jewish background of the New Testament was important because: (1) Christianity was born in a Jewish environment, and (2) Christianity was rooted in what God had already made known to His people through the Old Testament.

When Christ was alive, Judea was governed by officials appointed by Rome. Even so, the Jews were left to run their own internal affairs. They did so through the Sanhedrin, a ruling body of 70 whose leader was the high priest.

The religious life of Israel was centered in two institutions. The first was the temple, which had recently been

rebuilt by Herod the Great. It was a magnificent structure, constructed to appease the Jews. Old Testament rituals were elaborately carried out by devout Jews from all walks of life. The second, the synagogues, were centers of worship and instruction scattered throughout the land. Their services were simple, consisting of prayer, Scripture reading, and explanation. Jewish boys were educated in synagogues, and their learning was primarily religious. It was into this combination of Roman rule, Greek thought, and Jewish tradition that Jesus was born and Christianity took root.

JEWISH GROUPS IN JESUS' DAY

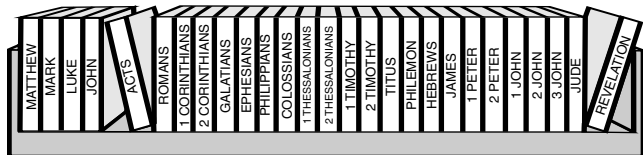
- 1. Pharisees.** Originating in the second century BC, this legalistic group believed in the combined authority of Scripture and oral tradition. They believed in angels, immortality, resurrection, and divine providence. In Jesus' day, they strongly objected to the Greek influence on Judaism, and they were primarily involved in synagogue worship.
- 2. Sadducees.** This party originated as a reaction to the Pharisees. They affirmed the authority of the Law but rejected oral tradition. Primarily from wealthy and influential families, they favored adopting Greek culture, denied resurrection, immortality, and the existence of angels, and accepted the free will of man. The Sadducees were mainly involved in the Jerusalem temple worship.
- 3. Essenes.** These extreme isolationists tried to escape the corruption of the world by living ascetic lifestyles in the desert caves of Qumran.
- 4. Herodians.** These people accepted a way of thinking that supported Roman rule in Palestine. Their goal was to keep Herod's family in power.
- 5. Zealots.** These Jewish patriots vigorously opposed Roman rule by using guerrilla-type activities to stir up revolt. The extent of their zeal was evidenced by the 960 people who committed suicide at Masada rather than be captured by Roman soldiers.

KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is a collection of smaller books. The 27 books in this “library” were written over a span of 50 years (AD 45–95) by eight known authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James, Jude) and one unidentified author (Hebrews).

The history of the Old Testament covers thousands of years; the New, about a century. Yet that century was the most important in the history of man. It was during those years that Jesus Christ was born, conducted His public ministry, was crucified, and was resurrected. Messianic prophecy was fulfilled and God’s plan of salvation was accomplished. The birth, the establishment, and the initial expansion of the church also occurred in that century.

The books of the New Testament are not arranged in the order in which they were written. Rather, they are placed in four literary groupings:



1. **Gospels:** Four biographies of Jesus Christ
2. **Acts:** The history of the early church
3. **Letters:** Twenty-one letters that define Christian belief and practice
4. **Revelation:** A vision of the endtimes

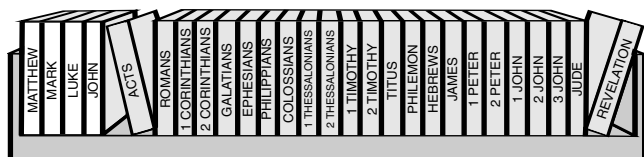
The word *testament* means “covenant” or “agreement.” The *New Testament*, then, tells of a new rela-

tionship between God and man—a new way of knowing God. The old covenant was based on the Mosaic Law and was made with the Jewish nation. The new (1 Cor. 11:25) was made with people of every nation who accepted by faith the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

The 27 books of the New Testament are filled with intense drama, inspired teaching, and practical instruction. According to the New Testament itself, they originated in the mind of God, came to us by divine inspiration, and were kept from error through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16).

God became a man and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14), revealing Himself more fully. The New Testament records the life, teaching, and impact of this God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why an understanding of the New Testament is essential if we are to know God better.

1. GOSPELS: Biography



The New Testament story begins with the cry of a newborn baby. In Bethlehem of Judea, a son was born to Joseph of Nazareth and his young wife Mary. But this was no ordinary birth. It was a virgin birth, prophesied in the Old Testament, announced by angels, and made possible by a miracle.

Jesus' Birth. An angel appeared to Mary, a devout Jewish girl, to tell her three astounding things: (1) She

was to be the mother of the “Son of the Highest” who would be given “the throne of His father David.” (2) He would be miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. (3) Her aged cousin Elizabeth was pregnant.¹

Joseph, Mary’s husband-to-be, was troubled when he learned that she was pregnant. But he was told by an angel that the baby conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit, that he should marry her, and that this child would “save His people from their sins.”²

When it came time for Mary to deliver, she and Joseph were in Bethlehem, “the city of David,” miles away from home because Rome had demanded that everyone in Palestine enroll for the tax in the city of their lineage.³ This fulfilled a prophecy of Micah.⁴

Angels heralded Jesus’ birth to shepherds on a Judean hillside.⁵ Eastern astrologers followed the leading of a star to worship Him.⁶ Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to flee to Egypt, saving the child from a massacre by the jealous and cruel King Herod.⁷

Jesus’ Inauguration. The child born to Elizabeth was John the Baptizer. He began to preach, calling the Jews to repentance in preparation for the kingdom of God.⁸ Those who purified their hearts testified to their act of preparation by being baptized.

One day, while John was baptizing in the Jordan River, Jesus came and insisted on being baptized.⁹ While He was in the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove and the Father in heaven voiced His approval.¹⁰ John’s words, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”¹¹ introduced Jesus to the world as its Messiah-Savior. The next day, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan.¹² Jesus thwarted His enemy’s attack by quoting from the Old Testament.

Jesus' Public Ministry. After His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus began to make Himself known to the people. His 3 years of public life were marked by 3 major activities: teaching, performing miracles, and training His apostles.

The Sermon on the Mount¹³ was Jesus' first great *teaching* session. In it He presented principles for living in His kingdom,¹⁴ His relationship to the Law,¹⁵ and instruction in prayer.¹⁶ He taught in ways the common people understood: parables,¹⁷ epigrams,¹⁸ and object lessons.¹⁹ Yet He taught with authority.²⁰

His teaching was accompanied by *miracles*. He demonstrated that His claim to be the Son of God was true by showing His power over nature,²¹ demons,²² disease,²³ and even death.²⁴

Jesus chose 12 men to be His *apostles*.²⁵ During the last 2 years of His public ministry, these men were with Him nearly all the time. This was important because the responsibility of carrying out His plan would fall squarely on their shoulders when He was gone.

THE GOSPELS COMPARED				
	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Christ As:	King	Servant	Man	God
Audience	Jew	Roman	Greek	Everyone
Mindset	Religious	Pragmatic	Idealistic	Universal
Tone	Prophetic	Practical	Historical	Spiritual
Emphasis	Sermons	Miracles	Parables	Doctrine
Arrangement	Topical	Sequential	Topical	Sequential
Key Word	“fulfilled”	“immediately”	“Son of Man”	“believe”
Key Verse	21:5	10:45	19:10	20:31
Jesus' Words	60%	42%	50%	50%
Date Written	AD 60–65	AD 55–60	AD 65–70	AD 85–90
Written By	Tax Collector	Missionary	Physician	Fisherman

Crowds flocked to Jesus. It seemed that wherever He went, He was surrounded by throngs. The common people accepted Him and He soon became popular.

The religious leaders of Israel, however, hated Him, They resented His popularity and they despised His claims. To them He was an impostor and a blasphemer, so they began plotting His death.²⁶

As His ministry drew to a close, even the crowds forsook Him.²⁷ His enemies grew more bold. Finally, one of His own apostles conspired to betray Him.²⁸

Jesus' Death. Each of the four gospel writers closed his book with an account of the last few days of Jesus' life. In Matthew, it covers 9 chapters; in Mark, 6; in Luke, 4½ long chapters; and in John, 10. This should not surprise us, for Jesus had made it clear from the beginning that He had come to give His life.²⁹ Seven times He had told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and die.

Jesus traveled to Jerusalem at Passover, the annual commemoration of Israel's rescue from the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt. When He came into the city of Zion in a triumphal entry, He was celebrated by the common people.³⁰ The next day, He threw the money-changers out of the temple.³¹

His enemies, masterminded by Caiaphas the high priest, planned Jesus' death.³² He met with His disciples one last time in an upper room, and while they were assembled Judas left to betray Him.³³ Jesus initiated the communion service before making His way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.³⁴ There He was arrested by a mob and then given an illegal trial before the Sanhedrin, declared guilty, and brought to Pilate.³⁵ When the Roman proconsul could not persuade the mob to release Him, he turned Him over to them.³⁶ Jesus was led to Calvary, where He was crucified with two criminals.³⁷ When He died, His body was claimed by two of His followers and placed in a new tomb.³⁸

All seemed lost for Jesus' disciples. But 3 days later, He rose from the dead.³⁹ He appeared privately to His disciples on several occasions, and was also seen by hundreds of others.⁴⁰ He had conquered death! The last sight of Him was His ascension into heaven 40 days after His resurrection.⁴¹

SEEING GOD

Because Jesus was God in the flesh, and because the gospels tell His story, they tell us volumes about God. Here are some examples of what Christ's life, death, and resurrection tell us about God.

- In Jesus' birth, we see the mercy of God as He humbled Himself to come to our rescue (Mt. 1:21-23).
- In Jesus' teaching, we see the wisdom and goodness of God as He tells us what to believe and how to live (Jn. 12:49-50).
- In Jesus' miracles, we see the unlimited power of God to control nature, disease, and death (Mk. 4:35-41; Lk. 7:11-18; 9:37-42).
- In Jesus' training of the Twelve, we see God's desire to work through His people (Jn. 14:12).
- In Jesus' death, we see how far God would go to redeem us from our sins (Jn. 3:16).
- In Jesus' resurrection, we see the supernatural power of God to conquer death (Mk. 16:1-8).

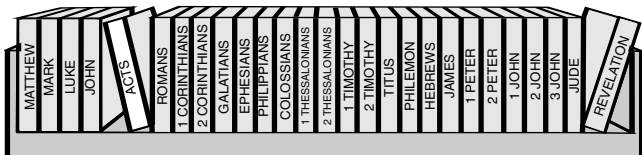
YOUR RESPONSE

What does the story recorded in the gospels mean to us today? To focus your response, look up the references and answer these questions:

- Read Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20. What does Christ's coming to earth mean to you?
- Read John 1:29. What is your response to the words, "Behold! The Lamb of God!"

- When Jesus called His disciples, He said, “Follow Me!” In what ways do these words apply to you in this 21st century?
- Read Luke 23:44-49; 24:1-8. If you had been living, how would you have felt at Jesus’ crucifixion? At the news of His resurrection?
- Now read John 14:7-11 In what ways should Jesus’ life influence your life?

2. ACTS: History



The hopes of Jesus’ disciples were crushed when Jesus died. His crucifixion had left them scattered and disillusioned. The news of His resurrection, however, brought them hope, and His appearance transformed them. From that little band of men, the church grew rapidly to worldwide dimensions. The book of Acts tells the story of the beginnings of the church. We will look at it under four headings: power, proclamation, persecution, and Paul.

Power (Acts 1–2:13). Before Jesus ascended to the Father,¹ He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit.² Ten days later, as the disciples were gathered on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole

house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

This marked the beginning of the church, the “called out ones” of all generations who compose the body of Christ. What appeared to be flames rested on each of the disciples, and they began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned. A sound like a howling wind caused a crowd to gather, and people from many countries heard the disciples speaking in their native dialects. That great institution for this age, the church, had begun.

Proclamation (2:14–3:26). Jesus had said that the disciples would receive power to become His witnesses.³ The very day they received that power, they began to proclaim Christ. Peter stood and addressed the crowd with great courage. The theme of his sermon was this: You crucified your long-awaited Messiah, but God raised Him from the dead.⁴ When the people asked what they should do, Peter replied:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38).

That day about 3,000 people trusted in Christ, and the church began to grow.⁵ Peter and John preached again in Solomon’s portico,⁶ and many more believed in the saving message of the gospel.⁷

Persecution (Acts 4:1–8:3). With growth came opposition. Peter and John were arrested for preaching, threatened, and ordered to stop.⁸ But they refused to

obey the order and prayed for even more boldness to preach.⁹ The Sadducees were jealous of the apostles' popularity, so they had them arrested and imprisoned.¹⁰ After they were freed by an angel¹¹ the apostles were recaptured and brought before the Jewish council, where they were beaten and commanded not to preach.¹² They told the council that they would obey God rather than men, and they continued daily in their preaching and teaching.¹³

The religious leaders' hatred of the Christians finally focused on Stephen. When he was brought before the high priest, Stephen preached with tremendous power, concluding his address with these strong words of condemnation:

You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

The crowd was furious. Stirred up by the religious leaders, they stoned Stephen to death.¹⁴ A man in that crowd named Saul held the garments of those who threw the rocks. He then took the lead in persecuting Christians, going from house to house and imprisoning men and women alike.¹⁵ The followers of Jesus fled Jerusalem, and wherever they scattered they took the gospel with them.¹⁶ Some went to Damascus, and Saul got permission to go and arrest them.¹⁷

Paul (Acts 9:1–28:31). As Saul was traveling to Damascus, a brilliant light stopped him and forced

him to the ground.¹⁸ A voice spoke to him from the light. When Saul asked who was speaking, Jesus identified Himself. In an instant Saul was converted. He said, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”¹⁹ Blinded, he was led to the house of Judas in Damascus, where the Lord used Ananias to restore Paul’s sight.²⁰

What a transformation! The persecutor became a follower; the antagonist became a believer. He would become the great missionary to the Gentiles—the one who would break the European barrier and take the gospel to the very heart of Rome itself.

Paul was called to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Accompanied by Barnabas, Silas, or Timothy, he went into city after city to proclaim Christ. His method was to go to the synagogue and teach as a rabbi. Usually the Jews would resist him, but he would still gather a following. He would then stay in the city, meet with the believers in homes, and continue to preach and teach as long as it was safe. Sometimes it would take beatings, scourgings, or imprisonment to make him move on. Thousands believed and churches were established in private homes. After Paul moved on, he often wrote to the churches to confirm the believers in the faith, to correct their doctrine, or to instruct them in Christian behavior.

“As the Gospels provide the history of Christ, the book of Acts provides the early history of His church.”

The day came when Paul could no longer avoid imprisonment. He was arrested in Jerusalem,²¹ where he appealed to his Roman citizenship.²² He was transported at night to Caesarea,²³ before being sent to

Rome,²⁴ where he remained under house arrest for 2 years.²⁵ But he was still able to preach and teach²⁶ and correspond with the churches he had planted.

The initial work was done. The church, firmly established in Jerusalem, had spread throughout the Roman world. Many thousands of people from all walks of life had believed. And the flame that was ignited on Pentecost still burns brightly today.

SEEING GOD

We can know God better through the history of the church recorded in Acts. Consider the following:

- In the coming of the Comforter, we see that God does not leave His people without help (Acts 2).
- In the establishment and growth of the church, we see that God has provided for the spiritual and personal needs of believers (Acts 2:40-47).
- In the boldness of the disciples, we see the power of the Holy Spirit available to us today (Acts 4:33).
- In the persecution of the Christians, we see the way God turns adversity into opportunity and accomplishment (Acts 8:4).
- In the missionary journeys, we see how God backs up His commission with His help (Acts 16:20-26).

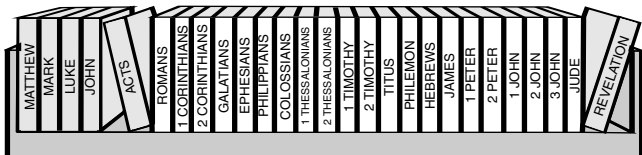
YOUR RESPONSE

The historical account of Acts should cause us to ask some probing questions of ourselves. Read and answer the following passages and questions:

- Read Acts 4:33. When was the last time you spoke boldly for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Read Acts 5:40-41; 7:59-60; 16:20-25. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith in Christ? What was your response?
- Read Acts 20:17-28. How are you supporting the church's effort to meet the world's need?

- Read Acts 20:31-38. What kind of influence are you having on people?
- Read Acts 28:30-31. In what specific ways are you letting Christ use you to build up His church?

3. LETTERS: Instruction



In the city of Corinth, a group of people responded to Paul's preaching, became Christians, and formed a church. But they were involved in immorality, division, and strife. In Philippi, a discouraged group of believers needed lifting up. In Rome, a loyal band of Christ's followers needed to clarify their beliefs about righteousness, the Law, and sanctification. They had questions about the Christian's everyday life. The believers at Thessalonica needed to know about Christ's return and the last days. In Ephesus, the leaders needed instruction about their position in Christ. Elsewhere, Christians were suffering and didn't understand why. False teachers were infiltrating churches and threatening to undermine the work. A pastor at Crete needed encouragement.

What was the best way to meet the needs of the growing church? The apostles couldn't be everywhere at once. So they sent letters (also known as epistles) to explain Christian teaching, to inspire God's people to holiness, and to tell them how to live.

The churches or individuals who received these letters were no doubt overjoyed when they arrived. They

were read aloud to the congregation and passed around from church to church. Copies were made with meticulous care for other churches. Believers began to collect them. All in all, 21 such letters were judged to be inspired, and they became a major portion of the New Testament.

Although there is some history and some biography in these letters, they were primarily written to amplify the teaching of Jesus Christ. Most of them were written either to local bodies of believers (such as those at Corinth or Rome) or to pastors (Timothy and Titus). The age that began at Pentecost is known as the church age, and these letters talk about church life. Among other things, they give instruction regarding:

- The unity of the church (Eph. 2:11-22).
- The worship of the church (1 Cor. 14:26-40).
- The leaders of the church (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).
- The discipline of the church (1 Tim. 6:3-5).
- The ordinances of the church (1 Cor. 11:23-30).
- The preaching of the church (2 Tim. 4:2).

“The 21 letters we call the Epistles were written to the church to amplify what Christ came to teach and to apply it to life.”

Although the epistles were church-centered, they were also useful for individuals. A person with the opportunity to read them would learn the principles to govern his conduct with his fellow believers and before the world. Here's a sample:

- We are to love one another (Rom. 12:10).
- We are to submit to government (Rom. 13:1).
- We are to imitate Christ (Eph. 5:1).
- We are to care for one another (1 Cor. 16:1)

- We are not to speak evil of anyone (Titus 3:2).
- We are to confess our sins (1 Jn. 1:9).

THE LETTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Epistle	Author	Date	Theme
Romans	Paul	57-58	Gospel of God
1 Corinthians	Paul	55-56	Church disorders
2 Corinthians	Paul	55-57	Paul's authority
Galatians	Paul	48-49	Gospel of liberty
Ephesians	Paul	60-61	Position in Christ
Philippians	Paul	60-61	Joyful humility
Colossians	Paul	60-61	Preeminence of Christ
1 Thessalonians	Paul	51-52	Return of Christ
2 Thessalonians	Paul	51-52	Comfort and correction
1 Timothy	Paul	62-65	Church organization
2 Timothy	Paul	66-67	Paul's last words
Titus	Paul	63-65	Church organization
Philemon	Paul	60-61	Forgiveness and love
Hebrews	?	64-68	Superiority of Christ
James	James	45-50	Faith in practice
1 Peter	Peter	63-64	Responding to suffering
2 Peter	Peter	65-68	Living in the last days
1 John	John	85-95	Fellowship and love
2 John	John	85-95	Faithfulness to the truth
3 John	John	85-95	Hospitality commended
Jude	Jude	65-80	Beware of apostates

These 21 letters were also written to define and clarify the basic beliefs of Christianity. For example:

- Jesus Christ is God (Col. 1:13-19).
- The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (1 Cor. 6:19-20).
- All are sinners (Rom. 3:23).
- Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
- Believers are to forsake sin (Rom. 6:1-14).
- Righteousness comes through Christ (Rom. 3:21-22).

- The Bible is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16).
- All will be resurrected (1 Cor. 15).

SEEING GOD

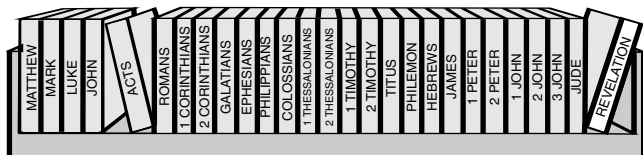
The epistles help us to know God in the following representative ways. As you read these letters, you will see many other elements of God's character.

- In the autobiographical writings of Paul, we see how able God is to supply the deepest needs of those who are willing to serve Him (2 Cor. 4).
- In the doctrinal portions, we see how careful God has been to provide a rescue that is as right as it is needed (Rom. 3:21-26).
- In the comforting passages, we see a God who is able to enter into our pain and care about our struggles (2 Cor. 1:3-6).
- In the corrective sections, we see a God who not only loves us enough to accept us just the way we are, but loves us so much that He is not willing to leave us the way He found us (Heb. 12:7-13).
- In the prophetic passages, we see a God who has promised to prepare for us an eternal kingdom where all evil and sin has been removed (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

YOUR RESPONSE

- Read Colossians 1:9-18. What is your personal relationship to Christ, the preeminent One?
- Read Ephesians 4:7-16. How are you using your spiritual gift to build up the body of Christ?
- Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. How does your faith in Christ affect what you say and do?
- Read 2 Peter 2:1-3 and 1 John 4:1-6. How can you protect yourself from false teachers?
- Read 1 Peter 1:6-9. In what ways does your suffering bring glory to Christ's name?

4. REVELATION: Prophecy



As we have worked through the New Testament, we have seen the story of God's salvation in Christ revealed like the gradual unrolling of a scroll. We have read of great events: the miraculous birth of Christ, His 3 years of public ministry, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. Rising out of the disappointment of Calvary came the transformed disciples who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, established the church and extended it throughout the world. And the church still lives today, perhaps stronger now than it has been for generations.

But how will it all turn out? What will happen next? What lies ahead for the church—and for the world?

The answers came to John, Jesus' beloved disciple, in a series of dreams and visions. Written down in the book of Revelation in highly figurative language, they set forth the future of the church and all mankind.

John's Vision Of The Past (Rev. 1–3). John saw Christ, the Head of the church, walking among lampstands that represented seven churches of Asia Minor.¹ To these churches He gave words of approval, accusation, or admonition. Those who endured were promised spiritual reward at Christ's return.

John's Vision Of Heaven (Rev. 4–5). First he saw the throne of God itself, shimmering in glory and surrounded by worshipers who exalted God for His wonderful creation.² When no one was found worthy to

open a large scroll, John wept.³ After he was told to stop weeping, he was given the vision of a slain Lamb (representing Jesus Christ) standing in the center of the throne in heaven.⁴ A chorus of praise rang out for the Lamb, who was worthy to open the scroll because He had purchased men with His own blood.⁵

John's Vision Of The Future (Rev. 6–22). The majority of the book of Revelation deals with future events. This portion may be divided into three general sections: the tribulation (Rev. 6–18), the return of Christ and related events (Rev. 19–20), and a vision of heaven (Rev. 21–22).

1. The Tribulation. The outpouring of God's wrath was shown in a vision to John in the opening of seven seals, the sounding of seven trumpets, and the outpouring of the contents of seven bowls. Here is what the opening of the seven seals revealed to John:

1st seal: a white horse—Antichrist⁶

2nd seal: a red horse—war⁷

3rd seal: a black horse—famine⁸

4th seal: a pale horse—death⁹

5th seal: martyred souls and the altar¹⁰

6th seal: earthquakes—destruction¹¹

7th seal: introduction of the seven trumpets¹²

The sounding of the trumpets will usher in terrible devastation on the earth: A third of the vegetation of the earth will be destroyed by hail and fire;¹³ a third of the creatures of the sea will be destroyed by a flaming mountain;¹⁴ a third of the rivers will be poisoned by a falling star;¹⁵ a third of the stars and planets will go dark;¹⁶ and a third of earth's population will be killed by a fiendish army of 200 million.¹⁷ Between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, John saw a vision of an angel with a little book and two witnesses.¹⁸

God will punish the rebellious nations of the earth. Meanwhile, His enemies, Satan and his henchmen, will gain control of vast segments of the world's population. The earth, reeling with war and death, will be filled with blasphemy and evil.

Then seven bowls filled with God's wrath will be poured out on the earth.¹⁹ One after another, plagues more terrible than ever seen before will fall on the earth. Multitudes of Christians will die as martyrs. And Satan's man, Antichrist, will assemble his armies in Palestine to destroy the Jews.

“Revelation is the only New Testament book primarily devoted to prophecy. Its imagery is based on the Old Testament, and it shows how the second coming of Christ will complete what was begun at His first coming.”

2. The Return Of Christ. In this part of John's vision, he saw heaven opened and the Lord Jesus Christ returning to earth in all His glory, surrounded by vast armies.²⁰ He also saw Antichrist defeated at Armageddon²¹ and Satan chained for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit.²²

After the Jews turn in faith to Jesus Christ as their true Messiah, He will establish His throne in Jerusalem for a 1,000-year reign over the earth in righteousness, prosperity, and peace.²³ When the millennium is over, Satan will be released and will lead a final revolt against the Lord.²⁴ The rebels will be destroyed by fire from heaven, and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire forever.²⁵ The earth and heavens as we know them will be destroyed, and they will be replaced by a new

heaven and new earth.²⁶ All unbelievers will be resurrected and judged before a great white throne.²⁷

3. A Look At Heaven. John's vision concludes with a grand survey of the new heaven and new earth.²⁸ The jeweled walls, crystal river, streets of gold, and tree of life will be the believers' eternal home. They will live in the presence of God and their Savior-King, the Lord Jesus Christ, forever.²⁹

SEEING GOD

The magnificent yet terrifying visions of Revelation help us to know God better. As you read this book, you will see many truths about God. For example:

- In Christ's messages to the seven churches, we see God's deep concern for the spiritual welfare of His people (Rev. 2–3).
- In the vision of the throne in heaven, we see the majestic, lofty, unlimited glory of God (Rev. 4).
- In the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, we see God's anger over a sinful and rebellious world (Rev. 6–18).
- In the defeat and banishment of Satan, we see that God has the power to conquer sin and evil (Rev. 19–20).
- In the description of heaven, we see the goodness of God eternally displayed (Rev. 21–22).

YOUR RESPONSE

In the light of our survey of Revelation, take a moment, respond personally to these questions:

- Read Revelation 1:9-17; 5:6-14. What is your response to these glimpses of Christ's glory?
- Read Revelation 2 and 3. If Christ wrote a letter to your church, what would He commend? What would He condemn?
- Read Revelation 6:1-17. What does this tell you

about the future of rulers who continue to reject God and nations that mock His name?

- Read Revelation 20:11-15. How does the certainty of the final judgment affect you? The lost?
 - Read Revelation 21. What thoughts enter your mind when you read John's description of heaven?
-

GOSPELS

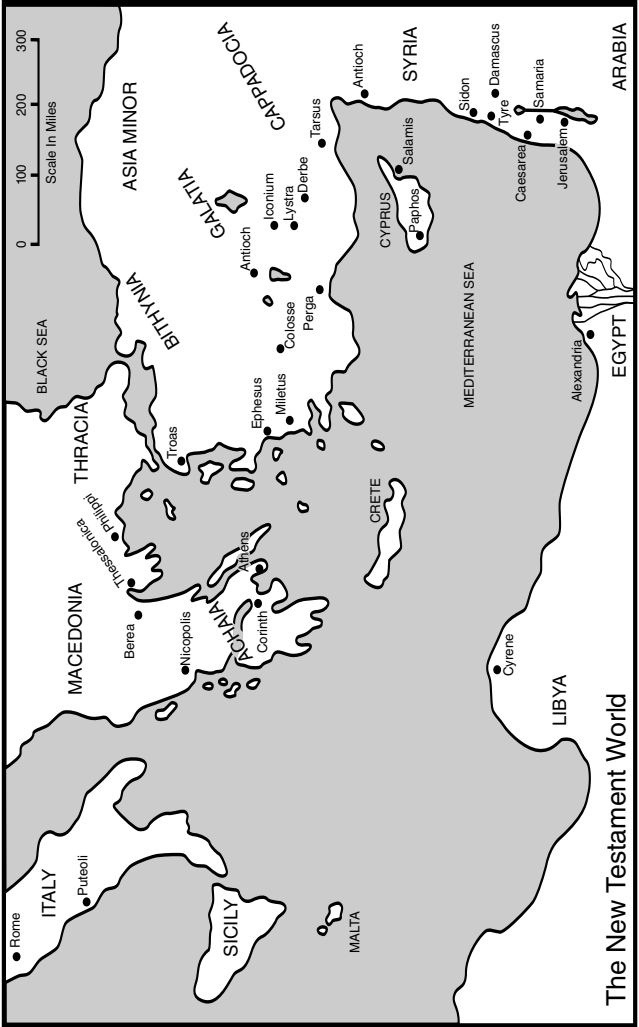
1. Luke 1:26-38; 2. Matthew 1:18-23; 3. Luke 2:1-3; 4. Micah 5:2; 5. Luke 2:8-14; 6. Matthew 2:1-12; 7. Matthew 2:13-18; 8. Matthew 3:1-12; 9. Matthew 3:13-15; 10. Matthew 3:16-17; 11. John 1:29; 12. Matthew 4:1-11; 13. Matthew 5-7; 14. Matthew 5:1-12; 15. Matthew 5:17-48; 16. Matthew 6:5-13; 17. Matthew 13; 18. Matthew 12:33; 19. Matthew 9:16-17; 20. Mark 1:22; 21. Mark 4:35-41; 22. Luke 9:37-42; 23. Mark 6:53-56; 24. Luke 7:11-18; 25. Luke 6:12-16; 26. Matthew 9:3; 12:14; 27. John 6:60-66; 7:12,40-44; 28. John 12:4; 29. Mark 8:31; 30. Matthew 21:1-9; 31. Mark 11:12-18; 32. Matthew 26:3-4; 33. John 13:2,24-30; 34. Mark 14:22-32; 35. Luke 22:47-23:12; 36. Luke 23:13-25; 37. Matthew 27:27-44; 38. John 19:38-42; 39. Luke 24:1-9; 40. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 41. Acts 1:1-11.

ACTS

1. Acts 1:9-10; 2. 1:4-5; 3. 1:8; 4. 2:22-36; 5. 2:41-47; 6. 3:11-26; 7. 4:4; 8. 4:1-21; 9. 4:23-31; 10. 5:17-18; 11. 5:19; 12. 5:26-40; 13. 5:29,42; 14. 7:54-60; 15. 8:3; 16. 8:4; 17. 9:1-2; 18. 9:3-4; 19. 9:6; 20. 9:17-18; 21. 21:31-35; 22. 22:22-29; 23. 23:23-33; 24. 27:1-28:16; 25. 28:30; 26. 28:31.

REVELATION

1. Revelation 2-3; 2. 4:11; 3. 5:2-4; 4. 5:5-6; 5. 5:9; 6. 6:1-2; 7. 6:3-4; 8. 6:5-6; 9. 6:7-8; 10. 6:9-11; 11. 6:12-17; 12. 8:1-6; 13. 8:7; 14. 8:8-9; 15. 8:10-11; 16. 8:12-13; 17. 9:1-12; 18. 10:1-11:14; 19. 16:1-21; 20. 19:11-16; 21. 19:17-21; 22. 20:1-2; 23. 20:4-6; 24. 20:7-9; 25. 20:9-10; 26. 21:1; 27. 20:11-15; 28. 21-22; 29. 22:3-5.



IMPORTANT DATES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

DATE	EVENT
63 BC	Fall of Jerusalem to Rome
37 BC	Herod the Great appointed
5 BC	Birth of Jesus Christ
4 BC	Death of Herod
AD 7	Christ questions the temple scholars
AD 27–30	Public ministry of Christ
AD 30	Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; the birth of the church and coming of the Holy Spirit
AD 33	Conversion of Saul of Tarsus
AD 47–48	Paul's first missionary journey
AD 49	The council at Jerusalem
AD 49–52	The second missionary journey
AD 52–56	The third missionary journey
AD 56	Paul arrested at Jerusalem
AD 57–59	Paul in prison in Caesarea
AD 60–61	Paul under house arrest in Rome
AD 62–66	Paul released, revisits churches, resumes evangelistic ministry
AD 64	Fire in Rome; Nero persecutes believers
AD 66	Paul arrested and imprisoned at Rome
AD 67	Paul executed
AD 70	Temple in Jerusalem destroyed by Titus
AD 81–96	Domitian's reign of terror for Christians
AD 100	Death of the apostle John

WHAT THE NAMES OF CHRIST TELL US ABOUT GOD

The names of Jesus tell us about God's character. Let's look at four of His most often-used names.

Jesus. This name was given to Jesus by angelic pronouncement before His birth (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 1:31). It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua and it means "the Lord is salvation." The name is a reminder that God delights in the salvation of His people. He delivered them in the past (the exodus and the return from Babylon), He is delivering people spiritually in the present, and He will deliver Israel literally in the endtimes through Jesus.

Christ. This name is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah, which means "the anointed one." Because this term was politically charged, Jesus used it of Himself sparingly. The name underscores the reliability of God: He had promised a deliverer and now He had come "to save His people from their sins."

Son Of Man. This was the term Jesus used most often of Himself. It was used prophetically of Jesus in Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus used this name to identify with mankind in general (Ps. 8:4; 80:17). This name tells us that God was willing to identify with His people and become their substitute to bring them salvation.

Son Of God. Jesus did not use this name for Himself very often. It was given to Him by the Father at His baptism and transfiguration (Mt. 3:17; Lk. 9:35). It identified Christ as God's Son—equal with the Father and having power to do things only God can do (see Jn. 5:25-26). This name reminds us that He truly was God among men.

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He instructed His followers to go into all the world, proclaim the gospel, and become disciple makers (Mt. 28:19-20). He also promised that they would be given power by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses throughout the earth (Acts 1:8). The message the followers of Christ were sent to proclaim is also the essential message of the New Testament. It may be summarized as follows:

Who Christ Is. The teaching of the New Testament is based on the identification of Jesus Christ. He is God the Son, born of a virgin in Bethlehem. He took on our human nature so that He could be our substitute. He lived without sin, though He was tempted with all the temptations that confront us (Heb. 4:15). He fulfilled the Father's plan in exact detail, submitting to the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). He was the God-man: fully God and fully man.

What Christ Did. The sinless life of Jesus Christ was ended by His death on a cross. He was accused of blasphemy by the religious leaders of Israel and executed with common thieves. In His suffering and death, He bore the penalty for our sins—even though He Himself was without guilt (2 Cor. 5:21). He took our place, dying that we might live. In that act, He fulfilled the Old Testament concept of sacrifice. As the animal died to atone for the sins of a man or the nation, so Jesus shed His blood as our sacrifice.

Christ's Resurrection. But Christ did not stay in the tomb. Three days after He died, He was raised from the dead. Some women, His disciples, and more than

500 others at one time were witnesses of the truth of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Because death is the penalty for sin (Rom. 5:12-14), His resurrection demonstrates that God accepted His death as a suitable sacrifice for sin. Death's power is broken (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

**“An inexpressible future awaits
those who accept the message of
the New Testament.”**

Our Response. How does a person respond to the message proclaimed by Christ's followers? How does he appropriate to himself the merit of Christ's sacrifice on his behalf? By faith. He first hears the gospel story—the good news of Christ's death for his sin—and then he believes and is born again (Jn. 3:16). This rescue does not come by works, heritage, baptism, or self-denial—it comes to all who trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. And when a person believes, he is forgiven of his sins (Eph. 4:32); he becomes a member of God's family (Jn. 1:12); he is baptized into the church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and he is justified in God's sight (Rom. 5:1).

The Future. An inexpressible future awaits those who accept the message of the New Testament. Jesus Christ has promised to return for His own (Jn. 14:13). When the endtime comes, He will punish the earth for its evil and purge it of its sin (2 Pet. 3:10-16). The wrongs of this world will be made right by Christ the perfect judge (Rev. 19:11), and believers will live forever in heaven. They will be completely satisfied, filled with a knowledge of God that will give them eternal joy and ultimate fulfillment in His presence.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND YOU

Now that we have surveyed the New Testament with a view toward knowing God and have looked closely at its message, it's time to respond to what we have learned. If you are already a believer, your heart should be rejoicing at the message of salvation and hope that is at the very core of the New Testament. If you are born again, you have the assurance that a wonderful life in heaven awaits you.

The New Testament, as we have seen, is filled with specific instructions for you. It calls for personal purity through obedience to Jesus Christ. It commands you to witness. It demands a life of self-sacrifice. It assumes that you will be an active member of a local church. So how are you doing? Any review of the glorious message of the gospel should fill you with renewed dedication.

But what if you are not a Christian? Your next step is clear. To know God through the New Testament, you must trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, as your Savior, He died for you! To receive Him, you must first acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you cannot save yourself. Then, in simple prayer, ask Jesus to save you, believing that He will. He has promised to give new life to all who call on Him in faith.

Trust Christ today. The Bible asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). When you receive Him, you will experience the freedom from sin and guilt that Jesus Christ promises to all who trust in Him.

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (Jn. 8:36).

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