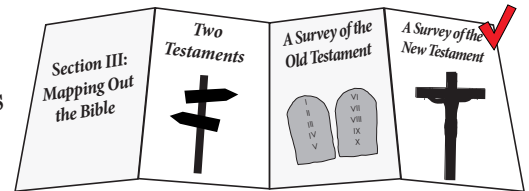




Part 3: Survey of the New Testament

Introduction: Between the Testaments



After the last prophet Malachi completed his Divinely inspired message, there was about 400 years of silence from God. The Jewish people who returned



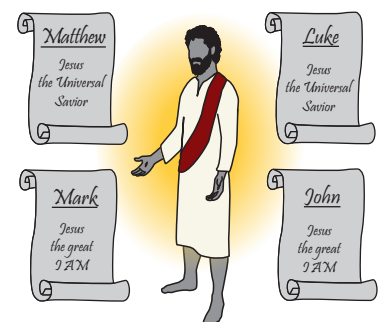
from slavery were but a remnant of the mighty nation of Israel that once existed. The powerful Roman armies took control of the Judean region. They ruled with great authority and the times were often tense with rebellion and strife. The Jews longed for the promised Messiah to come.

The majority anticipated a great military leader who would overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to international glory and power. The true mission of the Messiah was *spiritual* in nature. The Savior intended overthrow Satan's schemes and redeem man from sin and spiritual death. After 400 years, the divine silence was broken. Jesus ushered in the New Testament. Twenty-seven books were written and collected to guide mankind to the truth. This lesson will offer a brief survey of the New Testament books.

Gospels of Jesus Christ

The Gospels of Jesus are four accounts of the *good news* about Jesus Christ.² Some may ask why there are four books of the same narrative. Each Gospel writer had different audiences in mind when they wrote their book. They all worked in harmony to describe perfectly who Jesus was, is, and is to come. (40) Matthew focuses on *Jesus as the Messiah*. The principal audience of Matthew was the Jews. It was written to convince them through Jewish prophecy that Jesus was the Christ. Some themes of Matthew center on Jesus as the prophesied Messiah, His messianic Kingdom, Kingdom living, and Kingdom growth.

(41) Mark reveals *Jesus as the Son of God*. The principal audience of Mark were Gentile Christians who experienced increasingly difficult times. Tradition says Mark wrote this gospel based on the reflections of the apostle Peter. Some themes of Mark include: Jesus as the Son of God, the model of suffering, and a Savior for all who believe. (42) Luke is about *Jesus as the universal Savior*. His gospel and narrative history of the church (the book of Acts) have many purposes.



¹ Lamentations 2:9

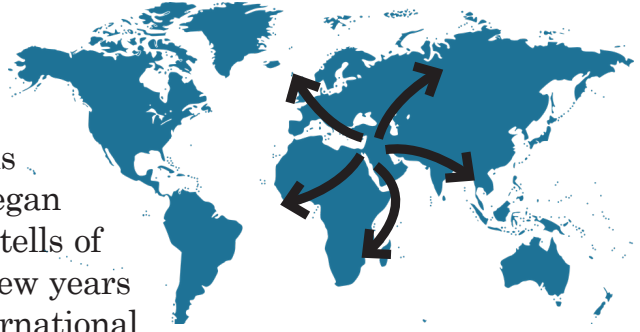
² The word "gospel" comes from an Old English phrase "god spell" which means "good tidings." It has come to be synonymous with the idea of "good news."

Some include: strengthening the faithful, demonstrating the truths of Jesus and the church, and countering the attack against Christians by persecutors. Some highlights include: the universality of the gospel, the non-threat that Christianity posed to Rome, responsibility to social outcasts, repentance, and managing wealth.

(43) John is a reflection of *Jesus as the great I AM*. This gospel was written for those who had doubts about the deity of Christ and whether or not He actually came in the flesh. The themes of John include: Jesus' humanity and deity, Jesus' authority, and theological discussions of who Jesus is to the believer.

New Testament History

There is only one book in the section of New Testament history: (45) The Acts of the Apostles. Acts is about *Church Beginnings*. After Jesus' resurrection, He showed Himself to His followers and ascended to Heaven. His disciples began sharing the gospel with others. The book of Acts tells of the early years of the church, and how in just a few years it grew from a Jerusalem based group to an international religion. The book of Acts gives us great examples of how the church practiced their faith.



New Testament Epistles

Romans

Righteousness through Faith

1 Corinthians

Correction

2 Corinthians

Vindication

Galatians

Justification by Faith

Ephesians

Revealing the Mystery

Philippians

Joy

Colossians

Christ is Supreme

1-2 Thessalonians

Endurance

1-2 Timothy

Teaching Others

Titus

Training Others

Philemon

Forgiving Others

As the church grew, the inspired apostles and evangelists could not be everywhere at once. They had to encourage, correct, rebuke, and teach the churches that were all over the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, certain men began writing letters to churches and individuals. These twenty-one letters are called epistles. Their practical instructions are for Christians to learn from and obey.

The Pauline Epistles. The apostle Paul wrote at least 13 of the 21 epistles.³ His epistles are the first in the section. They are organized by length (from longest to shortest) instead of chronological order. (45) Romans is about *Righteousness through Faith*. Paul explains to Roman Christians that faith is the cornerstone of Christianity. (46) First Corinthians is about *Correction*. Paul corrects various errors in the church in Corinth and appeals for a return to pure doctrine.

(51) Colossians is about the *Supremacy of Christ*. Paul warns the disciples in Colossae about errors. He lifts up Christ as supreme, and exhorts them to do their duties. (52-53) First and Second Thessalonians are about *Endurance*. Paul exhorts the disciples in Thessalonica to continue in the faith and in holy conversation. He also corrects false teaching about the second coming of Christ.

³ The epistle of Hebrews bears a striking similarity to Paul's writing style but does not bear his name.

(54-55) First & Second Timothy are about *Teaching Others*. Paul appeals to a younger evangelist named Timothy to train others, and be encouraged in his ministry. (56) Titus is about *Training Others*. Paul encourages a young evangelist named Titus to ordain elders and train Christians for good works. (57) Philemon is about *Forgiving Others*. Paul appeals to a Christian master to receive a converted, escaped slave.

Other Epistles. (58) Hebrews is about *New > Old*. The writer maintains that Jesus and the New Testament are greater than the Old Law. Christians are warned not to attempt to return to the Old Law. If they do, Jesus' sacrifice cannot cover their sins. (59) James is about *Faith + Works*. The Lord's half-brother James writes a letter to all Christians on the value of faith united with good works. (60-61) First and Second of Peter are about *Exhortation*. Peter exhorts Christians to live faithful lives, with various warnings and predictions. (62) First John is about *Love*. The apostle John confirms the eye witness of Jesus' coming in the flesh. He exhorts that love always prevail.

(63) Second John is about *Warning*. John warns the church against false teachers. (64) Third John is about *Hospitality*. John writes a personal letter to Gaius, praising him for his hospitality and telling him to stand against the tyranny of a corrupt leader. (65) Jude is about *Warning*. Jude warns against deceivers who would corrupt the church.

Hebrews

New > Old

James

Faith + Works

1-2 Peter

Exhortation & Warning

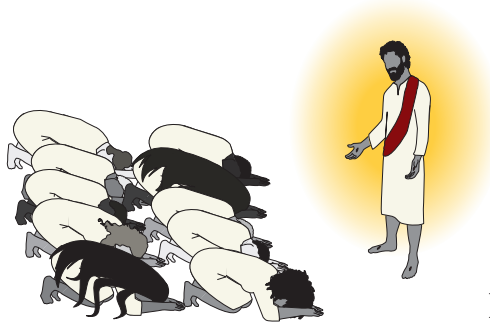
1-3 John

Love - Warning - Hospitality

Jude

Warning

New Testament Prophecy



The last book of the Bible is (66) The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Revelation is about *Victory*. Revelation is a prophetic letter written with figurative language. This book was written to encourage Christians who were enduring persecution. Its main encouragement is that Jesus will be victorious over the devil. Great descriptions of Heaven are also discussed in Revelation.

The New Testament is divided into four main parts: Gospels, History, Epistles, and Prophecy. When a Bible reader looks at these books for the first time, it may feel overwhelming. With an understanding of the purpose of the books, confidence may grow and Bible readers begin to see God's great plan.

Conclusion: Hungering and Thirsting for the Word of God

Introduction: Spiritual Cravings

Could you imagine going a day without eating or drinking anything? Some people might, but most of us wouldn't like to try! What about two days? Three? How about a week with no food or water? After a few days our bodies would begin to shut down and if we didn't find nourishment soon we would die.

It is human nature to eat and drink. Our body craves sustenance when we are hungry and thirsty. Our spirits also need nourishment. The Word of God is food for the soul. It has been compared to milk for the spiritually young and solid food for the spiritually mature.¹ The Bible says:

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. [...] They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.²

The Bible is described as sweeter than the honeycomb according to the Psalmist. This spiritual connection to food is something that all people understand. We know hunger and thirst. What would happen to us if we were to starve our spirits? It may not feel like physical hunger, but the consequences of not feeding our spirits with God's word are very real.

Hunger & Thirst

When Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, He listed out a series of spiritual blessings for character traits His followers should seek. Among the characteristics of Jesus' disciples was this admonition:



Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.³

One way to satisfy the hunger and thirst for righteousness is to feed upon God's word. How does a person who has not been in the habit of reading the Bible learn to spiritually crave the Word of God?

Read the Bible in a consistent way. Every person will have a different practice. Some prefer to read the Bible in the morning; others at night. Some like to read only a few verses; others prefer reading whole chapters or books. Some read every day, others read as often as they can. The important lesson is that we spend time reading and studying the Bible in a consistent way. It may begin from a sense of duty, but as we consistently read and study, we will begin to delight in the message that God has given us.

¹ Hebrews 5:13-14

² Psalm 19:7-8, 10

³ Mathew 5:6

*Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.*⁴

Pray for God's help to understand the Bible. Jesus told His followers, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."⁵ Why not ask, seek, and knock for God to help us understand? The Bible records a prayer of a man who asked for God's help to understand the Bible:



*Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.*⁶

Share the Bible with other people. Perhaps this means Christians sharing the Bible together; learning and encouraging each other with the word of God.⁷ Another way we can share is by reading the Bible to those who cannot read at all. We can also read the Bible with people who have never heard any part of it before. The Bible can be an intimidating book to people who have never read it. Sitting and reading together can be an encouragement to those who are unfamiliar with the Bible.

Obey what God has said. What a wonderful way to recognize God's authority! When we read and obey, we are showing God that we understand that He is in control! When people read the Bible and disregard its teachings, they are not just denying words on a page; they are denying God. We should all do our best to understand and obey God's will.⁸

Be Like the Bereans

One of the highest compliments paid in the Bible comes from a little city called Berea. This town had a group of Jews who were very serious about their faith and about their Bible study. Listen to what the Bible says about them:

*Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore, many of them believed.*⁹

When Paul preached, some believers in Berea searched the Scriptures in order to find out if what Paul was saying aligned with the Bible. They did not accept something because Paul was a great preacher. They didn't believe because it would give them some sort of physical benefit. The Bible says they were more fair-minded, or noble, than the city of Thessalonica where Paul had previously preached. The Bereans were more noble because of the way they respected the Bible.

The Bible student should seek to be fair-minded like the Bereans. No one should obey a man because he is a good speaker or writer. The amount of degrees, honors, titles, or popularity a religious leader has are not enough if this person shares only their opinions. Even the Bible study resources that are at our disposal must be aligned with the Bible and nothing more.¹⁰

Be like the Bereans: Study the Bible daily and find out what God's plan is for mankind. When people preach God's word, search the Scriptures. When people share spiritual opinions, search the Scriptures. Be noble minded and find out what the Bible says!

⁴ Psalm 119:77 NIV

⁵ Matthew 7:7

⁶ Psalm 119:18

⁷ Acts 2:42

⁸ Psalm 119:11

⁹ Acts 17:11

¹⁰ This includes the Pure and Simple Bible Series that you are currently studying!

Series Review

God is pleased when we are faithful to His Word. When we consistently, lovingly, and humbly open the Bible, we will find that our faith, knowledge, and love for God and all mankind will grow. This study series was designed to introduce you to the Word of God. The Bible is not for an elite group of people, but for everyone!

When we read the Bible, we have confidence based on the evidences that it comes from God. What a wonderful comfort it is to know the great care God has put into the Bible. The unity of the Scriptures and consistency of the documents offers compelling evidence for divine Inspiration. Fulfilled prophecy that is documented to be hundreds of years between the prophecy and the fulfillment is another evidence. Also considered were outside references of history and scientific foreknowledge that show that God is behind these Scriptures.

When considering the evidence, the Bible student can determine that the Bible comes from God. If God has spoken, then we must submit to God's authority. We have considered that God's Word speaks with objective authority, and that we do not have the ability to subjectively determine what is truth. Rather, through a common understanding of the Bible, Christians everywhere can unite and worship God in spirit and truth.

Once we have determined that the Bible speaks with God's authority and choose to submit to Him, Bible students can map out the Bible and understand the two sections: the Old and New Testaments. A survey of these testaments allow Bible students to appreciate the "big picture" of God's word.

This life can be confusing, difficult, and frustrating. The peace and comfort that the Word of God provides is deep and profound. It guides us through the darkness, and gives us hope when we are lost. May God bless you as you continue to study His Word.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God. (2 Timothy 3:16)