

ROAD TRIP 8



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

**RON
JONES**



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the Bible

ROAD TRIP 8
The General Epistles
and Revelation

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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up this best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this seventh road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our Redeemer.

For a book written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. That continuity is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of His Son, Jesus.

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including

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poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, and the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain so many people over a long period of time writing about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet doing so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. ... There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

The General Epistles and Revelation

The General Epistles include the following eight books: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, First John, Second John, Third John, and Jude. The book of Revelation follows Jude and concludes the New Testament canon.

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The General Epistles, which offer strong objections to false teachers, are called general because the writers—James, Peter, John, and Jude—address general or “catholic” audiences, unlike the Apostle Paul who wrote his letters to specific, recognizable people and churches. James writes “to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion” (James 1:1), and Peter writes “to those who are the elect exiles of the Dispersion” (First Peter 1:1). John writes his third epistle to Gaius, which makes Third John the exception to the general audience rule. Revelation stands alone because of its unique writing style and apocalyptic content, although John writes generally to seven first-century churches located in Asia Minor.

Two of the authors—James and Jude—were the half-brothers of Jesus. As two of Jesus’s disciples who saw the risen Savior, Peter and John wrote with apostolic authority. The human author who penned Hebrews is not known emphatically.

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Are you ready to begin traveling through the New Testament? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

August 2022

Hebrews

THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Psychologist Alfred Adler coined the term “superiority complex” in the early 1900s. Ironically, he believed the pathological behavior that made some people think too highly of themselves derived from one’s feelings of inferiority. His research showed that some people treat others with contempt, domineering them in a haughty manner to feel good about themselves. Psychoanalysts like Adler can make all of us look in the mirror and feel uncomfortable.

Some people in the first century might have thought Jesus of Nazareth needed psychological help because He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. But nobody who has seriously tried to psychoanalyze Jesus without bias has ever concluded that He had a superiority complex. On the contrary, most people agree that the humble God-man came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45).

Emotionally healthy people will tell you that life is more about giving than taking, serving than being served. Moreover, the truly superior person is least likely to have a superiority complex and is more likely to humbly serve others. Perhaps the writer of Hebrews had this in mind when he argued for the superiority of Jesus Christ in all things.



The New Testament book of Hebrews begins the final road trip on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Road Trip 8 travels through the General Epistles and Revelation. What contribution does Hebrews make to the New Testament canon of Scripture? Where is the Jesus juncture? How does Hebrews point us to the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ?

Let's begin with an observation from Walter Martin, who quipped, "The book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews."² That is a fair summation of the book and might add a slight grin to our understanding. However, there is much more to Hebrews than Martin's tongue-in-cheek view.³

The primary audience the writer of Hebrews had in mind were the Jewish followers of Jesus, who were afraid to fully embrace Christianity by leaving Judaism. Intense persecution contributed to their fear and tendency to slip back into the comfortable rituals they knew best. However, the writer of Hebrews strongly encouraged them to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ. The same writer also warned another group about falling away from that which they never fully embraced. This audience had accepted the facts of Christianity intellectually, but they never experienced saving faith.

Understanding the different audiences keeps us from making wrong theological assumptions about, for example, eternal security and the assurance of one's salvation. Considering Jesus's parable about the farmer who scattered seeds that fell on different soils is

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is our great high priest.

BIG IDEA

Jesus is superior to any other person or belief system.

MEMORY VERSE

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

HEBREWS 4:14

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
63-66 A.D.



helpful when reading Hebrews (Matthew 13:1-23).

Specifically, Hebrews contains five warning passages that must be carefully studied in light of the different parabolic soils. Think of these passages as road signs that read, “Warning: Dangerous Curve Ahead.”

- Hebrews 2:1-4 warns about drifting from the gospel message we heard and neglecting “such a great salvation.”
- Hebrews 3:7-4:13 warns about hardened hearts and the danger of unbelief.
- Hebrews 5:11-6:20 warns about apostasy, falling away from the truth.
- Hebrews 10:26-39 warns about trampling underfoot the Son of God, profaning His blood, and outraging the Spirit of grace.
- Hebrews 12:25-29 warns about refusing to hear God who is speaking to us.

Jesus, the Superior Person

The superiority of Jesus Christ and, thus, of Christianity carves through the book of Hebrews like water in a vast canyon, starting with the majestic words found in 1:1-4.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having



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become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Without the customary greetings and salutations we read in Paul's epistles, the writer of Hebrews immediately makes his case for the superiority of Jesus Christ. These opening verses are some of the grandest ascensions known in biblical literature about the person and nature of Jesus Christ. At the risk of mixing metaphors, they stand like a fourteener in Colorado alongside John 1:1-14 and Colossians 1:15-20.

After stating that Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets, the writer quickly states that He is equally superior to the angels of heaven (1:4-2:18). Neither prophets nor angels are in the same category as Jesus, who creates and sustains the entire universe "by the word of his power." He even sits "at the right hand of the Majesty on high," which is something prophets and angels never get to do. For what it's worth, this is where Christianity departs company from Islam, which views Jesus as merely a prophet, a little lower than Muhammad. Even Mormonism wrongly identifies Jesus as the spirit brother of Lucifer.

In 3:1-6, the writer of Hebrews makes another case for the superiority of Jesus; this time, Jesus is greater than Moses. "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself" (3:3). Then, attention turns to the rest God intended for His chosen people as they entered the Promised Land, suggesting Jesus is greater than Joshua, Moses's successor (3:7-4:13).

From Joshua, we learned that the Promised Land is not heaven but a picture of abundance, victory, and rest in the Christian life. Not all who came out of Egypt entered the Promised Land, let alone took full possession of it. From this Old Testament story, the writer



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of Hebrews speaks of a “Sabbath rest for the people of God” and encourages believers to enter that superior experience through Jesus (4:8-11; Matthew 11:28). The next verses remind us that the Bible is more than a dry and dusty history text.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. 4:12-13

The written word of God and the Living Logos (John 1:1-14) are never in contradiction. Together, they powerfully give life, deliver warnings, expose the inner motives of the human heart, and hold us accountable. Better to let the Bible psychoanalyze us than someone like Alfred Adler.

Jesus, the Superior High Priest

Next, the writer of Hebrews presents Jesus as the superior high priest who is greater than Aaron (4:14-8:13). He begins with these summarizing and encouraging words.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. 4:14-16

Unlike Aaron, Jesus was not a Levite. However, He qualified for the office of high priest forever “after the order of Melchizedek” (5:6, 10, 6:20, 7:11, 17). Who is Melchizedek, and why is his priesthood better than Aaron’s? After warning about apostasy in 5:11-6:20,



the writer explains the person and origin of Melchizedek in 7:1-10, followed by a comparison of Jesus and this mysterious high priest in the Old Testament with a strange name (7:11-28).

Melchizedek was the king of Salem, which later became Jerusalem. After Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and other kings in the Valley of Siddim near the Dead Sea (Genesis 14), the “priest of the Most High God” blessed Abraham. Then, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe (tenth) of the spoils of war as an act of worship. Adding to Melchizedek’s mystery, the Bible says, “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever” (7:3). That makes Melchizedek an Old Testament type of Christ or a preincarnate appearance of Him.

Like Melchizedek, the Levitical priesthood was a shadow (8:5, 10:1) of the true substance, which is found in Jesus Christ, who is “the guarantor of a better covenant” (7:22) and its mediator (8:6). The new covenant, which Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted, replaced the old covenant because the Mosaic Law fulfilled its purpose in pointing us to Christ (8:6-13).

The Superior Works of Jesus

The writer goes on to remind his Jewish audience how the Old Testament tent of meeting constructed by Moses in the wilderness served as a foreshadowing of the superior works of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the moral and sacrificial aspects of the Mosaic Law. The sacred objects and activities of the tabernacle pictured how sinful human beings can enter the holy presence of God and experience an audience with the Almighty (9:1-10).

God was doing much more in the wilderness than even Moses understood at the time. The writer explains how “through the



greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) [Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (9:11-12). The point is this: Jesus voluntarily offered Himself as a sinless sacrifice, and “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (9:1-10:18).

Chapter 10 ends with a theological “lettuce patch” that gives us “confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” (10:19). Read 10:21-25 slowly and carefully, paying attention to the thrice-repeated phrase “let us.”

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The Superior Walk of Faith

Chapter 11 begins with a definition of faith, which the writer of Hebrews warned about discarding in 10:19-39. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). In other words, believing is seeing, not the other way around. Known as the Hebrews Hall of Faith, the rest of the chapter illustrates a robust belief in unseen things through many profiles of courageous faith. Each summation of the life of faith encourages believers, Jews and Gentiles, to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (12:1-3).



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This magnificent New Testament book ends with practical ways to embrace the superior walk of faith, including an encouragement to endure the discipline of the Lord and “not grow weary or fainthearted” (12:3-11). Strive for peace, holiness, and grace. Avoid bitterness and sexual immorality (12:12-17). Live for the “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (12:18-29).

Chapter 13 begins with instructions about continuing in brotherly love, remembering prisoners, honoring marriage, keeping our lives “free from the love of money,” and obeying spiritual leaders, especially “those who spoke to you the word of God” (13:1-19). Then, the chapter and book end with one of the best benedictions in Holy Scripture (13:20-21), followed by final greetings (13:22-25).

None of what we read in the book of Hebrews should create a superiority complex in us. However, Hebrews should leave us with the distinct impression that Jesus Christ is truly superior, without comparison, and worthy of our earnest pursuit.

OUTLINE	1- 4:13	4:14 - 8:13	9 - 10	11- 13
FOCUS	Jesus the Superior Person	Jesus the Superior High Priest	The Superior Works of Jesus	The Superior Walk of Faith
KEY VERSE	1:2	4:14	10:21	11:1



James

YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

Phil McGraw is a famous psychologist known for his daily talk show on the Oprah Winfrey Network. “How’s that working for you?” is Dr. Phil’s favorite question to ask counselees who are frustrated with life. James, the half-brother of Jesus, asks a similar question throughout his New Testament letter, which he wrote to Christians who were scattered by religious persecution. James asks, “How’s your *faith* working for you?”

That question reminds me of Rich Mullins, the famous Christian music artist, who had James in mind when he lyrically compared a faith that does not work to the foolishness of a screen door on a submarine. Both Rich and James agree that an active faith is better than an inactive one. A living faith far exceeds a dead faith, and it will not sink.

Our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible is a general New Testament epistle filled with gritty, useful, and everyday spirituality. James shows us what real faith in Jesus Christ looks like in action. So, how is your faith working for you? Does it spring into action when you face the trials of life? Does it work to overcome



temptation? Does it control your tongue, eliminate racism, and bring about real social justice? Does it resolve conflict in your relationships? James links all these practical matters and more to authentic faith.

Let's get to know James before we learn from his letter. The New Testament mentions four men named James, including James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. Both of Zebedee's sons were among Jesus's disciples. However, James, the Lord's half-brother, is more likely the author of the New Testament letter called James.⁴

James became a significant pillar in the Jerusalem Church.⁵ He was so well known that Jude, another one of Jesus's siblings, identified himself simply as "the brother of James" (Jude 1:1). However, it was not until after Jesus's resurrection that James called his brother Lord and Christ (1:1, 2:1, 1 Corinthians 15:7). Until then, all of Jesus's siblings expressed skepticism about His Messiahship (John 7:3-5). Can you blame them? They played stickball (or something like that) with Jesus in the streets of Nazareth. It would be hard for me to call either of my brothers Messiah unless one of them died and rose from the dead.

Trials and Temptations

James jumps right into the deep end of life by saying, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (1:2-3). James encourages the scattered Jewish believers to expect the Lord to test their faith through various trials. When He does, choose joy, seek

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is is the Lord who heals..

BIG IDEA

The evidence of real faith is good works.

MEMORY VERSE

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

JAMES 1:26

AUTHOR AND DATE

James
45-50 A.D.



divine wisdom (1:5-8), and maintain an eternal perspective (1:9-11).

When facing the trials of life, we can either fold up like an accordion or firm up our faith. In an interview with Dial In ministries, John MacArthur said, “The single most validating reality in life is not some hidden idea in your head; it’s trials. It’s what your faith can survive.” James points to an eternal reward for those who refuse to fold up during trials, writing, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (1:12).

Seamlessly, James transitions from various trials to daily temptations (1:13-18). Read his words slowly and carefully.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 1:13-15

Temptation is the common experience of all humanity (1 Corinthians 10:13). As nobody gets an excused absence from the trials of life, no one is immune from the daily solicitations of the evil one. The devil even tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Moreover, James makes it clear that the source of temptation is the devil, not God. God tests our faith, but He never tempts us with evil.

James also presents us with four stages of temptation—desire, deception, disobedience, and death—followed by the solution for temptation. In summary, reflect on the goodness of God (1:19-21), reach for the truthful word of God (1:22-25), and remember God’s purpose for your life (1:26-27).



Love and Good Works

James begins chapter 2 by addressing the ugly truth about showing partiality in the church, a sin that has many expressions. Today, people inside and outside the church talk much about the evils of racial and economic bias, and rightly so. James takes aim at those who show partiality to rich people.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 2:2-4

James pulls no punches. He goes on to shine a spotlight on the foolishness of favoritism (2:5-13). Partial and biased people are evil judges, spiritually irrational, and lawbreakers. Furthermore, they are unmerciful and do not love their neighbor.

Then, James transitions to his favorite topic—a faith that really works! “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” (2:14). The discussion that follows in 2:14-26 is not without controversy. Martin Luther, the Catholic monk who is associated with the Protestant Reformation, read James and rejected the book’s canonical authority based on this passage, calling it “an epistle of straw.”

Zealous Luther believed James was theologically opposed to the Apostle Paul, who advocated for justification by faith alone, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). James, on the other hand, argued that faith without works is dead, even using Abraham to make his point. Are James and Paul in disagreement? Or do they present two sides of the same theological coin?



James is a commonsense theologian. If he were alive today, he might reside in Missouri, the Show-Me State! James wants you and I to show him our faith in action. If Luther had cooled his passion for reform even slightly, he might have seen how James and Paul complement each other theologically. Like Paul, James has no room for a faith that merely hides in one's head or one that is as useless as a screen door on a submarine. James writes, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (2:19).

Speech and Wisdom

Next, James gets even more gritty and useful about our everyday faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by warning about the human tongue. He begins by cautioning teachers who "will be judged with greater strictness" (3:1). Earlier, James urged every person to be "slow to speak" (1:19) and then linked true religion to the ability to bridle one's tongue (1:26).

In all, James has a lot to say about what we say. He compares the tongue, which is small but powerful, to a bit in a horse's mouth and a rudder that turns a ship. Positively, he says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body" (3:2). Negatively, "the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness" (3:6). Like a spark, it can set the whole forest on fire. Sadly, I have heard too many gossipy tongues set churches ablaze. I must ask, how's your tongue working for you?

James finishes the third chapter with a discussion about wisdom that works (3:13-18). Biblical wisdom is the ability to apply divine truth skillfully to all areas of life. James identifies two kinds of wisdom—that which "comes down from above" and the kind that is "earthly, unspiritual, and demonic." Then, he provides a closer look at each.



For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
3:16-18

Conflict and God's Will

In the fourth chapter, James turns his attention to conflict resolution (4:1-12). Inner conflict boils down to our lusts or wants, also known as the desires of our flesh. I want. I want what I can't have. I can't get what I want. Sound familiar? The problem with our wants travels deep into our inner being. For example, like Cain, who killed his brother Abel, unbridled inner conflict can lead to murder; the root of our fights and quarrels is envy.

Another reason we can't get what we want is that we fail to ask God, the one Person who can give us the desire of our heart (Psalm 37:4). Prayerlessness creates a vacuum that frustrates our inner conflicts. Even then, unanswered prayer means we must examine our motives. James says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (4:3).

The conflicts we experience boil down to one question: Are you a friend of God or the world? James describes friendship with the world as spiritual adultery, noting, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us" (4:5). James pulls no punches by saying friendship with the world is enmity with God.

In 4:7-12, James offers several practical ways to resolve the inner and outer conflicts we face. Namely, submit to God's authority (4:7a), resist the devil (4:7b), draw near to God (4:8b), pursue purity (4:8b), practice lament (4:9), be humble (4:10), and discipline your speech (4:11). Then, James pivots to how our faith works with God's will.



The half-brother of Jesus takes a “business unusual” approach to life.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. 4:13-17

James is not against planning. However, he warns about the dangers of planning presumptuously, as his brief argument turns on the word “instead.” The boastful, business-as-usual person does not consider the brevity and unpredictability of life. He or she also plans without God and prayer. However, the wise person plans his or her life by saying, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” The Latin phrase *Deo volente*, meaning “God willing,” captures the idea.

Patience and Prayer

Finally, how is your faith working during times of prosperity and adversity? Sounding a bit like a social justice advocate, James starts the fifth and final chapter with a warning to the rich who “have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence” (5:1-6). He rails on them for ripping off their laborers. He wants the rich to bless, not oppress, the poor.

Then, James encourages patience when suffering (5:7-12). “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” He points to the farmer who patiently awaits the arrival of his harvest and then to the prophets, “who spoke in the name of the Lord.” Also, “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”



James

YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

For those who face the adversity of physical illness, James prescribes fervent prayer and uses Elijah, the prophet, as his inspiration (5:13-20). “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

James gives us much to consider at the intersection of real-life and faith in Jesus Christ. So, how’s your faith working for you? Truly, a faith that works is better than a screen door on a submarine.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4	5
FOCUS	Testing and Temptation	Love and Good Works	Speech and Wisdom	Conflict and God’s Will	Patience and Prayer
KEY VERSE	1:2	1:26	3:2	4:4	5:16



1 Peter

BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE

Hope is something we cannot live without. Author Hal Lindsay expressed humanity's desperation by saying, "Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope."

For many people, hope is nothing more than wishful thinking, reflected in statements like, "I hope tomorrow is a better day than today," "I hope I get the job for which I interviewed," "I hope my kids turn out well," or, "I hope the doctor gets all the cancer." Wishful thinking produces pithy acronyms like "hang on, pain ends" and "hang on, peace exists." Wordplays like that might make us feel better momentarily, but they have little ability to sustain hope.

Biblical hope, on the other hand, is more than wishful thinking because it has substance and a foundation in the truth. What exactly is biblical hope? Pastor John Piper says, "Hope is that part of faith that focuses on the future." I agree with Piper, but his definition seems limiting. I say biblical hope is the confident expectation that God will do what He says He will do in the present and future. Because it is rooted in God's reliable word, biblical hope clings to the promises and prophecies made throughout the ages by our Creator.



1 Peter

BORN AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE

For example, Jeremiah the prophet spoke God's hope-filled word to the Jewish exiles in Babylon when he said, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11). Those words written to the Diaspora—a term used to describe exiled and scattered Jews dating back to the Babylonian captivity—provide a smooth transition to our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, the book of First Peter.

Peter writes "to those ... of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia." As the term Diaspora evolved, Peter's immediate audience included Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ who were scattered by the persecution of their faith in the first century A.D. In the opening verses (1:1-2), Peter continues his trinitarian greeting by diving into the deep end of theology, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you."

Each of Peter's God-breathed words set up his thesis in 1:3, which reads, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Born again to a living hope—what a powerful idea that is! Peter expands the idea throughout his letter by talking about living hope in salvation, submission, suffering, and through those who shepherd the church.

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd.

BIG IDEA

Living hope belongs to those who are truly born again.

MEMORY VERSE

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 PETER 1:3

AUTHOR and DATE

Peter
64 A.D.



1 Peter

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Living Hope in Salvation

Living hope is more than wishful thinking or an Alice-in-Wonderland-like fantasy because it is tethered to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and more. Both Paul and Peter understood that we would be hopeless if Jesus did not rise from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). Peter goes on to describe salvation in Jesus Christ as,

... an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1:4-7

You might be facing the loss of everything in this world but rest assured. The believer's hope is "kept in heaven for you" and is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." The prophets "searched and inquired carefully" into this living hope, and God's grace in salvation is something "into which angels long to look" (1:10-12).

Peter goes on to explain practical ways to live out our living hope in salvation (1:13-2:12). We must gird our minds for action, set our hope on the grace of God, and pursue holiness. To strengthen his point about personal holiness, the Galilean fisherman quotes from the Old Testament book of Leviticus, which reads, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Furthermore, we must "love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1:23). This is the second time Peter uses the phrase "born again," reminiscent of



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Jesus's conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, to whom He said, "You must be born again" (John 3:1-16). Are you born again to a living hope? Peter also makes a clear connection between our living hope in salvation and the living and abiding word of God, which "remains forever" (1:25).

Then, Peter refers to Jesus as the "living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious," and to believers as "living stones" in His "spiritual house." Masterfully, he draws again from the Old Testament to present Jesus as "the stone that the builders rejected," who became the "cornerstone" to some; to others, He is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." In that sense, nothing has changed in two thousand years. People are still divided about Jesus.

Peter reminds the exiles and us of our collective identity before God as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." In memory of Lo-ruhama and Lo-ammi, the prophet Hosea's children with Gomer, he says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Peter concludes this section of his letter with the following instruction,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 2:11-12

Peter wants us to remember that believers are not of this world. We are just passing through "as sojourners and exiles." As such, our conduct should glorify God.

Living Hope in Submission

Next, Peter turns his attention to the believer's living hope in



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submissive and respectful relationships, starting with the human institution of government (2:13-17). He says pointedly, “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” Then, he addresses servants and their relationships to both just and unjust masters (2:18-25). Like Paul, Peter did not challenge the Roman institution of slavery. However, he answered injustice with the model set forth by Jesus, who “also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” Peter continues,

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 2:22-25

Chapter 3 begins with Peter addressing the believer’s living hope as expressed in Christian marriage, which encourages a wife to respectfully submit to her husband “so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (3:1-6). Peter instructs husbands to “live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1:7).

A wife is the “weaker vessel” in the sense that she is like porcelain, easily broken emotionally and physically. A husband must not treat his wife like everyday dinnerware but honor her in the home as one would fine china. How a husband treats his wife impacts his prayer life.

Peter uses the word “finally” to begin the summary of his thoughts



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about our living hope in respectful and submissive relationships (3:8-12). He encourages “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” before reminding us how “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Living Hope in Suffering

Peter uses the word “hope” for the fifth and final time in 3:15, which reads, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” By using the Greek word *apologia*, Peter introduces us to Christian apologetics and encourages a respectful, Christ-like “defense” of the gospel when suffering “for righteousness’ sake” (2:20, 3:17, 4:15-16).

Peter begins his entire discussion about our living hope in suffering (3:13-5:14) by rationalizing, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” (1:17). Not surprisingly, he turns to Jesus Christ as the example to follow. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1:18).⁶

As opposition to Christianity increased for the exiles in the first century, Peter reminds believers, “for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (4:1-7). Believers must also serve as faithful stewards of the spiritual gifts God gave them, “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (4:7-11). As persecution intensifies, Peter offers the following perspective,



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Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 4:12

Living Hope and Shepherds

Those who “shepherd the flock of God” must be conveyors of living hope, which is where Peter directs his final thoughts (5:1-14). As witnesses of the sufferings of Christ, elders must exercise oversight “not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” Those who shepherd the flock of God well will receive an eternal reward (“the crown of glory”) “when the chief Shepherd appears.”

“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” is the best response to the sufferings of this present world that threaten our peace and hope. Shepherds and the sheep they serve must also be aware of the enemy of living hope who seeks to destroy us, humbling ourselves “under the mighty hand of God.” Peter adds this warning about the battles we face in the spiritual realm.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 5:8-9

King Solomon said, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12). That is why born again believers in Jesus Christ must resist the devil, fix our eyes on living hope, and trust the chief Shepherd who keeps hope alive in us.



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OUTLINE	1:1 - 2:12	2:13 - 3:12	3:13 - 4:19	5:1-14
FOCUS	Living Hope in Salvation	Living Hope in Submission	Living Hope in Suffering	Living Hope and Shepherds
KEY VERSE	1:3	2:25	4:12	5:2



2 Peter

GROWING IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE

Actor Johnny Depp played Captain Jack Sparrow in Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The swashbuckler made piracy funny, cool, and profitable. Likewise, modern piracy is big business and a serious crime. In 2015, the projected value of counterfeited goods worldwide was a whopping \$1.77 trillion.⁷

Counterfeit Christianity is also a serious matter. It feeds on false doctrine, sows mistrust, and damages the reputation of the church Jesus is building. The New Testament combats false teachers vigorously because religious pirates are everywhere.

In his second epistle, Peter turns his attention from fiery trials to false teaching, from challenges outside the church to dangers inside the church. First Peter reminds born again believers of our living hope in Jesus Christ, whereas Second Peter encourages believers to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter equips us to combat religious piracy and those who present a fraudulent imitation of Christianity.

The last verse in Second Peter is a good place to start because it summarizes Peter's overall theme and intent. It reads, "But grow in



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the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (3:18).

The FBI trains agents to discover counterfeit currency by studying real money. Likewise, the best way to discern false doctrine is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Specifically, the Apostle Peter encourages faith-filled believers to grow in Christian virtue (1:1-15), the word of God (1:16-21), discernment (2:1-22), and prophetic understanding (3:1-18). Let’s take a closer look.

Growing in Christian Virtue

Peter introduces himself as “a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1) and then tells us we should grow in Christian virtue because of all God has done for us (1:3-15).

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 1:3-4

With theological insight and eloquence not expected of a Galilean fisherman, Peter travels effortlessly through the realms of “divine power” and “divine nature.” He mentions the “precious and very great promises” which God granted, expecting us to live up to the reality of having escaped

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is Lord.

BIG IDEA

The best way to discern false doctrine is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2 PETER 3:18

AUTHOR AND DATE

Peter
66 A.D.



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from the corruption of sinful desire. We do this by pursuing Christian virtue, as the next verses make clear.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 1:5-9

Are you making the effort to grow in Christian virtue? Are these qualities increasing in you: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love? The person who lacks these qualities is like someone with severe myopia; he or she cannot see God clearly. Whatever happened to Christian virtue? One wonders when moral scandals plague the church today. Have we forgotten that by God's power we have escaped from the corruption of sinful desire to pursue moral excellence?

Years ago, William J. Bennett published a best-selling book called *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*. He wrote the book to “aid in the time-honored task of the moral education of the young.” Drawing from a rich depository of moral literature, the former Secretary of Education inspired a new generation to pursue ten timeless virtues: Self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.

Long before Bennett wrote a book on moral excellence, Peter urged believers to grow in Christian virtue. Why? Perhaps to show the contrast between believers who increase in Christian virtue and the counterfeits who do not. In chapter 2, Peter exposes the lack of virtue in the false teachers to fight against their false and destructive doctrines.



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Before he does, Peter encourages us to grow in the word of God.

Growing in the Word of God

Peter continues laying the groundwork for an attack against false teaching by upholding the trustworthiness of the word of God (1:16-21).

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 1:16-18

The “we” to which Peter refers in 1:18 is three of Jesus’s disciples who were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration: Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9). They heard the voice from heaven affirming Jesus and witnessed His glory for a brief but life-altering moment. Peter assures us that he and others did not make up stories about Jesus, elevating Him to a divine status. Instead, he goes on to explain how divine inspiration took place in human authors to form the written word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 1:19-21

Picture the wind filling a boat’s sail and carrying it along in the water. That is how Peter experienced the divine-human process involving the Holy Spirit, who inspired him and others to write



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according to the will of God, not man. Peter compares the prophetic word to “a lamp shining in a dark place.” That reminds me of Jesus who said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), and the psalmist who penned, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

The Catholic Church uses the idea “that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation” (1:20) to suggest that only the church has the authority to interpret the Bible, shunning the layperson’s personal study. Thus, the idea of personal or small group Bible study is foreign to many Catholics. However, Peter is affirming the divine source of Scripture, not the folly of its personal study. On the contrary, Protestants encourage personal Bible study in a way that rightly interprets every jot and tittle of the trustworthy text. Peter’s larger point is that knowing the Bible well is the best defense against false teaching.

Growing in Discernment

In 2:1-22, Peter finally pulls out the big guns and takes aim at the false teachers. Pull your seatbelt tighter and read his words slowly and carefully.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 2:1-3

Peter goes on to compare the fate of false teachers to the fallen angels whom God did not spare, Noah’s generation who died in the



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flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah (2:4-10). He pulls no punches by calling them “bold and willful,” “irrational animals,” “blots and blemishes,” and “accursed children.” He describes them as “having eyes full of adultery” and “hearts trained in greed.” Then, he compares them to Balaam, “who loved gain from wrongdoing” (2:11-17). Peter is not finished unloading on the religious pirates who teach falsehood. Let’s read on.

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. 2:17-19

“Loud boasts of folly” is the perfect way to describe the teaching of these blind guides, then and now. Their lack of virtue is equally appalling. Short of using red flashing lights, Peter could not warn us about the corruption of false teachers with anything stronger than the words the Holy Spirit led him to write. Finally, he compares them to a dog that returns to his vomit and a sow that washes herself and then returns to the mud pit (2:20-22). Child of God, beware! To avoid the folly of false teachers, we must grow in Christian virtue, the word of God, discernment, and, finally, prophetic understanding.

Growing in Prophetic Understanding

In the final chapter of Peter’s second epistle, he turns our attention to the day of the Lord at the end of the age. False teachers love to delve into Bible prophecy and make sensational predictions about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While eschatology is important to study and grasp, it can also be fertile ground for falsehood if a corrupt



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teacher wrongly handles the word of truth.

Peter urges us to “remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (3:2) and then adds,

Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 3:3-7

We are living in the “last days” and have been since Jesus arrived in Bethlehem. Whether we are living in the final days of the last days is another discussion. Nobody knows the day or hour of Jesus’s return (Matthew 24:36). However, the collective voices of scoffers are growing increasingly louder, making us wonder if we are fast approaching the end of the age. Peter continues by putting all the scoffing into perspective.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 3:8-11

The God who exists “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm



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90:2) views time differently than we do. Thus, we must adjust to His timetable. This should not be difficult because “he has put eternity into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). However, like a “thief in the night,” the day of the Lord will surprise those who scoff at His promised return. And when Jesus comes again, “the heavens will pass away with a roar,” making way for the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 22).

Considering the certainty of Jesus’s return, Peter draws a significant conclusion about how we must live in the meantime, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness” and “be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation” (3:12-15a).

In other words, every day the Lord does not return is an opportunity to place your faith in the real Jesus, not a counterfeit Christ. It is also a day to fight against religious piracy because there is nothing funny, cool, or profitable about it.

OUTLINE	1:1-15	1:16-21	2:1-22	3:1-18
FOCUS	Growing in Virtue	Growing in the Word	Growing in Discernment	Growing in Prophecy
KEY VERSE	1:5	1:21	2:1	3:10



1 John

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

In Leonardo Da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper*, the Italian Renaissance artist depicted John, the beloved disciple of Jesus (John 13:23), sitting next to the Savior with his head resting on His shoulder. In the Upper Room, Jesus shared intimate conversation and fellowship with twelve of His closest friends and followers less than twenty-four hours before he died on the cross. However, John seems to have had a closer relationship with Jesus than the other disciples did. While on the cross, Jesus even entrusted His own mother, Mary, to John (John 19:25-27).

Do you have a close, intimate relationship with Jesus? Are you walking in fellowship with God and others in the body of Christ? Intimate fellowship is scary for some people. Some prefer to keep a safe distance from others, even Jesus.

However, fellowship is an important New Testament concept. For example, the apostles' teaching in the early church was always connected to the fellowship they enjoyed with one another as believers in Jesus (Acts 2:42). The Greek word *koinonia* means fellowship, sharing in common, and communion. The word appears twenty



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times in the New Testament, including three times in the opening verses of First John, setting forth John's major theme.

To understand the difference between fellowship and relationship, think of marriage. Conflict might interrupt the sweet fellowship you experience with your spouse even though you are legally married. Anyone whose marriage has lasted longer than the honeymoon knows exactly what I am talking about. Likewise, we can be in relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and simultaneously in or out of fellowship with Him.

Given his special relationship with Jesus, John is the right disciple to talk about our fellowship with God. In the opening verses of his first epistle, John writes, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1:3).

John and His Purpose

The Apostle John is near the end of his life when he writes his epistles (85-90 A.D.).⁸ His exile to Patmos and the vision he received of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is still to come. By this time, though, he is the last of the living apostles and an old man. Thus, he writes with a fatherly tone to his "little children," "young men," and "fathers" (2:12-14).

As the overseer of a network of house churches near Ephesus, John writes one letter and two postcards, which are among the New

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is our
Advocate

BIG IDEA

Experience
fellowship with God
by walking in His
light and love.

MEMORY VERSE

But if we walk in
the light, as he is in
the light, we have
fellowship with one
another, and the
blood of Jesus his
Son cleanses us
from all sin.

1 JOHN 4:7

AUTHOR AND DATE

John
90 A.D.



1 John

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Testament general epistles. He writes First John to the broader network of churches, Second John to a specific house church, and Third John to Gaius, a member of one of the house churches. Second to the Apostle Paul, John is the most prolific writer in the New Testament, having contributed one gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. Why did John write First John? He states his purpose four times.

- “And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1:4). John makes the strong point that fellowship with God and others completes one’s joy.
- “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1).
- “I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you” (2:26). A false doctrine about Jesus called Gnosticism threatened the early church and John wrote to correct it.⁹
- “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13).

Do you know that you possess the gift of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Some people deny the doctrine of eternal security, believing we cannot know for sure that we are saved. Therefore, they lack the assurance of their salvation. However, John says we can know. In fact, the word “know” appears thirty-two times in First John. It seems that John wrote his first epistle as a companion to his gospel, which emphasizes the word “believe” (John 20:31). In First John, the beloved disciple wants believers in Jesus to know that



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what they have believed about Christ is true.

Tests of Genuine Faith and Fellowship

John did not write his epistles using linear or logical arguments as the Apostle Paul did. Instead, John's writing is more orientational. He presents a few major themes about life, eternal life, and the fellowship we enjoy while walking in God's light and love. Then, he cycles back through these ideas repeatedly in a way that amplifies the truth. Throughout his first letter, John contrasts light and darkness (1:5-2:11), love and hate (4:7-21), good and evil (2:29-3:34), Christ and antichrist, (2:18-28), the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (4:6).

The beloved disciple also sets forth seven tests of genuine faith in Christ, each beginning with the phrase "If we say" or "Whoever says." I have identified these tests in a way that makes them easier to remember.

- The Fellowship Test: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." 1:6
- The Truth Test: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1:8
- The Word Test: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." 1:10
- The Obedience Test: "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 2:4
- The Abiding Test: "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." 2:6
- The Light Test: "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness." 2:9



- The Love Test: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.” 4:20

John is direct, to the point, and adds no fluff. Now let’s take a closer look at his major themes.

Walking in God’s Light

Following John’s prologue (1:1-4), which recalls the apostolic authority he and others possessed because they had heard, seen, and touched Jesus’s ministry, he describes the conditions of fellowship with God and others.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1:5-10

God is light. In Him is no darkness, not even a hint of grey. In the Bible, light is a metaphor for truth. Thus, communion with God depends upon us walking in the truth—“walking in the light, as he is in the light” (1:5). This includes the honest confession of our sin to God. If we say something like “I’m okay, you’re okay,” then “the truth is not in us.” Confession is agreement with God about what breaks our fellowship with pure righteousness; confession is good for the soul because it yields God’s forgiveness and cleansing.

Think of 1:9 as the Christian’s bar of soap for daily cleansing from sin. Then, keep short accounts with God to ensure your



1 John

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

uninterrupted fellowship with Him, knowing that Jesus Christ is your Advocate, defending you against the prosecutions of the devil (2:1-6).

John cautions against other things that break our fellowship with God. For example, loving the world and its lusts (2:15-17), following the false doctrine of “many antichrists” (2:18-27), and making a “practice of sinning” (3:4-10). The word “practice” suggests habitual, unconfessed, and unrepentant sin.

While urging us to walk in God’s light, John also has the Lord’s coming in mind (2:28-3:3). “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” The word “abide” recalls the Upper Room discourse when Jesus declared, “I am the true vine” and told His disciples to “abide in me” (John 15:1-11).

Walking in God’s Love

Walking in divine love also produces sweet fellowship with God and others (3:11-5:21). John recalls what Jesus said in the Upper Room, “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (3:11; John 13:34). What does “love one another” look like?

Negatively, Cain, who killed his brother Able, is a picture of what love does not look like. John applies the story from Genesis broadly by saying, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (3:15). Positively, John points to Jesus and encourages us to follow His example by practicing self-sacrifice.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love



1 John

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 3:16-18

Jesus saw our need for forgiveness and reached out in sacrificial love. Likewise, opening our hearts to meet the real physical needs of hurting people yields confidence before God (3:19-22), answered prayer (3:22), and intimacy with the Almighty (3:23-24). It also means the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives (3:24). John launches off the Spirit into a larger admonition (4:1-6), which begins, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Both the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error are at work in the world today.

John circles back to the love of God in 4:7-20. He says, “God is love” twice (4:8, 16) and instructs us to “love one another” three times (4:7, 11, 12). He strings these concepts together like a pearl necklace by saying, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (4:7-8). Then, John connects our love for God and one another to our fellowship with the Father and Son.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 4:13-15

John goes on to tell us that perfect love like this gives us “confidence for the day of judgment” and “casts out fear.” Also, “we love because he first loved us” (4:17-19). Whatever measure of love we have for God and others is one hundred percent the result of God’s love for us. Charles Haddon Spurgeon called this “a great and certain truth, that we love him for no other reason than because he first loved us.” That is a quick summary of 4:7-20, but I encourage you to read this



1 John

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

passage multiple times to get the full gist of what John is saying.

In the last chapter, John links our love for God and fellowship with Him to keeping His commandments, which is another echo from the Upper Room (John 14:21). “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (5:3).

The epilogue (5:18-21) returns to a few broad ideas. Victory over sin and the devil is the common experience of those who are “born of God,” even though “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” Also, since believers are “in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ,” we should avoid the enticement of idols.

Like John at the Last Supper, are you leaning into Jesus intimately? Are you walking in fellowship with God?

OUTLINE	1:1 - 3:10	3:11 - 5:21
FOCUS	Walking in God's Light	Walking in God's Love
KEY VERSE	1:7	4:11



2 & 3 John

WALKING IN TRUTH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE

“All politics is local” is a common phrase among politicians in Washington DC. It reminds me of Thomas “Tip” O’Neil, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives from Boston, Massachusetts, who put the idea into practice regularly. With great political skill, he defeated his legislative opponents in Congress by turning a national bill into a local issue. That ability kept O’Neil in the Speakership for five consecutive Congressional terms (1977-1987), making him the third longest-serving Speaker in American history.

In a similar way, all New Testament ministry is congregational. The body of Christ worldwide is localized into churches and churches into smaller neighborhood groups. As the early church grew larger, it also grew smaller. The same has been happening for two thousand years. As Christians, we are simultaneously part of something large and small.

Keep that in mind as we arrive at the next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. The Apostle John wrote Second and Third John as follow up postcards to his first epistle. They are smaller because he anticipates a face-to-face meeting in the near future (2



2 & 3 John

**WALKING IN TRUTH,
LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE**

John 1:12, 3 John 1:14).

John writes Second John to a specific house church, which he addresses as “the elect lady and her children.” The word “truth” appears three times in his salutation as he commends the followers of Jesus for obeying God’s commandments and loving one another (1:1-6). Then, John warns the small congregation of the same false teachers he wrote about in First John to the broader network of house churches (1:7-13). Let’s take a closer look.

Walking in Truth and Love

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. 1:4-6

With his trademark fatherly tone, John revisits the major themes he wrote about in his first epistle. For starters, he commends the elect lady and her children for “walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.” Twice, the aging apostle mentions the commandment which they heard “from the beginning”—we should “love one another.” By the time John wrote this brief epistle, more than fifty years had passed since Jesus walked the earth, and the truth the Savior taught had not

2 John

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ came in the flesh as the God-man.

BIG IDEA

Walk in truth, love, and obedience.

MEMORY VERSE

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

2 JOHN 1:4

AUTHOR and DATE

John
90 A.D.



2 & 3 John

WALKING IN TRUTH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE

changed. Two thousand years later, it still has not changed.

Of course, this commandment echoes from the Upper Room where Jesus said to His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Jesus also tied obedience to a greater intimacy with God by saying, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10).

“One another” is one of the most rich and powerful phrases you will read in the New Testament. “One another” is two words in English and one word in Greek (*ahlayloan*). The Greek word appears one hundred times in the New Testament in ninety-four different verses. Forty-seven of the verses instruct New Testament believers in Jesus. For example,

- “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).
- “Speak truth to one another” (Ephesians 4:25).
- “Comfort one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- “Pray for one another” (James 5:16).
- “Serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).
- “Love one another” (John 13:34, 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 4:7, 11; 2 John 1:5)

“Love one another” appears in the New Testament more than any other “one another” phrase. The way we love one another says that we are Jesus’s disciples and that we are walking in the truth. What does this love look like in action? The Apostle Paul penned the most compelling description of divine love in First Corinthians 13.



Avoiding False Teachers

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. 1:7-11

Although John commended the elect lady and her children for walking in the truth and love, he took nothing for granted. He was concerned that traveling religious hucksters would make their way to all the house churches and spread their false teaching. The same falsehood threatens the body of Christ today, with many more ways false teachers can infiltrate the church via technology. Every heresy the church faces today is a rehash of some false doctrine the church has dealt with over the last two thousand years.

For example, in the first century, the Gnostics did not “confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.” Instead, they taught something called dualism, the idea that only the spirit mattered because matter (the body or flesh) was inherently evil. Therefore, God could not have a human body. Thus, the Gnostics presented an erroneous view of Jesus and salvation. John called such teachers “deceivers” and “antichrist.” Today, deceptive views of Jesus abound. John’s concern was that the elect lady and her children would follow the false teachers and lose their eternal reward.

John offers no wiggle room about false teachers and our relationship with them. Any association with a deceiver makes us partakers in their “wicked works.” In First John, the apostle encourages



2 & 3 John

**WALKING IN TRUTH,
LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE**

fellowship with God. But in Second John, he forbids our fellowship with false teachers. Do not invite them over to your house or even offer them a greeting in public. That might sound harsh but associating with lies about Jesus yields grave consequences for the church.

Gaius: Generosity and Hospitality

Third John is the shortest book in the Bible, with only fifteen verses. Unlike First and Second John, the names of real people take center stage, starting with Gaius, John's "beloved" friend.

*The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.
Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that
you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.
For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified
to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.
1:1-3*

John wants the best for his friend, praying that his life and health may prosper, even as his soul prospers. John rejoices after hearing from others that his friend is walking in the truth. With the swelling pride of a father, the friend and apostle writes, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (1:4).

John goes on to commend Gaius for the generosity and hospitality he offered to itinerant preachers and missionaries. Let's read on.

*Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers,
strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will*

3 John

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is
the truth.

BIG IDEA

Walk in truth,
generosity, and
hospitality.

MEMORY VERSE

I have no greater joy
than to hear that my
children are walking
in the truth.

3 JOHN 4

AUTHOR AND DATE

John
90 A.D.



2 & 3 John

**WALKING IN TRUTH,
LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE**

do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. 1:5-8

Three cheers for generous Gaius! He extended his gospel reach by financially supporting those who served “for the sake of the name,” meaning Jesus, though His name does not appear in Third John. Gospel patrons like Gaius have supported Christian ministers and ministries for two thousand years. Even Jesus had people who gave financially to His ministry (Luke 8:1-3), as did the Apostle Paul (Philippians 4:14-20). God calls some to go vocationally, but all to give and pray. Are you more like generous and hospitable Gaius or Diotrephes? Who is Diotrephes? I am glad you asked. Tighten your seat belt and read on.

Diotrephes: Hatred and Hostility

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. 1:9-10

If Gaius was humble, generous, and hospitable, Diotrephes, by contrast, was prideful, hateful, and hostile to the vocational ministers sent out by John. Diotrephes would not submit to John’s apostolic authority, refusing, for example, to read a letter written by John to the congregation. Furthermore, Diotrephes spoke “wicked nonsense” against John and his ministry team. John sized up Diotrephes as a man who “likes to put himself first.” Someone needed to pull him aside and say, “Diotrephes, it’s not about you!”



2 & 3 John

**WALKING IN TRUTH,
LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE**

Oh, the politics of the church! Diotrephes played the game to his own advantage, climbing his way to the top of the church leadership pyramid. However, John planned to expose Diotrephes's political gamesmanship, saying, "So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing." Those who use their tongues to undermine the leadership of the church must be called out and held accountable. John provides an example of bold, courageous leadership.

After the negative example of Diotrephes, John finishes on a positive note. "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true" (1:11-12). In short, follow the example of Demetrius, not Diotrephes.

All church politics is as local as your church or small group. However, the church works best when humble servants of God like Gaius and Demetrius extend themselves and the gospel generously; it works poorly when political hacks like Diotrephes assume the leadership of the ministry. Are you one of God's children who are walking in truth, love, obedience, generosity, and hospitality? Doing so makes congregational life a joy.

2 JOHN

OUTLINE	1-6	7-13
FOCUS	Walking in the Truth	Avoiding False Teachers
KEY VERSE	4	10-11



2 & 3 John

**WALKING IN TRUTH,
LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE**

3 JOHN

OUTLINE	1-8	9-14
FOCUS	Generosity and Hospitality Gaius	Hatred and Hostility Diotrephes
KEY VERSE	4	11



Jude

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Ronald Reagan served as the fortieth President of the United States of America at the same time Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of Great Britain. Together, they fought and won the Cold War, although Thatcher credited Reagan with ending the Cold War “without firing a shot.”

The names Reagan and Thatcher are like Colorado fourteeners rising majestically from the landscape of twentieth-century history. Both global leaders were clear-eyed when it came to the threat of communism around the world, starting with the former Soviet Union. Marxism-Leninism had also spread to other places, including Eastern and Central Europe, China, Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua. Ronald Reagan believed it was time for a new strategy in the fight against Socialist-Communist ideology: “We win, and they lose.”

In the Berlin Wall Speech on June 12, 1987, Reagan courageously sent word to the Soviet General Secretary, saying, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” while ignoring his advisers who cautioned against his stern rhetoric. Not long after, the Berlin Wall fell, and the Soviet Union collapsed. According to Lee Edwards of The Heritage



Foundation, in the end, even Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet system, “publicly acknowledged the failures of Marxism-Leninism and the futility of Russian imperialism.”¹⁰

Like Ronald Reagan, Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, was equally clear-eyed about what threatened the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the first century.¹¹ Jude joins the choir of New Testament voices by sternly warning about false teachers that “crept in unnoticed” to the church. After a brief greeting that extends grace, mercy, and peace to his readers “who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (1-2), Jude writes,

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. 3-4

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jude penned a different letter than what he intended to write. In response to what he believed was a four-alarm theological fire, he urged his readers to “contend for the faith.” The word “contend” means “to struggle in opposition, to strive in debate; dispute earnestly.” As it applies to the gospel, the phrase “once for all” suggests there is nothing more to add and certainly nothing to subtract.

Are you clear-eyed about the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you know

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ keeps us from stumbling away from the truth.

BIG IDEA

We are in a battle to keep the gospel pure.

MEMORY VERSE

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

JUDE 3

AUTHOR AND DATE

Jude
70-80 A.D.



biblical Christianity well enough to recognize false teaching when you hear it? Do you possess the Reagan-like courage to tear down the walls of erroneous doctrine? How many alarms must sound before you grasp the seriousness of a catastrophic theological fire? Will you contend for the Christian faith?

Why Contend for the Faith?

Jude draws from the first five books of the Bible—the Books of Law—to offer three reasons why we must contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. 5-7

Jude wants us to remember Israel’s unbelief after the Lord delivered them from Egyptian slavery. Exodus 12:37-38 says that a “mixed multitude” went out with them from Egypt. In time, the unbelievers complained about the Lord’s provision during something I referred to as the Grumble in the Jungle. The Lord sent a great plague to strike down the complainers, and many died (Numbers 11). Jude also points out the eternal fate of the angels who followed Lucifer in the rebellion against heaven’s authority. There is a dark and gloomy place reserved for them until the final day of judgment.

Finally, Jude calls to remembrance the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whom God destroyed because of their gross sexual



immorality. Some people say the sin for which God judged Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality but inhospitality, which is ridiculously false. According to Jude, God judged the people in these ancient cities for their unnatural sexual behavior, meaning men had relations with men (Genesis 18-19).

Together, these three Old Testament stories illustrate the dangers of allowing unbelievers and their false doctrines to mix with the truth. Jude makes his case against the false teachers stronger by comparing them to blasphemers. Let's read on.

Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. 8-11

The word "blaspheme" appears three times in these verses, suggesting that arrogant false teachers speak irreverently of God. Moreover, destroyed by the things they practice, they act more like three Old Testament bad boys—Cain, Balaam, and Korah—than true and trustworthy followers of God. Jude holds nothing back by calling them "unreasoning animals" who mock what they do not understand. Regarding their interaction with supernatural powers, Michael, the archangel, is more careful about the way he deals with the devil.

Jude is not done with expressing his contempt for false teachers. He locates metaphors in nature that aptly describe the grave danger and sheer emptiness of the apostates who malign Christian orthodoxy.



Read the following verses slowly, allowing the graphic rhetorical images to fully develop in your mind.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. 12-13

Unexpectedly, Jude follows these verses with a quote from the noncanonical book of Enoch about the Lord executing judgment on the ungodly (14-15). Then, he adds another unflattering description of the false teachers by saying, “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage” (16).

Overall, Jude’s description of the false teachers reads like 2 Peter 2:1-3:4, raising questions about the relationship between the two books. Did Jude draw from Peter’s writings or vice versa, or is there another explanation? There is no evidence for a third, independent source from which Jude and Peter drew their material. The best explanation is for the priority of 2 Peter, with Jude describing the historical fulfillment of what Peter predicts concerning the coming of false teachers.

How to Contend for the Faith

When it comes to contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, the how is as important as the why. With the twice-repeated phrase “but you,” Jude changes rhetorical direction and speaks to the church in the following verses.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers,



following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. 17-23

Jude wants those who are loved in Christ (“beloved”) to remember what the Holy Spirit told the apostles about scoffers who will malign the faith and divide churches. For example, Peter spoke about scoffers who will come scoffing in the last days (2 Peter 3:2), and Paul warned the Ephesians about “savage wolves” that “will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:29).

Jude lays a damning indictment upon scoffers by saying they are “worldly” and “devoid of the Spirit,” meaning they masquerade as true believers in Jesus Christ. They operate in the church under false pretenses. Unlike true believers who might grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, the false teachers possess zero of the Spirit.

Then, Jude encourages the beloved to grow in Christian discipleship. He uses the word “yourselves” twice, suggesting we have a responsibility to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our spiritual growth. We must also “wait” for the full measure of God’s mercy in eternal life. Finally, we contend for the faith by supporting those who exhibit a weaker faith.

Kept from Stumbling

Jude ends with a doxology that should arouse the believer’s confidence while contending for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. His ascription of praise to God excels anything



man could write without the aid and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. 24-25

Like Ronald Reagan’s Cold War strategy, Jude’s doxology says true believers win, and false teachers lose. Therefore, do not be fooled when scoffers appear to have the upper hand. In the end, apostates cannot destroy your faith because Jesus is “able to keep you from stumbling.” Jude affirmed this truth at the beginning of his brief letter when he addressed those “beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (1). Truly, He who possesses all glory, majesty, dominion, and authority will “present you blameless” in Christ. No wonder Jude ended with a word that settles the matter once and for all, “Amen!”

Berliners, not to mention the entire free world, experienced euphoria on November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, and the Cold War began to thaw. Something like that and a lot more awaits the believer in Jesus Christ who never stops contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

OUTLINE	1-4	5-16	17-23	24-25
FOCUS	Contending for the Faith	Why Contend for the Faith	How to Contend for the Faith	Kept from Stumbling
KEY VERSE	3	5	20	24



Revelation

THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

A good story always has something easily seen and something hidden, something obvious to the naked eye and something more mysterious. This is especially true of God's story.

So far, we have seen only what God chooses to reveal and what the eyes of faith are willing to see. But much more of God and His story remains hidden from us. Mysteriously, the Apostle Paul admitted, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).¹²

We have arrived at our final stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible—the fascinating and mysterious book The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated “revelation” is *apocalypsis*, meaning “to unveil or reveal.” Culturally, the word apocalypse has come to mean the catastrophic end of the world, but in the Bible, it means something different. Think of The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ as God pulling back the curtain to show us what's really happening in the world, now and in the future.

Known for its strange images that are difficult to understand,



Revelation

THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation is apocalyptic literature, a type of prophecy. Other examples in Scripture include Nebuchadnezzar's giant statue made of four metals (Daniel 2) and four-faced creatures with wings and wheels (Ezekiel 1). Additionally, the four horsemen of the apocalypse and the beast of Revelation have intrigued Bible readers for two thousand years.

Throughout church history, Bible teachers have chosen one of four ways to interpret Revelation.¹³ Years ago, I adopted the view that sees the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) and Revelation 4-22 as happening in the future. Based on the standard (literal or normal) way to interpret Scripture, even apocalyptic symbols, I believe the futurist view makes the most consistent sense. Moreover, I agree with other futurists who see 1:19 as the key that unlocks the mysteries of the apocalypse: "Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this." Thus, Revelation unfolds this way: "Things that you have seen" (1), "those that are" (2-3), and "those that are to take place" (4-22). Let's take a closer look.

Glorified Jesus

While imprisoned on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John "bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2). To encourage us to read, study, and apply the revelation, John tells us, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (1:3). This blessing

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is revealed as the glorious King and eternal God who reigns in heaven and on earth.

BIG IDEA

Like a bride waiting for her groom, the church awaits Jesus's return.

MEMORY VERSE

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

REVELATION 22:20

AUTHOR AND DATE

John
90 A.D.



Revelation

THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

is one of seven mentioned in Revelation.¹⁴ The blessed life belongs to believers in Jesus who read the last book of the Bible and obey it.

Read the last four words of verse 3 again. The time is near for what? Like a bride waiting for her groom, the church waits patiently in hope for the return of Jesus Christ. We are nearer to Jesus's Second Coming than John was two thousand years ago. "Nearness" must be understood from God's eternal perspective (2 Peter 3:8).

When Jesus came to this earth from heaven, He veiled certain aspects of His deity and identity (Philippians 2:7, Mark 9:3). But Revelation 1 unveils glorified Jesus in ways only briefly seen by three of His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. This time, John does not write about the Jesus of Bethlehem, Galilee, or Gethsemane. Instead, he writes of "Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth" (1:5).

John sees glorified Jesus as the royal priest and ancient sage, saying, "I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow" (1:12-14a). John also encounters Jesus, who burns with conviction, speaks with authority, and comforts his fears.

His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." 1:14b-18



Letters to the Churches

While in the Spirit on the Lord's day, John heard a loud voice saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (1:11). Chapters 2-3 record the seven letters John penned from Jesus to seven churches located in Asia Minor.

Each of the letters follows a similar pattern, starting with reference to Jesus taken from John's breathtaking description of Him in chapter 1. The letters contain a mixture of commendation and correction. Some churches were doing better than others. The churches can be characterized as follows:

- Ephesus: The Loveless Church
- Smyrna: The Persecuted Church
- Pergamum: The Compromising Church
- Thyatira: The Corrupt Church
- Sardis: The Dead Church
- Philadelphia: The Faithful Church
- Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

Located along the western coast of today's Turkey, these seven churches existed centuries ago. They might also preview the flow of church history from its birth to the end of the age. If that is the case, Laodicea, the lukewarm church, might be representative of the church today.

Worship in Heaven

Chapter 3 ends with Jesus knocking at the door of the lukewarm church in Laodicea. Tragically, at the end of the church age, Jesus



is outside of His church, waiting for the bride of Christ to open the door to Him (3:20). The next scene pictures the Apostle John standing before heaven's open door. A voice that sounds like a trumpet says to the apostle, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this" (4:1).

After chapter 3, the church is not mentioned again in Revelation, which some see as silent evidence for the Rapture of the Church prior to the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). If the church is not on earth but in heaven, the shift in chapters 4-5 to worship in heaven makes sense.

In my book *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets*, I note, "John pauses three times in the book of Revelation to give us a glimpse of worship in heaven (4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12). While apocalyptic disasters are happening on earth during the Tribulation (6-19), exhilarating worship is taking place in heaven. John's descriptions are breathtaking."

Tribulation on Earth

The book's largest section describes a seven-year period in Bible prophecy known as the Tribulation (6-19). The fulfillment of Daniel's "seventieth week" (Daniel 9:24-27) is arguably the worst of times on planet earth. Jesus refers to the last three and a half years as a "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). During the Tribulation, twenty-one divine judgments fall upon the earth and its inhabitants—seven seal judgments (6:1-8:5), seven trumpet judgments (8:6-15:8) and seven bowls of God's wrath (16:1-21).

The seven seal judgments (6:1-8:5) begin with the arrival of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Deception, destruction, drought, and death follow in proportions the world has never experienced. The opening of the fifth and sixth seals reveal the blood of martyrs (6:9-11)



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and the breakdown of celestial order (6:12-17). Then, John reveals an evangelistic explosion with 144,000 Jewish believers winning souls to Christ (7:1-8). While this is happening on earth, another glimpse of heaven reveals “a great multitude” surrounding the throne of God and crying with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (7:9-17).

Devastation on planet earth accelerates with the blowing of the trumpet judgments (8:6-15:8). For example, a giant meteor falls to the earth at the sound of the second trumpet, yielding environmental disaster and economic turmoil. John says, “A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed” (8:9). Another meteor follows and pollutes one-third of the world’s drinking water. The last three trumpets release the powers of darkness from the bottomless pit (Abyss), and one-third of the world population dies. John writes, “In those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them” (9:6).

Situations go from bad to worse with “the seven bowls of God’s wrath” poured out upon the earth (16:1). Painful body sores. Bloody oceans, rivers, and springs. Scorching sun and heat. These are just some of the earthly disasters that intensify. The sixth bowl dries up the Euphrates River, making way for “the kings of the east” (probably China and her allies) to march their armies toward Israel to a place in Hebrew called *Har-Megiddo* (16:12-16).

During the seven-year Tribulation on earth, also called “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), a powerful, devil-possessed ruler seizes political control of the world’s economy and religion. Mimicking God, Satan forms an unholy trinity with the Antichrist (13:1-10) and the False Prophet (13:11-18). Revelation portrays the Antichrist as a “beast” who makes friends with Israel for three and a half years and then turns on her in the last half of the Tribulation. The Antichrist desecrates the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem in an act of abominable



blasphemy and demands worship that belongs to God alone.

Pictured as the fall of Babylon, the world economy collapses (18:1-24) while the raptured church enjoys the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:1-10). This happens prior to the final consummation when Jesus returns with His church and the angelic hosts of heaven to defeat his enemies at the Battle of Armageddon (19:11-21). The New Testament refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

Millennial Reign

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The ultimate answer to that prayer follows the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when the Savior establishes His kingdom on this earth for one thousand years. Mark Hitchcock, a Bible prophecy expert, writes,

When the Lord Jesus returns to this earth, God’s word tells us that the next great event, the culmination of history, is the one-thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords—or simply, the millennial kingdom. During this era, the world will flourish under the rule of the Prince of Peace, basking in unrestricted peace and prosperity.¹⁵

Revelation 20:1-10 describes the formation of the government of Christ on earth. Then, big government will be a good thing, led by the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7). During that peaceful time on earth, the devil will be bound in chains and thrown into a pit “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended” (20:1-3). Until then, every attempt by sinful humans to create a utopia on earth will fail.¹⁶



New Heaven and Earth

Before John reveals the new heaven and earth (21-22), he sees a judgment that takes place before a great white throne (20:11-15). John “saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. ... And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” God also casts the devil, death, and Hades into the lake of fire.

As sobering as the final judgment is for unbelievers, believers in Jesus get to look forward to a new heaven and earth (22:1-8), a new Jerusalem (22:9-27), and the river of life (22:1-5). Why is God making all things new? After the catastrophic effects of the Tribulation, I can understand the need for a new earth, but why a new heaven? Let’s just say that God loves to create new things (Ezekiel 36:26).

His deepest desire is to create a new you by giving you a new life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Since the beginning, God has desired to dwell with His people, starting with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The book of Revelation brings us back to that divine desire. John writes,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” 21:3

Based on John’s inspired description of the new heaven and earth, we can anticipate that our eternal dwelling is a massive (21:9-17), beautiful (21:18-19), welcoming (21:25-27), healing (22:1-2), and worshipping place (4:8-11, 5:8-14, 7:9-12). There is no place like the believer’s eternal home called heaven.



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Revelation ends with a reminder that Jesus is coming soon (22:6-21). Given all that God has revealed to us, we should join the Apostle John in praying, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

OUTLINE	1	2-3	4-22
FOCUS 1:19	“Things that you have seen”	“Those that are”	“Those that are to take place”
KEY VERSE	1:5	2:15	3:10

OUTLINE	1	2-3	4-5
FOCUS	Glorified Jesus	Letters to Churches	Worship in Heaven
KEY VERSE	1:8	1:11	4:11

OUTLINE	6 - 19	20	21 - 22
FOCUS	Tribulation on Earth	Millennial Reign	New Heaven and Earth
KEY VERSE	19:11	20:6	21:3



Small Group Discussion Questions



HEBREWS

1. What is the big idea of Hebrews? Explain how the writer develops it.
 2. How do the Hebrews warning passages impact your understanding of eternal security and the assurance of your salvation?
 3. Read Hebrews 11:1. What is the definition of faith? How does it differ from the world's understanding of faith?
 4. Who is Melchizedek? What is his relationship to Jesus and the walk of faith?
 5. What encouragement(s) do you derive from Hebrews 11-13?
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James

1. Who is James and why did he write this letter?
2. Read James 2:14-26. Is James in conflict theologically with Paul? Why or why not?
3. Consider James 3:1-11. What does the tongue have to do with a faith that works?
4. What encouragement does James give to those who are physically sick?
5. Overall, how is your faith working for you?

Small Group Discussion Questions



1 PETER

1. What is the difference between biblical hope and wishful thinking?
 2. What does Peter mean by the phrase “born again to a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3)?
 3. Read 1 Peter 1:4-7. Reflect upon our living hope in salvation.
 4. Read 1 Peter 2:22-25. Reflect upon the way Jesus submitted himself to authority.
 5. Read 1 Peter 4:12. How does living hope help us during times of suffering?
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2 PETER

1. Why Does Peter write his second epistle?
2. How is false doctrine like piracy? What dangers does it present?
3. Name four ways Peter urges Christians to combat counterfeit Christianity.
4. Read 2 Peter 1:5- 9. What is virtue. Are you growing in Christian virtue? Why or why not?
5. Read 2 Peter 3:1-11. What does Peter say about the day of the Lord? Why is prophetic understanding important to the fight against false doctrine?

Small Group Discussion Questions



1 JOHN

1. What is the big idea of the book of 1 John?
 2. Describe the difference between relationship and fellowship. Are you hesitant to pursue intimate fellowship with God and others? Why or why not?
 3. Name three things that break our fellowship with God. What one thing must we do to return to fellowship with Him? (Hint: read 1 John 1:9)
 4. Discuss the seven tests of genuine faith and fellowship in Christ and how they apply to you.
 5. Read 1 John 4:17-19 and discuss the significance of God's love.
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2 & 3 JOHN

1. Why did John write Second and Third John?
2. In Second John, what commandment does John give us to obey and why?
3. What lesson does Second John teach about false teachers and our relationship to them?
4. In Third John, who is Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius? Why are they good or bad examples to follow?
5. What stewardship lesson does Third John teach about financially supporting gospel ministers and

Small Group Discussion Questions



JUDE

1. What letter did Jude plan to write? What urgency made him change his rhetorical direction?
 2. Why is it dangerous to allow false teaching to mix with the truth? How does Jude illustrate the danger?
 3. Read and review Jude 8-13. How does Jude describe the false teachers?
 4. Describe your emotional and intellectual response to Jude's doxology in 24-25.
 5. How is God calling you to contend for the Christian faith?
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REVELATION

1. What does the word translated "revelation" (*apocalypsis*) mean? How is the cultural understanding of the word different?
2. How is the description of Jesus in Revelation 1 the same or different than the Jesus we read about in the Gospels?
3. What is your biggest takeaway after reading the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3?
4. Revelation 6-19 describes the Tribulation on earth. How does it make you feel about the world we are living in today?
5. Describe the sense of wonder you feel when reading about the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21-22.

¹ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.

² “Summary of the Book of Hebrews,” Got Questions, accessed on May 18, 2022, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Hebrews.html>

³ Much debate surrounds the authorship of Hebrews, with some attributing it to the Apostle Paul. However, after vigorous arguments for and against Pauline authorship, the writer of Hebrews remains ambiguous. Weaker arguments for authorship include Luke, Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Phillip, or Aquilla and Priscilla. A third-century theologian named Origen said, “Who was it that really wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, God only knows.”

⁴ We refer to James as Jesus’s half-brother because they had the same mother, Mary, but not the same father.

⁵ See Acts 12:17, 15:13-21, 21:18, and Galatians 2:9, 12.

⁶ To say the least, 3:18-22 is a mysterious passage, making some people wonder if Jesus traveled to hell between His death and resurrection. In my book *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets*, I address Peter’s inspired insight. “Jesus went to Hades not hell and “proclaimed to the spirits in prison.” The word translated “proclaimed” is the Greek word *kerysso* which means “to preach.” Yes, Jesus preached a sermon in Hades. What did he preach? We don’t have a record of his sermon, but it’s reasonable to assume that He proclaimed “liberty to the captives” (Luke 4:18). We know Jesus rose from the dead and later ascended to the Father as recorded in Acts chapter 1. At that time, He seized the keys of Death and Hades” (p. 54).

⁷ Counterfeiting statistics, International Anticounterfeiting Coalition, accessed on June 13, 2022, <https://www.iacc.org/resources/about/statistics>

⁸ There is some debate as to whether “the elder” mentioned in Second and Third John is the beloved disciple of Jesus (John 13:23), the same John who wrote The Gospel According to John and Revelation. However, most agree that “the elder” is the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’s disciples.

- ⁹ Gnosticism was a heresy that threatened the early church, based on the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “to know.” Two false premises form Gnostic thinking. First, regarding spirit and matter, the latter is inherently evil. Thus, anything done in the body, even gross sin, does not matter because anything of spiritual value happens in the spirit. For this reason, Gnostics deny that Jesus, the Son of God, came in the flesh. Second, Gnostics claim to possess a higher, deeper truth that
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- ¹⁰ “How Ronald Reagan Won the Cold War” by Lee Edwards, The Heritage Foundation, online article accessed on June 29, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/conservatism/commentary/how-ronald-reagan-won-the-cold-war>
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- ¹¹ Jude identified himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (1). Like his brothers, Jude did not believe in Jesus until after His resurrection from the dead (John 7:1-9, Acts 1:14).
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- ¹² Moses said to the children of Israel who were about to cross the Jordan River and take possession of the Promised Land, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).” God reveals much to us in the Bible; He also keeps as many, if not more, secrets.
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- ¹³ The *idealist* interprets Revelation allegorically, viewing the symbolic language as representative of the battle between God and Satan, good and evil. The *preterist* sees Revelation as a description of the events leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The *historicist* teaches that Revelation describes the course of church history symbolically, from the apostolic era to the end of the age. Finally, the *futurist* teaches that the events of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) and Revelation 4-22 will take place in the future.
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- ¹⁴ Places where blessings appear in Revelation are 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14.
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- ¹⁵ Mark Hitchcock, *The End: The Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, p. 175.

- ¹⁶ Amillennialists do not believe in a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on this earth. They adopt the idealist (allegorical) way of interpreting the book of Revelation. However, the phrase “a thousand years” appears six times in Revelation 20:1-10. What does “a thousand years” mean but a thousand years. When interpreting the Bible, keep this in mind: When the plain sense makes the best sense, seek no other sense.

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

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Road Trip 7: The Pauline Epistles

Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

Ron Jones is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

