



## **“Interpreting the New Testament Normally” by Noel Heikkinen**

*I harp on people all the time to interpret the Bible “normally.” It occurs to me that some of us may need help figuring out what that means.*

*The goal of this paper is to help you get a basic understanding of the context of each of the books that make up the New Testament. It is not meant to be an intensive survey or commentary, just a summary, as well as some basic principles of Biblical interpretation.*

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Before diving into the books of the New Testament, I want to highlight the principles of interpretation I take when reading the Bible. A lot of confusion can be avoided by simply paying attention to the context.

### **Start by asking yourself, “what kind of book am I reading?”**

The Bible is comprised of 66 different books, each different in style. Some are poetry, some are history, some are “wisdom literature,” etc. You have to start by knowing what kind of book you are reading, otherwise the text just won’t make any sense at all. If you didn’t know Ezekiel was prophetic, this may be a confusing passage:

*Ezekiel 1:15-16 - As I looked at these beings, I saw four wheels touching the ground beside them, one wheel belonging to each. The wheels sparkled as if made of beryl. All four wheels looked alike and were made the same; each wheel had a second wheel turning crosswise within it.*

Sometimes, different parts of the same book are different so you have to stay on top of that, as well. Daniel is an example of a book that’s partially historical, partially prophetic.

### **Who wrote it and who were they writing to?**

This is a biggie that lots of people miss. Yes, the entire Bible “is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

That means that everything we read in the Bible has application to us in our everyday lives.

However, we have to determine if what we are reading is a “command” for us or if it is a “principle” to follow. There is a huge difference. For instance, the Sabbath. Here’s God’s command to Israel:



*Exodus 35:1-3 - Then Moses called together the whole community of Israel and told them, “These are the instructions the LORD has commanded you to follow. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day must be a Sabbath day of complete rest, a holy day dedicated to the LORD. Anyone who works on that day must be put to death. You must not even light a fire in any of your homes on the Sabbath.”*

The Sabbath was a command for Israel, not Christians. Now, even though I am not required to keep the Sabbath, the principle of taking a day of rest applies to us. Taking appropriate time of rest, along with appropriate time for work is something we should pay attention to. The Sabbath was a command for Israel, and a principle for us.

A lot of determining whether something is a command or a principle comes from figuring out who wrote the book and whom they were writing to.

***Along with the last question, ask “What did the author intend to say?”***

Sometimes we try to come up with fancy analogies that the authors did not intend or find hidden secret meanings. That’s borderline Gnosticism, which claims you are saved through some sort of secret knowledge.

It’s important to pay attention to the figures of speech that are being used. For instance, if I told you I was “so hungry i could eat a cow” you would be an idiot to run out and bring me back a cow. I was using a figure of speech called “hyperbole.”

Also, pay close attention to sarcasm! It’s all over the Bible. I laugh when people tell me sarcasm is sinful because if that were true, Jesus would have to be labeled as sinful since he was a super sarcastic guy. A quick glance at the Gospels will tell you that.

***If a verse is unclear, interpret it in the context of verses that are more clear.***

Because the Bible was written originally to other audiences, it can sometimes seem confusing. When you hit a verse like that, look around the chapter for keys that can help you determine what the author meant. If you can’t figure it out from there, look around the whole book, then the same Testament, then the whole Bible.

Yes, that can take some time, but it’s better than misinterpreting the Bible! We should heed the words of CH Spurgeon, who said, “I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the Word of God.”

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. Each of these is an eye-witness account of the life of Jesus written by a different person for a different audience. That's why there are slight variations in the story—it's all about perspective.

The beauty of the Gospels is how they work together and paint the picture of who Jesus is. Mark Driscoll from Mars Hill Church in Seattle says Matthew, Mark, and Luke are like ABC, CBS, and NBC (local news) and John is like CNN (national news).

### **Matthew**

#### *Author*

Matthew, Jewish Disciple of Jesus. Matthew's birth name was Levi and he was a Tax Collector.

#### *Intended Audience*

Jews

#### *Theme*

Jesus is the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for. He is the King of the Jews.

#### *Random Thoughts*

It's cool that the first Gospel was written by a member of a hated group in Jewish society: tax collectors. Beyond that, he wrote his book to Jews about Jesus as a Jew. Think about that for a bit.

Because Matthew was writing to Jews to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah, he quotes the Old Testament more than anyone else. He either directly quotes or references the Old Testament more than a hundred times.

Matthew uses the phrase "The Kingdom of Heaven" 32 times.

Notice that his genealogy of Jesus goes back to Abraham. That's because he was showing that Jesus was the Messiah.

### **Mark**

#### *Author*

Mark, most likely a convert of Peter. He was also Barnabas' cousin, and he traveled with Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey.

### *Intended Audience*

Romans

### *Theme*

Jesus is the Servant of God. Mark shows how Jesus laid down his life for us in obedience to God.

### *Random Thoughts*

Because this book is written to Gentiles, Mark does not include a genealogy because they wouldn't care about that kind of thing. You'll also notice that the Sermon on the Mount is not there, again because it was not targeted toward the Jews.

Because of the Roman audience, you'll notice that there is a theme of Jesus getting stuff done. In fact, the word translated "immediately" or something like that shows up 42 times. Jesus is shown as man of action, a guy who gets stuff done. Mark does the same thing in his book. He writes a fast action-packed Gospel that wraps up quickly.

Mark also follows a very logical order. He's not trying to paint pretty pictures that the Jews would appreciate, rather his Gospel is a clear, immediate portrayal of Jesus as God's boy getting his work done.

## **Luke**

### *Author*

Luke, a Greek-speaking, Gentile doctor. Luke was an evangelist at heart and he travelled around with Paul quite a bit. We also know that he was an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus.

### *Intended Audience*

Initially written to a guy named Theophilus, this book is clearly intended to be read by Greek Gentiles. Don't forget that Luke was a Greek Gentile. Therefore, he (just like Mark) doesn't include a lot of fancy Jewish imagery, he translates Aramaic phrases into Greek, and he explains customs so that non-Jewish readers can figure out what he's talking about.

### *Theme*

Jesus is seen as the Son of Man. We see him as totally human. The Gentiles wouldn't have cared as much that he was the fulfillment of Jewish prophesy. But the fact that he was fully human and lived a perfect life was proof that he could save us.

### *Random Thoughts*

Luke is actually the first of a two book series. The second book is Acts. It's actually a really cool read to start at the beginning of Luke and then go right to Acts.

Luke interviewed people, studied different accounts, and presented in this book the clearest, most, straight-forward account he could about the life of Jesus. He is most concerned with giving a historically accurate account so that Greek Gentiles could know Jesus.

Notice that his genealogy goes all the way back to Adam. This was to show that Jesus was fully human. And having a human live a perfect life was the Greek ideal. This was a springboard to the Gospel for them.

## **John**

### *Author*

John, disciple of Jesus. John was the son of Zebedee, the brother of James. He likes to call himself the "beloved disciple." Nice, huh? He was part of Jesus' inner circle of three, so I suppose he had the right to say that about himself.

### *Intended Audience*

The churches in the Asia-Minor area (where Ephesus was located). That means the target audience was Greeks.

### *Theme*

John tells us clearly what his purpose is in chapter 20:

*Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

The theme is that Jesus is the Son of God who saves those who believe. In fact, the word "believe" appears 98 times in John.

### *Random Thoughts*

John wrote this after all the other disciples had died, and He most likely wanted to fill in the gaps in the other accounts.

This book is very different from the other three Gospels. He doesn't include any genealogical reference, nothing about Jesus' birth or baptism or temptation. He doesn't talk about the Lord's Supper, or his ascension.

John focuses on the time when Jesus is in Jerusalem and his private ministry with people including the Jews he had contact with and his disciples.

John focuses on major signs that Jesus was God. He then goes on to explain those signs and encourages the reader to believe in Jesus.

## **Acts**

### *Author*

Luke, a Greek-speaking, Gentile doctor. Luke was an evangelist at heart and he travelled around with Paul quite a bit. We also know that he was an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus.

### *Intended Audience*

Initially written to a guy named Theophilus, this book is clearly intended to be read by Greek Gentiles. Don't forget that Luke was a Greek Gentile. Therefore, he doesn't include a lot of fancy Jewish imagery, he translates Aramaic phrases into Greek, and he explains customs so that non-Jewish readers can figure out what he's talking about.

### *Theme*

Acts is part two of the book series Luke started in...um...Luke. Here he continues his detailed account by picking up where he left off. Many people forget that Acts starts out with Jesus still here on earth post-Resurrection. Then he does the spooky floating into the sky thing and the church kicks off.

The book of Acts details the first 30 years or so of the church and wraps up before the burning of Jerusalem in 68AD.

### *Random Thoughts*

Remember that Luke was a Greek-speaking Gentile, so this book serves to show the world how this Jewish man Jesus instituted a worldwide faith that is made available to everyone, everywhere.

It continues the book of Luke in the tradition of showing the progression of the Jewish faith to the Gentile world by showing the progression of the church from Jerusalem to the Roman Empire and the world.

## **Romans**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

Romans (both Jew and Gentile)

### *Theme*

The theme of Romans is summarized in these verses:

*Romans 1:16-17 - For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”*

In Romans, Paul clearly paints how God saves a sinner. He wanted them to know clearly how Jesus’ death and resurrection affects a believer’s past, present, and future.

He also had to deal with issues the church was encountering because there were both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church. So, in this book he clearly explains how salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles.

### *Random Thoughts*

Ironically, Paul (the “Apostle to the Gentiles”) always wanted to go to Rome to work with the church there. Unfortunately, he only made it there as a prisoner and was never able to actually work in the church.

The words “righteousness” or “righteous” appear over 60 times in Romans.

The book is very logical and is each chapter builds on the last. This is not a book that can be read easily in a “point and read” fashion.

## **1st Corinthians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

The Church in Corinth.

Most of the Christians were Gentiles, although there was a Jewish population in the church, as well. Many of the Christians were very very poor (2/3 of the population of Corinth were slaves), while some of the believers were incredibly wealthy and had

rooms in their houses that could seat hundreds of people (that is most likely where they held their church services).

### Theme

Butt-whoopin’.

The church in Corinth was just as screwed up as the city itself. There were divisions in the church, there was disruptive and disorderly worship, there was even a guy sleeping with his step-mom. The church followed people’s personalities instead of God, creating a “celebrity pastor” mentality. It’s interesting to note that the church was fighting over which leader they liked better and there is no indication that the leaders themselves were causing that problem.

This book was Paul rebuking the church for all of its problems. He clears up doctrine on everything from marriage to worship services to spiritual gifts to the resurrection of Jesus.

### Random Thoughts

Corinth was a freakin’ huge city. The population was 700,000 or so. For reference, if you add up Ingham, Clinton, and Eaton Counties, you get roughly 450,000 people. Corinth was more like Detroit (which has 900,000).

Corinth had the reputation of being a worldly / sinful city. In his work Republic, Plato’s description of a hooker was “a Corinthian girl.”

Paul repeatedly contrasts men’s wisdom with God’s. In fact, the word “wisdom” appears almost 30 times.

## 2nd Corinthians

### Author

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### Intended Audience

The Church in Corinth.

Most of the Christians were Gentiles, although there was a Jewish population in the church, as well. Many of the Christians were very very poor (2/3 of the population of Corinth were slaves), while some of the believers were incredibly wealthy and had

### Corinthian Timeline

- Paul visits Corinth
- Paul writes first letter to the church in Corinth (which we do not have)
- Paul writes second letter to the church in Corinth (1st Corinthians)
- Paul visits Corinth again (and calls it “painful” - 2nd Corinthians 2:1)
- Paul writes a third letter to the church in Corinth (which, again, we do not have)
- Paul writes a fourth letter to the church in Corinth (2nd Corinthians)
- Paul visits Corinth for a third time

rooms in their houses that could seat hundreds of people (that is most likely where they held their church services).

### *Theme*

This letter is the most personal of all of Paul's church letters. Even though the recipient of the letter is a church filled with crazy people who are fickle and inconsistent, Paul loves them and you can see it big time in this letter.

Paul shows that he is encouraged big time because of how they have responded to his teaching. They have been a very teachable people, which is a great thing.

But this has fed into a new problem in the church: false teachers (and not just false teachers, but false teachers who were talking smack about Paul). So Paul writes this letter to remind them of his authority and after that is established, to remind them of his message and the things he had already taught them.

### *Random Thoughts*

It's cool to see that this messed up church had really taken Paul's rebuke in I Corinthians seriously. They were teachable and humble, which was so counter to their culture (as well as ours).

Unfortunately, their teachableness led to them being susceptible to false teachers. Paul, like any good pastor, defended good doctrine and opposed the false teachers in the church.

## **Galatians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

The Churches in Galatia.

This is the only one of Paul's letters written to a group of churches.

### *Theme*

The theme of this book is found in my favorite word in this verse:

*Galatians 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*

In context, what Paul is teaching is that we have “freedom from extremes.” The beauty of this book is that Paul combats those that would apply Old Testament laws to New Testament believers, but he doesn’t stop there. He also combats those that would use grace as a means to sin. In other words, those that keep sinning because they know they are forgiven and free.

We are free from extremes! We don’t have to sin and we don’t have to keep the law—it’s all about balance.

### *Random Thoughts*

What the Galatian churches were encountering is the same thing we face in our culture. There are those that add to Christianity and try to get us to keep the law and there are those that flaunt their freedom and harm the message of Jesus in the process. We need to constantly live the life Paul calls us to in Galatians.

## **Ephesians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church (while he was in jail)

### *Intended Audience*

The Church in Ephesus

### *Theme*

This book doesn’t address any specific problems in the Ephesian church, rather it deals with the fact that the church is the body of Christ, and that He is the head of the church.

### *Random Thoughts*

In painting the picture of a body, with Christ as the head and believers as the rest of the body, Paul shows us how vital each one of us is in the work Jesus is doing on earth. It also shows why each of us should play that part to the best of our ability. The reason we serve is not so that we can become a part of the body, but precisely because we already are a part of the body.

## **Philippians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church (while he was in jail)

### *Intended Audience*

## The Church in Phillipi

### *Theme*

Paul wants the church to stand firm and unified in the face of persecution. He also wants them to face whatever they need to face with joy.

He uses Jesus as the ultimate example of someone who lays down His life joyfully for others and then he encourages us to follow His example.

### *Random Thoughts*

Steve Sommerlot did a great series on this book. You can download his teachings at [www.eriv.net](http://www.eriv.net).

## **Colossians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church (while he was in jail)

### *Intended Audience*

The Church in Colosse

### *Theme*

This book was written, in part, to correct some false teaching in the church. This particular false teaching was a big deal, because over the centuries it gave birth to Gnosticism. Paul was combating several specific heresies in the church, which are the foundations of Gnosticism.

First, that the church had to continue to observe Old Testament laws. I'm blown away at the frequency Paul has to combat this particular line of thinking. You can look back on my notes on Galatians for another example. And even with the clear Scriptural teaching on this, it continues to be a problem in the church today (nearly 2000 years after Paul penned these words).

Second, these heresies were deeply philosophical. In other words, they elevated human logic over God's word.

Third, there was an arrogance that came with these teachings. Those that agreed with them saw themselves as the "elite." Again, I'm amazed at how often I see this in the church today. I have heard Christians describe their little sect as "the remnant" or the "true church," excluding all other believers.

Paul combatted these three things first by encouraging the believers to essentially grow up. Jesus is everything—we are secondary to him. That simple argument eventually dismantles all three of these false teachings.

### *Random Thoughts*

Did I mention the Christians were worshipping angels? See Chapter 2.

## **1 Thessalonians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

The Church in Thessalonica

### *Theme*

Paul and Timothy had planted this church and after they left things seemed to be very difficult for the church. Paul sent Timothy back to care for them and when he returned, apparently he brought good news.

This letter is Paul's response to the church following Timothy's report. He encouraged them in their faith and ability to stand strong during times of persecution. He also addresses a few things these young Christians needed to be reminded of. Namely, the necessity of living a life that honors Jesus, the fact that Jesus is coming back, and the need to honor their spiritual leaders.

### *Random Thoughts*

Thessalonica was named after Alexander the Great's half-sister who was married to one of his generals (Cassander) who built the city.

## **2 Thessalonians**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

The Church in Thessalonica

### *Theme*

Sometime after the writing of I Thessalonians, Paul got a report back about how things were going. There was good news and bad news. The good news was that the church continued to grow and stand up under the pressure of persecution. The bad news was that false teaching had crept in.

Again, just like the last letter, Paul spends some time talking about Jesus' return. This is striking because there are so many Christians today who don't believe in this central doctrine. These verses are particularly appropriate:

*2 Thess 2:1-4 - Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.*

Paul also reminds them to live lives that were worthy of Jesus. In particular, he warns against laziness in the church.

### *Random Thoughts*

It's amazing to me how often the Bible warns about false teaching and how plain some teachings (such as the return of Jesus) are. And yet, we sometimes deny these teachings and are afraid to confront false teachings when they pop up.

## **I Timothy**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

His protégé Timothy

### *Theme*

Timothy was a pastor that Paul had mentored. He traveled a lot with Paul and was quite often Paul's messenger, delivering letters for him and bringing news back.

After a visit to Ephesus, Paul left Timothy behind to give some extremely needed guidance to the church. This letter is Paul encouraging Timothy in this work.

Timothy was likely a kinda shy guy who was constantly looked down on because of his age. Paul, therefore, encourages him to step up to the plate and make stuff happen in the church. One of the key passages is this one:

*1 Timothy 4:11-13 - Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them. Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them.*

Specifically, Paul addresses false teachers (are we catching that theme yet?), how the church should behave on a whole and as different groups (olders, youngers, slaves, masters, men, women, etc), what a pastor/elder looks like in the church, and what deacons look like in the church.

### *Random Thoughts*

This is a cool letter because it is a turn for Paul from church-wide letters. Here, he writes a personal letter to a young man he had mentored. Obviously, there is instruction here for the whole church, but he expects Timothy to teach the church these things to them.

## **2 Timothy**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church (while he was in prison)

### *Intended Audience*

His protégé Timothy

### *Theme*

This is Paul's second letter to Timothy. This one was written from prison and the tone is a little different from the first. At this time, Paul was feeling deserted by the very people in the church Timothy was pastoring.

So he writes this letter to Timothy and it's the last thing he ever writes.

The letter has the feel of "final words." Paul doesn't think he will ever get out of prison so he takes this time to do what?

Complain about being deserted?

No, instead he takes this opportunity to encourage Timothy, knowing this will also encourage the very church that has turned their backs on him. 2 Timothy is a testimony to Paul's amazing character.

### *Random Thoughts*

This is one of those books that deserves a straight-through reading. Sit down, remembering that Paul wrote it in prison to Timothy pastoring a church in a difficult situation. Read it front to back.

He also asks Timothy to come visit him one more time, bringing with him a warm coat and some books...that's kind cool and personal.

## **Titus**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

Titus

### *Theme*

Paul and Titus had begun a work on the Island of Crete. There were very likely churches there before they arrived, but they went to work setting the churches into order.

There were two major problems plaguing the church there: legalism and ungodliness. Paul encourages Titus in a third option, living a godly life that is neither legalistic nor ungodly.

Paul then details how this works out in relationships within the church, relationships outside of the church, and with unbelievers. He speaks directly to specific groups within the church, including men and women, elders and youngers, etc. He also details what the qualifications are for a pastor/elder in a church.

### *Random Thoughts*

I taught a series on this book at Riverview. You can download the MP3s at [www.eriv.net](http://www.eriv.net).

## **Philemon**

### *Author*

Paul, a converted Pharisee and former persecutor of the church

### *Intended Audience*

Philemon

### *Theme*

To get the theme of this book, just read the dang thing. It's pretty self-explanatory and since it is only one chapter, it won't take you long.

The bottom line is there was a guy named Onesimus who stole some stuff from Philemon (who was his master). He then ran away and ended up turning his life over to Jesus. Paul sent him back to Philemon to repent and repay what he owed him.

In this short book, Paul encourages Philemon to accept Onesimus home as a fellow believer. It is a really cool picture of the Gospel and how it works out practically in the everyday life of Christ-followers.

### *Random Thoughts*

I love how personal this letter is. It's kinda like we get to peek in on the personal life of a couple people. It's like reality TV without the TV.

## **Hebrews**

### *Author*

This one is a bit tricky. There are a lot of people who are convinced Hebrews was written by Paul, but that is merely tradition because it never overtly says so. Others believe it was Barnabas. One way or another, we will never know for sure until we get to ask Jesus about it.

### *Intended Audience*

We don't know with certainty who this book was written to, but it has historically been called "Hebrews" because it seems very clear that it was written to a Jewish audience. It talks about the Levitical priesthood and often refers to the Old Testament which makes it seem like it was written to those who would care about those things in the early church.

### *Theme*

The theme of this book is Jesus, plain and simple. It talks about his deity, the reasons he came and died and rose again, and the fact that He is our High Priest. It is a great defense of the Gospel, especially to those from a Jewish background.

### *Random Thoughts*

This book would have shaken up Jews in the first century, not only because of its clear insistence that Jesus was the coming Messiah, but that it is by faith in Him, not works, that one is saved.

## **James**

### *Author*

Jesus' half-brother James and brother of Jude (author of the book of Jude)

### *Intended Audience*

This book was written to Jewish believers who were scattered all around the known world. Apparently, he intended for it to be copied and passed around quite a bit.

### *Theme*

James is a very unique book. It is more like Proverbs or Ecclesiastes than any of the other books of the New Testament. It has this “wisdom literature” flavor about it.

This letter clearly is a challenge to the early church to live a mature and holy life. James doesn't spend any time presenting the Gospel or trying to convince someone to believe.

Instead, he deals strongly with how a Christ-follower should live their life. He talks about confidence, compassion, watching what you say and how you say it, sharing what you have, etc.

### *Random Thoughts*

James I was the first chapter of the Bible I ever memorized. And as I memorized it, I found that it really seems like it was meant to be preached. I can almost picture someone using this as the text of a sermon to one of the early churches.

Martin Luther hated this book with a passion. It was too “works” oriented for him.

## **I Peter**

### *Author*

Peter, Apostle of Jesus

### *Intended Audience*

Persecuted Christians living in the foreign lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

## *Theme*

In July of 64 AD, Rome burned nearly to the ground and many people believed that Nero, the emperor, was responsible. You see, Nero had this insatiable appetite for building stuff and many people in Rome believed that he had burned the city down in order to have an excuse to build it again.

The Romans were devastated because in a sense, their culture had burned down with their city: their gorgeous temple, their art, their very culture itself was reduced to ash and rubble. The people were furious and their fury was turning into revolt.

Nero was in a tough position. He knew that unless their anger was funneled somewhere, they would destroy him and so he looked at their culture for a scapegoat. He found one in the Christians. So a few well-placed rumors and accusations later a vicious and bloodthirsty persecution began and it spread out from Rome to Christians throughout the empire.

1 Peter is a practical book that details how a Christian should stand strong during persecution and continue to live a godly lifestyle. Peter encourages the Christians to have an eternal perspective and that should dictate how they live life here on earth.

## *Random Thoughts*

Even though the believers were being persecuted, Peter seems to hint at the fact that this was just the beginning. It was, indeed.

## **2 Peter**

### *Author*

Peter, Apostle of Jesus

### *Intended Audience*

Persecuted Christians living in the foreign lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

### *Theme*

Since Peter's first letter, something had begun to face the church that was worse than the persecution. Churches traditionally grow during persecution, but this great influx of new people brought a new, more dangerous problem: false teachers.

At this critical point, Peter writes this letter, which details his final words to the church he has given his life to help build. He paints pictures of hope, warning, and finally victory.

### *Random Thoughts*

Jesus had promised Peter that He would build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against her. Those words had to be ringing in Peter's head as he watched the church face persecution and false teaching.

## **1 John**

### *Author*

John, Apostle of Jesus

### *Intended Audience*

Christians. That's about all we get. There is no indication in this letter to whom it was written, outside of the apparent assumption that it is to those who claim to follow Jesus.

### *Theme*

This letter has the common theme of many of the epistles: false teachers. The readers are encouraged to live godly lives, which includes loving each other as a big theme.

### *Random Thoughts*

This book has traditionally been attributed to John, although that is more tradition than anything. We know that the author was an eyewitness to Jesus' public ministry, and it is written with a certain sense of authority. I don't think there is any good reason to doubt that John wrote it, especially in light of my thoughts on 2 & 3 John.

## **2 John**

### *Author*

The Apostle John

### *Intended Audience*

2 John was written to "The Chosen Lady and Her Children." Admittedly, this is a weird audience.

What John likely means is a specific local church, although he could have been addressing a specific person. We can't know for sure.

### *Theme*

Really, it has the same theme as 1 John, it's just more succinct. Love each other and watch out for false teachers.

### *Random Thoughts*

The fact that this book says it is from John is one of the evidences that I John is also from John. The writing style and themes are virtually identical.

### **3 John**

#### *Author*

The Apostle John

#### *Intended Audience*

Gaius, a friend of John's.

#### *Theme*

John is thanking Gaius for being hospitable to traveling preachers in contrast to another leader in the church (Diotrephes) who was not so kind.

### *Random Thoughts*

Again, this book gives more credibility to I John for being authored by John. The style is identical. The only marked difference is I John doesn't give a greeting at all. It's kinda weird like that.

### **Jude**

#### *Author*

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus and brother of James (author of the book of James)

#### *Intended Audience*

All Christians everywhere.

With this said, there is a decidedly Jewish tone to this letter. He refers often to the Old Testament and to other literary sources as though his audience would have known what he was talking about. That seems to imply that the majority of his audience was Jewish.

#### *Theme*

Jude had wanted to write a letter about the wonderful salvation that had come at the cost of his brother's life. Instead, he looked around the church and saw tons of false teaching. Do I have to mention yet again how often this shows up in the New Testament?

So instead of writing the letter he wanted to write, he writes one of the most severe books in the New Testament: a letter both of warning and encouragement. He specifically addresses lordship issues, authority issues, moral issues, and divisive people.

### *Random Thoughts*

Even though Jude didn't get to write the joyful book he wanted to write, it's still cool that he closes with these words:

*Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.*

## **Revelation**

### *Author*

John, Apostle of Jesus

### *Intended Audience*

Seven churches in modern day Turkey: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea,

### *Theme*

This book starts with the most popular portion of Revelation: the letters to the churches. These are a stunning warning to these churches, which all Christians should take to heart. These letters spell out how important it is for Christians to live a godly life and it reminds us all that someday Jesus will come and deal with sin once and for all.

The rest of the book is written to reveal the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus (when he will deal with sin once and for all). It also talks about the thousand-year reign of Jesus here on earth. This caused some (such as Martin Luther) to doubt that John was its author and that it was Scripture. The reason? It disagreed with his theology. That is part of the problem with letting our theology interpret scripture instead of the other way around.

### *Random Thoughts*

It's very appropriate that the New Testament ends with the book of Revelation. First of all, because it was the last written of all the books in the Bible. Secondly, it deals so clearly with Jesus' return, which is something we should always keep at the forefront of our minds.

I end this brief New Testament Survey the same way John ends Revelation:

*Revelation 22:20-21 - He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's holy people.*



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