



# VARIOUS GENRES OF NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

## Gospels



The Gospels are the 4 books which record the life of Jesus. These books are narratives since they tell a story, have characters, and have a plot. They are also true accounts of history.

*Books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*



## Narrative (Acts)



The book of Acts is the only other narrative in the New Testament. Acts was written by Luke as a sequel to the gospel he wrote and it follows the disciples and the early Church through their journeys following Jesus' ascension.

*Book: Acts*



## Letters



Many letters were written by Paul, and the rest by Church leaders, to various churches throughout the regions where Christianity was spreading.

*Books: Romans; 1&2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1&2 Thessalonians; 1&2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; Hebrews; James; 1&2 Peter; 1,2,&3 John; Jude*



## Prophecy



The disciple John received a vision from God about things to come. He records this vision in the final book of the Bible: Revelation.

*Book: Revelation*



# BACKGROUND: THE GOSPELS

## Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to Jewish audiences. He prioritized Jesus' teachings by sharing them in great detail. Matthew's recording of the Sermon on the Mount is the longest account of that sermon. There are also 11 parables that are exclusive to Matthew's Gospel. His gospel ends with the Great Commission which is a calling to spiritual growth, obedience to God, and ultimately a life of evangelism / discipleship.

## Mark

Mark is the shortest Gospel with only 16 chapters. Mark emphasized the need for repentance and Jesus' saving work on the cross. Mark's Gospel is similar to Matthew and Luke to the point where most stories in Mark are also in the other Gospels (see below).

Sixty-five of the 70 separate stories in Mark's Gospel can also be found in Matthew or Luke's Gospels.

Accounts in Mark that are found in other Gospels



Accounts that are exclusive to Mark's Gospel



## Luke

Luke's Gospel was written using eyewitness testimony and written accounts of Jesus' ministry. Luke later wrote a sequel to his Gospel which is now known as the book of Acts. Luke shares how Jesus involved women in His ministry, taught on the Holy Spirit often, and socialized with diverse groups of people. One of the most well-known stories found in Luke is that of Jesus' birth.

## John

While Mark is very similar to Matthew and Luke, John is completely different. John's Gospel clearly proves Jesus is God through His miracles and His claims. John shares the longest account of the Upper Room Discourse which was Jesus' final night with His disciples.

Forty-two of the 60 separate stories in John's Gospel can only be found in John. Most of the accounts that can be found in another Gospel pertain to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Accounts in John that are found in other Gospels



Accounts that are exclusive to John's Gospel





# HOW TO STUDY: THE GOSPELS

## Gospel Variations

The Gospels are sometimes accused of containing contradictions. This is problematic because if the Bible is God's Word, it cannot contain false information. We need to remember that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or individuals who used eyewitness testimony. It would actually be suspicious if all of the Gospels were identical. Eyewitness testimony typically varies on minor details but agree on the main idea. This is how the Gospels operate, they do not contradict each other but they offer different details and perspectives of the same events.



### Observe

- What does this passage say?
- Observe literary devices (irony, rhetorical questions, etc.)
- How does this story relate to the stories before and after it?
- Is this passage a lesson that Jesus taught or a story about the life of Jesus (or a combination of both)?
- Does this passage contain a parable (if so, see next page)?



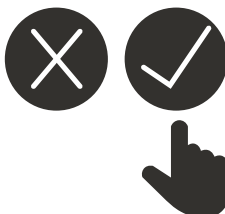
### Interpret

- What does this passage mean?
- How does this passage relate to the accounts found in other Gospels?
- Jesus' Life: What does this passage tell us about Jesus?
- Jesus' Teachings: How did the original audience interpret this teaching?



### Discern

- What spiritual truths are present in this parable?
- Common spiritual truths in the Gospels:
  - *Jesus is the Messiah*
  - *Mankind needs Jesus*
  - *Following Jesus requires sacrifice*
  - *Following Jesus requires obedience*
  - *Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Law*



### Apply

- How can I apply these spiritual truths to my daily life?
- Keep the context of the entire Bible in mind. Some of Jesus' teachings have been misinterpreted by ignoring what the rest of the Bible teaches on the matter.



# HOW TO STUDY: PARABLES

***Parables are stories which use earthly illustrations to convey spiritual truth.***

## Parables are NOT Allegories

**Parable** = Certain elements of the story symbolize something

**Allegory** = Every element of the story symbolizes something

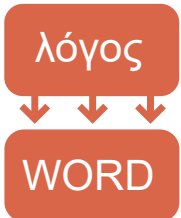
**Parable** = The meaning of the story is found in the response of the audience

**Allegory** = The elements of the story give the story meaning



### Observe

- What does this parable say?
- What imagery is used?
- Read the parable from the original audience's perspective.
- Look for the reference points (what was Jesus referring to in the parables which His audience clearly understood?)



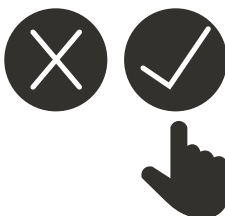
### Interpret

- What does this parable mean?
- How did the original audience interpret this parable?
- What is the main point of this parable?
- Do not over-interpret the passage (do not find a hidden meaning).



### Discern

- What spiritual truths are present in this parable?
- Spritual truths are:
  - *timeless*
  - *transcend culture*
  - *in-line with the rest of the Bible*
  - *clearly present in the text*



### Apply

- How can I apply these spiritual truths to my daily life?
- What might this parable look like if Jesus taught it in today's culture?  
*For example, if the Parable of the Good Samaritan were taught to "religious" Christians today, the Good Samaritan might be replaced by an atheist.*



# HOW TO STUDY: ACTS (NARRATIVE)

## Purpose

“Luke’s purpose for writing Acts was to show the progress of the gospel through the ministry of the risen Christ.”

*Thomas D. Lea<sup>1</sup>*

## Plot

**Jesus ascends to heaven**

*Acts 1:1-11*

**The Holy Spirit indwelt believers**

*Acts 2*

**Stephen is murdered**

*Acts 7*

**Saul (Paul) is converted**

*Acts 9*

**Paul and Barnabas spread the gospel**

*Acts 13*

**The Council at Jerusalem**

*Acts 15*

**Paul and Barnabas Split Up**

*Acts 15:36-41*

**Timothy joins Paul**

*Acts 16:1-5*

**Paul is arrested**

*Acts 21:27-36*

**Paul arrives at Rome**

*Acts 28:11-16*

## People

While Acts follows the early Church, the main “characters” of the book are **Peter** and **Paul**.

**Chapters 1-12**

**Chapters 13-28**

### Peter

Peter was a disciple of Jesus and was a leader in the early Church. He later went on to write the letters we know as 1 and 2 Peter.

### Paul

Paul was a persecutor of the Church but suddenly became a Christian because he saw the risen Jesus.<sup>2</sup> He then became a prominent leader of the Church.

## Place

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all **Judea** and **Samaria**,

and to **the ends of the earth.**”

*Acts 1:8*

**Chapters 1-6**

**Chapters 6-12**

**Chapters 13-28**

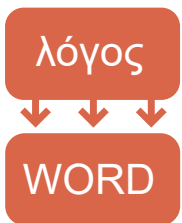


# HOW TO STUDY: ACTS (NARRATIVE)



## Observe

- What does this passage say?
- Pay attention to people (both godly examples and ungodly examples).
- Pay attention to sermons / speeches.
- Observe the historical details that Luke gives.
- Look for common themes and phrases.



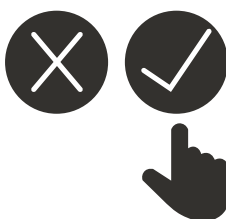
## Interpret

- What does this passage mean?
- Why did Luke include this in his book?
- How did the original audience interpret these events? For example, why did the people in Lystra worship Paul and Barnabas as gods (Acts 14:8-20)?



## Discern

- What spiritual truths are present in this passage?
- Common themes of Acts include:
  - *The Holy Spirit's work in the early Church*
  - *The spreading of the gospel*
  - *The persecution of the Church*
  - *The power of prayer / the early Church's reliance on prayer*
  - *The spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews)*
  - *The unity, fellowship, and love of the early Church*



## Apply

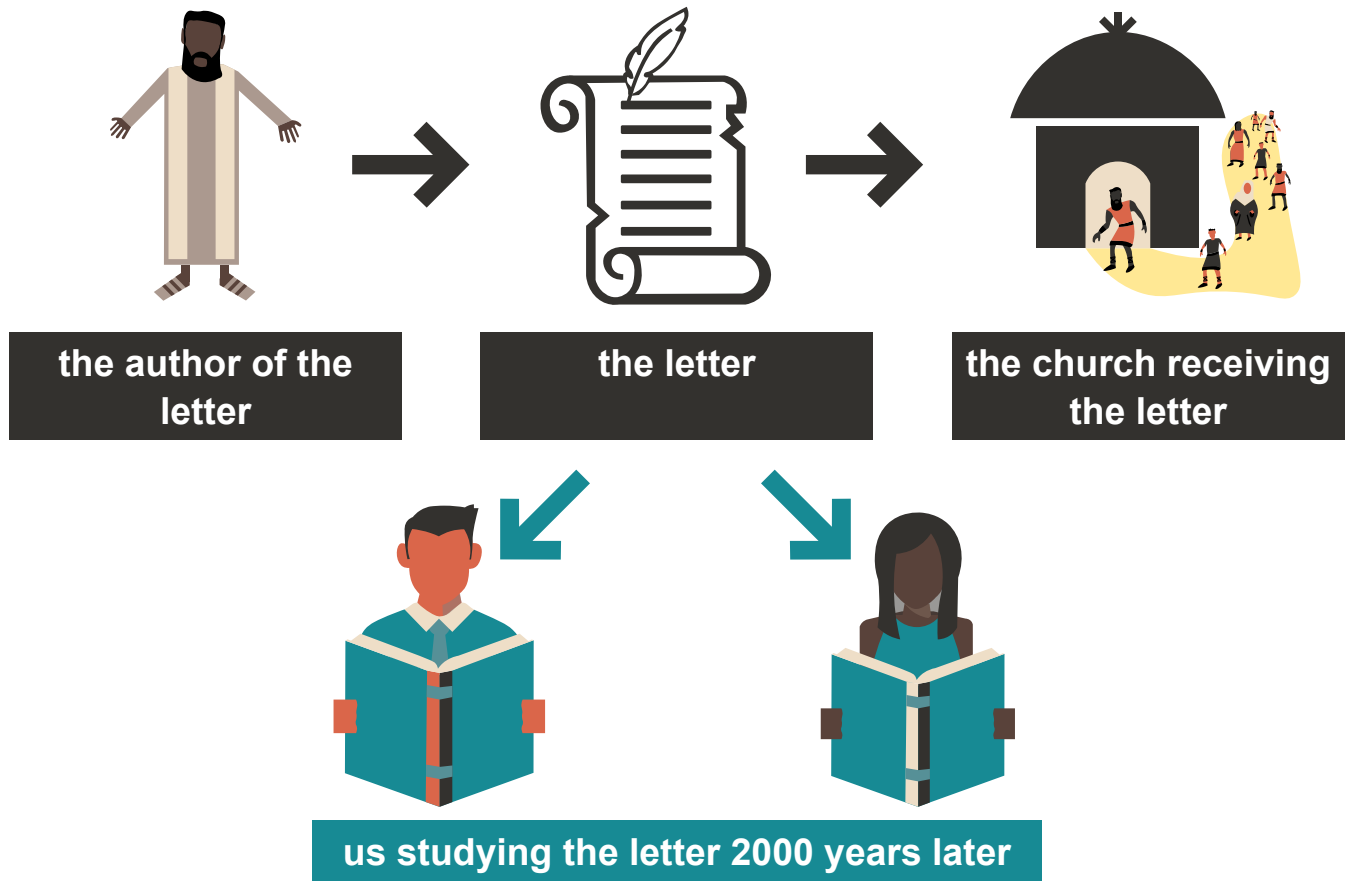
- How can I apply these spiritual truths to my daily life?
- How can I help my local church put these truths into practice?
- How can I help the American Church put these truths into practice?



# HOW TO STUDY: LETTERS

## Audience

We are not the original audience. The author was writing either to churches he had visited or to churches he had heard about from other Christians. We need to study these letters through the lens of the original audience.



## Letter Structure

Introduction



Body



Conclusion

## Purpose

The author was usually addressing specific issues which that particular church was dealing with, therefore the purpose is different depending on the letter.

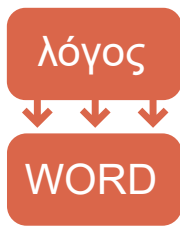


# HOW TO STUDY: LETTERS



## Observe

- What does this letter say?
- Read the letter in 1 sitting (the letter was read to the entire church in 1 sitting just as we would read an entire letter at once).
- Determine the reason the author wrote the letter based on points and comments being made.
- Is the author proud of the church or disappointed in them?



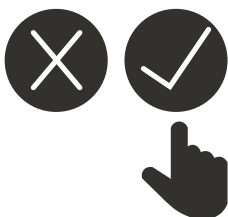
## Interpret

- Break it down by paragraphs. There is a lot of information in nearly every paragraph so study paragraph by paragraph.
- What does this paragraph mean?
- How did the original audience interpret this paragraph?



## Discern

- What spiritual truths are present in this paragraph?
- Do not base your theology on an obscure passage, study while keeping the teachings of the rest of the Bible in mind.
- Be sure to explore what other letters in the New Testament say about the same topics.
- *The New Testament letters typically work with other letters in the New Testament to create a more comprehensive overview of the topic being studied.*



## Apply

- How did the original audience apply this letter to their lives?
- How can I apply these spiritual truths to my daily life?





# HOW TO STUDY: LETTERS

**Romans** - Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church in order to (1) receive financial support for an upcoming missionary trip and (2) build the church up through sound theological teaching. It is this theological teaching which makes up most of the letter, as it is considered to be the most detailed explanation of the gospel in the Bible.

**1 & 2 Corinthians** - Paul wrote the 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church because they were experiencing some disunity in the church and because they requested that he send them a message to settle some issues the church was experiencing. The 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Corinth was written by Paul to express his joy in hearing that the church was doing well and heeding his instructions from the 1<sup>st</sup> letter.

**Galatians** - Paul wrote this letter because the Jews at the church were teaching that Old Testament laws and ceremonies were still in effect and some were questioning Paul's apostleship. Paul also wrote this letter in order to counter the belief that was circulating around the church that we can be saved by our works apart from God's grace.

**Ephesians** - Paul did not write this letter as a result of any particular problem or error that the church was carrying out. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome and it has a solemn tone to it.

**Philippians** - Paul wrote this letter as a thank you to the church for giving him a gift. He then went on to speak out against their disunity and encouraged them to practice humility. He also warned them about false teachers who were either adding to or taking away from the teaching of salvation.

**Colossians** - Paul wrote this letter to rebuke heretical teaching that was going around the church. One such heretical teaching was that Jesus was merely a man and not God. Paul's response to this false teaching provides us with one of the clearest and most vivid descriptions of the supremacy of Jesus (1:15-23).

**1 & 2 Thessalonians** - Paul wrote these letters to (1) encourage the church since it was experiencing persecution, (2) instruct the church on how to use spiritual gifts, (3) explain God's high moral standards (as some were dealing with sexual sins), (4) reverse the church's laziness, and (5) to reveal that Jesus had not yet returned (as some people at the church were saying)

# HOW TO STUDY: LETTERS



**1 & 2 Timothy** - Paul wrote these letters to Timothy who was the leader of the church in Ephesus in order to instruct him on how to properly lead the church and deal with false teachers that were sprouting up in the area.

**Titus** - Paul wrote this letter to Titus who was the leader of the church at Crete in order to instruct him on how to appoint church leaders, create a culture of discipleship in the church, and how to develop faith and godly conduct.

**Philemon** - Paul wrote this letter to Philemon because Paul found his slave (Onesimus) who had run away from him. Paul was sending Onesimus and this letter back to Philemon and asking him to treat Onesimus well and welcome him as a brother.

**Hebrews** - The author of Hebrews is unknown. The author wrote this letter to believers with a strong understanding of the Old Testament and were experiencing persecution. After some encouraging words, the author rebuked them for various shortcomings.

**James** - James, the brother of Jesus, wrote this letter to Jewish Christians. His letter emphasizes the actions that result from faith in Christ Jesus. These good works do not save us, however they are naturally a part of the lifestyle of anyone who is an authentic follower of Jesus.

**1 & 2 Peter** - Peter wrote these letters to Christians in Asia Minor who were under persecution and dealing with false teachers who infiltrated the church.

**1, 2, & 3 John** - John also wrote these letters to Christians in Asia Minor. John writes to develop a stronger relationship with the recipients, to assure his readers of their salvation, and to warn against false teachers.

**Jude** - Jude, a brother of Jesus, wrote this letter to Christians who were being threatened by false teachers. Jude warned them about these false teachers in his short letter which consists of only 25 verses.



# HOW TO STUDY: REVELATION (PROPHECY)

## Author

Jesus' disciple John wrote the book of Revelation when he was exiled to the island of Patmos. He received the vision described in Revelation while on that island.

## Audience

John sent the vision to the 7 churches described in Revelation 2 and 3. These churches were experiencing persecution and some were struggling with various sin which was addressed in those chapters.

## Purpose

The purpose of Revelation depends on how you interpret the book. There are 4 perspectives of how to interpret Revelation.<sup>3</sup>

Perspective	Description	Purpose
<b>Preterist</b>	Events in Revelation already occurred in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed	Encourages believers to stand strong in the face of the persecution they were enduring
<b>Historicist</b>	Revelation is an overview of Church history, events describe various tribulations of Christians	Prepares believers throughout all time of the monumental events of the Church
<b>Idealist</b>	Revelation is symbolic and reveals the overarching fight of good verses evil	Shows how good will triumph over evil
<b>Futurist<sup>4</sup></b>	Revelation 4-22 describes future events which will occur during the "end times" (or end of this age).	Assures believers of Jesus' final defeat of evil and warns unbelievers of coming judgment

The author's interpretation of Revelation is the futurist view because the book itself claims to be prophetic (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19) and it is the only perspective of interpretation which uses the same literal style of interpretation that the rest of the Bible uses. One argument against this view and for the preterist view is that if Revelation is about the end times, then it is only valuable to people who live in that time and it is worthless to the original audience. This argument does not stand up since the book of Revelation assures all believers of Jesus' eventual conquering of Satan and of Jesus' restoration of creation.



# HOW TO STUDY: REVELATION (PROPHECY)



## Observe

- What does this passage say?
- What imagery is used?
- Read the passage from the original audience's perspective (remember that the original audience was experiencing persecution).
- Do not get overwhelmed with every detail, start with studying the passage as a whole.
- Remember that the imagery is not always literal (for example, Satan is not a literal dragon as described in Revelation 12).



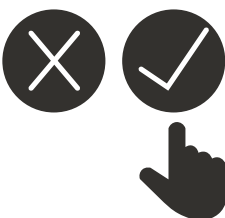
## Interpret

- What does this passage mean?
- How did the original audience interpret this passage?
- What is the main point of this passage?
- Do not over-interpret the passage (do not find a hidden meaning).  
*Typically Revelation is pretty straightforward so try to take it as literally as you can. For example, there is no reason to doubt that the beasts described in the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet will in fact look as they were described.*



## Discern

- What spiritual truths are present in this passage?
- What does this passage tell me about the future?
- What does this passage tell me about God?
- What does this passage tell me about man?



## Apply

- How can I apply these spiritual truths to my daily life?
- What hope do I have based on the truth of this passage?
- How can I share the gospel with unbelievers based on the truth found in this passage?