COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE
11

Understanding *the* Bible

STUDY GUIDE 8 OF 8:

The General Epistles and Revelation

An overview of steadfast faith and Christ unveiled.



Equipping and empowering for effective service
2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

Content

PREFACE
INTRODUCTION: THE FINAL WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
UNDERSTANDING THE GENERAL EPISTLES
HEBREWS: JESUS CHRIST AND THE BETTER COVENANT
JAMES: FAITH THAT IS LIVED
1 PETER: FAITHFULNESS THROUGH SUFFERING
2 PETER: GROWTH, TRUTH AND WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS
1 JOHN: GOD IS LIGHT, LOVE AND LIFE
2 JOHN: WALKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE
3 JOHN: WALKING IN TRUTH AND REJECTING SELF-PROMOTION
JUDE: EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH
INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION: AN UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST
REVELATION: JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH IN THE GOSPEL DAY
THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION
THE SEVEN SERIES: A LAYERED PICTURE OF THE GOSPEL DAY
THE SEVEN SPIRITS: THE COMPLETE WORK OF THE ONE SPIRIT
UNDERSTANDING THE SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF REVELATION
CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE ENDS WITH JESUS CHRIST REVEALED
MODULE CONCLUSION: FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION - JESUS CHRIST AT THE CENTRE

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

Contact and Links

Website: cogma.com.au

Email: admin@cogma.org.au

Radio COGMA: radiocogma.com

YouTube: youtube.com/@COGMAChannel

Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=61585399471540

SEARCH THIS STUDY GUIDE

Windows: Ctrl + F | Mac: Cmd + F | Phone or tablet: use Search in your PDF reader.

PREFACE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous Study Guide followed the book of Acts and the thirteen Epistles associated with the apostle Paul. We saw the Gospel moving outward from Jerusalem into the wider world and believers learning how to live faithfully in Jesus Christ.

We now come to the final books of the New Testament: the General Epistles and the Revelation of Jesus Christ. These books bring us to the conclusion of the New Testament and the final stage of our journey through the Bible.

The General Epistles were written by several different writers and were addressed to believers facing a wide variety of circumstances. Some were suffering persecution, while others needed warning concerning false teachers, encouragement to remain faithful or instruction concerning how genuine faith should be expressed through daily Christian living.

Although these letters differ in style and emphasis, they continually direct believers towards truth, holiness, love, perseverance and faithfulness in Jesus Christ. Together they provide important instruction for believers living through different circumstances and spiritual challenges.

The final book of the Bible then brings us to Revelation. Its opening words establish clearly the true subject of the book.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

Revelation is therefore not primarily a book about frightening world events, political speculation or a future individual antichrist. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and this truth must remain central to the way we approach the book.

Revelation uses signs, symbols and prophetic pictures to reveal Christ, His Church and the spiritual conflict that unfolds throughout the Gospel Day. Understanding its symbolic language requires careful study and a willingness to allow Scripture to explain Scripture.

This final Study Guide therefore brings the Understanding the Bible module to its conclusion. We will first examine the eight General Epistles individually and then turn to Revelation, learning how its structure and symbols should be approached.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells one unfolding story. At the centre of that story stands Jesus Christ, and the final books of the New Testament continue directing our attention towards Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the final New Testament writings keep Jesus Christ at the centre?

Personal Reflection

Which of these writings have you read without looking for their witness to Him?

Action Step

Read one verse from an Epistle or Revelation that reveals Jesus. What understanding of Him will now govern your faith or conduct?

INTRODUCTION: THE FINAL WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BACK TO CONTENTS

The New Testament does not end with the writings of Paul. After the thirteen Epistles associated with Paul come eight further letters commonly known as the General Epistles, followed by the final book of Scripture, the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Together, these writings complete the New Testament record. They strengthen believers in truth, warn against spiritual danger, encourage faithfulness during persecution and continually direct attention towards Jesus Christ.

The General Epistles

The eight General Epistles are:

- Hebrews;
- James;
- 1 Peter;
- 2 Peter;
- 1 John;
- 2 John;
- 3 John;
- Jude.

They are called General Epistles because most were not addressed to one particular congregation in the same way as many of Paul's letters. They were written for believers more broadly and could be shared among different congregations.

They are sometimes called the Catholic Epistles, using the older meaning of the word catholic as universal or widespread. This does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but simply describes their wider audience.

Different Writers and Different Styles

Unlike the Pauline Epistles, the General Epistles came from several writers. Hebrews does not identify its writer, while the remaining letters are associated with James, Peter, John and Jude.

They also use different forms of writing. Hebrews often reads like a sermon, James has many features of wisdom teaching, and 1 Peter has the character of a pastoral letter written to strengthen suffering believers.

Second Peter has the tone of a final message from an ageing apostle. First John reads much like a sermon, while 2 John, 3 John and Jude are brief letters dealing with particular spiritual concerns.

Although their forms differ, their purpose remains practical. They teach believers how to remain faithful to Jesus Christ while facing persecution, false teaching, temptation and spiritual decline.

Truth Must Be Lived

The General Epistles repeatedly connect what believers believe with how believers live. James emphasises that genuine faith produces action, Peter encourages steadfastness through suffering, John joins truth with love, and Jude calls believers to contend for the faith.

These writings therefore complement Paul's Epistles rather than presenting a different Gospel. Together, the New Testament letters provide instruction concerning doctrine, character, relationships, perseverance and faithful Christian living.

The New Testament Ends With Revelation

After these letters comes Revelation, the final book of the Bible. Revelation differs greatly in style because it communicates through visions, signs and symbols.

Yet its subject is established from its opening words: it is *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."* The New Testament therefore closes by directing our attention once again to the same Person revealed throughout Scripture.

The Gospels reveal Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry, Acts shows His Gospel going forth, and the Epistles teach believers how to live in Him. Revelation then unveils Jesus Christ and His Church throughout the Gospel Day.

The final writings of the New Testament therefore bring the biblical story towards its conclusion. Through them all, Jesus Christ remains at the centre.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the General Epistles and Revelation call believers to live the truth?

Personal Reflection

Which call to faithfulness most challenges you now?

Action Step

Choose an instruction from these final writings. What personal attitude does it expose, and how will Christ's life within direct your response?

UNDERSTANDING THE GENERAL EPISTLES

BACK TO CONTENTS

After the thirteen Epistles associated with Paul, the New Testament contains eight writings commonly known as the General Epistles. They are Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Jude.

These writings differ from Paul's Epistles in several important ways. Paul's letters are usually named after the congregation or individual to whom he wrote, while most of the General Epistles are named after their writers. Hebrews is the exception because its writer is not identified within the book.

Why Are They Called General Epistles?

The word general reflects the broader audience of many of these writings. Rather than being directed only to one local congregation, several were intended for believers spread across a wider area.

They have also been called the Catholic Epistles. In this older use, the word catholic means universal or widespread. It does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but simply describes the broader circulation of these writings.

The General Epistles were especially connected with Jewish believers, although their teaching reaches far beyond one natural people. They address matters affecting believers generally, including persecution, false teaching, spiritual growth, Christian conduct, love, truth and perseverance.

Different Writers, One Gospel

Unlike the Pauline Epistles, the General Epistles came from several writers. James, Peter, John and Jude are named in these writings, while Hebrews remains anonymous.

Several of these writers had close connections with the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Peter and John were among the twelve disciples, while James and Jude were related to Jesus according to the flesh and later became believers.

Although the writers differed in background and style, they did not present different Gospels. Their writings strengthen the same faith and continually call believers to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

Different Forms of Writing

The General Epistles do not all follow the same literary form. Each book has its own purpose, emphasis and style.

Hebrews often reads like a sermon and concludes with features normally associated with a letter. Its great emphasis is upon the superiority of Jesus Christ and the better covenant established through Him.

James begins like a letter but soon develops a style similar to wisdom literature. Its teaching is direct and practical, showing that genuine faith must become visible in the way a believer lives.

1 Peter has the character of a pastoral letter written to encourage believers experiencing persecution. Peter urges them to remain faithful despite suffering and opposition.

2 Peter has the character of a farewell message and warns strongly against false teachers. Peter also encourages believers to continue growing spiritually.

1 John reads more like a sermon than a normal letter. John repeatedly develops the great themes that God is light, God is love and God is life.

2 John, 3 John and Jude are much shorter letters, but each deals with important spiritual concerns. Their messages address truth, love, false teaching, faithful conduct and the need to stand firmly for the faith.

These differences remind us that the New Testament contains more than one form of writing. Each book should therefore be understood according to its own purpose and style.

Why These Letters Matter

The General Epistles provide important instruction concerning life in Jesus Christ. They show believers how to respond to suffering, recognise false teaching, grow in godly character, walk in love, remain faithful to truth and contend for the faith when error arises.

They therefore stand alongside Paul's Epistles as an important part of New Testament instruction. Just as the four Gospel writers present Jesus Christ from different perspectives, the writers of the General Epistles contribute to a fuller understanding of Christian faith and life.

Their messages are practical as well as doctrinal. Truth is not presented simply as something to understand intellectually, but as something that should shape conduct, relationships, perseverance and spiritual character.

As we examine these eight writings individually, one central question should remain before us: What does each writer teach believers about remaining faithful to Jesus Christ? Keeping this question before us will help us recognise the particular emphasis of each book.

The circumstances and emphasis may differ, but the foundation remains the same. Believers are called to know the truth, live the truth and remain steadfast in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can different writers and forms of letters still proclaim one Gospel?

Personal Reflection

Have you overlooked a General Epistle because its style differs from Paul's letters?

Action Step

Read one General Epistle you have neglected. What truth must move from your understanding into your daily conduct?

HEBREWS: JESUS CHRIST AND THE BETTER COVENANT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 67-69

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 67-69

Place in the Biblical Story: Hebrews directs Jewish believers away from returning to Judaism and establishes their confidence in the superiority of Jesus Christ and the better covenant found in Him.

Hebrews is the first of the General Epistles and contains thirteen chapters. Unlike most New Testament letters, the writer does not identify himself.

Many suggestions have been made concerning its authorship, including Paul, Luke, Barnabas and Apollos. Because the book itself does not tell us who wrote it, the writer is best left unidentified.

The letter was addressed especially to Jewish believers who understood the Law, priesthood, sacrifices and worship connected with the former covenant. They were facing severe pressure and needed encouragement not to turn back from Jesus Christ to Judaism.

The Great Word Is "Better"

One of the most important words for understanding Hebrews is *"better."* The writer repeatedly compares what belonged to the former covenant with the greater reality now found in Jesus Christ.

The message is not that the former things had no purpose. They had served their appointed place, but something greater had now come.

Jesus Christ is better because He is the fulfilment towards which those earlier things pointed. The believer is therefore directed towards the greater reality found in Him.

Jesus Christ Is Greater Than the Angels

Hebrews begins by directing attention immediately to the greatness of Jesus Christ. The writer establishes His superiority from the opening chapter.

Hebrews 1:4 states:

> *"Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."*

The believers were not to look towards angels or any other spiritual messenger as though someone greater than Christ still needed to be found. The Epistle begins by establishing the superiority of Jesus Christ.

He possesses *"a more excellent name,"* and the believer's confidence must remain in Him. Nothing greater needs to be found beyond Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Is Greater Than Moses

For Jewish believers, Moses held an important place in their understanding of God's dealings with Israel. Hebrews does not dishonour Moses, but it clearly places Jesus Christ above him.

Hebrews 3:3 states:

> *"For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house."*

Moses faithfully served, but Jesus Christ possesses greater glory. The servant must not be placed above the One who is greater.

This was especially important for believers who might have been tempted to return to confidence in the Law of Moses. Hebrews directs them beyond the servant to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does Hebrews describe what believers have in Jesus as better?

Personal Reflection

What older form or practice have you treated as if it could replace Christ?

Action Step

Read Hebrews comparing shadow and reality. What outward form or practice have you trusted in place of Christ's completed work?

Jesus Christ Is the Greater High Priest

Hebrews also gives considerable attention to the priesthood. Under the former covenant, priests served continually, and the high priest held a particular responsibility before God.

Chapters 4 through 7 especially develop the truth that believers now have a greater High Priest. Their confidence does not rest in an earthly priesthood because Jesus Christ Himself fulfils what that priesthood could only represent.

The believer therefore does not need to return to the former system in order to draw near to God. Jesus Christ is our High Priest, and the believer now possesses the greater reality that the former priesthood represented.

A Better Covenant

This movement reaches one of its clearest statements in **Hebrews 8:6**. The writer brings together the greater ministry of Jesus Christ and the better covenant established through Him.

"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."

Notice the language *"a more excellent ministry"* and *"a better covenant."* The New Covenant is not simply an adjustment to the Old Covenant because Jesus Christ is the mediator of something better.

This truth was crucial for Jewish believers who were considering returning to Judaism. To return to the former covenant for spiritual confidence would mean turning away from the greater reality already found in Jesus Christ.

The direction of Hebrews is therefore always towards Christ, not back towards the shadows. The former things pointed forward, but the greater reality had now come.

Faith Looks Towards What God Has Promised

Hebrews also contains one of the best-known chapters concerning faith. Chapter 11 records men and women who trusted God even when they had not yet seen everything He had promised.

This chapter is often called the *"Hall of Faith."* Their examples reminded suffering believers that faithfulness sometimes requires continuing when circumstances are difficult.

Hebrews 11:16 states:

> *"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."*

Again the word *"better"* appears. Their confidence reached beyond what could be seen naturally and rested in what God had prepared.

Encouragement During Persecution

Hebrews was written during a period when believers were facing serious opposition and persecution. Some could therefore have been tempted to withdraw from the faith and return to the religious security they had previously known.

The writer continually encourages them not to turn back. Their answer was not found in returning to the former covenant, but in recognising more clearly what they already possessed in Jesus Christ.

They had:

- A greater Person;
- A greater High Priest;
- A more excellent ministry;
- A better covenant;
- Better promises;
- A better country.

Everything in the Epistle directs their confidence towards Christ. The answer to pressure was not to retreat towards the former system, but to remain faithful to the greater reality they had received.

Do Not Return From Reality to Shadow

Hebrews is especially important for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Covenants. The former system had served its God-given purpose, and its priesthood, sacrifices and covenant forms pointed beyond themselves towards the greater reality that would come through Jesus Christ.

Now that Christ had come, believers were not being called backwards. They were being called to remain faithful to the better covenant established through Him.

The central message of Hebrews can therefore be expressed simply: Do not leave the greater reality found in Jesus Christ in order to return to what pointed towards Him. The former things had served their purpose, but the believer now possesses the greater reality in Christ.

Jesus Christ is greater, His priesthood is greater, and His covenant is better. The believer's confidence must therefore remain completely in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the better covenant in Christ give hope for continuing in faith?

Personal Reflection

What promise helps you endure when obedience is difficult?

Action Step

Read a warning and a promise in Hebrews. What fear or temptation to turn back must give way to your confidence in Jesus?

JAMES: FAITH THAT IS LIVED

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 67-69

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 67-69

Place in the Biblical Story: James gives practical instruction showing that the truth believers receive must become visible in their conduct, speech, relationships and daily life.

James is the second of the General Epistles and contains five chapters. The writer is traditionally understood to be James, the earthly brother of Jesus, who later became an important leader among the believers in Jerusalem.

Paul referred to him in **Galatians 1:19**:

> *"But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."*

James had not been a follower of Jesus during the earlier part of His earthly ministry, but later became a believer. His Epistle shows the practical wisdom of a man deeply concerned that Christian faith should affect everyday life.

The Proverbs of the New Testament

James is sometimes called the *"Proverbs of the New Testament"* because its style resembles the practical wisdom found in Proverbs. The book moves quickly through subjects such as trials, temptation, wisdom, speech, partiality, relationships, prayer and Christian conduct.

James does not allow truth to remain simply something a believer hears or understands. Truth must become visible in the way a person lives.

Be Doers of the Word

One of the clearest statements in the Epistle appears in **James 1:22**. James makes clear that hearing the Word is not enough if the truth is never put into practice.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

It is possible to hear truth, agree with truth and even speak about truth without allowing it to govern our lives. James therefore places responsibility upon the hearer.

The purpose of receiving God's Word is not simply to increase knowledge. The truth must become part of our decisions, attitudes, relationships and conduct.

This is a major theme throughout James: Faith must be lived. What we say we believe should become visible in the life we live.

Be Swift to Hear and Slow to Speak

James gives particular attention to the way believers use their words. He teaches the importance of listening carefully and controlling both speech and anger.

James wrote in **James 1:19-20**:

> *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."*

James tells believers to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath. This is practical instruction for everyday relationships.

Anger can cause people to speak quickly and carelessly. James reminds believers that uncontrolled anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

The Power of the Tongue

Chapter 3 develops this subject further. James compares the tongue to small things that can produce enormous effects.

A small helm can turn a large ship, and a small fire can spread quickly. In the same way, words may appear small, but their influence can be powerful.

The believer must therefore take speech seriously. Gossip, angry words, boasting and destructive speech are inconsistent with the spiritual life received through Jesus Christ.

Christian conduct includes not only what we do, but also what we say. The believer's words should agree with the spiritual life within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does James say hearing God's Word must lead to doing it?

Personal Reflection

What truth have you heard but delayed obeying?

Action Step

Identify a truth in James that you have heard but neglected. What action will show a genuine response through Christ's life within?

Wisdom From Above

James also distinguishes between worldly attitudes and the wisdom that comes from God. True wisdom can be recognised by the character it produces.

James wrote in **James 3:17**:

> *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."*

True wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Godly wisdom therefore becomes visible in character and conduct.

A person may possess considerable knowledge and still lack spiritual wisdom. James directs believers towards wisdom that produces purity, peace, mercy and good fruit.

Faith Must Produce Action

James continually brings belief and conduct together. Genuine faith cannot remain simply an outward profession because the faith within should produce visible fruit.

This does not mean that salvation is earned by human works. Rather, James teaches that genuine faith produces action in the life of the believer.

If a person claims to believe God's Word, that faith should influence the way they speak, treat others, respond to difficulty and make decisions. Faith that never affects conduct has not become practical in the believer's life.

James therefore does not separate faith from Christian living. The spiritual life received through Jesus Christ should become visible in what the believer does.

Prayer in Every Circumstance

James also teaches believers to turn towards God through the different circumstances of life. Both trouble and joy should direct the believer towards Him.

James wrote in **James 5:13**:

> *"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms."*

When afflicted, the believer should pray, while in times of joy the believer should sing psalms. The relationship with God is therefore not limited to one kind of circumstance.

Trouble should turn us towards Him in prayer, while joy should turn us towards Him in praise. Every circumstance can therefore become an opportunity to look towards God.

Truth Must Become Life

James is a deeply practical Epistle because it teaches that Christian faith cannot remain simply in words, knowledge or profession. Truth must become visible in the believer's life.

The movement of James can therefore be remembered simply as Hear the Word → receive the Word → live the Word. The believer who follows Jesus Christ should demonstrate that spiritual life through wise speech, godly conduct, mercy, prayer and practical obedience.

James therefore leaves us with an important question: Is the truth I believe becoming visible in the way I live? This question brings the message of the Epistle directly into our own conduct.

The Epistle reminds us that genuine Christian faith is not simply something we profess. It is faith that is lived.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do speech, wisdom, action, and prayer show faith at work?

Personal Reflection

Which part of your conduct most needs the correction James gives?

Action Step

Read James about speech or wisdom. What change will you make in your next conversation or difficult decision?

1 PETER: FAITHFULNESS THROUGH SUFFERING

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 64
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 64
Place in the Biblical Story: Peter writes to encourage persecuted believers to remain faithful to Jesus Christ despite suffering and opposition.

1 Peter is the third of the General Epistles and contains five chapters. It was written during a period when believers were facing increasing hostility and persecution under the Roman Empire.

Peter's purpose was therefore strongly pastoral. He wanted believers who were experiencing difficulty to understand that suffering did not mean that God had abandoned them.

Encouragement During Persecution

The Epistle was written during the reign of Emperor Nero, a period remembered for severe hostility towards Christians. Believers could face rejection, persecution and suffering because they followed Jesus Christ.

Peter therefore prepared them not to be surprised when trials came. He wanted them to understand that difficult circumstances did not change their relationship with Christ.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:12-13**:

> *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."*

Peter did not pretend that suffering was pleasant. Instead, he taught believers not to interpret persecution as something strange or unexpected.

Their circumstances could become difficult, but they were still called to remain faithful to Christ. Opposition around them did not need to produce spiritual defeat within them.

Faith Tested Through Difficulty

Earlier in the letter, Peter explained that trials could test the genuineness of faith. The believers could experience real sorrow while still continuing faithfully in Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:6-7**:

> *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"*

Peter recognised both sides of their experience. They could be *"in heaviness"* because of their trials, yet their faith could remain steadfast.

Suffering did not have to destroy their confidence in Jesus Christ. Faith could remain strong even while circumstances were painful.

Written From "Babylon"

Towards the conclusion of the Epistle, Peter refers to *"Babylon."* This expression has often been understood as a symbolic reference to Rome, where Peter is believed to have written the letter.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 5:13**:

> *"The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son."*

Rome was a major centre of pagan power and idolatry, making the symbolic description especially meaningful. Whatever difficulties surrounded the believers, Peter's message remained one of encouragement and perseverance.

Jew and Gentile Must Remain Faithful

Peter's encouragement was not restricted to believers from one natural background. Jewish and Gentile believers alike had been brought into Jesus Christ and now needed to remain faithful despite the opposition surrounding them.

Persecution could not change their spiritual relationship with Christ. Their calling was not to retreat when circumstances became difficult, but to continue living faithfully according to the Gospel they had received.

The same spiritual life was found in Jesus Christ regardless of natural background. Those who belonged to Him shared the same need for courage, holiness and perseverance.

Stay the Course With Jesus Christ

The message of 1 Peter can therefore be remembered through several simple truths. Together they show how believers should respond when following Jesus Christ brings suffering or opposition:

- Trials should not surprise believers;
- Suffering does not mean that God has abandoned His people;
- Faith can remain strong during persecution;
- Jew and Gentile believers share the same calling in Christ;
- Difficult circumstances must not turn believers away from Jesus Christ.

1 Peter is therefore a letter of comfort, courage and perseverance. Peter does not promise believers freedom from every difficult circumstance, but he continually encourages them to remain faithful through those circumstances.

His message to suffering believers is clear: Whatever happens around you, stay the course with Jesus Christ. Faith can remain steadfast even when the circumstances surrounding the believer are difficult.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Peter encourage believers facing suffering to remain faithful?

Personal Reflection

What difficulty tests your trust in Christ now?

Action Step

Read an instruction in 1 Peter about suffering. What fearful response will you replace with faithful trust in Christ?

2 PETER: GROWTH, TRUTH AND WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 67
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 67
Place in the Biblical Story: Peter warns believers against false teachers arising from within while encouraging them to continue growing in spiritual character and remaining faithful to Jesus Christ.

2 Peter is the fourth of the General Epistles and contains only three chapters. It was written towards the end of Peter's life and has the character of a final message to believers whom he wanted to see established firmly in truth.

Peter's two Epistles address different kinds of danger. 1 Peter concentrates especially upon persecution and opposition coming from outside the Church, while 2 Peter turns towards dangers developing from within.

The Danger of False Teachers

Peter warned plainly that false teachers would arise among believers. The danger would come from people who appeared among them but introduced teaching that could lead others away from the truth.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 2:1**:

> *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."*

Notice the expression *"false teachers among you."* The danger was not only persecution from an openly hostile world because false teaching could also arise among people claiming to belong to the Christian community.

This required believers to know the truth and remain spiritually discerning. They could not accept every teaching simply because it was presented in religious language.

External and Internal Opposition

The difference between Peter's two letters can be remembered simply. 1 Peter addresses pressure coming largely from outside, while 2 Peter warns about corruption and false teaching arising inside.

Both dangers could weaken believers if they were not spiritually established. External persecution might tempt someone to abandon the faith because following Christ had become costly, while false teaching could draw someone away more subtly by changing what they believed.

Peter therefore wanted believers to remain steadfast against both dangers. They needed courage when facing opposition and discernment when confronting error.

Growth in Christian Character

Second Peter does more than warn against error because Peter also emphasises the continuing development of Christian character. Believers were not simply to avoid false teachers, but were to continue growing spiritually so that the truth of Jesus Christ became increasingly evident in their lives.

Growth and discernment therefore belong together. A believer who continues learning the truth and developing godly character is better prepared to recognise teaching that does not agree with the Gospel.

Peter's concern was both protective and positive. He warned against what could corrupt believers while encouraging them to become stronger and more established in the faith.

Peter's Final Message

The writing style of 2 Peter differs noticeably from 1 Peter. One possible explanation is that Peter may have used assistance in writing the first letter, while the second may more closely reflect his own manner of expression.

Tradition holds that Peter eventually suffered martyrdom. Whatever the precise circumstances surrounding the end of his life, 2 Peter has the character of a man who understood that his earthly ministry was drawing towards its close and wanted believers to continue faithfully after him.

His message can be remembered through several important principles:

- Grow spiritually;
- Know the truth;
- Recognise false teaching;
- Do not allow deception to enter unnoticed;
- Remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

First Peter teaches believers how to endure pressure from outside, while Second Peter teaches them to recognise danger from within. Both letters show the need for believers to remain spiritually established when different forms of opposition arise.

Together they call the Church to steadfastness, spiritual growth and continued faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Believers must know the truth, live the truth and refuse to allow either persecution or false teaching to turn them away from Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do growth in character and warnings against false teachers belong together?

Personal Reflection

What attractive teaching have you accepted without testing it?

Action Step

Read 2 Peter's warning concerning false teaching. What attractive claim must you test before allowing it to shape your beliefs?

1 JOHN: GOD IS LIGHT, LOVE AND LIFE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 90-95

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 90-95

Place in the Biblical Story: John strengthens believers against false teaching and shows that genuine spiritual life is revealed through walking in light, love and the life found in Jesus Christ.

1 John is the fifth of the General Epistles and contains five chapters. It is traditionally associated with the apostle John and has many similarities to the Gospel that bears his name.

John writes with both affection and firmness. He repeatedly addresses believers as *"little children,"* showing his concern for their spiritual welfare, while also warning them against false teaching.

Three great themes help us understand the Epistle. They are God is Light, God is Love and God is Life.

God Is Light

John introduces the first great theme by declaring that God is light. This truth becomes the foundation for his teaching concerning the way believers should live.

John wrote in **1 John 1:5**:

> *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

Light and darkness cannot be treated as though they are the same. John therefore connects fellowship with God to the way believers live.

He continued in **1 John 1:7**:

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

John does not present Christianity as an outward profession separated from conduct. Those who have received the truth are called to walk in the light, and that truth must affect the way they live.

God Is Love

A second major theme is love. John repeatedly teaches that love should characterise those who belong to God.

Christian love is not simply an emotion because it becomes visible in the way believers treat one another. John shows that our love begins with the love God has already shown towards us.

John wrote in **1 John 4:19**:

> *"We love him, because he first loved us."*

Believers respond to the love first shown to them, and that love should then become visible in their relationships with others. John therefore connects spiritual life with practical love.

A person cannot claim fellowship with God while continually refusing to love fellow believers. Truth and love belong together, and both should be evident in the believer's life.

God Is Life

The third great emphasis is life. John places this spiritual life entirely in Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Notice where John places spiritual life: *"this life is in his Son."* The believer does not receive spiritual life apart from Jesus Christ.

John's statement is direct: *"He that hath the Son hath life."* Christian life is therefore more than membership in a religious organisation or knowledge of doctrine because spiritual life is found in Jesus Christ.

Warning Against False Teaching

John also wrote to warn believers against false teaching. Teachings associated with Gnosticism were influencing people and distorting the truth concerning Jesus Christ.

John therefore repeatedly brings believers back to what they had received concerning Him. What we believe about Jesus Christ matters because false teaching concerning His identity affects the foundation of Christian faith.

John combines strong warning with pastoral affection. His repeated expression *"little children"* shows that correction and love were not opposites, and he warned because he cared.

Walking in Truth

First John continually joins spiritual truth with practical life. If God is light, believers should walk in the light, and if God is love, believers should walk in love.

If life is in the Son, believers must remain centred upon Jesus Christ. These truths cannot be separated from Christian conduct.

John wanted believers to recognise the difference between profession and reality. Genuine spiritual life should become visible through truth, obedience, love and fellowship.

The message of 1 John can therefore be remembered through three great statements:

- God is light: walk in the light;
- God is love: walk in love;
- God is life: life is found in Jesus Christ.

Light governs how we walk, while love governs how we treat one another. Life comes through Jesus Christ, and therefore every part of genuine spiritual life returns to Him.

First John calls believers beyond outward religion into genuine spiritual life. Its great assurance is *"He that hath the Son hath life,"* because the spiritual life of the believer is found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do light, love, and life in 1 John belong together?

Personal Reflection

Which of these truths exposes a gap between what you say and how you live?

Action Step

Consider the light and love described in 1 John. Where should Christ's life within change the way you treat someone?

2 JOHN: WALKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 90-95
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 90-95
Place in the Biblical Story: John encourages believers to walk in truth and love while remaining alert to deception concerning Jesus Christ.

2 John is the sixth of the General Epistles and contains only one chapter. Because of its brevity, it is sometimes described as a *"Postcard Epistle."*

The letter is addressed to *"the elect lady and her children."* Whether this refers to an individual woman and her family or symbolically to a congregation has been debated, but John's message is clear.

Walking in Truth

John rejoiced because some of her children were *"walking in truth."* For John, truth was not simply something believers understood, but something they were expected to live.

He also joins truth with love. Christian love does not require believers to ignore error, and commitment to truth does not remove the responsibility to love one another.

Truth and love belong together, and both should be visible in the believer's life. Walking in truth must never become separated from walking in love.

Beware of Deceivers

John warned believers that deception concerning Jesus Christ was already operating in his own time. They therefore needed to remain alert to teaching that did not agree with the truth they had received.

John wrote in **2 John 1**:7:

> *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."*

John shows that deception concerning Jesus Christ was already present and active. His warning therefore called believers to spiritual discernment.

Love did not mean accepting every teacher or teaching without examination. Believers needed to recognise deception while continuing to walk in truth and love.

Remain Faithful to Christ

Second John is brief, but its message is important. It brings together truth, love, discernment and continued faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Believers are called to:

- Walk in truth;
- Love one another;
- Recognise deception;
- Remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

The Epistle reminds us that genuine Christian love and genuine Christian truth must remain together. We are called to walk in truth, walk in love and remain centred upon Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must truth and love remain together in 2 John?

Personal Reflection

Have you used love as a reason to overlook error, or truth as a reason to neglect love?

Action Step

Read 2 John on truth and love. What will you change so that neither is neglected in a real relationship?

3 JOHN: WALKING IN TRUTH AND REJECTING SELF-PROMOTION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 90-95

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 90-95

Place in the Biblical Story: John contrasts faithful Christian conduct with selfish ambition through the examples of Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius.

3 John is the seventh of the General Epistles and contains only one chapter. Like 2 John, it is a short personal letter, but it provides valuable instruction through the lives of three different men.

Gaius Walked in Truth

John warmly commended Gaius for his faithfulness. His conduct demonstrated that the truth he believed was also shaping the way he lived.

John wrote in **3 John 1**:4:

> *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."*

Gaius not only believed the truth but demonstrated it through his conduct and hospitality towards fellow believers. Once again, John emphasises that truth must be walked in and become visible in everyday life.

Diotrephes Loved the Preeminence

John then speaks very differently about Diotrephes. His conduct revealed a desire for personal prominence rather than humble service among believers.

John wrote in **3 John 1**:9:

> *"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not."*

The problem was not simply disagreement because Diotrephes *"loveth to have the preeminence."* His desire for prominence affected the way he treated other believers and even caused him to reject faithful brethren.

Christian service should never be driven by the desire to be important or control others. Jesus Christ must have the preeminence, and those who serve Him should not seek that place for themselves.

A Good Example

John also commended Demetrius, who had a good testimony. His example provides another contrast with the conduct of Diotrephes.

The three men can therefore be remembered simply:

- Gaius: Walking faithfully in truth;
- Diotrephes: Seeking preeminence;
- Demetrius: Possessing a good testimony.

Third John reminds believers that character matters. What a person believes should become visible in the way that person treats others and serves among God's people.

We are called to walk in truth, receive faithful brethren and reject the desire for personal prominence. Jesus Christ, rather than ourselves, must remain central.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What contrast does 3 John draw between Gaius and Diotrephes?

Personal Reflection

Where might the desire to be first affect your service to others?

Action Step

Read 3 John on Gaius and Diotrephes. What desire for attention must you surrender as you support someone quietly?

JUDE: EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 75

Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 75

Place in the Biblical Story: Jude warns believers about false teachers already among them and calls them to remain faithful to the truth they had received.

Jude is the eighth and final of the General Epistles and contains only one chapter. The writer is traditionally understood to be Jude, the earthly brother of Jesus, and should not be confused with Judas Iscariot.

Jude originally intended to write concerning *"the common salvation,"* but circumstances required him to address a more urgent danger. False teaching had entered among believers, and the faith they had received needed to be defended.

Contend for the Faith

Jude explains clearly why he changed the subject of his letter. The presence of false teaching made it necessary for him to call believers to remain firmly established in the faith.

Jude wrote in **Jude 1**:3:

> *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."*

The believers already possessed the truth that had been delivered to them. Jude's concern was that they should hold firmly to it when false teaching arose.

To *"earnestly contend for the faith"* does not mean being argumentative. It means refusing to surrender or compromise the truth of Jesus Christ.

False Teachers Had Entered

Peter had warned that false teachers would arise, but by the time Jude wrote, the danger was already present. False teachers had entered among believers and were attempting to corrupt the faith.

Jude therefore called believers to spiritual discernment and steadfastness. They needed to recognise error while remaining firmly established in the truth they had already received.

God Is Able to Keep Us

Jude concludes with a powerful declaration of confidence in God. After warning strongly against deception, he directs the believer's attention towards the One who is able to keep His people.

Jude wrote in **Jude 1**:24-25:

> *"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."*

Jude warns strongly against deception, but he does not end with fear. The believer's confidence remains in God our Saviour, who is able to keep His people.

Jude's message can therefore be remembered simply: Know the faith, hold firmly to the faith, recognise false teaching and remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Believers are called to contend for the truth while keeping their confidence in the God who is able to keep them.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Jude call believers to defend the faith while trusting God to keep them?

Personal Reflection

What claim needs careful testing before you accept it?

Action Step

Examine a claim you have recently heard alongside Jude and other Bible verses. What belief or attitude should change as a result?

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION: AN UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. A.D. 94-96
Approximate Date of Writing: c. A.D. 94-96
Place in the Biblical Story: Revelation concludes the New Testament by unveiling Jesus Christ and showing His Church through the Gospel Day.

Revelation is the final book of the New Testament and contains twenty-two chapters. It was written by John while he was exiled on the Isle of Patmos during a period of persecution.

Many people approach Revelation expecting primarily to find predictions about world leaders, political events or a future antichrist. However, the opening verse tells us plainly what the book is about.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

The central subject is Jesus Christ, and this must remain before us as we study the book. Revelation should therefore be understood first according to the subject identified in its own opening words.

Revelation Means an Unveiling

The book is sometimes called The Apocalypse. Today the word apocalypse is often associated with catastrophe or the destruction of the world, but its biblical meaning is much simpler.

It means an uncovering or unveiling. Revelation therefore should not be approached as though God intended to hide truth from His people.

Its purpose is to reveal. It unveils Jesus Christ and provides a prophetic picture of His people, the Church, throughout the Gospel Day.

John Was Told to Write What He Saw

John received the Revelation in vision and was instructed to record what he saw. The book therefore presents what was shown to him rather than a message he created himself.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:19**:

> *"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;"*

The book contains things connected with John's own time as well as events that would unfold afterwards. John was responsible to record faithfully the vision that had been given to him.

A Book That Uses Signs

Revelation 1:1 also tells us that the message was *"signified."* This points towards one of the most important principles for understanding the book.

Revelation communicates extensively through signs, symbols and prophetic pictures. We should therefore not assume that every object, creature or event described in the vision is intended to be understood literally.

Scripture itself must help us understand the meaning of these symbols. As we study Revelation, we will therefore compare its prophetic pictures with other verses of Scripture that help explain the language being used.

Do Not Be Afraid to Study Revelation

Revelation can appear difficult when first read, but believers should not avoid it. The book itself gives encouragement to those who read, hear and keep its message.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:3**:

> *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."*

Revelation begins with a blessing upon those who read, hear and keep its message. This shows that the book was given to be understood and received rather than simply feared or avoided.

We therefore approach Revelation carefully and prayerfully, allowing Scripture to help explain its signs and symbols. Above all, we keep Jesus Christ at the centre, remembering that the purpose of the book is not confusion but revelation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should Revelation be read as an unveiling of Jesus Christ through signs?

Personal Reflection

Has fear or speculation drawn your attention away from the Jesus Christ whom Revelation reveals?

Action Step

Read Revelation's opening as a revelation of Jesus Christ. What fear or speculative assumption should you now set aside?

REVELATION: JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH IN THE GOSPEL DAY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Revelation is different from every other New Testament book because it is devoted almost entirely to prophecy. Through visions, signs and symbols, it gives a prophetic picture of Jesus Christ and His people throughout the Gospel Day.

The key to the book is found in its opening words. Before attempting to understand beasts, churches, seals, trumpets or any other prophetic picture, we must first establish the subject of the Revelation.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

The foundation is clear: Revelation is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Everything that follows must therefore be understood with Jesus Christ at the centre.

Why Was Revelation Given?

The word revelation means an uncovering or unveiling. Something that was hidden is being made known.

Revelation therefore was not given simply to create mystery. It was given so that the servants of Jesus Christ could understand spiritual realities concerning Christ, His Church and what His people would experience throughout the Gospel Day.

John was instructed in **Revelation 1:19**:

> *"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;"*

This gives Revelation a broad prophetic scope. Some things belonged to John's immediate circumstances, while other things would unfold after his time.

The book therefore reaches beyond the congregations of John's own generation. It gives a prophetic picture of God's people throughout the Gospel Day.

John Received the Vision on Patmos

John received the Revelation while exiled on the Isle of Patmos during a period of severe persecution. Although isolated geographically, he was given a remarkable vision concerning Jesus Christ and His Church.

John was told in **Revelation 1:11**:

> *"Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."*

John therefore acted as the one who recorded what he was shown. He was instructed to write what he saw and send it to the seven churches in Asia.

Those churches were real congregations, but their significance reaches beyond their immediate historical setting. Together they form part of the prophetic picture of the complete Church throughout the Gospel Day.

Revelation Was Given to Christ's Servants

Revelation 1:1 says that the message was given *"to shew unto his servants."* The book therefore belongs especially to those who belong to Jesus Christ.

It is not simply a collection of mysterious predictions for curious minds. Its purpose is spiritual and concerns the people of God.

Revelation shows Christ's servants what the Church would face, how spiritual conflict would develop and how Jesus Christ would remain with His people throughout the Gospel Day. This is why the book must be read with Christ and His Church at the centre.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was Revelation given to Christ's servants in the Gospel Day?

Personal Reflection

What does its message show you about Christ's care for His Church now?

Action Step

Read Christ's message to one congregation. What warning or encouragement speaks to your present faithfulness and calls for a response?

The Gospel Day

The Gospel Day began in A.D. 31 and continues until the end of time. Revelation provides a prophetic picture of God's people throughout this entire period.

The book does not move in a simple straight line from chapter 1 to chapter 22 as though every chapter describes an event occurring later than the chapter before it. Instead, Revelation repeatedly presents different prophetic pictures covering the Gospel Day from different perspectives.

This becomes important when we study its structure. The seven churches, for example, form one prophetic series, while other series later add further information concerning the same broad Gospel Day.

Each series contributes another part of the picture. Together they help us understand the spiritual experiences of Christ's Church throughout the Gospel Day.

Revelation Uses Symbolic Language

Another essential key appears in **Revelation 1:1**, where we are told that the message was *"signified."* Revelation therefore communicates extensively through signs, symbols and prophetic pictures.

This kind of language should not surprise us because symbolic expressions appear throughout Scripture. Jesus called His disciples the *"salt of the earth"* and the *"light of the world,"* and He also described Himself as *"the door."*

These expressions are spiritually meaningful because the words represent something beyond their ordinary physical meaning. Revelation uses this principle extensively throughout its prophetic pictures.

John sees churches, lamps, horses and many other symbols. We must therefore resist the temptation to interpret every image as a literal physical object or future event.

The symbols communicate spiritual truth. Their meaning must be understood according to the way Scripture uses and explains such language.

Scripture Helps Explain the Symbols

John was a Hebrew whose understanding had been shaped by the Scriptures. Many of the symbols appearing in Revelation therefore draw upon language and pictures already found elsewhere in the Bible.

This gives us an important principle of interpretation: Allow Scripture to help explain Scripture. We should first look within the Word of God for the meaning of its prophetic language.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 34:16**:

> *"Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them."*

When Revelation introduces a symbol, we should therefore ask whether Scripture uses the same or a similar picture elsewhere. Comparing Scripture with Scripture helps us understand the prophetic language more carefully.

This also protects us from inventing meanings based upon imagination, current events or popular speculation. The Bible itself must remain our foundation for understanding the symbols it uses.

Revelation Is About the Church

The seven churches named in Revelation 1 were real congregations in Asia. Yet the number seven is repeatedly connected with completeness, and these congregations together form a prophetic picture of God's complete Church throughout the Gospel Day.

This helps us understand why Revelation repeatedly uses the number seven. The pattern appears again and again as the prophetic message develops.

We encounter:

- Seven churches;
- Seven Spirits;
- Seven prophetic series;
- Other repeated groups of seven.

The repeated pattern points towards completeness. Revelation therefore gives us a complete prophetic picture of Christ's dealings with His people throughout the Gospel Day.

One Spirit Working Throughout the Gospel Day

Revelation speaks of the *"seven Spirits of God,"* yet the New Testament plainly teaches that there is only one Spirit. The symbolic language must therefore be understood in harmony with the clear teaching of Scripture.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

The seven Spirits must therefore be understood symbolically rather than as seven separate divine Spirits. Scripture plainly establishes that there is one Spirit.

Just as the seven churches represent the complete Church throughout the Gospel Day, the seven Spirits represent the complete work of the one Spirit of God throughout that same period. The symbol must agree with the clear teaching of Scripture.

Revelation Should Not Be Centred on a Future Antichrist

Much popular teaching approaches Revelation primarily through world politics, future wars, political rulers or the expectation of one future individual antichrist. This approach moves attention away from the purpose stated in the opening verse.

The book identifies itself as *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."* Its prophetic pictures concern Christ, His Church and the spiritual conflict surrounding God's people throughout the Gospel Day.

Jesus Christ must therefore remain at the centre of our interpretation. Political speculation must never replace the Person whom the book itself declares that it reveals.

Understanding Comes Through Jesus Christ

Revelation requires spiritual understanding because intellectual ability alone cannot unlock spiritual truth. The believer must possess spiritual life in order to see the things of God spiritually.

Jesus said in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The new birth gives spiritual life, enabling the believer to see what cannot be understood through natural reasoning alone. Spiritual truth requires spiritual understanding.

Jesus also demonstrated His ability to open understanding. The disciples needed more than the written words before them because Christ helped them understand what those Scriptures were saying.

Luke wrote in **Luke 24:45**:

> *"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

Understanding ultimately comes through Jesus Christ. We therefore approach Revelation depending upon Him to help us understand the spiritual truth being revealed.

We Must Still Study

Depending upon Christ for understanding does not mean that careful study is unnecessary. Believers are instructed to study God's Word faithfully and handle its truth correctly.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Revelation therefore requires both spiritual understanding and careful Bible study. These belong together rather than opposing one another.

We should compare Scripture with Scripture, examine the symbols carefully and keep the central purpose of the book continually before us. Careful study helps us avoid interpretations based simply upon imagination or speculation.

Keep Jesus Christ at the Centre

Revelation is not intended to draw believers into endless speculation. It is an unveiling of Jesus Christ, His Church and the spiritual experiences of God's people throughout the Gospel Day.

As we continue into the structure of Revelation, we will examine the seven churches, the seven prophetic series, the seven Spirits and the symbolic language through which the vision is communicated. Through each part of the study, the foundation must remain unchanged.

Jesus Christ is the central Person of Revelation, and every prophetic picture must be approached with that truth before us. If our interpretation causes Christ to disappear behind political speculation, sensational predictions or imagined future events, we have lost sight of the opening words of the book.

Revelation begins by telling us exactly what it is, and that declaration should govern the way we study everything that follows. It is *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should the vision not be centred on a future antichrist instead of Christ's work?

Personal Reflection

Has a future-focused reading distracted you from what Christ says to His Church now?

Action Step

Read part of Revelation with Christ's present Church in view. What distraction with future speculation will you put aside?

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

One of the first great patterns in Revelation is the repeated use of the number seven. The book begins by addressing seven actual congregations in Asia, but these seven churches also form a prophetic picture of God's complete Church throughout the Gospel Day.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:4**:

> *"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;"*

The seven churches were Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These were real congregations, but together they also provide a complete prophetic picture.

The Significance of Seven

Throughout Scripture, the number seven is repeatedly associated with completeness. God completed His work of creation and rested on the seventh day, while Israel also observed patterns involving seven days.

The number appears repeatedly in God's dealings with His people, and Revelation uses seven again and again. The seven churches therefore represent more than seven isolated congregations.

Together they give a complete prophetic picture of the Church throughout the Gospel Day. The number seven helps us recognise the completeness of the picture being presented.

Seven Real Congregations

The churches named in Revelation were real congregations located in Asia. Each had its own circumstances, strengths, weaknesses and spiritual condition.

Jesus Christ addressed each congregation according to what He saw among them. Some were commended for faithfulness, while others were suffering persecution.

Some had allowed false teaching or spiritual compromise, while others had become spiritually weak or lukewarm. The messages therefore had immediate meaning for the believers who first received them.

However, their significance extends beyond those local congregations. Each church also forms part of the larger prophetic picture of the Gospel Day.

Seven Periods of the Gospel Day

The Gospel Day began in A.D. 31 and continues until the end of time. The seven churches prophetically represent seven successive periods within that Gospel Day.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 30:26**:

> *"Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."*

The expression *"the light of seven days"* helps us understand the sevenfold prophetic picture of the Gospel Day. Each church represents a particular period and the spiritual conditions connected with that time.

The seven churches and the periods they represent are:

- Ephesus: A.D. 31 to 270;
- Smyrna: A.D. 270 to 530;
- Pergamos: A.D. 530 to 1530;
- Thyatira: A.D. 1530 to 1730;
- Sardis: A.D. 1730 to 1880;
- Philadelphia: A.D. 1880 to 1930;
- Laodicea: A.D. 1930 to the end of time.

Each congregation was deliberately suited to represent the spiritual conditions that would characterise God's people during its corresponding period. Together the seven periods cover the complete Gospel Day.

Christ Speaks to His Church

This is important because Revelation is not simply giving us a timeline of world events. The focus remains upon Jesus Christ and His Church.

Through the seven letters, Christ reveals that He knows the spiritual condition of His people. He sees faithfulness and suffering, but He also sees compromise and spiritual decline.

Christ also gives the correction needed for each period. The seven churches therefore show us that He has never lost sight of His Church throughout the Gospel Day.

The Whole Church Is Being Portrayed

There were more than seven congregations in Asia during John's time. The selection of these particular seven therefore carries prophetic significance.

Together they represent the complete Church through the complete Gospel Day. The seven churches form one complete prophetic series.

This also explains why the message to each church concludes with an appeal that reaches beyond one local congregation. Jesus repeatedly says, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

The message given to one church therefore contains truth from which believers in every period can learn. Although each church has its particular place within the prophetic series, Christ's words remain important for all who have ears to hear.

Seven Opportunities During the Gospel Day

The seven periods together cover the entire Gospel Day from A.D. 31 until the end of time. A useful comparison can be seen in the days of Noah, when God gave seven days before the door of the ark was shut.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 7:4**:

> *"For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth."*

In a similar way, the Gospel Day contains seven prophetic periods before time ends and eternity begins. The seven periods therefore carry us through the complete Gospel Day.

The important message, however, is not simply to know where the dates fall. The greater question is whether we are listening to what Jesus Christ says to His Church.

The seven churches provide the first great prophetic series of Revelation. They show one Church, one Gospel Day and Jesus Christ speaking to His people throughout every period of time.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can the seven churches speak to the whole Church?

Personal Reflection

Which praise or correction spoken by Christ do you need to hear?

Action Step

Read one of Christ's messages to the seven churches. What personal praise or correction requires a changed response from you?

THE SEVEN SERIES: A LAYERED PICTURE OF THE GOSPEL DAY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Another important key to understanding Revelation is recognising that the book contains seven prophetic series. These series do not simply describe seven unrelated subjects, but together provide an increasingly complete picture of Jesus Christ, His Church and the spiritual events of the Gospel Day.

Understanding this structure helps prevent us from reading Revelation as though every chapter must occur chronologically after the chapter before it. Instead, the book repeatedly returns to the Gospel Day and adds further information through different prophetic pictures.

Think of Transparent Overlays

A simple illustration can help us understand this principle. Imagine a textbook containing transparent overlays of the human body.

The first overlay might show the skeleton, while another might add the digestive system. Further overlays could show the circulatory system and other parts of the body.

Each overlay shows something different, but they are not describing different people. They are adding information about the same person.

When the overlays are placed together, they provide a more complete picture. Revelation works in a similar way.

Each Series Adds More Information

The seven prophetic series repeatedly take us through the Gospel Day, but each series adds further detail and gives another perspective. Together they build a fuller understanding of the spiritual experiences of God's people.

The first of these series is found in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where Jesus Christ gives messages to the seven churches. As we have seen, those seven churches represent seven successive periods of the Gospel Day.

Other prophetic series then add further information concerning the experiences of God's people during that same broad period. Each series contributes another layer to the prophetic picture.

We can therefore think of the structure in this way:

- First series: One view of the Gospel Day;
- Second series: Further information;
- Third series: Another layer;
- Additional series: An increasingly complete prophetic picture.

When all seven series are considered together, they help us see a much fuller picture of the Church throughout the Gospel Day. Each series adds information without replacing what has already been shown.

Revelation Does Not Always Move in a Straight Line

This principle is especially important because Revelation can become confusing if we assume that chapter 8 must describe events occurring after everything in chapter 7. Neither should we assume that chapter 13 must necessarily describe events occurring after everything in chapter 12.

The prophetic vision can return to the same broad period and show it from another perspective. The seven series therefore overlap rather than simply forming one uninterrupted chronological timeline.

Recognising this structure removes much unnecessary confusion. It allows us to see how different prophetic pictures can describe the same Gospel Day while emphasising different spiritual events and conditions.

Keep the Central Subject in View

Although the prophetic pictures differ, the central subject does not change. Revelation remains *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."*

The seven series help us understand His relationship with His Church and the spiritual conflicts His people experience throughout the Gospel Day. The purpose is not simply to construct a complicated prophetic chart, but to understand the complete picture Scripture is presenting.

The seven-series structure can therefore be remembered through the illustration of the transparent overlays. Each series provides another layer, and each layer adds understanding.

Together, the seven series provide a fuller prophetic picture of Jesus Christ and His Church throughout the Gospel Day. The pictures differ, but the Person, the Church and the Gospel Day being revealed remain the same.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can repeated series in Revelation show different views of the Gospel Day?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed each vision follows the last in simple time order?

Action Step

Compare two visionary series in Revelation. What assumed timeline will you reconsider before drawing conclusions about Christ's work?

THE SEVEN SPIRITS: THE COMPLETE WORK OF THE ONE SPIRIT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Another important use of the number seven in Revelation is found in the expression *"the seven Spirits of God."* This expression must be understood in harmony with the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the Spirit of God.

John wrote in **Revelation 4:5**:

> *"And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."*

If this expression were read literally, it might appear to suggest that God has seven different Spirits. However, the clear teaching of Scripture is that there is one Spirit.

There Is One Spirit

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

The word *"one"* emphasises singularity. Paul is not describing several divine Spirits working independently because there is one Spirit of God.

This means that the expression *"seven Spirits of God"* in Revelation must be understood symbolically. Its meaning must agree with the clear teaching that there is one Spirit.

Seven Represents Completeness

We have already seen that the number seven is repeatedly associated with completeness in Revelation. This principle helps us understand the meaning of the seven Spirits.

The seven churches do not represent seven different Churches of God. Together they form a complete prophetic picture of the one Church throughout the seven periods of the Gospel Day.

The same principle applies to the seven Spirits. They represent the complete operation of the one Spirit of God throughout the complete Gospel Day.

The symbol therefore does not divide God's Spirit into seven separate Spirits. It describes the fullness and completeness of His spiritual work throughout every period represented in Revelation.

One Spirit Throughout the Gospel Day

The Church has always depended upon the same Spirit of God. Different periods of history may involve different circumstances, struggles and levels of spiritual light, but God's Spirit does not become a different Spirit from one period to another.

The New Testament establishes this unity clearly:

- One body;
- One Spirit;
- One Lord;
- One faith.

Revelation's symbolic language must always agree with the clear teaching of Scripture. The expression *"seven Spirits of God"* therefore gives us another example of how Revelation uses the number seven symbolically.

It does not teach that there are seven separate Spirits. It presents the complete work of the one Spirit of God throughout the seven periods of the Gospel Day.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do the seven spirits point to the complete work of the one Spirit?

Personal Reflection

Have you thought of the Holy Spirit as separate from Jesus Christ rather than recognising the one Spirit of God?

Action Step

Read the verses about the seven spirits and the one Spirit. What belief that separates God's Spirit from Christ must you correct?

UNDERSTANDING THE SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF REVELATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

One of the most important principles for understanding Revelation is recognising that it communicates extensively through signs, symbols and prophetic pictures. If symbolic language is treated as though every detail must be literal, the meaning of the vision can easily become confused.

The first verse itself provides this important key. It tells us that the Revelation was communicated to John in a particular way.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

The word *"signified"* shows that the message was communicated through signs. John was shown pictures that represented spiritual realities.

Symbolic Language Is Common in Scripture

Revelation is not the only place where Scripture uses symbolic language. Throughout the Bible, physical pictures are used to communicate spiritual truth.

Jesus called His disciples the *"salt of the earth"* and the *"light of the world."* He also said, *"I am the door."*

No one understands these expressions to mean that Jesus was literally a wooden door or that His disciples were literally salt. The physical picture represents a spiritual truth.

Revelation uses the same principle, but on a much larger scale. John sees churches, lamps, horses, beasts and many other images that communicate spiritual meaning.

John Saw a Vision

John repeatedly describes what he saw. This is important because Revelation records prophetic visions rather than ordinary physical events taking place before him.

John wrote in **Revelation 9:17**:

> *"And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone."*

John plainly says that he saw these things *"in the vision."* This helps us understand why Revelation contains such striking and unusual images.

John was recording the prophetic pictures shown to him rather than describing ordinary physical events. The pictures therefore need to be understood according to the spiritual truths they represent.

Allow Scripture to Explain Scripture

John was a Hebrew whose understanding had been shaped by the Old Testament Scriptures. Many symbols appearing in Revelation therefore have parallels elsewhere in the Bible.

This gives us an important rule: Do not invent the meaning of a symbol when Scripture can help explain it. The Bible itself should provide the foundation for understanding its prophetic language.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 34:16**:

> *"Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them."*

When we encounter a symbol in Revelation, we should search the Scriptures for other verses using similar language or imagery. Those verses can help us understand what the prophetic picture represents.

This allows the Bible to interpret the Bible rather than allowing current events, imagination or popular theories to determine the meaning. Scripture must remain our foundation for interpreting Scripture.

Spiritual Understanding Comes Through Jesus Christ

Correct interpretation requires more than intellectual ability. Spiritual truth must be spiritually understood.

Jesus said in **John 3:3**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The new birth gives spiritual life and enables the believer to see the things of God spiritually. Natural reasoning alone cannot provide the spiritual understanding needed to see the kingdom of God.

After His resurrection, Jesus also demonstrated that He could open the understanding of His disciples. They needed Him to help them understand what the Scriptures were saying.

Luke wrote in **Luke 24:45**:

> *"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

The believer therefore approaches Revelation depending upon Jesus Christ for understanding. He is both the central Person revealed in the book and the One who enables His people to understand spiritual truth.

Spiritual Understanding Does Not Replace Study

Depending upon Christ does not mean that careful Bible study is unnecessary. Spiritual dependence and careful study belong together.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Understanding Revelation therefore requires both spiritual life and careful study. Believers should depend upon Jesus Christ while also examining the Scriptures carefully.

Several principles should remain before us as we study:

- Recognise that Revelation uses signs and symbols;
- Remember that John was recording a vision;
- Compare Scripture with Scripture;
- Allow clear verses to help explain symbolic verses;
- Depend upon Jesus Christ for spiritual understanding;
- Study carefully rather than relying upon speculation.

These principles help protect us from interpretations based upon imagination rather than Scripture. They also help keep the prophetic language connected with the spiritual purpose for which it was given.

Above all, every symbol must be understood within the central purpose of the book. Revelation is *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ,"* and that truth must govern the way we interpret its prophetic pictures.

The symbols are not given to hide Jesus Christ behind mystery. Properly understood, they help unveil Jesus Christ, His Church and the spiritual events of the Gospel Day.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should the Bible help explain the signs John saw?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted a popular explanation of a Revelation symbol without checking how the Bible uses it?

Action Step

Choose a symbol from Revelation and compare earlier Bible usage. What unsupported assumption will you stop repeating?

CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE ENDS WITH JESUS CHRIST REVEALED

BACK TO CONTENTS

The General Epistles and Revelation bring us to the conclusion of the New Testament and of the Bible itself. These final writings continue the same central message we have followed throughout Scripture: Jesus Christ must remain at the centre of our understanding.

The General Epistles show believers facing persecution, false teaching, spiritual compromise and the practical challenges of Christian life. Their writers repeatedly call God's people back to truth, faithfulness, holiness, love and perseverance.

Hebrews presents Jesus Christ and the better covenant, while James teaches that genuine faith must become visible in daily life. Peter encourages believers to remain steadfast through persecution and alert to false teachers.

John joins truth, love and spiritual life, while Jude calls believers to *"earnestly contend for the faith."* Different writers address different circumstances, but their direction remains the same: Remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

Revelation Brings the Bible to Its Final Prophetic Picture

The final book of the Bible brings us to a prophetic unveiling of Jesus Christ. Its opening words establish the subject that must remain central throughout the book.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

Revelation therefore closes the biblical record by unveiling Jesus Christ and His Church throughout the Gospel Day. Its signs and symbols must be understood spiritually and carefully.

Scripture should interpret Scripture, and speculation must never replace sound biblical understanding. The symbolic language of Revelation must remain connected with the spiritual purpose for which the book was given.

The seven churches show Christ speaking to His Church through the seven periods of the Gospel Day. The seven series provide overlapping prophetic pictures, while the seven Spirits represent the complete work of the one Spirit of God throughout the Gospel Day.

One Bible, One Continuing Revelation

Throughout this module, we have seen that the Bible contains many books, writers, historical periods and forms of literature. Yet these writings belong together within one unfolding revelation.

The Law, History, Wisdom, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation all contribute to our understanding of God's purpose. Each part has its own setting and emphasis, but together they form the Scriptural testimony we have followed from Genesis to Revelation.

The Bible begins with creation and ends with Revelation, but throughout its pages one Person increasingly comes into view. That Person is Jesus Christ, and Scripture must always be understood with Him at the centre.

The purpose of Bible study is therefore not simply to know more facts, dates, books or prophetic symbols. We study so that we may understand God's Word, rightly divide its truth and allow that truth to shape the way we live.

The Understanding the Bible module therefore ends with the same foundation that should govern every future study of Scripture. We must read carefully, study faithfully, allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and keep Jesus Christ at the centre.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Revelation bring the Bible's witness to its final picture of Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What has become clearer to you about His rule and His Church?

Action Step

Read a closing vision of Revelation. How will its witness to Christ strengthen your trust and faithfulness today?

MODULE CONCLUSION: FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION - JESUS CHRIST AT THE CENTRE

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now reached the end of the Understanding the Bible module. Across these eight Study Guides, we have followed the Bible from its structure and formation through the Law, History, Wisdom, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation.

The Bible contains many books written in different periods, by different writers and in different literary forms. Yet these books belong together within one unfolding revelation of God's purpose, and again and again that revelation brings us to Jesus Christ.

One Unfolding Biblical Story

The Books of the Law introduced creation, sin, covenant, Israel and the early unfolding of God's dealings with humanity. They established foundations that continue throughout the rest of Scripture.

The Historical Books followed Israel through conquest, kingdom, division, captivity and restoration. They showed both the faithfulness of God and the repeated failures of His people.

The Books of Wisdom and Poetry brought us into worship, suffering, wisdom, purpose, love and practical life before God. They showed how God's truth speaks into the experiences and questions of everyday life.

The Prophets warned, corrected and called God's people back to faithfulness. At the same time, they continually directed attention towards the coming Messiah.

The Four Gospels then brought that expectation into reality. Jesus Christ came, and the One promised throughout Scripture was now revealed.

Acts showed the Gospel going forth into the wider world. The Epistles then explained how those who had received spiritual life were to live faithfully in Jesus Christ.

Finally, Revelation brought the biblical record to its great prophetic conclusion. It unveils Jesus Christ and His Church throughout the Gospel Day.

Scripture Must Be Rightly Understood

Throughout this module, we have also learned important principles for studying God's Word. These principles help us understand individual verses within the larger revelation of Scripture:

- Read every verse within its context;

- Recognise the kind of writing we are reading;
- Understand the historical setting;
- Compare Scripture with Scripture;
- Allow clear verses to help explain difficult verses;
- Distinguish between shadow and fulfilment;
- Rightly divide the Word of truth;
- Keep Jesus Christ at the centre.

Bible study is therefore more than collecting verses or memorising facts. We must understand how each verse fits within the larger revelation of Scripture.

The Scriptures Testify of Jesus Christ

After His resurrection, Jesus explained the relationship between the Scriptures and Himself. He showed His disciples that the different parts of the Old Testament had been pointing towards Him.

Luke wrote in **Luke 24:44-45**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,"*

Notice the breadth of His statement. Jesus referred to *"the law of Moses," "the prophets"* and *"the psalms,"* and then said those writings contained things *"concerning me."*

The Scriptures therefore cannot be properly understood if Jesus Christ is removed from their centre. From the promises and shadows of the Old Testament to their fulfilment in the New Testament, Scripture continually directs us towards Him.

Understanding Must Lead to Living

The purpose of Bible study is not simply to become knowledgeable. Truth must become life, and what we learn should influence the way we live.

The truth of Scripture should affect:

- What we believe;
- How we speak;
- How we treat others;
- How we respond to difficulty;
- How we worship;
- How we serve;
- How faithfully we walk with Jesus Christ.

Knowledge without application can leave the life unchanged. True understanding should lead to obedience, wisdom, holiness and spiritual growth.

The Foundation for Every Future Study

The Understanding the Bible module therefore ends with a foundation that should govern every future study of Scripture. These principles should continue with us whenever we open the Word of God:

- Read carefully;
- Study faithfully;
- Understand the context;
- Compare Scripture with Scripture;
- Rightly divide the Word of truth;
- Allow the Bible to interpret itself;
- Keep Jesus Christ at the centre.

The Bible begins with creation and ends with Revelation, but throughout its pages one Person increasingly comes into view. That Person is Jesus Christ.

As we continue studying God's Word, our understanding should become deeper and our faith stronger. Most importantly, our lives should increasingly reflect the truth we have received in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the story from Genesis to Revelation keep Jesus Christ at the centre?

Personal Reflection

Which part of this whole biblical witness has most changed your understanding?

Action Step

Compare an early Bible promise with its fulfilment in Christ. What has the whole biblical story changed about how you live?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do the General Epistles and Revelation together present Jesus Christ as the centre of faith, faithful living and the final unveiling of God's purpose? Explain the better covenant in Hebrews and the call to persevere.

2. Understanding

How do Hebrews' teaching about Jesus and the better covenant and James's insistence that faith be lived correct two different misunderstandings of Christian belief and conduct?

3. Personal Reflection

Which challenge most directly tests you: faithfulness through suffering in 1 Peter, growth amid false teaching in 2 Peter, or walking in light and love in 1 John? Explain the response it calls for.

4. Response to Truth

How should the calls to truth and love in 2 John, the warning against self-promotion in 3 John and Jude's call to contend for the faith shape your treatment of others and of false teaching?

5. Action Step

Choose one warning or encouragement from Christ's messages to the seven churches. What needs to change in your faith or conduct, and how will you respond through His indwelling life?

6. Early Response

Have you begun responding to that message? Describe what changed in your understanding, attitude or conduct. If not, explain what is preventing you from responding.

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing practice will help you read Revelation's symbolic language, seven series and seven spirits carefully while remaining attentive to the one Spirit's complete work in the Gospel day?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Hebrews' better covenant, John's teaching that God is light, love and life, and Revelation's unveiling of Jesus Christ clarify what faithful worship and witness require?

9. Living the Truth

Where does the contrast between knowing the truth and walking in it appear in your life? Connect a real choice with James, the letters of John and the witness of Christ's church in Revelation.

10. Final Response

Bring together the better covenant in Hebrews, faith lived in James, truth and love in John's letters, and Christ revealed to His Church in Revelation. What has become clearer about Jesus Christ, and how will you now live by that truth?