

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth!

LETTERS

Equipped by God

2 Tim. 2:15; 3: 10-17

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Why so Important?

A double-sided snapshot of earliest Christianity

1. The writers' understanding of Gospel essentials
 2. What it was like to be an early Christian
- The Letters mainly pre-date the Four Gospels
 - The bedrock of Christianity

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The Letters in the NT context

- 21 of 27 NT documents are “Letters”
- 13 of those 21 attributed to Paul
- Letters are 37% of NT in length
- Paul’s writings - a quarter of the entire NT; but 70% of all the Letters

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Paul as Letter Writer (1)

- 1 & 2 Thessalonians . AD 50. “You turned.....to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven...” I Thess. 1: 9-10.
- Galatians. AD 50-52? “For freedom Christ has set us free.” Gal. 5:1
- 1 & 2 Corinthians. Mid 50s AD. “Faith, hope and love.” 1 Cor. 13:13.
- Romans. AD 56-57. Justification by faith through grace.

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Paul as Letter Writer (2)

The Captivity Letters

- Philemon. Mid/late 50s AD. Grace in action.
- Philippians. Mid 50s/Early 60s AD. (Depends on place of imprisonment).
“I thank my God every time I remember you.” Phil. 1:3.
- Colossians. AD 57-61. The Cosmic Christ. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Col. 1:2 7.
- Ephesians. Early 60s AD. “Head over everything for the church ...his body.” Eph. 1:22-23.

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Paul as Letter Writer (3)

The Pastoral Epistles AD 62-64?

- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus

☐ Instruction manuals for church leaders.

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- **The General or Catholic Letters**
- Latter half of the first century.
- “Catholic” = applying to the universal church.
- James. “Faith without deeds is dead.” Jas. 2:26.
- 1 & 2 Peter. “Chosen by God.” 1 Peter 1:2
- 1, 2 & 3 John. Light, eternal life, love. “We should love one another.” 1 John 3:11.
- Jude. “Build yourselves up in your most holy faith” v.21.
- Hebrews. Once for all sacrifice of Jesus. “Tempted in every way – yet without sin.” Heb. 4:15.

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- **How to read the NT Letters?**

Key Questions. What do YOU think about?.....

- Why written?
 - Writer's attitude to his readers, and theirs to him?
 - Writer's points, arguments and themes?
 - Recipients? Their problems and challenges?
- ❖ The clues are all there! Look for them for yourself

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Relevance and Application

- **Scripture's aim** – To hear God speaking to/challenging us in our own times.
 - A. When we share similar life situations/issues with the first century world - God's Word to us today is **the same. Heed it/act upon it!**
 - B. When our situation and the original recipients of the Letters differ – **Identify and apply the principles behind what is being said.**

The Vital Ingredient - The Spirit's Illumination!

- “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law....” Ps. 119:18.