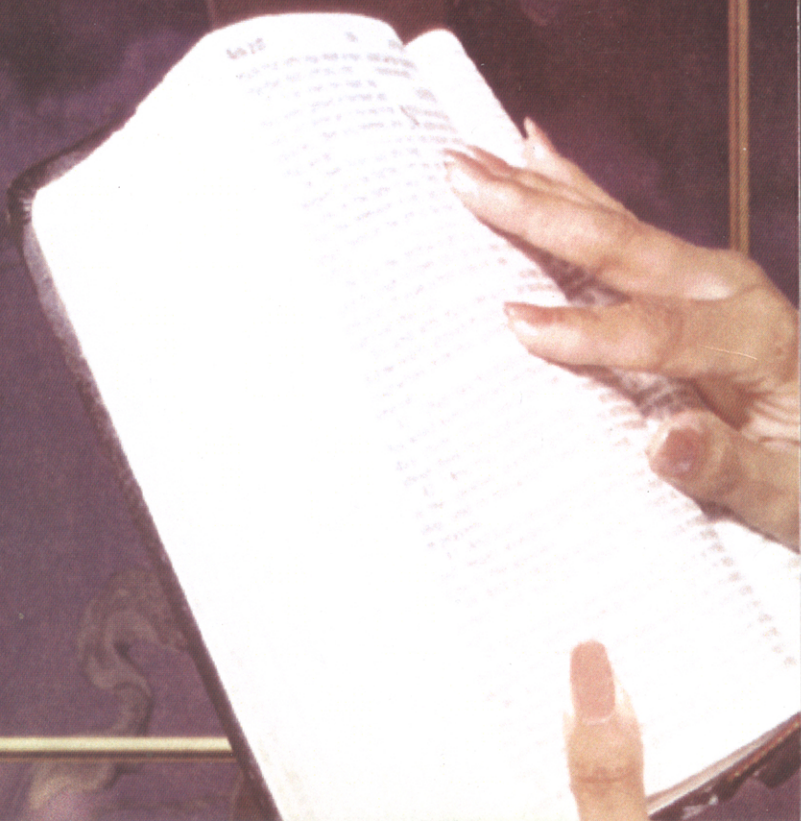


How To Read The Bible

by Debra Johnson



**HOW TO
READ
THE BIBLE**

By Debra Johnson

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FOREWORD

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed thereto according to thy word.

(Psalm 119:9)

"I poured out my heart to You...I sent up these sorrowful words: 'How long, how long, tomorrow, and tomorrow? Why not now? Why is there not in this hour an end to my uncleanness?' I was speaking and weeping in this way, with the most bitter sorrow and repentance of heart, when, suddenly, I heard a voice from a neighboring house -- I do not know if it was a boy or girl -- chanting and continually repeating, 'Take up and read. Take up and read.' Instantly, my countenance changed. I began to consider whether children usually sang such words in any of the games they play, and I could not remember ever hearing anything similar to this. So, holding back my torrent of tears, I got up, interpreting it to be none other than a command from God to open the book and read..." (from The Confessions of Saint Augustine, an African saint.)

Reading the Holy Bible is the act of a wise person. Your determination to read God's Word will benefit your life. Perhaps your previous efforts have not been fruitful due to a lack of encouragement, poor instruction, or the suspicion that reading the Bible may have a negative effect on you. Fear not. The act of reading God's Word, which is the Holy Bible, shall comfort, strengthen, and inform you of the everlasting love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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WHICH TRANSLATION?

Versions of the Bible abound, and the serious reader can easily become confused. Different translations do render conflicting meanings to the same verse of Scripture. To avoid that snare, the reader is urged to read only those Bibles with the word "holy" in the title. When the word "holy" (which means spiritually clean and devoid of sin) is used in the title of the Bible, this indicates that no words supplied by human beings have been added to God's words during the translation process.

Still, there are a variety of Holy Bibles. Many contain statements by an author or publisher whose comments may or may not enhance the reader's comprehension. Wait until after you have read the Holy Bible through several times before you ingest man's interpretation. Get God's Word first. Later on, there will be no shortage of Bible study guides and commentaries, I assure you.

The King James Version is the most beautiful and readable version of the Holy Bible. The vocabulary contains many words that appear on standardized tests at the high school, college, and graduate school levels. Mastering Biblical vocabulary words shall have long-reaching benefits. Furthermore, in the King James Version, any word that is not in the original Bible text is written in italics, thereby demonstrating the holy accuracy of the translation. As for the thee's and thou's, let's conquer them instantly. Thee and ye are the plural forms of the word "you"; as you read the word thee or ye, think "you all" or "y'all." Thou is the singular form of you; it's just you spelled with a th instead of with a y. Thy is the singular form of thine which is plural: both words mean your. A t, st, th, est, eth or an ith on the end of a word means the action of the verb continues without stopping. Now, thou hast cleared the "thee-thou" hurdle, haven't you?

As you select the King James Version of the Holy Bible, you may wish to consider the giant print type. The large type may make Bible reading a pleasure instead of a quest to envision tiny letters resembling ants marching across the pages. A giant print King James Version of the Holy Bible should be available for less than \$35.00 from a

bookstore or Christian bookstore. If not, check one out from your local library or ask the librarian to order one for your use.

OPTIONAL TOOLS

In addition to the King James Version of the Holy Bible, you may be able to obtain an unabridged dictionary and a book titled Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. The unabridged dictionary is the fat kind that contains sentences as examples of how words are used. Unabridged dictionaries are expensive and can cost \$50.00 or more. However, feel free to ask a librarian if there are any unabridged dictionaries that are no longer in use, or go to a used bookstore or sale. Schools may have them lying around, and you may be able to get one just by asking. If you are unable to locate an unabridged dictionary, just get the largest dictionary you can find. This will do until your blessing comes.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance can aid you in locating Scriptures and finding out the meanings of words in their original language. The cost can range from \$25.00 and up. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is recommended because it contains the Scriptural location and original meaning of every word found in the text of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. The unabridged dictionary and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance are optional tools that may enhance your comprehension of God's Word: the only tool you really need is the Holy Bible itself. If that's all you have, you're ready to begin.

WHY ARE YOU READING THE BIBLE?

This is an odd question, isn't it? The manner in which you answer the above question will let you know where to begin reading the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God, and the Word of God is a living Person, not a mere book. John 1:1 says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus ends John

6:63 with this statement: "...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

The Bible is the most powerful document in the world because it is the only book made up of 66 books written by the infinite, holy Mind of God. Since the Bible is a Person, and not just a book, one is wise to approach reading the Bible intelligently, and not carelessly.

The careful reader is mindful of his own spiritual condition when he is beginning to read the Word of God. **If you are a person with no knowledge of salvation, and you want to find out more about God**, you may wish to begin reading at the first book of the Bible, which is titled Genesis. After you have completed the Old Testament, then read the New Testament.

If you have been taught that to be saved from sin, you must be baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38) and you have been baptized in Jesus' name, but you have not yet received the gift of the Holy Ghost, begin reading the book titled Acts or Acts of the Apostles, which recounts multiple instances of baptism in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38 – 41, Acts 8:12, Acts 8:37 and 38, Acts 10:47 and 48, Acts 16:31 – 33, and Acts 19:1 – 5) and multiple fillings of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues (Acts 2:3 and 4, Acts 8:17, Acts 9:17, Acts 10:44 – 46 and Acts 19:6). After you have read the book of Acts, begin with the book of Matthew and continue to read the New Testament until you have received the gift of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues.

If you have been baptized in Jesus' name and have received the gift of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues, first read the New Testament beginning with the book of Matthew through the book of Revelations, then read the Old Testament beginning with the book of Genesis through the book of Malachi. This order is suggested because of Jesus' words in Matthew 13:52 which reads: "Then he said unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out

of his treasure things new and old." Our treasure is the Word of God; therefore, let us read the New Testament, and then the Old Testament.

If there is any question in your mind as to your spiritual status, I urge you to review Acts 2:37 – 40 which read: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all afar off, even a many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying Save yourselves from this untoward generation."

There is no salvation in "accepting Christ as your personal savior," and many people have been deceived by that phrase which is not found anywhere in the Bible. If you want to be baptized in Jesus' name and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, get a Yellow Pages directory and look under the designation of Churches, then look under Apostolic. Locate the church closest to you, then call and tell them you want to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Ask them how soon can they baptize you. If they cannot baptize you within 24 hours, call another Apostolic church until you locate one whose members are available to baptize you. (If you are incarcerated, ask the church to send a minister to baptize you.)

After you have been baptized in Jesus' name, the people at the church will then encourage you to receive the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. People who have been baptized in Jesus' name and who have spoken other languages when they received the Holy Ghost (or the Holy Spirit) are born again according to John 3:5 which reads: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

Now that you have determined your spiritual status, you are ready to begin reading the Word of God.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT READING THE BIBLE?

The prophet Moses, who by the Spirit of God wrote the first five books of the Bible, recorded the greatest commandment which begins: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5.) This commandment is immediately followed by God's instruction regarding His words: "And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6 and 7.)

To get God's words in your heart so that they overflow into all areas of your life, may I suggest that you read God's Word before, during or after breakfast? Reading God's Word again before you go to sleep at night will also cause the Word of God to be placed in your heart. Attending Bible class at a church where being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues are taught as doctrine will also help the words of God to grow in your heart. If you are able, read God's Word during the day, as long as your career is not hindered, and your responsibilities are fulfilled.

Jesus expects people to read the Bible. In Matthew 12:3 – 5, He questions the Pharisees: "But he said unto them, **Have ye not read** what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? **Or have you not read** in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?"

Jesus queries the Pharisees in Matthew 19:4 and 5: "And he answered and said unto them, **Have ye not read**, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and they shall become one flesh?"

In Matthew 21:16, Jesus responds to the people in the temple who question Him: "And said unto him, hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them Yea; **have ye never read**, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" And in Matthew 21:42: "Jesus saith unto them, **Did ye never read** in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

Jesus poses the question again in Matthew 22:31: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, **have ye not read** that which was spoken unto you by God saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

God expects us to read the Bible. Yet many of us may find ourselves in the position of the politically powerful black man who was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament (Acts 8:26 - 29) when the evangelist Philip asked the Ethiopian a question in Acts 8:30 and 31: "And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except that some man should guide me?" In order to fully comprehend God's Word, we need guidance.

If at all possible, join a church that baptizes in Jesus' name, and teaches the doctrine of being filled with the Holy Ghost so that you may receive divine guidance as you read God's Word. Reading God's Word can occur in solitude, but your comprehension will be increased as you receive instruction from a knowledgeable Bible teacher.

TWO METHODS: SEQUENTIAL AND RANDOM

After you have established your spiritual status (see the section titled "Why are You Reading the Bible?") and you start to regularly read the Bible, is it required to "begin at the beginning," that is, at the beginning of the Old Testament or the New Testament, and proceed through each book as it is ordered in the Bible? Or is it acceptable to open the Bible randomly, and begin reading at whatever pages appear?

Both methods can be used depending on your circumstances. If you have unrestricted time, read pages or chapters in the sequence they occur in the Bible. If you have only about ten or fifteen minutes, open the Bible randomly, read the left, then the right page, and then turn the right page over and complete the chapter that began on the previous right page. If there is no continuation from the previous right page, you are done for that session.

Read God's Word according to whichever order feels most comfortable to you. If you have a desire to read or re-read a particular book or passage, indulge yourself. Feel free to meditate on God's Word after the Bible has been closed. Your life shall improve as God opens your mind to the reality of His Word.

If possible, obtain several Bibles. You may prefer to keep one at your bedside, use another during worship and Bible study services at your church, and keep a third Bible at work to read during lunch breaks (if you are able to do.) There is no book like the Bible. After over twenty-five years of reading God's Word, I can always get more, but I have never gotten enough!

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

There are 39 books of the Old Testament in the Holy Bible. Scholars have applied four labels to the books. The labels are The Law, the Historical Books, the Poetry Books and the Prophetic Books. These labels do not appear in the Bible, but the books do appear to be arranged according to the descriptions given by the labels.

The Law

Genesis	the beginning of the universe to the death of Joseph in Egypt
Exodus	the exit of the Jews from Egypt
Leviticus	laws for the Jewish priests
Numbers	history and accounting of the twelve tribes of Israel
Deuteronomy	laws for the Jewish people

These five books are also called The Law of Moses, who wrote them according to God's inspiration or direction. They are arranged in chronological order, and cover the time period from the Creation of the Universe to the death of Moses, who lead the Jews out of Egypt and almost to the Promised Land.

The Historical Books

Joshua	account of the Jews under Joshua's leadership as they entered and lived in the Promised Land, which is called Israel (after a Jewish patriarch)
Judges	account of the Jews under the rule of the Judges, who were divinely appointed people who ruled Israel
Ruth	account of King David's great-grandmother and her second husband
I Samuel	account from the last judge to the death of Israel's first king who was named Saul
II Samuel	account of the elevation to the throne and reign of Israel's second king who was named David
I Kings	account of Israel's third king, Solomon, who was King David's son and built the original Temple, to Solomon's descendant, King Ahaziah
II Kings	account of Israel from the death of King Ahaz to the beginning of the Babylonian captivity with captured King Joachin of Judah
I Chronicles	genealogical account from Adam, the first man, to the sons of Benjamin (one of the 12 sons of the patriarch Israel), followed by stories of King Saul and King David, then a listing of King David's mighty men. More stories of King David follow, then a listing of the sons of Aaron, Levi, David's captains, and an account of David's death.
II Chronicles	account of King Solomon's ascension, his conversation with God, Solomon's death, and stories of kings who succeeded Solomon. The account closes with Israel's descent into Babylonian captivity followed by the promise of Israel's restoration by King Cyrus of Persia.
Ezra	an account of the rebuilding, cessation, then completion of the Temple after the Babylonian captivity ended, and the Jews begin to return to Israel

Nehemiah	an almost parallel account of the completion of the temple
Esther	an account of a Jewish queen whom God uses to bless the Jews after the Babylonian captivity

These 12 historical books cover the time period from the succession of Joshua as leader of the Jews after Moses' death, to the Jews' entrance and habitation in the land of Israel, to the Jews' expulsion from Israel to captivity (or slavery) in the land of Babylon, and to the Jews' return to the land of Israel. The historical books are arranged chronologically only from Joshua through II Kings.

The Bible reader should be aware that the Jewish nation developed from a man named Abraham. One of Abraham's descendants was named Israel, a man who fathered 12 sons. These 12 sons and their families grew and were known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel. After King Solomon's reign ended, the Jews were divided into two kingdoms. The rulers of the larger kingdom (now called "The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel") were called the kings of Israel. The rulers of the smaller kingdom of the two remaining tribes were called the kings of Judah. These Jewish kings had a shared family origin. Still, the kings of Israel were occasionally at peace and at other times at war with the kings of Judah in I and II Kings, and in II Chronicles. This distinction may help you understand the difference in the meaning of the terms "king of Israel" and "king of Judah."

Due to the disobedience of the Jews on both sides of the family split, the Jews were punished by God's sending them into captivity (or slavery) in the land of Babylon for 70 years. After that time ended, the Jews were allowed to return to the land of Israel. They began to rebuild the Temple, and determined that only the descendants of the Two Tribes or people whose names were listed in genealogies could be called Jews. The events in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther occurred after the 70 year time period ended.

The Poetry Books

Job	account of one man's captivity or slavery to Satan (or the devil), and Job's restoration by God
Psalms	praises to God by King David and others
Proverbs	wise observations by King Solomon and others
Ecclesiastes	more wise observations by King Solomon
Song of Solomon	account of the love between King Solomon and his black wife

These five poetry books contain more symbolism, metaphors, similes, imagery, parallelism, and examples of figurative language than other books of the Bible. They also express spiritual rejoicing and ruminations on the conditions of people and life, especially concerning fools and wise men. Job is the oldest of the Poetry Books, and was probably written before the Jews entered the land of Israel. The Psalms, written by King David, Moses, and others, contain praises to God. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon were generally written by King Solomon.

The Prophetic Books

These 17 books are called the Prophetic Books because they were written by various prophets. A prophet is a person with a message from God. God originally intended for the leaders of the Jews to serve as prophets to them. According to God's plan, the Jews should have been ruled by judges, who were also prophets, after the Jews inhabited the land of Israel. After the Jews requested a king, the kingly line began with King Saul, who was also a prophet. King David, who succeeded King Saul (but was not Saul's son), and King Solomon, who was King David's son, were also prophets. Due to the spiritual disobedience of most of the kings who succeeded King Solomon, the kings were no longer given the message from God. God selected His Own people, the prophets, to deliver His message to the Jews and to other people.

The Prophetic Books are listed in the Bible in this order:

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The Prophetic Books are not chronologically arranged in the Bible. In order to more clearly comprehend God's messages, the Bible reader should be aware that each book of prophecy is connected to a major event or occurrence. Event One does not occur in chronological order, but Events Two through Six occur in chronological order. The books and the corresponding events are as follows:

<u>Book</u>	<u>Event</u>
1. Jonah	<i>Event One: Preaching to Black People.</i> After being regurgitated by a great fish, Jonah preaches to the black people of Nineveh during the reign of King Ahaziah, king of Judah. (This occurred some generations after King Solomon's reign.) The people of Nineveh repent, but Jonah the Jew sulks.

- Nahum God gives up on the city of Nineveh and condemns its people.
2. Amos *Event Two: Pleading for Obedience.* God pleads for the nation of Israel to stop sinning and to become obedient to the Law.
- Hosea God pleads for the nation of Israel to stop sinning and to become obedient to the Law.
- Isaiah God pleads for the nation of Israel to stop sinning and to become obedient to the Law.
- Micah God pleads for the nation of Israel to stop sinning and to become obedient to the Law.
- Zephaniah God continues to plead for Israel to obey the Law.
3. Habakkuk *Event Three: Prediction of Babylonian Captivity.* God predicts the Chaldean Babylonians (black people) will overthrow the Jews due to the Jews' unrighteousness.
- Jeremiah God predicts the disobedient Jews will go into captivity in Babylon. This event occurs, and the Temple, built earlier by King Solomon, is destroyed.
4. Lamentations *Event Four: Life in Babylonian Captivity.* The pitiful condition of the Jews in Babylon is described by Jeremiah.

Daniel The Jews are in captivity (or slavery) in Chaldean Babylon.

Ezekiel The Jews are almost midway through the 70 year period of captivity in Babylon.

Obadiah God reflects on Israel's captivity and predicts deliverance.

Joel God reflects on Israel's captivity and predicts deliverance.

5. Haggai *Event Five: Return to Israel.* The 70 years of captivity have ended. The Jews have returned to the land of Israel, and have left Babylon. God urges the Jews to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah God urges the Jews to rebuild the Temple.

6. Malachi *Event Six: Wait for the Messiah.* God tells the Jews to remember to obey the Law, and that He will send a prophet before Him at the time when God Himself comes to the Jews.

Why didn't God cause the Old Testament books of the Bible to be arranged in a manner that would be instantly comprehensible to the Bible reader? The answer is in the personality of God. Isaiah 45:15 states: "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." Why would God hide Himself? He's that kind of God!

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Just as the Old Testament ends with the prophecy that God will send a prophet to the Jews before He Himself appears to the Jews (Malachi 4: 5 and 6), so the New Testament is organized according to the Word of God. The gospels, **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**, give four occasionally overlapping accounts of the history and accomplishments of Jesus Christ. The book called **Acts of the Apostles** begins with Jesus' command for the apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:4 and 5). The apostles' infilling with the Holy Ghost and their speaking with other tongues are recorded in Acts 2:1 -3, as well as Peter's using the keys of the kingdom to open the church in Acts 2:38 which states: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The adventures and growth of the early church plus the miraculous conversion of Paul, the apostle who took Judas Iscariot's place in the lineup of the disciples, are recorded in the book of Acts.

Paul was the apostle called by God to preach to white people, or Gentiles, as Caucasians are labeled in the Bible. The gospel message is for everybody, not only white people, but Paul was a one man spiritual rights commission or affirmative action program who was designated by God to teach white people how to access God.

Prior to the ministry of Paul, white people (or Gentiles) had no access to God. Jesus hesitated before He responded to a white woman's request in Mark 7:26 - 30 because His ministry was designated to the Jews (descendants of the Two Tribes of Judah and Benjamin) and to the Samaritans, descendants of members of the Ten Lost Tribes who had intermarried with the black people who were the indigenous inhabitants of the land of Israel.

The letters Paul wrote to these churches that were made up mostly of white people (Gentiles) were sent to the locations of churches that Paul had previously set up. The letters are not necessarily arranged in chronological order in the Bible.

Paul wrote a letter to the **Romans** at Rome. He sent two letters to the **Corinthians** at Corinth. Letters were sent to the **Galatians** at Galatia, the **Ephesians** at Ephesus, the **Philippians** at Philippi, the **Colossians** at Colosse, and two letters were sent to the **Thessalonians** at Thessalonica.

Paul was the mentor to **Timothy**, a Gentile Jew. Paul sent Timothy two letters. Paul also wrote letters addressed to a man named **Titus** and a man named **Philemon**. With Timothy's assistance, Paul wrote a letter to a group of Christian Jews. This letter is known as **Hebrews**.

The next letter writer in the New Testament is **James**, who was probably a half-brother to Jesus. This letter is addressed to the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The apostle **Peter** wrote two letters to a church. The apostle **John** wrote three letters to a church. **Jude** wrote a letter to a church. The final letter in the New Testament was written by the apostle John and is addressed to seven churches in Asia. This letter is known as the **Revelation of St. John the Divine**.

As you read the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, please remember that neither the author nor the intended audience of the Scriptures is crucial. What matters is the Word of God. As the Scriptures proclaim: **"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"** (II Timothy 3:16 and 17.) Amen!

Reading the Bible is an excellent method for a person to build up his soul and his life. Please begin now!