# EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

## OF THE BIBLE

Elmer L. Towns

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
*FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH*

# *EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES*

OF THE BIBLE

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OF THE BIBLE

Elmer L. Towns

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# Contents

**Introduction**

***OLD TESTAMENT***

**Genesis**

**Exodus**

**Leviticus**

**Numbers**

**Deuteronomy**

**Joshua**

**Judges**

**Ruth**

**1 Samuel**

**2 Samuel**

**1 Kings**

**2 Kings**

**1 Chronicles**

**2 Chronicles**

**Ezra**

**Nehemiah**

**Esther**

**Job**

**Psalms**

**Proverbs**

**Ecclesiastes**

**Song of Solomon**

**Isaiah**

**Jeremiah**

**Lamentations**

**Ezekiel**

**Daniel**

**Hosea**

**Joel**

**Amos**

**Obadiah**

**Jonah**

**Micah**

**Nahum**

**Habakkuk**

**Zephaniah**

**Haggai**

**Zechariah**

**Malachi**

## *NEW TESTAMENT*

**Matthew**

**Mark**

**Luke**

**John**

**Acts**

**Romans**

**1 Corinthians**

**2 Corinthians**

**Galatians**

**Ephesians**

**Philippians**

**Colossians**

**1 Thessalonians**

**2 Thessalonians**

**1 Timothy**

**2 Timothy**

**Titus**

**Philemon**

**Hebrews**

**James**

**1 Peter**

**2 Peter**

**1 John**

**2 John**

**3 John**

**Jude**

**Revelation**

# Introduction

THESE EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES OF THE BIBLE, *The Prayer Bible—A Modern Translation,* are instrumental for anyone desiring a comprehensive yet compact synopsis of the greatest Book ever written.

Elmer L. Towns translated the New Testament and poetic books and Roy B. Zuck translated the rest of the Old Testament. Both worked together on each other's text so that they agreed on the final manuscript that became *The Prayer Bible,* published in 2014, that has touched lives worldwide. It is accurate and faithful to the original text.

These executive summaries provide an overview and insights from a man who has dedicated his life to sharing God's Word with people around the world, and specifically with students at Liberty University, which he co-founded with Jerry Falwell, and has served the academic community there for many years. The summaries are a combination of creativity and biblical knowledge that will expand every reader's spiritual life.

Each summary includes a key word, key verse, and the theme of the specific book of the Bible. Also included is a prayer that brings together the basic foundation of the book, which opens communication between God and the reader.

# *OLD TESTAMENT*

# Genesis

**KEY WORD:** *Beginning* (Genesis 1:1)

**KEY VERSES:** "These are the generations of…" (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:27; 25:19; 37:2).

**THEME:** Genesis is a book of beginnings. It tells not only the beginning of the heavens and the earth (creation), but of plant life, animal life, and human life. It tells the beginning of marriage, worship, government, occupations, covenants, and the beginning of the Hebrew race, that is God's people, the Jews.

Genesis tells the beginning of prayer. It tells of *False-Prayer* (4:6-15), *Call-Prayer* (4:26), *Responsibility-Praying* (6:22), *Worship-Prayer* (8:20-22), *Repentance-Prayer* (12:1), *Blessing Expectation-Prayer* (13:14-18), *Protection-Prayer* (15:1), *Justification-Based Prayer* (15:2 ff.), *Intimacy-Prayer* (17:1 ff.), *Intercessor's-Prayer* (18:23 ff.), *Healing-Prayer* (20:17), *Deliverance-Prayer* (21:17), *Frightful-Prayer* (22:11-12), *Mourning the Dead-Prayer* (23:2), *Guidance-Prayer* (24:27). This is just the first half of Genesis. You cannot read Genesis without praying to God, and surely Genesis teaches us many ways to pray.

*Lord, thank You for a book that explains in a logical way how everything began. I believe the creation story just as it was created, and I praise You for Your greatness and intelligence that is evident in the world I see. Amen.*

# Exodus

**KEY WORD:** *Deliverance* (Exodus 18:9-10)

**KEY VERSE:** “I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (3:8).

**THEME:** The name Exodus means “way out” and it tells the story of God sending ten plagues on Egypt that motivated the Egyptians to release God’s people from bondage. It tells of the march through the wilderness to Mount Sinai and how God revealed Himself to them in the Ten Commands.

Also included is the introduction of the rules of worship, fellowship, and service, and a narrative blueprint for the construction of the tabernacle. Exodus is a picture of our *deliverance* and *redemption* from sin’s bondage, which is essential for a relationship with a holy God. The book ends with God’s presence filling the tabernacle and His people worshiping Him, which also is a picture of God’s purpose for us.

*Lord, thank You for my deliverance and redemption from sin. I worship You for all the ways You lead me through the desert of this life. I worship You for manifesting Your presence to me. Amen.*

# Leviticus

**KEY WORD:** *Holiness* (Leviticus 11:44)

**KEY VERSE:** “For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (11:44).

**THEME:** Exodus ends with God’s presence filling the tabernacle; Leviticus tells how His people must worship Him. The major theme is that God is holy and His people must be holy to worship Him, have fellowship with Him, and obey Him. God’s people are to be separate from the world, even though they live in the world. Therefore, they must bring a blood sacrifice at the beginning of worship and constant cleansing is necessary for their continued walk with God (Israel’s five essential sacrifices are in chapters 1-6).

*Just as the Mosaic law made Israel distinct from other tribes and nations (that is, holiness to the Lord), so the believer must be separate today from sin and separated to God. Lord, I will follow close to You and will keep myself separate from sin. Amen.*

# Numbers

**KEY WORDS:** *Wilderness wanderings* (Numbers 32:13)

**KEY VERSE:** “And the Lord’s anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord, was consumed” (32:13).

**THEME:** The book of Numbers gets its name from the two censuses (chapters 1 and 26) at the beginning and end of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. The people of God were counted to determine how many there were. God promised to lead the people to a land flowing with “milk and honey” (14:8), but Israel rejected God and refused to enter the Promised Land. Therefore, God allowed all people age 20 and older to wander in the wilderness until they died there. But even in Israel’s failure, God’s faithfulness is seen in the ways He continually provided for them.

We see a picture of our sinfulness in Numbers as we fail to walk with God and serve Him, but even then God is faithful to punish and bring us back to Himself.

*Lord, great is Your faithfulness in saving me and guiding me through the wilderness of this life. Amen.*

# Deuteronomy

**KEY WORDS:** *Ye shall* (Deuteronomy 11:31)

**KEY VERSE:** “For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day” (11:31-32).

**THEME:** Deuteronomy means “second giving of the law.” As Israel was camped on the east side of the Jordan River—ready to enter the Promised Land—Moses repeated the law and a history of the wilderness wandering because this generation was under 20 years of age when God delivered them from the Egyptian bondage. This book includes five sermons reminding Israel “you shall” obey the Lord and worship Him in integrity. Deuteronomy is a picture of what we must do to enter God’s promises today and how we must walk in fellowship with Him.

*Lord, I don’t look back to my sin and failure but I look to You for redemption and fellowship. Amen.*

# Joshua

**KEY WORD:** *Success* (Joshua 1:8)

**KEY VERSE:** “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (1:8).

**THEME:** The book begins, “Moses my servant is dead” (1:2), and Joshua takes over to lead Israel “out” of its wilderness wanderings, and “into” the Promised Land. God promises Israel success—victory over pagan nations—as they obey and follow Him. “And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein” (21:43).

Joshua is a picture of the victorious Christian life promised to believers today. Victory doesn’t come without obedience to God (see 1:8), plus our struggling or fighting against our spiritual enemy. Victory comes with preparation, discipline, and trust in God.

*Lord, I want to live victoriously over sin; I want You to be glorified in my life. Amen.*

# Judges

**KEY WORD:** *Delivered* (Judges 1:2)

**KEY VERSE:** “And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge” (2:18).

**THEME:** Another key verse in Judges is, “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). As a result, there was disunity among the 12 tribes; no one completely followed the Lord, and no tribe completely conquered the territory assigned to them. There was apostasy among the priests, and rebellion and sin among the people.

We see in Judges seven cycles of failure where Israel sinned and worshiped the idols of nations around them. Each spiritual failure led to a military defeat and cultural failures. After each failure, God in His mercy raised up a judge to deliver Israel. Judges were much more than legal arbitrators as seen today; they were spiritual leaders who led in reforms, military leaders who fought, and prophets who spoke for God.

Judges teaches the natural tendency of people to selfish disobedience and sin, but it also shows how God uses human leaders to call His people to repent and return to Him for their prosperity and security.

*Lord, I will not drift from You. Use me to call others back to obedience. Amen.*

# Ruth

**KEY WORD:** *Kinsman* (Ruth 4:14)

**KEY VERSE:** “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son” (4:13).

**THEME:** The author (possibly Samuel) tells a short story that begins with a *crisis* when Elimelech and his family abandon the Holy Land and move to the nation of Moab. Complications follow with Elimelech and his two sons dying, leaving a wife and two daughters-in-law without husbands. When Naomi tells the two widows to return to their family and idol worship, one of the two widows—Ruth—decides to follow the Lord of Israel and goes with her mother-in-law (Naomi) back to the Holy Land and Bethlehem.

What appears to be a chance choice of a field to pick up leftover grain was obviously divine guidance because the field was owned by Boaz, a family relative who becomes the “Kinsman Redeemer.” Boaz redeems Ruth out of bankruptcy and marries her. Their son is Obed, the grandfather of King David.

Ruth is a picture of the Gentile bride, the church, redeemed by the family of David—Jesus Christ. It’s also a picture of Gentiles who choose the salvation of the Lord, as did Ruth.

*Lord, I choose to follow Jesus Christ and will serve Him all my life. Amen.*

# 1 Samuel

**KEY WORDS:** *King Saul* (1 Samuel 11:15)

**KEY VERSE:** “And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, ‘Samuel, Samuel.’ Then Samuel answered, ‘Speak; for thy servant heareth’” (3:10).

**THEME:** First Samuel marks the end of the time of the judges when, “Everyone did what was right inhis own eyes” (Judg. 21:25 NKJV). The priesthood under Eli became corrupt, and Samuel introduced the office of prophets, and from then on a prophet, not a priest, primarily spoke the “words of God.” Also this book introduces the office of king, when Samuel first anointed Saul. Then after Saul’s rebellion against God, Samuel anointed David as the next king. First Samuel contrasts the bad leadership of Saul with the godly leadership of David who was “a man after his (God’s) own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14).

*Lord, I will seek You as did David, and I will follow You with all my heart. Amen.*

# 2 Samuel

**KEY WORDS:** *King David* (2 Samuel 2:4)

**KEY VERSE:** “So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years” (5:3-4).

**THEME:** First Samuel records the failure of Eli and King Saul, and Second Samuel reflects the restoration of peace to the nation of Israel through the strength of King David. The tenderhearted David—the shepherd king—conquers the enemies of Israel and sets up a godly rule in Jerusalem. Yet even in the midst of strength and prosperity, evil slipped into David’s life. He sinned with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. God judged David’s sin, just as God punishes sin today. Bathsheba’s baby died, David’s family was ravaged by sin, and David’s oldest son Absalom tried to kill him.

*Lord, I vow to live a pure life; keep me from sin. And when I sin ignorantly—or otherwise—deal with me in mercy and cleanse me by the blood of Christ (see 1 John 1:7-9).*

# 1 Kings

**KEY WORDS:** *King Solomon* (1 Kings 1:30)

**KEY VERSE:** “And Zadok the priest took a horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save King Solomon” (1:39).

**THEME:** First Kings records the attempt by Adonijah, a son of David, to steal the throne of Israel. David wisely led Solomon to ascend properly to the office. Solomon built the temple, but fell away from God. The kingdom was separated under Jeroboam and Rehoboam, and First Kings traces the history of the divided nations until Jehoram was king over the southern godly kingdom of Judah, and Ahaziah was king over the northern ungodly kingdom of Israel. We see how godly kings led the people to obey God’s law and ungodly kings led the people away in disobedience. Since there is a principle that obedience brings blessings, we see events of prosperity when God’s people obey Him, and likewise, events of suffering when God’s people forsake Him.

*Lord, may I never forsake You; may I always obey You from the heart. Amen.*

# 2 Kings

**KEY WORDS:** *Babylon Captivity* (2 Kings 24:15)

**KEY VERSE:** “And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king’s mother, and the king’s wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon” (24:15).

**THEME:** This book records two great tragedies as the result of God’s people who disobeyed Him and polluted themselves with idols. First, in 723 BC the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria and was carried away in slavery. Second, in 586 BC the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were carried away in slavery. This book emphasizes the ministry of Elijah and Elisha (plus warnings from other prophets) to the northern kingdom. It also contains the ministry of Isaiah and Jeremiah (plus warnings from other prophets) to the southern kingdom. The lesson is obvious; when people turn away from God to give themselves to sin; they end up in slavery to sin.

*Lord, I want to be Your slave; keep me from addictive slavery of sin. Amen.*

# 1 Chronicles

**KEY WORDS:** *All Israel* (45 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “Then all Israel gathered themselves to David unto Hebron, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh” (1 Chronicles 11:1).

**THEME:** The chronicler wanted to see “all Israel” united because they were God’s people, and they all came from Abraham. He traces the genealogy from Adam to Saul (chapters 1-11). Then he traces David’s life, but was kind to David in not mentioning his sins. The book ends with David’s death.

The Bible is all about how God dealt with His people. We should read about them to avoid their mistakes and follow their exploits. Then we should commit ourselves in prayer to always be faithful to God, and to always strive against sin.

*Lord, I want to learn from Your servants. Help me to be strong against sin and be kind to the needy. Amen.*

# 2 Chronicles

**KEY WORDS:** *Temple*, also see *Sanctuary* and the *House of the Lord* (2 Chronicles 2:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple” (7:1).

**THEME:** The word “temple” occurs more in this book than any other Old Testament book, but the temple is also described as “the house of the Lord” and “sanctuary.” The chronicler saw the temple as essential for the unity of the people and the strength of the kingdom. While God used human kings to rally His people to spirituality, it was God’s house where the people expressed their faith and reflected their repentance and/or worship. Therefore Second Chronicles emphasizes the southern kingdom of Judah, and refers to the northern kingdom of Israel only when they interacted with the south. Also First and Second Chronicles emphasize the priesthood more than the office of king. The southern kingdom allowed apostasy to grow by worshiping idols. And apostasy goes hand in hand with immorality. Then God judged them and allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and the temple and take the people of God into captivity.

*Lord, I will stay true to biblical doctrine; keep me from sin. I will not drift from You. Amen.*

# Ezra

**KEY WORDS:** *God of Heaven* (Ezra 1:2; 5:11-12; 6:9-10; 7:12,23)

**KEY VERSE:** "Rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem so that sacrifices can be made there" (6:3, *Prayer Journey Paraphrase*).

**THEME:** The book of Ezra tells the story of the Jewish people returning from 70 years of captivity in Babylon. King Cyrus of Medo-Persia defeated Babylon and decreed the Jews' return to their land. The first part of Ezra (chapters 1-6) tells of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel leading the people back and rebuilding the temple. The long-suffering prayers of God's people are answered (Dan. 9:3-19; Ps. 137).

The second part (chapters 7-10) is a record of Ezra's leadership and the repentance of the people (with fasting) that led to revival. Ezra's favorite name for the Lord was "God of Heaven." Since Israel was out of fellowship with the Lord, and didn't have a central place for worship; Ezra worked under the guidance of the *God of Heaven.*

Ezra teaches us to fast and pray when we face dangerous situations, and life-threatening challenges.

*Lord, I know evil destroys people, so I will keep myself from sin. Like Ezra, I will fast and pray for spiritual protection from the evil one. Amen.*

# Nehemiah

**KEY WORD:** *Remember* (Nehemiah 13:31)

**KEY VERSE:** “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days” (6:15 NKJV).

**THEME:** The book of Nehemiah covers the period following 445 BC when Israel re-established itself on its homeland by rebuilding the walls and re-creating a vibrant community life. Throughout, Nehemiah inserts prayers as he writes this book, “Remember me, O my God, for good” (13:31). As needs came to Nehemiah’s mind, he wrote them into the scriptural record.

Nehemiah teaches us to write out our prayers, and to pray as we go about our daily activities. Whether we’re waiting in line or doing any normal work, we should pray spontaneously as did Nehemiah.

*Lord, I will pray as I do my work, just as Nehemiah prayed. I will pray as I write. Keep me close to You so I can pray at all times. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Amen.*

# Esther

**KEY WORDS:** "*For such a time as this*" (Esther 4:14)

**KEY VERSE:** "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king…and if I perish, I perish!" (4:16 NKJV).

**THEME:** While the name God is not written in this book, the presence of God is unmistakably seen in the irreversible tide of events. Queen Vashti was removed from the throne of Persia and Esther took her place. Prime Minister Haman hated the Jews and planned their entire extinction. Haman planned to hang Mordecai, but was himself hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai. The Jews were able to successfully defend themselves against greedy, hateful men who intended their destruction. Finally, Mordecai became Prime Minister of Persia. The book of Esther teaches us to trust God who controls the affairs of this life, and to fast and pray for His intervention when circumstances seem bleakest.

*Lord, I determine to follow You and be faithful to You—even to death, "If I perish, I perish" (4:16). Amen.*

# Job

**KEY WORDS:** *The Almighty* (Job 5:17)

**KEY VERSE:** "'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong" (1:21-22 NKJV).

**THEME:** The Hebrew name for God, "El Shaddai," means *Almighty.* This title occurs 31 times in Job, far more than in any other Bible book.

Job was possibly the son of Issachar mentioned in Genesis 46:13. Issachar was one of the 12 sons of Jacob who eventually went down to Egypt to live (see Gen. 46:13). Issachar was approximately 40 years old when he went down to Egypt. That suggests his third son, Job, would have been about 20 years old at that time (1706 BC). While most of Israel originally prospered in Egypt under Joseph, possibly Job did not stay in Egypt with his parents. Maybe he returned back to the Sinai Peninsula to live in Uz. It was there Job accumulated his wealth and prosperity.

Job was approximately 70 years old when his wealth and health were taken away (see Job 1-2). When he was restored, God gave him a "double blessing" (42:10), which would imply that he lived another 140 years. Apparently Job was 210 years old when he died.

The fact that Job may have been the son of Issachar accounts for him being a worshiper of the God of Abraham and accounts for his multiple use of the term El Shaddai—translated "Almighty"—a name for God used in Genesis 17:1.

The first of Job's friends—Eliphaz—was a son of Esau (see Gen. 36:4, 10, 11). Eliphaz was one generation older than Job. Therefore Eliphaz who rebuked Job was really a crotchety old uncle who thought his family ties gave him the right to criticize Job. The second "comforter" was Bildad. As a Shuhite, he was probably related to Shuah, Abraham's youngest son by Keturah (see Gen. 25:2).

When Job died (1516 BC), Moses was 55 years old and had already spent 15 years in the Sinai Peninsula watching his sheep. Job and Moses not only overlapped each other because they lived in the same area, and they may have

known each other. Perhaps Moses was an “ear-witness” of the content of the book as Job told him the stories of losing his wealth and the hypocritical speeches of the three “comforters.” Job’s family may have even met some of Job’s friends. Job may have told his amazing story of suffering to Moses who wrote it down. Moses kept the manuscript; eventually adding it to the collection of the first five books of the Old Testament that he also wrote.

The book of Job tells the amazing story of a man who held tenaciously to his integrity in the face of pain, loss, darkness, and even death. Job’s integrity tells its own story that a man’s relationship to God is more important than anything else, even his own physical life.

The book of Job teaches its own lesson that in this world there is sickness, pain and loss, even to those who follow God. Trouble comes to the just and unjust. This story also tells that friends can give the wrong advice to those who are sick. Their worst advice was that Job was suffering because he had sinned against God.

*Lord, I will serve You in sickness and health, in the good days and in bad days. Amen.*

# Psalms

**KEY WORD:** *Praise.* All but one sentence in Psalm 150 begins with the word Praise.

**KEY VERSE:** “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6 NKJV, last verse in the Psalms).

**THEME:** The Psalms were written as prayers for the Hebrew people to sing. Their music was their deep feeling about God, or a prayer to God. Therefore each psalm is a worship event. Thus, some psalms are rewritten into prayers. Instead of reading “The Lord is my shepherd,” you’ll pray, “Lord, You are my shepherd.” Lord, teach me to talk to You through Scripture. Amen.

Each psalm is a mirror that reflects your soul. As you pray them, you’ll see in these mirrors your sin and hypocrisy more clearly than ever before. So pray the psalms of repentance and turn to God. But you’ll also see in these mirrors the essence of a godly life. Then pray with the psalmist, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (42:1 NKJV). Look deep into each mirror and you’ll see God. While this is not a theology textbook on God, you’ll see many aspects of His person and attributes as you read through this Prayer Bible. Lord, I want to know You. Amen.

The Psalms are poetry, not like English poetry with rhyme and meter, for example, “Roses are red, violets are blue, the angels in heaven, know I surely love you.” Hebrew poetry had neither rhyme nor meter. Their poetry had rhythm as they accentuated different phrases, so that the poetry was matched phrases. The secret of Hebrew poetry is that thoughts matched, with no matching rhymes or meter.

The Psalms are written in prayers so we can identify with them and pray them. But not all the psalms were originally prayers to God. Some psalms were originally written as devotional thoughts about God (Psalm 23); a few psalms pour out anger at enemies (Psalms 3 and 4). Some psalms are instructional (Psalm 119), teaching the law of God. But in this book all of them are transposed into prayers in modern language so you can pray the words to talk to God.

*Lord, I want You to feel my passionate love for You as I pray these psalms, and I want You to feel my anger as I vent my feelings about evil people. Sometimes I pray these psalms begging You for protection…for rest…or from relief from pain. Sometimes I ask You for forgiveness, or for Your guidance in my life. I need to touch You and let You touch me. I pray these psalms in order to enter Your presence. Amen.*

# Proverbs

**KEY WORD:** *Wisdom* (occurs 54 times, Proverbs 1:2)

**KEY VERSE:** “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding” (3:13 NKJV).

**THEME:** A proverb usually expresses familiar truth in a popularly known way and is expressed in simple metaphorical truth so that people may apply or honor its teaching. The thrust of Proverbs is “apply your heart to wisdom, that you may gain understanding.” This is another way of saying learn to think what is right, so you’ll do what is right.

God didn’t include a lot of things in Proverbs. There is no plan of salvation, doctrine, and messianic predictions. You’ll get these topics in other books of the Bible. Also there are no plots or storyline and no individuals identified by name in Proverbs, except Solomon, Bathsheba, Ithiel, and Ucal. Proverbs gets its points across by brief, one or two-line declarations of truth to illustrate proper living. Personalities are described but are not involved in parables or conversations with each other, nor do they refer to actual persons. They are descriptions of actions or attitudes that we should follow or reject to have a good life.

*The Prayer Bible* is a book that can change your life. If you will honestly pray the Proverbs, you will gain wisdom; it will help you live better. And wisdom is truth applied to daily life.

*Lord, give me wisdom so I will know the right way to live, then give me strength to live rightly. Amen.*

# Ecclesiastes

**KEY WORDS:** *Vanity of vanities* (occurs 35 times, Ecclesiastes 1:2)

**KEY VERSE:** “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (1:2).

**THEME:** According to Jewish tradition, Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon with its passionate emphasis on love when he was a young man who walked with God. Solomon’s second book, Proverbs, emphasizes practical wisdom he used. Building his kingdom on wisdom and through good leadership principles, he chronicled Proverbs in his middle adult life. The third book, Ecclesiastes, was written by Solomon in his old age after his successes and failures of many marriages, his lack of contentment with luxury, and his boredom with power and authority.

Through the years many people have been perplexed at the negative attitudes of Ecclesiastes. This is Solomon’s attempt to show the futility of life lived apart from God’s principles. The Preacher begins, “Vanity of vanities” (1:2, which is translated in this volume as “frustrating and nothing makes sense,” *Prayer Bible paraphrase*). Then the Preacher asks the question, “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (1:3). The word “profit” is the Hebrew word *yithron*, a word unique to Ecclesiastes drawn from the business world. It means a financial profit, gain, superiority, or preeminence. What can man gain from a fallen world? Solomon concludes that money, luxury, and sexual exploits are all frustrating and meaningless. Solomon asked the same question the Lord Jesus asked, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

*Lord, I will seek Your wisdom to live properly for Your glory. Keep me from vanities and sin. Amen.*

# Song of Solomon

**KEY WORD:** *Beloved* found 28 times (see Song of Solomon 2:3)

**KEY VERSE:** “My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies” (2:16).

**THEME:** The sons of David worked in the fields to learn character, just as David learned many lessons as a boy shepherd. In the fields Solomon met a young dark-skinned Shulamite girl, and fell in love with her. It was pure love! Suddenly Solomon was taken away to become king. She was left alone with his promise that he would return. She had dreams and desires, and as the old adage says, “Separation makes the heart grow fonder.” She loved Solomon more in separation than in presence.

The day came when Solomon returned triumphantly to claim his bride. His chariot came dashing down the country road. “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?” (3:6).

This book is called “Solomon’s Song of Songs” (1:1 NIV). But what does that mean? It means that this song is foundational to all other songs because it’s about a *relationship* of pure love between a man and his wife; which is a picture of the believer’s love for Christ. Christ loves us deeper than a bridegroom loves his new bride, and we ought to respond in kind. This is the best song that has ever been written, perhaps a “Song of Songs” about your love to Christ.

*Lord, I love You with all my heart because You first loved me and gave Yourself for me. Amen.*

# Isaiah

**KEY WORDS:** *The Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah's unique name for God, Isaiah 1:4)

**KEY VERSE:** "Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (6:9-10).

**THEME:** Isaiah began his career during a time of relative peace and prosperity under two of Judah's kings—Uzziah and Jotham. However, conditions deteriorated, especially on the international scene. During Ahaz's reign in the north, Assyria became a superpower and deported away Judah's sister kingdom (Israel) in 722 BC. During Hezekiah's reign, Assyria ravaged the Judean countryside, and the city of Jerusalem itself almost fell. Again Isaiah preached a message of hope and Hezekiah's prayer turned away Assyria.

To view Isaiah merely as a preacher about events during his lifetime is to have only half the picture, because he is perhaps best known for his prophecies about the intermediate and distant future. Isaiah 1-39 deal primarily with events during the prophet's lifetime, but the latter part of the book is almost totally concerned with the future (from their vantage point in history). Isaiah 40 begins a major section that looks ahead to Judah's intermediate return from Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, and her return at the end of the age when God's people will triumphantly occupy the Holy Land.

Isaiah has many prophecies about the coming Messiah; the most striking relate to Jesus' miraculous birth (7:14), His deity (9:6-7) and His suffering and death (53).

*Lord, thank You for the predictions of Jesus' birth and death, for these confirm to me His supernatural death for my sins. Amen.*

# Jeremiah

**KEY WORDS:** *The Word of the Lord came* (Jeremiah 1:4)

**KEY VERSE:** "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations'" (1:4-5).

**THEME:** Jeremiah came from a priestly family living in Anathoth near Jerusalem. He wrote the longest book in the Bible, and his career spanned more than 40 years—during the reigns of Judah's last five kings. Jeremiah was called by God as a young man, and throughout his long turbulent life, he confronted a people who had rejected God's commands and deliberately chose false gods. He warned them of their eventual destruction. Nevertheless God's people refused to repent, so Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC, and they were deported to Babylon.

In Jeremiah's famous "Temple Sermon," he had told the people that the temple would be destroyed and for that he nearly lost his life. Thereafter Jeremiah was considered as a traitor and was arrested and jailed.

When the city of Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah was given the privilege of remaining in Judah. He wanted to stay in the Holy Land, but renegade Jews forced him to go to Egypt where tradition has it that he died.

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because his burden was so heavy. The Jews would not listen to him and they opposed him and tried to kill him, leading him to periods of deep depression. His was an example of total faithfulness to God, regardless of failure or circumstances.

*Lord, may I be as faithful to You as was Jeremiah when rejected by an unsaved world. Amen.*

# Lamentations

**KEY WORD:** *Affliction (*occurs 9 time, Lamentations 1:12)

**KEY VERSE:** "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (3:22-23).

**THEME:** This book was written within three months after the fall of Jerusalem in the summer of 586 BC, before the remnant departed for Egypt (Jer. 39:2; 41:1,18; 43:7). Jeremiah sat on a Judean hill and watched the city smolder while the few remaining inhabitants scavenged through garbage and trash looking for food. The tears of the weeping prophet are never more evident than in his crying over the destruction of the temple, the priestly sacrificial system, the Jewish culture and life as it once prospered in Jerusalem.

In the midst of the gloom, the author framed the chapters with a beautiful literary acrostic style. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each has 22 verses, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of each verse begins with a Hebrew letter, progressing in order through the entire alphabet. Lamentations 3 does the same thing in blocks of three verses, for a total of 66 verses (22x3 = 66). Although Lamentations 5 also has 22 verses, no acrostic mechanism is present.

The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, 285-247 BC) has this introduction, "It came to pass that after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem was made desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said…" Jeremiah realized it was God's mercy that the remnant was not destroyed, even when God afflicted (keyword) His children for their sin and rebellion. He thanks God that His mercies are "new every morning." Then Jeremiah praised God, "Great is thy faithfulness."

*Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness to draw me to Yourself. Amen.*

# Ezekiel

**KEY WORDS:** *Son of Man* (occurs 107 times, Ezekiel 2:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him” (1:3).

**THEME:** Ezekiel was born into the priestly tribe (see 1:3), but God gave him visions, and commanded him to tell (prophesy) them to the nation of Israel. Ezekiel was carried into Babylon in the first deportation (606 BC). He kept before the nation the sins which led to their captivity. He also predicted Israel’s return to the land of promise (chapter 37) and described the temple in Jerusalem during the coming millennial kingdom (chapters 40-48). Ezekiel also predicted judgment upon the surrounding nations that had oppressed Israel. There are two reoccurring phrases in Ezekiel that establish the authority of his messages; “the hand of the Lord was there upon him” (Ezek. 1:3; 3:14,22) and “The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel” (1:3).

God calls Ezekiel “Son of Man” to remind him of his humanity because he comes from flesh; yet God used him in supernatural ways. Jesus used the same term (80 times in Luke in reference to Himself, that is, “Son of Man” to accentuate that God had come from the flesh).

*Lord, Ezekiel was just human, yet You spoke to him supernaturally and used him to communicate Your message to others. In the same way, I am just human; but You speak to me supernaturally through Scripture, so I will tell Your message to others. Amen.*

# Daniel

**KEY WORDS:** *Dreams and Visions* (Daniel 7:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days (2:27-28).

**THEME:** Whereas most prophets speak primarily to the Jews, God’s people; Daniel focused on secular world empires. Daniel properly predicts the coming of four empires that conquered the Western civilized world (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome 2:31-43). But Daniel’s focus was on the coming world dominion by God and His Son, Jesus Christ. The reader should pray for worldwide evangelization and for the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will judge all evil when He establishes His worldwide rule.

*Lord, thank You for the plan You had for the Jews, and thank You for Your command to me and the church to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every people group (see Matt. 28:19-20). Amen.*

# Hosea

**KEY WORDS:** *Not my people* (Hosea 1:9)

**KEY VERSE:** “For ye are not my people, and I will not be your God” (1:9).

**THEME:** Hosea is told to marry a woman with a predisposition to adultery as a picture of Israel who has a predisposition to worship false gods. God established a “covenant of love” with the Jews when He led them out of Egypt. But Israel constantly worshiped the idols and gods of the surrounding nations. The rough language of Hosea 2:2-7 is a picture of the Lord’s disgust at Israel’s spiritual adultery. In Israel, the penalty of adultery was death (see Lev. 20:10), so when God tells Hosea to receive back his wife, it’s a picture of the grace of God to receive back Israel who rejected Him. Then Israel will say, “Thou art my God” (2:23).

In Hosea you’ll learn that the Lord is a demanding God who punishes our unfaithfulness to Him, but He has another side. God is long-suffering to you and will forgive and receive you. Pray that you will be protected from backsliding, but also pray for forgiveness when you sin, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

*Lord, forgive me of all my sin—ignorant sin, and otherwise—cleanse me by the blood of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.*

# Joel

**KEY WORDS:** *The Day of the Lord* (Joel 1:15)

**KEY VERSE:** "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (2:32).

**THEME:** Joel predicts a coming locust-judgment from God on the nation because of her sins against God, calling it "The day of the Lord." The plague and drought will be so devastating that the nation cannot sacrifice offerings to God. The second half of Joel (2:28-3:21) predicts the future repentance and restoration of the Jews. Joel teaches us to pray for the true meaning of revival, that is, God pouring His presence on His people, and He is safety for all who call upon Him (see 2:28-32).

*Lord, forgive me of all my sin and restore me to Your fellowship. Pour out Your presence on me in revival. Amen.*

# Amos

**KEY WORD:** *Prepare* (Amos 4:12)

**KEY VERSE:** “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (4:12).

**THEME:** Amos predicts the coming destruction of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations. He prophesied the destruction of Jeroboam’s kingdom when it was strong and prosperous, and his prediction seemed unlikely to happen. Yet 50 years later the kingdom was completely destroyed. This teaches us to claim the promises of God in prayer, even when it seems an answer may not be in sight.

*Lord, I will heed Your warnings and will turn away from sin. I know You speak the truth and will punish sin. Protect me by the blood of Christ (see 1 John 1:7). Amen.*

# Obadiah

**KEY WORD:** *Edom* (Obadiah 1:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord” (1:3-4).

**THEME:** Obadiah prophesies against a tribal nation named Edom or Esau. Edom means “red,” and perhaps the people got their name when Esau was born, “The first (Esau) came out red, all over like a hairy garment” (Gen. 25:25). So the Edomites came from Esau, and were named “red” after their father. But Esau “despised” the spiritual birthright of the people of God. He didn’t want to be God’s man to carry on the Abrahamic promise. They are also called “red” because they lived up in the “red” rocks south of the Dead Sea.

Nothing is known about Obadiah except that his name means “servant of the Lord.” Nothing! This tells us four things. First, being a servant of God is more important than your family background or experiences or preparations. Second, the message of the servant of the Lord is more important than the messenger. Third, don’t bring attention to yourself in ministry, but rather bring attention to the message God gives you to deliver. Finally, the greatest thing that can be said of all of us is we are “a servant of the Lord.”

*Lord, may I be like Obadiah; may I be Your faithful servant and deliver Your message faithfully. Amen.*

# Jonah

**KEY WORD:** *Prepare* (Jonah 1:17; 4:6-8)

**KEY VERSE:** "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (4:11).

**THEME:** Jonah was a bigoted Jew who was unwilling to preach repentance to an enemy of Israel, that is, Nineveh. This book tells how God dealt with Jonah to motivate him to preach to unsaved Gentiles.

Jonah is a picture (type) of Christ who was raised from the dead then carried salvation to the Gentiles; the fish's belly is a picture of Jesus' entombment. Jesus gives credibility to the historical reliability of Jonah (see Matt. 12:39-41), so to reject the historical accuracy of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish is tantamount to rejecting Jesus' credibility and reliability. As you read Jonah, search your heart for any excuses or resistance to your obligation to share the gospel with lost people.

*Lord, I will go give the gospel to any person or race. Forgive me for any racism I've had in the past. Give me a love for all people, everywhere. Amen.*

# Micah

**KEY WORD:** *Hear* (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple” (1:2).

**THEME:** Micah prophesied between 750 and 725 BC and was a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. He focused on Samaria (Israel the Northern Kingdom) and Jerusalem (the Southern Kingdom of Judah). He had a dual theme of judgment of sin followed by future restoration. He had a strong sense of social justice in the courts (3:11; 7:3) in business (6:10-12), in places of authority and power (2:1-9; 3:1-10; 6:12; 7:2-6).

Micah preached against a Jewish religious system that had much ritual but little repentance or holiness. Therefore a person’s responsibility was “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (6:8).

*Lord, keep me from looking for my spirituality from religious tradition and meetings. May religious “things” only be methods that point me to You. Amen.*

# Nahum

**KEY WORD:** *Nineveh* (Nahum 1:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies” (1:7-8).

**THEME:** Little is known about the prophet Nahum, the Elkoshite (see 1:1) and nothing is known about Elkosh; even its location is unknown. Nahum prophesied 200 years after Jonah preached repentance (852 BC), to Nineveh and the city turned to God (see Jonah 3:1-10). But Nahum does not call for repentance, but warns of the city’s destruction that occurred in 612 BC. Therefore, Nahum preached around 650 BC.

Nineveh stands for false religions among Gentiles, and thus represents all morally corrupt cultures that will be judged by God. “There is no healing” (Nah. 3:19) for morally corrupt apostasy, only complete judgment by God (Rom. 1:18-32). But in the middle of a message of God’s awesome vengeance is a picture of God’s protection for those who put their trust in Him, “A strong hold in the day of trouble” (Nah. 1:7). Yes, “God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth” (1:2), but “the Lord is good” (1:7).

*Lord, I look for Your mercy to me as You judge sin. Amen.*

# Habakkuk

**KEY WORD:** *Silence* (Habakkuk 2:20)

**KEY VERSE:** “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20).

**THEME:** Habakkuk never mentions the nation of Assyria which was destroyed in 612 BC so we assume he wrote after that date. He describes Babylon as a great force, but God’s people are not yet subdued to them (began in 605 BC) so he writes between these two dates. Habakkuk asks why God’s justice is silent. Habakkuk is like people today who ask when trouble approaches, “Where is God?” People today see victorious evil winning over God’s people, and ask, “Why is God silent?”

Habakkuk announces God will judge Judah for her spiritual sins and rejecting the Lord. But Babylon is so violent and morally wicked Habakkuk asks, “Why is God’s judgment silent against this Gentile nation?” He was not reluctant to question the purpose of God.

Finally, Habakkuk realizes God reigns in heaven no matter what happens on earth, “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20).

*Lord, forgive me when I question You in unbelief, or I don’t trust Your plan for my life. Amen.*

# Zephaniah

**KEY WORDS:** *The day of the Lord's anger* (Zephaniah 2:3).

**KEY VERSE:** "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3).

**THEME:** Zephaniah (means the Lord hides) was the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, the king who reformed and brought revival to Jerusalem. Zephaniah prophesied during King Josiah, also a revival king. Zephaniah wrote before AD 612 because he predicted Nineveh would fall. He also prophesied prior to Josiah's 18th year (622 BC).

Zephaniah's key words, "The day of the Lord's anger" described Nebuchadnezzar's invasion—judgment, but he also predicts the restoration of Israel and God's blessing on them.

*Lord, I know You judge sin because You punished Christ for my sins, and now I enjoy restoration to Your favor and I enjoy spiritual prosperity. Amen.*

# Haggai

**KEY WORD:** *Consider* (Haggai 1:5,7; 2:15,18)

**KEY VERSE:** “Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord” (1:7-8).

**THEME:** Haggai preached to the Jews who came back from the Babylonian captivity (beginning in 520 BC, see Zech. 1:1,7). He called the people to proper worship as his first priority. He motivated the Jews to rebuild the temple, that is, the house of worship. To do this, he motivated the people to gather the materials to start the work (see Hag. 1:7-8). His key phrase was to “think about” or “consider” the consequences if they didn’t, but also consider that the glory of God would fill the house (see 2:9).

Haggai reminds us that God and His work are more important than our homes, jobs, and material things. If we don’t put God first, our prayers won’t be answered.

*Lord, I surrender everything I have to You—all my belongings—to be used to worship and glorify You. Amen.*

# Zechariah

**KEY WORDS:** *The Lord of hosts* (Zechariah 4:6)

**KEY VERSE:** "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (4:6).

**THEME:** Zechariah began prophesying in 520 BC about two months after Haggai prophesied. The Babylonian kingdom had previously fallen to the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 BC, and a year later, King Cyrus, as specifically predicted by Isaiah (see Isa. 44:24-28 and 45:1-13), issued a decree which allowed some of the Jews to return to their homeland (see 2 Chron. 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-11; 2:1 ff.). Approximately 42,000 of the exiles made the long trip under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (see Ezra 2:2,64). By 536 BC, the first group had arrived in Palestine and laid the foundation of the temple. However, because of opposition from neighboring peoples, work on the temple stopped (see 4:4-5).

Construction was not resumed until God raised up two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) 16 years later. They preached to motivate the Jewish people to complete the reconstruction project. The combined preaching of these two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—was perhaps the most effective preaching ever. The people began building the temple immediately, and didn't stop until it was finished.

*Lord, thank You for effective preachers of Your Word. May Your preachers be effective today. Use me as You used Haggai and Zechariah. Amen.*

# Malachi

**KEY WORD:** *Messenger* (Malachi 3:1)

**KEY VERSE:** “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts” (3:1).

**THEME:** The name Malachi means “my messenger.” Malachi speaks for the Lord who calls him, “My messenger” (3:1). He is also called, “the Messenger of the Lord of hosts” (2:7). The emphasis of this book is on the message, and not the messenger, that is, Malachi. Therefore, 47 of the 55 verses are personal messages from the Lord. The Lord has always loved Israel in spite of her sin(s). He will still love Israel, and will always love Israel in the future. But Israel has not honored the Lord as a child should honor their father, or a slave should honor their master. Israel’s sin—dishonest worship and deceitful rituals.

Malachi emphasizes giving God the best of everything in worship. This principle is still true.

*Lord, I give You my whole heart. Pry open my hands from holding tightly to this world. Fix my grip on You. Amen.*

# *NEW TESTAMENT*

# Matthew

**KEY WORD:** *King* (Matthew 2:2)

**KEY VERSE:** “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (2:2 NKJV).

**THEME**: Matthew wrote to show Jesus as the King of Israel who fulfilled the Old Testament predictions of the coming King of Israel as demonstrated by His lineage (see Matt. 1:1-18), His birth in Bethlehem, and his being worshiped by wise men as a King. Matthew described the forerunner of the King (John the Baptizer), the sermons (speeches) of the King, the ministry of the King, and Israel’s rejection of her King. In His first coming, Jesus didn’t come to sit on a throne in Jerusalem, but to die for the sins of the world. Jesus wants to sit on the throne of His follower’s hearts and rule from the inside out.

When reading Matthew, be wise like the wise men who asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” (2:2). When you discover Jesus, follow the example of the wise men and “worship Him” (2:2). Then “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (6:33 NKJV) and let the influence of Jesus—the King of your heart—rule your life and influence your world.

*Lord, come sit on the throne of my heart and rule my life. I want to be Your servant. Amen.*

# Mark

**KEY WORDS:** *Immediately* (Mark 1:12)

**KEY VERSE:** "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45 NKJV).

**THEME:** Mark presents Jesus as a servant. Also He is seen as a mighty worker doing miracles. The key word "immediately" reveals the character trait of a servant who immediately serves His master, that is, Jesus' heavenly Father. Notice the things that are not emphasized about servants: their birth, genealogy, sayings (sermons and parables), and fulfillment of prophecy. Mark does not refer to these aspects of Jesus.

Prepare your heart to read about Jesus, the humble servant, who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" but emptied Himself of the form of God and was found in the appearance as a man so He might serve people and die for their sins" (see Phil. 2:6-8). Then, pray to become a better servant and minister to the needs of others.

*Lord, I want to be a servant, but I confess my proud heart. I like to be number one. Forgive me! Give me the heart of serving others. Amen.*

# Luke

**KEY WORDS:** *Son of Man* (Luke 19:10)

**KEY VERSE:** “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:10 NKJV).

**THEME:** Luke, called “the beloved physician” by Paul (Col. 4:14), wrote about the human side of Jesus Christ, who is the God-Man. He emphasized Jesus’ mother, His birth, boyhood, and human growth (Luke 2:52). He emphasized the wisdom of Jesus in His parables and of course His death, burial, resurrection, and return to heaven.

Search the Gospel of Luke to see the human characteristics of Jesus, then pray, “What would Jesus do?” (WWJD). Read to find how Jesus lived, served, and gave His life for others; then pray for strength and wisdom to follow His example (see 1 Peter 2:21).

*Lord, I love the man Jesus; help me live as He lived. I submit myself to Jesus, the Son of God, who died for me. Forgive me of my sin and use me. Amen.*

# John

**KEY WORD:** *Believe* (occurs 96 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31 NKJV).

**THEME:** John writes to demonstrate Jesus’ deity, that He is the Son of God, and that those who believe in Jesus for salvation will have eternal life. Then John exhorts his readers to be transformed by the indwelling power of Jesus Christ (see 14:20; 15:1-7). John doesn’t tell of Jesus’ earthly genealogy, birth or growth years. He begins in eternity past. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John writes only of eight miracles in Jesus’ earthly ministry that are “signs” pointing to His deity.

The supernatural promise of Jesus to believers is, “I in them, and You in Me” (17:23 NKJV). Thus, in salvation Jesus comes to dwell in us on this earth so we can live for Him. But we are “in Christ,” a term that occurs 172 times in Scripture. That means we are in Jesus as He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. Negatively, Jesus intercedes for forgiveness of our sins (see Heb. 7:25), and positively, Jesus presents our prayers to the Father so they will be answered.

*Lord, I come to You because Jesus lives in my heart. He motivates me to pray to You. But also, I come “ in Christ” as He is at Your right hand. Hear my prayers in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# Acts

**KEY WORDS:** *Prayer, Witness, Holy Spirit, Church* (see Acts 1:8,14; 2:4,47)

**KEY VERSE:** "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8 NKJV).

**THEME:** The author Luke continues writing about the record he began in the gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-2). What Jesus began in the gospels results in the formation and spread of the church in Acts. The four key words explain the success of the new church. It all began with the first words, *earth-shaking prayer.* God responded to the intercession of His people in the upper room by filling them with the Holy Spirit. The gospel was spread by all believers *witnessing* (second word) to everyone, every place they went. The *Holy Spirit* was the power that worked in and through all believers who spread the message of the gospel at all times.

The result was the formation of the *church* (fourth word). But this new church was not just an organization to join; it was a life-giving movement that flowed through communities where sinners were transformed when they believed in Jesus Christ. The church was the body of Christ on earth that determined to spread its gospel from Caesar's palace (see Phil. 4:21) to the entire earth (see Acts 1:8).

*Lord, I will serve You in my church, and will love doing it because You " loved the church and gave [Yourself] for her"* (Eph. 5:25*).*

# Romans

**KEY WORD:** *Righteousness* (Romans 1:17)

**KEY VERSE:** “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (1:17 NKJV).

**THEME:** The book of Romans gives the most systematic approach to theology (what to believe) of all the books in the Bible. Paul makes it clear that He is not “the God of the Jews only” but “of the Gentiles also” (3:29).

Paul began writing: (a) the whole world has sinned and is guilty before God (1:8–3:23); (b) the death and resurrection of Christ provides justification to all who exercise faith (3:24–5:21); (c) believers can be delivered from the power of sin (6:1–7:25); (d) the Holy Spirit gives victory (8:1-39); (e) God has past and future plans for Israel (9:1–11:36); (f) God gives guidelines for practical Christian life and service (12:1–15:33).

*Lord, I will learn the essential doctrines of Christianity and live by them. Amen.*

# 1 Corinthians

**KEY WORD:** *Wisdom* (1 Corinthians 1:24)

**KEY VERSE:** “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (3:16 NKJV).

**THEME:** Paul had been informed of the problems in the Corinthian church. The issue was not primarily heresy, but carnality in the lives of leaders and Christians. Paul deals with the issue of marriage (chapter 7) and meats offered to idols (chapter 8). But he also deals with division in the church (chapters 2-3), contentions in the church (chapter 5) and a case of incest that had not been dealt with. There were irregularities and manifestations of sin at the Lord’s Table (chapters 10-11). There was confusion over spiritual gifts (chapter 12) and tongues (chapter 14). And there were problems with issues of the resurrection (chapter 15). Yet in the middle of the letter Paul pens one of the loftiest passages ever written on love (chapter 13).

But in the midst of all these problems, Paul doesn’t tell the leadership to clean up the mess; but rather Paul holds every believer responsible for proper doctrine and holy living. Hence Paul establishes the church as Christ’s body (see 3:16) and that Christ indwells every believer. They are the ones who are accountable for the church.

*Lord, thank You for the indwelling Christ who guides me into holiness. I am accountable to Him and I will live for Him. “For to me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Amen.*

# 2 Corinthians

**KEY WORDS:** *Comfort* and *encourage* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

**KEY VERSE:** “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (1:3-4 NKJV).

**THEME:** Paul wrote a previous severe letter to the church in Corinth that rebuked their sin and told them to “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13). When the church repented (and the individual repented), Paul wrote a letter to comfort and encourage them in Christ.

This letter also reflects Paul’s weariness, pain, and deep burden for the churches. First, Paul was anguished over Jews (anti-grace teachers) who opposed the churches; and second, over the Jewish Christian legalizers who denied his apostleship. In this letter Paul makes one of the strongest defenses of his apostleship.

*Lord, the world makes it difficult to live the Christian life, yet You give comfort to me internally. Thank You for the confidence and assurance that You give. Amen.*

# Galatians

**KEY WORD:** *Law* (Galatians 2:16)

**KEY VERSE:** "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'" (3:10-11 NKJV).

**THEME:** Paul received news that the Galatians (in modern Turkey) had been influenced by Jewish "missionaries" who were legalizers, and had invaded the area to bring new Christian believers under the law, that is, to make Gentile Christians Jews. Their teaching was twofold: first, that obedience to Old Testament law—mingled with faith in Christ—was the basis of salvation; and second, that justified believers were made perfect before God by keeping the law.

Paul has a fivefold rebuttal: (a) Paul received his revelation of grace and apostleship from God (1:6–2:14); (b) justification is by faith without the law (2:15–3:24); (c) the believer lives by faith, not the law (3:25–5:15); (d) sanctification comes from the Holy Spirit, not the law (5:16-26); (e) the new life is a brotherhood (6:1-18).

*Lord, keep my faith based on the Word of God; keep my eyes on Jesus as my example. Keep my life filled with the Holy Spirit. Keep my prayers based on Your promises. Keep me in Your church so this brotherhood can watch over me spiritually. Amen.*

# Ephesians

**KEY WORDS:** *Heavenly places* (Ephesians 2:6)

**KEY VERSE:** “And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6 NKJV).

**THEME:** The book of Ephesians is the most impersonal letters of Paul because he wanted it read in other churches (Colossians 4:16 may refer to the book of Ephesians). He doesn’t attempt to correct false doctrine or sinful living. Rather Paul emphasizes that Christ is “the head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph. 1:22-23). The world has called the body of Christ the universal church, the mystical body, the triumphant church, the glorified church. The body of Christ contains all saved believers on earth (regardless of their denominational affiliations or lack of affiliation) and all believers in heaven who are “in Christ.”

All believers walk among sin and temptation in their *state* on earth, but they *stand* perfect in heaven “in Christ.” They are “in Christ” in the heavenlies because they *stand* in Christ at the right hand of God the Father. Because of this exalted *position* in the heavenlies, they should live godly in their *place* on earth.

Ephesians has a fourfold division: (a) Paul’s greetings, (1:1-2); (b) the believer’s wealth in the heavenlies “in Christ” (1:3–3:21); (c) the believer’s walk and service (4:1–5:17); (d) spiritual warfare (5:18–6:23).

*Lord, I only partly realize how wealthy I am in Christ. Open my eyes to see all the things You have done for me. Then help me to walk on this earth according to my standing in heaven. Then protect me from the evil one for I can’t protect myself. Amen.*

# Philippians

**KEY WORDS:** *Joy* or *Rejoice* (Philippians 2:2)

**KEY VERSE:** “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (4:4-7 NKJV).

**THEME:** Paul exhorts the Christian to live triumphantly for God. He says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21). He writes joyfully as Nero’s prisoner facing death, yet he expresses joy and peace and is not anxious about anything (see 4:4-7). Paul knows that death (see 1:22-24) means entrance into heaven, but he also realizes he can serve God while he remains alive. But Paul warns against attempting to drift into heaven. He wants believers to know Christ more intimately while on earth (see 3:10) and that he will strive to do all he can for God while on this earth (see 3:14).

*Lord, may I follow Paul’s example to do all I can to serve You while I live on this earth. Amen.*

# Colossians

**KEY WORD:** *Preeminence* (Colossians 1:18).

**KEY VERSE:** "And [Christ] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (1:18 NKJV).

**THEME:** In Colossians Paul wrote a lofty passage in praise of Jesus Christ (see 1:15-20). Epaphras, who served in the church at Colosse, came to tell Paul about the church while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. The church was rich, yet Paul warns of some subtle errors at work in the church. First, was legalism, "do not touch, do not taste" (2:21 NKJV), and Judaistic observance of days (see 2:16). Second, there was false mysticism, "intruding into those things which he has not seen" (2:18 NKJV). Third, some were involved in the "worship of angels" (2:18 NKJV). Fourth, there was philosophic speculation: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit" (2:8 NKJV).

*Lord, keep me straight in thinking and practice. I will walk in fellowship with Christ, just as when I received Him as my Savior. Amen.*

# 1 Thessalonians

**KEY WORD:** *Example* (1 Thessalonians 1:7)

**KEY VERSE:** “So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1:7 NKJV).

**THEME:** Because of persecution (Acts 17:1-10), Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica and almost immediately he wrote back this first letter to the Thessalonians. His first theme deals with their confusion about Christ’s return. Some Christians in the church died and those still alive thought wrongly that the dead had missed out on the return of Christ. Paul writes to tell that “the dead in Christ” would be first in the rapture. Second, Paul describes the richness of local church evangelism. Third, Paul exhorts them to holiness of living, and fourth, he confirms young believers in foundational truths he had taught them.

*Lord, I love a church that reaches out to win lost people to Christ. Put me in a church like that and help me win someone to Christ. Amen.*

# 2 Thessalonians

**KEY WORDS:** *"He comes"* (2 Thessalonians 1:10)

**KEY VERSE:** "When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (1:10 NKJV).

**THEME:** The Thessalonians probably thought Jesus would come immediately to set up His kingdom, so they raised the question, "Some in our church have died since believing in Christ; what will happen to them?" Paul wrote First Thessalonians to explain that those who died in Christ will go first in the rapture when Christ returns.

Paul wrote this second letter to the Thessalonians because some in the church were "shaken in mind" and were "troubled" because they were going through persecution. They thought their trouble was the seven years of tribulation. Paul wrote this second letter to tell them the rapture hadn't come. Then he outlines the horrible things that will happen during the tribulation. He then instructs the Thessalonians about the glorious event when "He comes" (1:10).

*Lord, I don't look for tribulation, judgment, or any parallel event. I look to see the Lord Jesus when He shall come for me and all those who belong to Him. Amen.*

# 1 Timothy

**KEY WORDS:** *Faithful sayings* (1 Timothy 1:15)

**KEY VERSE:** “But if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (3:15 NKJV).

**THEME:** Originally the apostles were the authority in the churches, teaching people what to believe, and guiding the church’s ministry. But as the end of the apostolic era approached, it was necessary that a clear revelation be given about the soundness of faith, and church order. Paul wrote First Timothy, “so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (3:15 NKJV).

Four times Paul used the key words “faithful sayings” like a verse we might repeat to remind us of the essentials of Christianity (1 Tim. 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8).

*Lord, I love Your church and I will learn how to live for You in the church. Help me to be faithful in all things. Amen.*

# 2 Timothy

**KEY WORD:** *Doctrine* (occurs 4 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “Preach the Word. Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (4:2 NIV).

**THEME:** Paul wrote First Timothy from the relative ease of his “own rented house” in Rome (Acts 28:30). He was released and later arrested or put in the Mamertine Prison, a miserable dark damp hole in the ground. Paul writes Second Timothy from difficult circumstances, knowing he would be martyred soon. Paul emphasizes the personal life of a servant of Christ in a time of apostasy. He says, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me” (1:15 NKJV) and “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (4:10 NKJV). Paul describes apostasy (see 3:1-8) and exhorts Timothy to “continue in the things which you have learned” (3:14 NKJV).

Paul asks Timothy, “Do your best to come to me quickly” (4:9 NIV). Then Paul asks for a few items, “the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments” (4:13 NIV).

*Lord, may I be faithful to You till death, as was Paul; whether I die or You come in the sky, I look forward to being with You. Amen.*

# Titus

**KEY WORDS:** *Set in order* (Titus 1:5)

**KEY VERSE:** "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (1:5 NIV).

**THEME:** After Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome about AD 63, he and Titus journeyed together to tour the churches, but their trip to Crete was the cause of this book. Titus was left in Crete to straighten out the problems they found there. First, the churches were careless about essential doctrine (see 3:8), and second, the churches needed to finish the work that was left undone and "to appoint elders in every town" (1:5).

Titus is never mentioned in Acts because he may have been the one supplying needed information to Luke, the human author. We know he was a Gentile (see Gal. 2:3), who was led to Christ by Paul (Titus 1:4). The two worked together in Antioch before the Council in Jerusalem (see Acts 15). Then Titus accompanied Paul on his trips (see Gal. 2:1).

It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.

*Lord, I thank You for faithful workers like Titus who are not in the limelight. I will serve You even if I don't get recognition. Amen.*

# Philemon

**KEY WORD:** *Profitable* (Philemon 11)

**KEY VERSE:** “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me” (10-11 NKJV).

**THEME:** Onesimus (meaning “profitable”) had robbed his master Philemon in Colosse and escaped to Rome. Then by providence, Paul crossed paths with Onesimus and led him to Christ. Then Onesimus began serving Paul who was renting “his own rented house” (Acts 28:30) where he was continually chained to an armed Roman soldier (Acts 28:16). Eventually Paul sent Onesimus back home with this letter that asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him as a “brother in Christ.” Paul could ask this because he had led Philemon to Christ (v. 19). Paul pleads, “But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account” (v. 18 NKJV).

This short letter is a picture of redemption. Onesimus represents us who have sinned against God the Father, who is represented by Philemon. Paul, representing Christ, intercedes for the Father to forgive our sin. Christ asks the Father to put our sin to His account (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

*Lord, I am a sinner who deserves punishment and death. I come through the intercession of Christ because He paid the price for my sin. Thank You for putting my sin on Christ’s account. Amen.*

# Hebrews

**KEY WORD:** *Better* (occurs 11 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “Beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation” (Hebrews 6:9 NKJV).

**THEME:** God used the book of Hebrews to stop the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and around the world from going back into the temple and resorting to Old Testament religious practices and celebrations. They may have gone back into the temple because of their religious heritage, or because of their natural commitment to friends and relatives who were not converted to Christ. But the longer they remained in the temple, the more likely they were caught up in its practices, and eventually they would backslide.

Therefore the author tells them Christ is “better” than angels (1:4–2:18), better than Moses (3:1 19), better than the Sabbath (4:1-16), better than the priesthood (5:1-8:5), better than the covenants (8:6-7), better than the temple (9:1, 10:39), and better than Old Testament heroes (11:1–12:2). The author also interjects warnings throughout the book: 2:1-4; 5:11–6:12; 10:26-39; 12:3-17; 12:25-29. He warns that in the temple “no sacrifice for sins is left” (10:26 NIV). Christ is the “better” sacrifice and the “better” high priest. When the Jews offered temple sacrifices, they had “trampled the Son of God underfoot” and “treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant and…insulted the Spirit of grace” (10:29 NIV).

*Lord, You are better than all religious services and worship expressions. You are my life and salvation. I put my trust in You, You are better than anything this world can offer. Amen.*

# James

**KEY WORDS:** *Test* or *Troubles* (James 1:2-3)

**KEY VERSE:** “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (1:12).

**THEME:** James, the half-brother of Jesus, writes to encourage Jewish believers (see 1:1) who are going through various tests and trials in their Christian life. God allows His children to be tested so they will become stronger, and through difficulties they can demonstrate the genuine nature of their faith.

James was called a “pillar” of the church (Gal. 2:9) and presided over the first church council (see Acts 15), and very early he wrote this letter that contains 54 imperatives (commands) out of 108 verses. A person’s outward “religion” was proof of his transforming faith. James’ admonition on “good works” is not an argument against Paul’s emphasis on grace, but James is stating that if you have experienced free grace, you will demonstrate it by your actions (see 2:14-26). James wrote this letter before AD 40 and tradition tells that he was martyred in AD 62.

*Lord, I will obey Your commands because I love You and want to please You. I don’t keep Your commands in order to become a Christian; I keep them because I am saved. Amen.*

# 1 Peter

**KEY WORD:** *Suffering* (1 Peter 2:20, occurs 12 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (4:12-13 NKJV).

**THEME:** Peter, the spokesman for the 12 disciples while Jesus was alive, writes this letter from Babylon in approximately AD 60. He writes to suffering believers he probably has never seen. They were driven out of their homes in areas that Paul evangelized (see 1:2). He doesn’t make a personal reference or greetings to anyone.

Peter’s theme is victory in the midst of suffering. He has a threefold message: (a) living for Christ while suffering in light of our full salvation (1:1–2:8); (b) our suffering in light of the new position we have in Christ (2:9–4:19); (c) serving Christ in light of His return (5:1-14).

This letter is full of exhortations to godly living, with many references to both the Old Testament and actual words of Christ.

*Lord, thank You for the faithfulness of Peter, may I be as faithful to You as he was. Also, may I be faithful to You when suffering and trials come. I don’t like pain, so may I be a good testimony to You when trials and sufferings come. Amen.*

# 2 Peter

**KEY WORDS:** *Know, Knowing,* and *Knowledge* (occurs 3 times)

**KEY VERSE:** "Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9 NKJV).

**THEME:** Peter was aware that martyrdom was near (see 1:14), just as Paul was also aware that his martyrdom was near (see 2 Tim. 4:6). Yet both men were not bitter or fearful, but they rejoiced in serving Jesus. Both men saw apostasy creeping into the church. Peter traces apostasy to false teachers (see 2:1-3), and he shows how false teaching leads to filthy, ungodly living.

Note the sections in Second Peter. The believer's salvation is validated by the practices of Christian virtues (1:4-14); Peter recalls the transfiguration of Christ (1:15-18); prophecy is inspired and authoritative (1:19-21); false teachers bear certain marks (2:1–3:3); and Jesus will return (3:4-13); and spiritual diligence and steadfastness is encouraged (3:14-17).

*Lord, keep me from heresy and false teaching and give me spiritual insight to sniff out any trace in my life. May I be faithful to You in mind, body, and belief. Amen.*

# 1 John

**KEY WORD:** *Know* (occurs 32 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13 NKJV).

**THEME:** John writes an intimate family letter to his “little children,” telling them to love one another to demonstrate they are born again. He expects them not to sin, and treats sin as a child’s offense against their heavenly Father. There are no personal greetings from John as found in Paul’s letters, nor are there greetings to those who receive this letter; probably this is because John intended this letter to be read in all the churches.

The apostle sets a stark contrast with darkness, death, falsehood, and hate in this letter. Against that dark background, John teaches the child of God should have assurance of their salvation. Therefore John uses the word *know* to give them many reasons for inner confidence.

He maintains, “Now he who keeps His commands abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (3:24 NKJV).

*Lord, I love You with all my heart; give me that same love for others. I know Christ is in my heart; give me confidence of faith so I’ ll have an assurance of salvation. Amen.*

# 2 John

**KEY WORD:** *Truth* (occurs 4 times)

**KEY VERSE:** “The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever” (2 John 1-2 NKJV).

**THEME:** The key word “truth” is attached to love in the phrase “in truth and love” (v. 3). In this way John continues the theme of love in his first letter. Truth is the body of revealed truth, that is, the Word of God. And love is the defining attribute of Christ’s followers. Because “many deceivers are entered into the world” (v. 7), John tells his “children” to mark these persons, have no fellowship with them in their house, nor greet them (v. 10). He writes as an “elder” which is a reference to his office. “The chosen lady” is probably a reference to the church that received this letter. If he had written to a specific lady, he probably would have used her name, as he does with other individuals (3 John 9,12). The “elect lady” was probably a reference to the Ephesian church from which John writes.

*Lord, I love Your church and will fellowship with it. I also abhor false teaching and will separate myself from them. Amen.*

# 3 John

**KEY WORDS:** *Love in truth* (3 John 1)

**KEY VERSE:** “The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth” (v. 1 NKJV).

**THEME:** John writes to a church where Diotrophes had exercised control over the congregation to his own selfish purposes. Diotrophes had rejected an apostolic letter and authority, and wouldn’t receive visiting preachers (see v. 10). John no longer writes as an apostle (because the day of apostles was ceasing) but as an elder, using the authority that comes with congregational recognition to deal with Diotrophes. John spells out a believer’s responsibility as a member of a local church in the days of coming apostasy.

The key is to remain faithful to “the truth,” the Word of God. But that doesn’t mean obstinate faithfulness, but to “love in truth” (v. 1).

*Lord, I will look to You as my authority in all things. I will find truth in the Word of God and will follow it. Don’t let me fall into the snare and spirit of Diotrophes. Keep me loving at all times. Amen.*

# Jude

**KEY WORDS:** *Fight for the faith* (Jude 3)

**KEY VERSE:** “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3 NKJV).

**THEME:** This brief letter describes the way apostasy was creeping into the early church and predicted it would be even greater in the future. Jude warned about the consequences of apostasy and challenged the readers to “fight” against its every appearance. He ends his letter sharing the things that will protect against apostasy: living in the word (v. 20); prayer (v. 20); fellowship with believers (v. 21); hope (v. 21); serving Christ (v. 22); evangelism of the lost (v. 23); separation from sin (v. 23); and resting in assurance (v. 24).

Jude was one of the 12 apostles, and he is identified as “not Iscariot” (John 14:22). Perhaps that is because his name was the same as Judas, the betrayer of Christ; Jude had a lifelong struggle to free his identity from Judas, the ultimate apostate. Therefore Jude was qualified to deal with apostasy. He changed his name from Jude to Lebbaeus, Thaddaeus. Later in life he returned to the Latin form of his original name, Jude. Jerome, an early church father, called him Trionius, “the man with three names.”

*Lord, I believe everything You said in the Bible. I will not add to it or take away from it. I will do what the Bible commands, and will live what it teaches. Keep me from selfish speculation about Your Word. Amen.*

# Revelation

**KEY WORDS:** *I saw* (occurs 24 times, that is, John saw a vision from God)

**KEY VERSE:** “Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it, for the time *is* near” (Revelation 1:3 NKJV).

**THEME:** The emphasis of this book is Jesus Christ, not judgments, tribulations, and persecution. This book is “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). We see a threefold picture of Christ. First, His eternal nature; “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:8 NKJV). Second, His death, He “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (1:5 NKJV). Third, His return, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him” (1:7 NKJV).

The book is divided into three time events. First, the past, “the things which you have seen” (1:1-20); second, the present, “things which are” (2:1–3:22); and third, the future, “things which shall be hereafter” (4:1–22:21).

Revelation is a difficult book to interpret; don’t get sidetracked by what you don’t understand. Emphasize what you understand and practice it. There are many prayers contained in this book, learn to pray them, “even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (22:20).

*Lord, I know You will return to raise all believers to be with You. I don’t understand all the details of the future, but my hope and security is that I’ ll be with You. Amen.*

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