

A NEW VIEW OF REALITY

- A. Introduction: The Bible is clear that there will be increasing difficulties on this earth in the years leading up to Jesus' return. Jesus likened them to birth pains that start out mild and infrequent but increase in frequency and intensity as the time of birth nears. Although the process is hard, the end result is worth it. Matt 24:4-8
1. According to Jesus, people will be terrified by what they see happening around them. But Jesus told His followers not to be fearful. Rather, He said that we should look up because redemption draws near. The idea in the original Greek language is be elated in joyous expectation. Luke 21:25-28
 - a. You can respond like this if you understand what is happening and why. The best thing you can do to prepare for what's ahead is become a Bible reader since that's where why and what is found.
 1. The apostle Paul warned his son in the faith Timothy that increasingly perilous times will come on this world before the Lord returns. II Tim 3:1-5
 2. II Tim 3:13-15—Note, Paul exhorted Timothy that as the times grow worse he should continue in God's Word. We need to do the same.
 - b. Those perilous times are well underway right now, for a number of reasons. Societal restraints on people's behaviors are being removed which leads to increasing chaos. And, demonic deception is increasing as the devil attempts to hold onto control of this world (lessons for another night).
 2. Sadly, very few Christians read the Bible. While some freely admit they don't read because they find it boring and don't understand what they read, others truly believe that they read because they read verses and selected passages or devotionals and other books with scriptures in them.
 - a. The Bible isn't a collection of verses. It wasn't written in chapters and verses. Those headings were added years after the Bible was completed for reference purposes. The Bible is a collection of books and letters, each of which is meant to be read like any book or letter—from start to finish.
 - b. To that end, I am challenging you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. (The Old Testament is easier to understand once you are competent in the New.)
 1. By systematic reading I mean don't skip around and read random passages. Read each book and letter from start to finish. Don't stop to look up words or consult commentaries; just read.
 - A. This doesn't mean you can't ever skip around or look up words and topics in a dictionary or commentary. But do that at another time besides this regular, systematic reading time.
 - B. The goal is to become familiar with the New Testament because understanding comes with familiarity, and familiarity comes with frequent, repeated reading.
 2. By regular reading I mean: Set aside ten to twenty minutes each day and read as much as you can. Leave a marker where you stop and pick up where you left off the next day. Try to read some of the smaller epistles in just one sitting. If you miss a day or two, don't get discouraged and stop. Pick it up again. Make regular, systematic reading a lifelong habit.
 - A. Regular, systematic reading of the Bible will change the way you see things and give you a framework from which to understand and deal with life more effectively.
 - B. As your view of reality changes and you begin to see things the way they are according to God, it will change how you live. It's not what you see it's how you see what you see.
 3. People also struggle with Bible reading because they don't understand the Bible's purpose and have false expectations about what it will do for them.
 - a. The Bible is not a book of promises or a collection of wise sayings. It wasn't written to help you live a successful life or solve your immediate crisis. The Bible was written to reveal Almighty God and His plan of redemption—the salvation that He has provided through Jesus. II Tim 3:15
 1. Together, the 66 writings in the Bible tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths He has gone to, through Jesus, to have His family. Every book and letter adds to or advances the story in some way.

2. The Bible was written to real people by real people (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to convey information to them. Those three factors set context and help us gain understanding.
 - b. For the next several weeks I want to share information with you aimed at not only inspiring you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament, but helping you succeed at it.
- B. The Bible is 50% history (25% prophecy and 25% instruction in righteous living). It is a historical record of God's interaction with real people worked out His plan to have a family of beings made in His image, with whom He can live in loving relationship and through whom He can express His glory.
1. God created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 - a. When the first man, Adam, disobeyed God sin and death entered the human race and a curse of corruption and death entered the family home. Neither humanity nor the earth is as God intended them to be. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 1. This turn of events did not take God by surprise. He already had a plan to undo the damage done by mankind's rebellion through the Lord Jesus Christ (the Seed of the woman). Gen 3:15
 2. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin and open the way for all who put faith in Him and His sacrifice to be transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. He will come again to renew and restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family.
 - b. Following God's promise of a coming Redeemer (deliverer), the Lord instructed men to begin to keep a written record as He progressively revealed more and more of His plan of redemption.
 1. Gen 5:1—"This is the book—the written record of the offspring of Adam" (Amp), the line through which the Seed, Jesus the Redeemer, will come into this world (Luke 3:36-38).
 2. This record grew into what we know as the Old Testament. The Old Testament records the history of the people group Jesus was born into, the descendants of Abraham (the Jews). They were also commissioned with compiling and preserving the written record. Rom 3:2
 - A. The Bible is redemptive history. It doesn't list everything that happened to everybody—just events and people that relate to the unfolding plan of redemption.
 - B. The action and events recorded in the Bible took place in the lands of the Middle East, centering on modern-day Israel. Many of the references seem strange to us because we aren't familiar with the geography or customs of that area and the time periods described.
 2. Two thousand years ago the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, entered time and space and was born a Jew in the nation of Israel. These people knew from the writings of their prophets (the Old Testament) that this world is not as God created it to be because of sin.
 - a. But they also knew that the Redeemer will come to renew and restore it to its pre-sin condition and establish His kingdom on earth. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; Isa 65:17; Isa 51:3; etc.
 1. First century Jews knew that this age—the time when things are not as God intended them to be—will come to an end, and that's a good thing. Therefore, when Jesus came on the scene preaching "the [appointed period of] time is (completed) fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15, Amp), He had everyone's attention.
 2. The Old Testament prophets were not clearly shown that there would be two separate comings of the Redeemer. Some of their prophecies refer to both the first and second coming of Jesus in the same passage. Isa 9:6-7
 - b. During the three plus years Jesus spent with His twelve apostles He revealed to them that He was not at that time going to establish the visible kingdom of God on earth, but that He would return to do so.
 3. After Jesus returned to Heaven His apostles went out to preach the gospel (Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, I Cor 15:1-4) with the consciousness that it was the last times. The last days began with Jesus' first coming and will conclude with His second coming.

- a. The term last days (last time, latter days, last hour) is found in a number of place in the Old and New Testament. It refers to the end of this present age and the years leading up to the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom on earth. Job 19:25; Isa 2:2; Dan 2:28; Dan 8:23; Dan 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; Acts 2:17; II Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; James 5:3; I Pet 1:5; II Pet 3:3; I John 2:8; Jude 18
 - b. Peter made a statement in one of his first sermons that that shows us how they viewed the last days and the second coming. Peter proclaimed that Jesus will remain in Heaven “until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past—from the most ancient time in the memory of man” (Acts 3:21, Amp).
 1. We’ve reduced the end times (or last days) to frenzied discussions of the Antichrist’s identity, a vigorous debate over whether the rapture is pre, mid, or post tribulation, and an argument about who will go in the rapture.
 2. We’re so focused on individual pieces (events connected with Christ’s return) that we miss the big picture, and we are afraid. Jesus is coming back to complete God’s plan of redemption! Regular, systematic reading of the New Testament will help us straighten out our thinking.
- C. The Bible is progressive revelation, meaning that God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan of salvation or redemption through the pages of Scripture, leading to the revelation of Jesus Christ.
1. The Old Testament not only gives the history of the Jewish people, it points to the coming Redeemer through numerous prophecies as well as types and shadows (real people and events that picture some aspect of the person or work of Jesus, like the Passover Lamb, Ex 13; I Cor 5:7).
 - a. Jesus confirmed that the Old Testament points to Him. On resurrection day Jesus used the Old Testament to confirm what He accomplished through the Cross. John 5:39; Luke 24:44-45
 - b. The Old Testament is important (but lesser) light and it must be read in the greater light of the New Testament. That’s why we begin our regular, systematic reading with it.
 - c. Heb 1:1-2—Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son. (ESV)
 2. The New Testament is the record of the Redeemer’s arrival and His redemptive work. All of the writers were eye witnesses of Jesus or close associates of eye witnesses.
 - a. They saw Jesus crucified and then saw Him raised from the dead. All wrote with the consciousness that it was (is) the end of the age (the last time) and that Jesus will return.
 1. Matthew, John, and Peter were among the twelve apostles who followed Jesus during His earth ministry. Mark and Luke weren’t part of the twelve but Mark was a companion of Peter.
 2. Luke was a companion of Paul who was converted when he encountered Jesus on the Damascus road. James and Jude were half brothers of Jesus. They became believers in Him following the resurrection. Matt 10:2-4; Acts 12:5-12; Acts 20:5-21; Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3
 - b. The gospels are historical books written to present Jesus (who He is and what He did). Acts is a historical record of the apostles’ activities as they went out to preach the resurrection of Jesus.
 - c. The epistles (letters) were written to believers who were converted to Christ through the ministries of the apostles during the period described in Acts. They were written to explain doctrine (what Christians believe) and give instruction on how to live.
 1. Some of the statements seem strange to us because the writers had to address issues that concerned the first generation of believers but aren’t a problem for us today. Should Christians eat meat offered to idols? What is the place of the Law of Moses?
 2. Some of it deals with specific questions that arose in these communities of believers—real people writing to real people about real issues. Some parts were written to remind readers of what the writer taught them when he visited in person.
 - d. The information in the Book of Revelation was given to the apostle John when Jesus appeared to

him about 60 years after his return to Heaven. Most of the book is an account of events in Heaven and on earth that will precede the Second Coming of Jesus, ending with earth restored and God coming to live with His redeemed people in the family home. Rev 21-22

3. Jesus is the Word of God, the Word made flesh (John 1:1; John 1:14). Jesus, the Living Word of God, reveals Himself through the written Word of God, the Bible.
 - a. The Bible is the only 100% reliable picture we have of Jesus. It trumps emotions, circumstances, and supernatural manifestations. This is especially important because of the times we live in.
 - b. The end of the age is at hand. A false gospel is growing and taking root in many places. It will culminate with Satan offering a false messiah to the world (Antichrist). If we are familiar with Jesus of the Bible we will be able to recognize false christs and false gospels. Matt 24:4-5

- D. Part of the reason for reading is to change your perspective. Regular reading of the New Testament will give you a picture of what it looks like to live as a Christian in this world and will help you recognize teachings that aren't in the New Testament and/or contradict orthodox Christianity.
 1. So much of the popular teaching in the Church at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century emphasizes our purpose and destiny. The focus is all on this life—achieving your goals and dreams. But there is nothing like that in the New Testament.
 - a. What we see is that we have a purpose that was given us by God in eternity past, to receive His life through faith in Christ and become part of His family—His sons and daughters. Although our purpose begins in this life, it will outlast this life. II Tim 1:9-10; Titus 1:2-3; Rom 8:28-30
 - b. The apostle Paul (who was taught the gospel that he preached by Jesus Himself, Gal 1:11-12) wrote the verses in the previous line. He also wrote the epistle (letter) to Titus. In three statements Paul summarized what Christianity looks like. Titus 2:11-13
 1. God's grace has brought us salvation from sin. His grace teaches us that we should "turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God" (NLT).
 2. We're to live looking expectantly for our blessed hope, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to complete the plan of redemption.
 - c. The apostle Peter echoed that sentiment when he wrote that we should always be ready to explain to others why we, as Christians, have hope (I Pet 3:15). He went to a martyr's death eagerly looking forward to the completion of the plan (II Pet 3:13).
 2. Regular, systematic reading of the New Testament will build a framework in your mind through which to view life and by which to order your life. This is the framework you'll get. If this becomes your view of reality fear will vanish and you will overcome in life's challenges.
 - a. We're only passing through this world as it is. The greater and better part of life is ahead. Eternal things matter more than temporal or temporary things.
 - b. God is much more interested in you developing Christ-like character than He is in where you live, what job you have, who you marry or what ministry you're in. The most important thing you can do in this life is shine the light of Jesus as you live in relationship with Almighty God.
 3. Paul wrote these words as well: All scripture is give by inspiration of God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for resetting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, and fit him fully for all branches of his work (II Tim 3:16-17, J.B. Phillips).

- E. Conclusion: The greatest gift you can give yourself is to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. Not only will it change how you see things and give you a new view of reality, it will change you (more on that in later lessons).