
The Unity of the Spirit

Vol. 7 Issue 4

"In the Bond of Peace"

Winter 2001-02

A Newsletter of the Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.



Dear Fellow-believers,

In this issue of *The Unity of the Spirit* we are going to be setting forth a review and recommendation of books for Christian believers who are interested in in-depth study of the Bible and in subjects closely related to the Bible. In part, this will be a revision of an earlier issue published in the Fall of 1998. Nevertheless, there will be a great deal of new information presented and it is hoped that it will be information that is useful for those who are searching for a greater in-depth knowledge of the truth. It should, of course, come as no surprise that the most important book that will be recommended is the Bible itself. In doing this we are following the pattern of most of the great figures of the Bible, both Old Testament and New, whose own lives were rooted and grounded in the Scriptures. We begin, therefore, by setting forth the biblical view of the Scriptures themselves.

The classic view of God's inspiration of the Scriptures was set forth by the apostle Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy and it serves as a good example of the view of all faithful Jews and of the early Christian churches about the inspiration of the Scriptures:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in

righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:14-17).

In their original context these verses referred primarily to the Old Testament Scriptures since most of the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written or collected into what we today call the New Testament canon. During the Old Testament era all faithful Jews viewed the Scriptures – that is, the holy, or set-apart, writings - as inspired by God (e.g. Psalm 1, 19, 119, etc.).

These Scriptures began to be written down and collected by Moses many centuries before the time of Christ. They contained the record of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, the calling of Abraham and God's covenant people Israel, the giving of the Mosaic Law, and most importantly, the promises of God that ultimately would be fulfilled through Christ in the New Testament. These Scriptures gave the Old Testament people of Israel their guide for daily living in all aspects of their lives as well as promises for the working out of God's purposes for the world through them. When looked at from a New Testament, or spiritual, perspective the main story line - always operating behind the scenes - is about God's plan of salvation. This eventually focused on the promise of a coming Messiah, or Christ, who would bring about a new covenant relationship between God and his people and, ultimately, establish the glorious kingdom of God in a new heavens and earth forever.

When we come to the New Testament Scriptures, we see that the promised Messiah, or Christ, based his whole life and ministry on the Old Testament Scriptures and consistently confirmed

their divine inspiration (e.g. Matt. 4:4; 15:1-9; 22:29). In fact, Christ saw himself as the fulfillment of those Scriptures and he stated that the entire Old Testament testified of him (Luke 24:45-49). In short, the New Testament writings can best be understood as being the collected witness and explanation of the fulfillment of God's promises to his covenant people in the Old Testament. The late NT scholar F.F. Bruce summarizes this understanding of the New Testament Scriptures:

"The NT stands to the OT in the relation of fulfillment to promise. If the OT records what 'God ... spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets', the NT records that final word which he spoke in Son, in which all the earlier revelation was summed up, confirmed and transcended. The mighty works of the OT revelation, culminate in the redemptive work of Christ; the words of the OT prophets receive their fulfillment in him." (FF Bruce, "Bible", *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 137).

All of the New Testament writers shared this view of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New and it is set out in The Letter to the Hebrews:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Thus, the Scriptures were based first and foremost on all that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had taught his apostles. These truths were then handed down to the other disciples either by word of mouth or, eventually, in written form – a process summarized by Luke:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good for me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

The New Testament Scriptures also clearly indicate that God, through Christ, continued to guide

his apostles in their understanding of the truth both by direct revelation (e.g. Gal. 1:11-12) and through the guidance of God's Spirit (e.g. Eph. 3:2-6). These truths were then written down and sent to the different churches. In fact, Paul's Letters seem to be specifically spoken of as, or on a par with, Scripture:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (II Pet. 3:15-17).

All of the writings, or Books, of the New Testament were either written by apostles or by close associates of the apostles. It is precisely for the reason that they were considered to be an inspired and faithful presentation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the truths of the new covenant that he established, that they were later collected and put into the form – i.e., the New Testament - that we have today. Ultimately, however, the greatest evidence for the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures comes from their own internal evidence, and, from their manifest success in helping believers to understand the "gospel" – the "good news" of God's salvation accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, after all, one of their chief purposes as expressly stated in the Gospel of John:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

Richie Temple

The Gospel: Of First Importance

by Richie Temple
Cary, N.C

Christ's Proclamation: the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

When studying the Bible it is always necessary to remember that the one subject that should be of first importance is the gospel – that is, the good news of salvation concerning the coming kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the day of Pentecost, the gospel focused on the good news of the coming kingdom of God. The Old Testament Scriptures had promised the coming of the Messiah, or Christ, who would establish the everlasting kingdom of God in a renewed and glorious earth. The chief focus of Christ's entire earthly ministry was to proclaim, explain and demonstrate the true nature of God's kingdom through all his words and deeds. This can be clearly seen by a couple of examples from the Gospels:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15).

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:42-43).

For every pious Jew this proclamation of the kingdom of God meant that the "time had come" when the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, the destruction of evil, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the final establishment of the kingdom of God in a renewed and glorious earth were "at hand." It was necessary therefore to repent – to turn from sin to God – so as to escape the wrath to come and to receive eternal life in the coming age of the kingdom of God.

It cannot be emphasized enough that proclaiming, explaining and demonstrating this coming kingdom of God was the central focus of Christ's earthly ministry. It is suggested that the reader go through the Gospel of Luke and note each time that the term "kingdom of God" is used and look at their contexts. In addition, it is also necessary to note the inter-relationship of terms such as kingdom of God, eternal life and salvation. Biblically, salvation is a comprehensive term. It refers primarily to forgiveness of sins and therefore escape – or salvation - from the condemnation of the final judgment. As a result, rather than being condemned, the believer will inherit the gift of eternal life – life of the age to come - in the glorious kingdom of God. It is towards this goal that the whole biblical story – from Genesis to Revelation - moves.

Two records in the Gospels that explain the centrality of the kingdom of God in the thinking of all New Testament believers are John 3:1-17 and Luke 18:18-30. In the first, Christ indicates that it is necessary to be born again if one is to enter the kingdom of God. How is that done? The Letter of I John chapter 5:1 says "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." But this could not occur until after Christ's death and resurrection and the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost. In the second record in Luke, Christ shows the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God by our own efforts – i.e., by keeping the Mosaic Law. However, Jesus makes it clear that entering the kingdom of God, though perhaps impossible for men, *is* possible with God. However, there is a divine necessity for Christ "to give his life as a ransom for many" because of the weakness and sinfulness of man – in other words, mankind needs a Savior.

The New Covenant Proclamation: The Gospel of Salvation

The Gospels, therefore, indicate that there was a problem that required Christ's sacrificial death, resurrection and the giving of the Spirit. It then records Christ accomplishing these events and portrays this as the fulfillment of the new covenant promised in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 22:14-20). The necessity of these events and their fulfillment of Old Testament promises was made clear by Christ himself:

“I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:18-20).

Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:45-49).

Since the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, it is these “Christ-events” that have become the focus of the “gospel.” Thus, after the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of the holy Spirit on Pentecost there are some basic changes, or rather additions, to the “gospel” message. It still focuses on the good news of eternal life in the coming kingdom of God because that is its final goal. This can be clearly seen by continuing through the Book of Acts and noting all the references to the kingdom of God as summed up in Paul’s teaching in the last two verses of Acts:

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 28:30-31).

Despite this continuing focus on the coming kingdom of God, after Pentecost the *central* focus of the “gospel” shifts to the death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit to all who believe in him. The new covenant has been established and Christ has become the means by which redemption and salvation have now been accomplished for all who have faith in him. This shift in focus is evident in the apostles’ teaching in Acts and in all of the New Testament Letters. In short, Christ died for our sins and God raised him from the dead making him Lord over God’s people and creation. He is the

“firstborn” from the dead; therefore, the resurrection has *already* begun. In addition, he has *already* entered into his glory and has become the prototype for those who believe in him. Thus, the one who preached has become the one who *is* preached and salvation becomes dependent on his accomplishments. In short, those who believe in the life, death and resurrection of Christ are forgiven of their sins and are thus “saved” from “the wrath to come”, i.e., God’s final judgment of condemnation against sinners. They receive the “firstfruits” of God’s Spirit, becoming children in God’s family, and, as heirs of God, have the hope of eternal life in the coming kingdom of God.

This is truly “good news!” And that’s why the apostles and disciples were so committed to it and so excited about it. When the apostle Paul went on his missionary journeys his chief priority was to set before the people this “good news” (e.g. Acts 13 & 14). He explained the importance of this “gospel” in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (I Cor. 15:1-11; cf. Rom. 10:9-10).

It is this “gospel of salvation” (Eph. 1:13) concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is “of first importance” in the Scriptures. All of the central truths of this gospel of salvation are summed-up in the new covenant message as beautifully symbolized in the Lord’s Supper (I Cor. 11:23-26). That is why the early Christians churches focused their gatherings around it. The key to Bible study is to begin with, and focus on, this “gospel” of salvation. Then branch out from there to gain a wider scope and understanding of the Bible as a whole.

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

Understanding the Bible:

Common Sense Principles of Biblical Interpretation and Application

Bible study is a subject of intense interest for most Christians and any believer who has spent much time reading and studying the Scriptures can testify to their life-changing truth. The Bible, however, should be read intelligently and understood in the light of the original intent of each inspired writer. The belief that "all Scripture is inspired by God" does not mean foregoing reason or doing away with historical, cultural and linguistic study. In order to get the most out of Bible study certain facts are simply essential to know. First, the Bible is a collection of written documents of various kinds. They were collected over many centuries and finally put in the form in which we have them today. These "books" are arranged logically. For example, in the New Testament: the Gospels, then Acts and then the NT Letters.

Originally, however, each New Testament Gospel, Letter, etc. was written independently to a specific group of people to address specific situations and needs. Each of these NT documents focused on some aspect of the "gospel" of Jesus Christ. But the inspired writers of these documents did not write them with the idea of their being put into a NT "canon" of Scripture - this occurred much later with the final form of our present canon being completed only in the 4th century. Originally each NT document was a self-contained "Gospel," "Letter," etc. and should be read as such. Since they each focus on some aspect of the "gospel" they all fit together "thematically." However, to try to make them fit together in every detail like a giant jigsaw puzzle is to go beyond their original purpose.

Most of us are not Bible scholars nor do we need to be. The "gospel of salvation" (Eph. 1:13) is a simple message and when explained correctly it is easy to understand. All of the NT books revolve around this same theme. However, if we are going to teach the Bible in our fellowships, churches, Bible studies, etc. then we have a responsibility to be as accurate as we can in what we present. To do this it

is helpful to not only read the Bible itself but also to consult Bible study aids that are prepared by experts in biblical studies. The last half of the 20th century - especially the last 25 years - has seen a virtual explosion in such study aids and this will be our focus in this article.

First though, a few preliminary comments may be helpful. It is common knowledge that many Bible believing Christians prefer to "just read the Bible" rather than to use Bible study aids. The fact is, however, that we all read the Bible under the guidance and tutelage of others whether we know it or not. To begin with, every version of the English Bible that we use today - i.e., KJV, NIV, etc. - is the result of a painstaking effort by the translators and editors of that version to understand the "original" text and to translate it into equivalent English that communicates its message faithfully. This very process requires knowledge of the original biblical languages, history, culture, etc. and forces the translator to make *interpretive* choices in the words he or she chooses for the translation. In addition, it is even more obvious that most people who read the Bible also listen to sermons, teachings, etc. - all of which are aids for helping us to understand the Bible. The question is not then, *if* we should use study aids? Rather it is, *which* study aids will we use and/or *which* teachers will we choose to listen to?

In this light, the Book of Acts presents a wonderful record that is very instructive for those of us who are interested in coming to a better and more detailed understanding of the Bible:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go South to the road - the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

*The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" **Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.***

Who among us has not felt at times like the Eunuch as we endeavor to read and understand the Scriptures? Who has not at times felt like he needed help? In this light there are three specific points in this record that can serve as basic principles for us in our own reading and study of the Scriptures:

(1). *Read, study and memorize the Bible.* This is the first thing that should be noticed about the eunuch. He was reading the Scriptures in order to gain an understanding of them. He was searching for truth. This is so very important for no matter what else you do you must read the Scriptures if you want to understand them. Without doing this there is not much point in trying to proceed any further. For it is impossible to gain a good knowledge of the Bible as a whole without putting forth a great deal of time and effort. Few things in life that are worthwhile come easy and biblical understanding is certainly not one of them. In this light it must be emphasized: *any sincere quest for understanding the Bible must rest on the foundation of one's own reading, study and memorization of the Scriptures.*

(2). When reading the Bible we should always endeavor to understand it according to its *original intent and meaning* and, then, to determine how it *applies it to our lives today*. Therefore, when reading and studying the

Bible we should always ask ourselves two very basic and important questions:

a. *What was the inspired writer's original intent and meaning of the Scriptural passage that we are reading?*

b. *How does this Scriptural passage apply to me and to other fellow Christian believers today?*

Now certainly the great majority of Scripture can be understood in the plain sense in which it is read without any great need for further research. But the key to this is always reading the Scriptures in their historical, cultural and linguistic contexts. To do this we often need to consult experts in the field of biblical studies. Is there any other field of study where this is not true? The Eunuch in the passage above needed help in understanding the Scriptures from someone who was better trained in the Scriptures than himself. First, he read them for himself. Then he sought help from someone else. The principle responsibility lies upon ourselves for making the necessary effort to study the Bible and then to seek out those resources or teachers that/who can best help us. They don't just automatically or instantaneously appear on our desks, beside our easy chairs, or under the Christmas tree. In sum, if we are to understand the Scriptures correctly we must put forth the effort that is necessary to do so

(3). The focus of our study should be *the gospel*; that is, God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ. The focus of what Philip taught "beginning from that very Scripture" was "the good news about Jesus." This is where all biblical study should begin and where its central and abiding focus must be. The purpose of Bible study is not to find things that will tickle our itching ears. It is to enable us to understand and live in the light of God's wonderful plan of salvation. Keeping this focus will help us avoid all kinds of charlatans who would have us believe and follow "some new thing" which they have just discovered in the Bible.

Recommended New Testament

Study Aids:

In the light of these three basic common sense principles we will now set forth a listing of recommended aids for Bible study - focusing on the New Testament. All of the works listed are works by Bible scholars of outstanding abilities who are experts in the original languages, history and cultures of the Bible. These authors are all believers and range from conservative to somewhat liberal in their Scriptural viewpoints. They encompass many different denominations from evangelical Protestant to Roman Catholic. The works chosen are chosen solely on the basis of the quality of the scholarship.

The one common denominator in all of these scholars, in addition to their scholarly abilities, is their "already" but "not yet" viewpoint of the fulfillment of "salvation history" in the New Testament. In other words, all of the scholars below view the NT as presenting the culmination of God's OT promises to his people through the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. With Christ's first coming the power of God's kingdom was manifested on earth; through the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost the firstfruits of God's kingdom has already been received; and finally, the second coming of Christ will usher in the final establishment of God's kingdom in a renewed and glorious earth.

One should choose from these works carefully. Before buying any of them look them over in bookstores or borrow them from libraries or friends to see if they'll be useful for you. Almost all are also available through the inter-library loan system. As with any book, one should read the preface and introduction of each work listed in order to most effectively use them in the light of their plan and purpose. The following listings are our *top* recommendations but this does not imply that we agree with all that is said in any of them or that there are not many other useful works as well. It is assumed that our readers are able to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions as they use these works. Each study aid will be listed by either author or title or commentary series. The works most highly recommended will be in **bold print**. Well-known titles are abbreviated for the sake of space. All books listed below are available

from CBD (Christian Book Distributors – www.christianbooks.com) unless otherwise noted. Call them at 1-978-977-5000 for a free catalog and information on orders, membership, discounts, etc. Out of print books are listed (OP) and must be found in used bookstores or wherever you can find them. They will only be listed if they are of exceptional quality. The recommendations below are based on the quality of the particular work, their availability and the price. Choose wisely according to your own needs.

1. Bible Versions:

The Bible can be understood in any of the major English versions that are used today such as *The New International Version (NIV)*, *The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, *The King James Version (KJV)*, *The New King James Versions (NKJV)*, *The Revised English Bible (REB)*, *Today's English Version (TEV)*, *The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)* and many, many others. Of course, they will only be understood *if* they are diligently read! However, if one reads for scope and context the particular version that is used generally doesn't make that much difference. Since all of these versions are fairly accurate, the number one guiding factor in choosing a main version should be that it is reader-friendly; that is, it should be a version that you *can* read and *will* read!

The KJV is certainly beautiful, reverent, and even majestic. At one time it formed the basis for our common English language. Unfortunately, today it is archaic and, in addition, it is by far the least accurate of any of the versions above because of the underlying texts on which it was based. All of the other versions above have their own strong and weak points. I generally use the **NIV** because it is quite accurate, strikes a good balance between literal and thought for thought translation, is very readable, and extremely popular. It also has many research works that are now keyed to it. An excellent new version of the Bible that just came out in 2001 is the English Standard Version (ESV). It is in the tradition of more literal renderings and reads with the same beauty and style of the King James Version. I highly recommend the **ESV** to those who want to retain the beauty and feel of the KJV but desire more modern and clear language.

Of course, whichever version you use as your main text annotations may be necessary to make the text

more accurate in certain verses. One good thing about the NIV and the ESV is that they have footnotes that give alternative readings for most of the most important questionable renderings. The reader, however, must learn to consult these. In addition, when studying a section of Scripture in-depth it is good to consult many of the other good versions – especially the more thought-for-thought versions which can add insight into the meaning of the section being studied. To see the literal underlying Greek text it is necessary to get a good Greek-English Interlinear. Try to get one that has the main version you use in the margin. Finally, read the introduction in each Bible version you use so as to understand its translation method and goal. Translations range from very literal (KJV, NKJV, ESV), to mostly literal but sometimes thought for thought or free (NRSV, NIV), to mostly thought for thought or free (REB, TEV, NJB, P). The following scale illustrates this:

KJV NKJV ESV NRSV NIV REB NJB TEV

Literal Literal/Free Free

All versions lie somewhere on this scale with many modern versions or paraphrases going almost off the chart on the “free” side. Each version should be used in the light of its expressed purpose and then compared with others. There are many Parallel Bibles that have several of these versions together side by side. This makes it easy to compare them.

2. Study Bibles:

Study Bibles are the most useful study aid for most Christian believers. *The NIV Study Bible* and *The Harper Collins Study Bible (with the NRSV)* are the best of those available. They are both full of useful information: background, word definitions, maps, diagrams, short concordance, scripture cross-references, etc. *The NIV Study Bible* is conservative in its outlook on Scripture but recognizes the necessity for historical, cultural and linguistic study to properly understand the Bible. *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (with NRSV) comes from the much more liberal view of Scripture of The Society for Biblical Literature whose expertise in all biblical fields is undoubted. This is what makes this study Bible especially good for comparison.

3. Bible Dictionaries:

Next to a good Study Bible this is by far the best study aid for the general student of the Bible. It should be the first study aid to turn to when studying any topic. My favorite is the **New Bible Dictionary** (NBD). The NBD is conservative in outlook but deep on scholarship. The articles in it are written by many outstanding biblical scholars who are also devout believers. There are a lot of other good Bible Dictionaries - both single and multi-volume - which you can choose from to supplement this one.

4. Word Meanings:

Study Bibles have concise definitions of most key words and this is all the great majority of people need. It is a common fallacy to think that one can study words on their own apart from their contexts. Unfortunately, languages don't work this way. For most people, therefore, it is much better to use a good Study Bible, Bible Dictionary or, especially, a good Commentary to help you to understand the meaning of a word - in its context - than to do word studies or to look up individual words in regular English dictionaries or, even, in Greek-English lexicons or dictionaries. Always remember, it's the Greek word or phrase behind the English word or phrase that matters - not the English word!

For those who want to do more in-depth study there are four works that are more complex beginning with *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* by Bauer, Arntd, Gingrich and Danker (BAGD). This has recently been updated and is an excellent standard work, though it is difficult to use without some knowledge of Greek. “*Little Kittel*” is more useful. It is a one-volume abridged version of the multi-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and gleans the best insights from that work. But my favorite is *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT). This comes in 3 volumes plus one volume of extremely useful indexes. In addition, there is a recently completed abridgement of this work keyed to the NIV. It is called *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*. If you use the NIV this is, perhaps the simplest and most useful work of all for understanding NT words.

5. Theologies of the New Testament :

There are many theologies of the New Testament that one can learn a great deal from. They are especially important for explaining the overall background of the New Testament including history, culture and language. They also should present the perspectives and emphases of each of the NT writers. I have three favorites: *A Theology of the New Testament* by George Eldon Ladd. This work, though a little dry, explains the NT plan and perspective of Salvation in clear terms and then goes through the entire NT in a logical manner dealing with almost every important NT word, concept and issue. The indexes in this work are invaluable and make it possible to look up almost any verse, subject, etc. of importance and to study them in-depth. A second, intriguing, thought-provoking and very readable work is *New Testament Theology* by J.B. Caird. This book can be read straight through and is simply loaded with insights on many subjects. Finally, by far the best theology focusing primarily on Paul's theology is *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* by James D.G. Dunn. This is an outstanding and very up to date work and is highly recommended. It centers on Paul's Letter to the Romans and proceeds to study Paul's theology from there. Dunn is an outstanding scholar who is not afraid to go beyond the accepted wisdom on any topic and offer new insights or suggestions. Though some of his positions can at times be iconoclastic, they are always worth considering and more often than not are correct. This is a work that every serious student of the Bible should have.

Recommended New Testament Commentaries:

Bible commentaries are indispensable for serious study of the individual books of the Bible. But, they are not for everybody. They should be used as *references* to help with background, word meanings, setting, etc. in order to understand a book or section of scripture *in its original context*. Some of these are written well enough to be read straight through, but they should *never* take precedence over your own reading, study and memorization of the Scriptures themselves. The commentaries below are listed in order of increasing complexity under each NT book as well as by the author and title of the series in which they appear. Two cheap and useful series in their entirety are *Tyndale* and *NIBC*. For the

best overall quality of research, usability, readability and price I would choose the *NICNT* series. All abbreviations are explained at the end.

Matthew:

1. Richard T. France, Tyndale
2. Donald A. Carson, Expositors, 2 Volumes

These are both excellent commentaries that complement each other well throughout. I generally prefer France's because it is a clearer format but Carson's is more detailed. It's good to compare their views of the eschatological discourse of Matt. 24. The most detailed commentary on Matthew is the ICC contribution by Allison and Davies which is in three volumes and sold for an exorbitant price.

Mark:

1. Larry Hurtado, NIBC
2. William Lane, NICNT

The NIV Study Bible notes are usually sufficient for Mark. Hurtado's commentary is somewhat dry but it is solid in background material with good end-notes after each chapter. Lane's commentary has more detail and a real reverence for the subject but I'm not sure many really need a commentary of this size on Mark. Mark is pretty straightforward except for sections like chapter 13.

Luke:

1. E. Earl Ellis, NCBC (OP)
2. Joseph Fitzmyer, Anchor, 2 Volumes

E. Earl Ellis' commentary on Luke is a classic and though the NCBC series is (OP), it is well worth trying to find this particular volume. There is a lot in this commentary that you won't find anywhere else. It is written in a succinct style with an excellent Introduction. Fitzmyer's commentary is the standard: very detailed with lots of learning. The format is clear and the Introduction ties together Lucan theology in Luke/Acts. This commentary is quite complex. It is always of interest to see what Fitzmyer has to say on any subject, but this two-volume set is also quite expensive.

John:

1. F.F. Bruce, Eerdmans (not part of a series)
2. Raymond Brown, Anchor, 2 Volumes

Bruce's work is a straightforward commentary of the biblical text that emphasizes the new age of salvation from John's perspective. It also contains a good deal of pertinent background information that relates to the context. For the most part it avoids reading Nicean ideas back into the text. Brown's commentary is something of a classic and comes in two volumes that are filled with many insightful comments and very good notes on the text. Brown also aims to summarize and interact with all major commentaries on John before his. Be prepared for a lot of speculation on setting, sources, etc. as well as a major dose of sacramentalism in this work.

Acts:

1. **F.F. Bruce, NICNT**

Comparatively speaking, there are not that many good commentaries available on the Book of Acts but this is one. It is a solid commentary by Bruce in a clear format. It is especially good at showing the NT fulfillment of OT themes throughout. This commentary also provides an opportunity to tap into Bruce's wide and deep knowledge of the historical background of the NT which is so necessary to understanding both Acts and the NT Letters.

Romans:

1. **F.F. Bruce, Tyndale** and James R. Edwards, NIBC

2. **Joseph Fitzmyer, Anchor** and Douglass Moo, NICNT

3. J.D.G. Dunn, WBC, 2 Volumes

There are many good commentaries on Romans that one can learn a great deal from. The first two listed here are cheap and easy to use. Bruce's commentary is somewhat of a classic. It is compact and concise but in no way lacking in theological content. It is a wonderful exposition of the gospel message throughout with an extremely helpful Introduction. Edwards' commentary has very interesting comments throughout along with valuable end-notes after each chapter. It's very helpful on difficult sections such as Rom. 9-11 and offers a lot of insights in its endnotes, including those culled from J.D.G. Dunn's excellent and massive work on Romans (also recommended, but very technical) as well. Moo's commentary has a tremendous amount of useful information and is popular amongst Evangelicals. However, Joseph Fitzmyer's

commentary on Romans is simply the best. It is a masterpiece of learning, precision and sound judgment. Though detailed, it is presented in a very clear format. The Introduction offers a superb summary of Paul's theology. Of the many other commentaries on Romans that truly have something to offer Fitzmyer's contribution stands out for its overall clarity and its scope and understanding of every aspect of the subject. Any student of Romans should have this commentary for constant reference.

I Corinthians:

1. Richard B. Hays, Interpr.

2. **Gordon Fee, NICNT**

These are two outstanding commentaries and both are highly recommended for those who have a special interest in this book of the Bible. Hays' commentary is full of insightful and forceful remarks from beginning to end with a lot that you won't find anywhere else. It's easy to read and a joy to read. Fee's commentary is a blend of extremely detailed scholarly work and pointed comments that need to be heard by many in the church today. Both commentaries are very good on the "spiritual matters" of I Cor. 12-14 and on "eschatological" thought throughout - esp. chap. 15. In short, students of I Corinthians are very well served by these two commentaries.

II Corinthians:

1. Colin Kruse, Tyndale

This is a brief, solid commentary that is easy to read and follow but not lacking in insightful commentary. Well written with sound judgment throughout.

Galatians:

1. R. Alan Cole, Tyndale

2. **Ronald Y. K. Fung, NICNT**

3. F.F. Bruce, NIGTC

Cole's commentary is a clear and excellent exposition of the heart of the gospel as set forth in Galatians despite its brevity. Fung's work offers a detailed exposition of justification by faith together with a good understanding and presentation of the many other issues in Galatians as such as the role of the Spirit, continuity between the OT and New, etc. Bruce's commentary is detailed and extremely

precise. The NIGTC format in this case is not difficult to follow even if you can't read Greek.

Ephesians:

1. Francis Foulkes, Tyndale
2. **F.F. Bruce, NICNT with Ephesians, Colossians & Philemon**
3. Andrew Lincoln, WBC

Foulkes' commentary is quite good and a good value despite its brevity. For insightful understanding of Paul's thought Bruce's commentary is first class and it comes together in one volume with his commentary on Colossians and Philemon. This is my favorite and it's a super value! Lincoln's commentary is detailed, massive and theologically rich. It is loaded with valuable information but also loaded with Greek and the WBC series, though excellent for serious students, is not easy to follow.

Philippians:

1. Gordon Fee, NICNT
2. Gerald Hawthorne, WBC

These commentaries have a lot to offer in understanding Paul's theology and thought within the setting of this Letter. Anyone who can find G.B. Caird's *Paul's Letters from Prison* (OP) would also be well advised to do so.

Colossians:

1. F.F. Bruce, NICNT with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.
2. **James D.G. Dunn, NIGTC with Philemon**

Bruce's work is solid as usual and comes in one volume with his commentary on Ephesians and Philemon. James Dunn offers a great deal in his commentary that you won't find anywhere else - especially in his understanding of Col. 1:15ff. Above all, he offers a solid and consistent exposition of the text in the light of true Jewish/Christian monotheism.

I & II Thessalonians:

1. David Williams, NIBC
2. **F.F. Bruce, WBC**

The NIV Study Bible has excellent notes on I and II Thessalonians and most people won't need much

more than that. Williams' commentary is good, especially if it is used with, and compared with, *The NIV Study Bible* notes. Bruce's detailed work is first class and is a model of sound scholarship. It is cautious in judgments about matters that are debatable from the text. He sets forth the major alternative views and then his own solid judgments.

I & II Timothy and Titus:

1. Gordon Fee, NIBC

A generally good commentary with a strong defense of Paul's authorship and a good Introduction and endnotes.

Hebrews:

1. **F.F. Bruce, NICNT**

An excellent commentary throughout with the usual solid emphasis on the continuity and liberating effects of the new covenant gospel message that is so characteristic of Bruce.

James:

1. Douglas Moo, Tyndale
2. Peter Davids, NIBC

The notes in the NIV Study Bible are excellent on James. Moo's work is solid and doesn't go in for speculation beyond the plain meaning of the text. Davids' is good, with good end-notes, but should be compared with Moo's, especially on the subject of "works" and on the setting of the Letter.

I Peter:

1. Peter Davids, NICNT
2. J. Ramsey Michaels, WBC

Both of these are excellent commentaries on I Peter with a good grasp of the main themes and are very helpful on the more difficult sections. Davids' is much easier to read and follow but Michaels' has a lot of interesting detail and sound comments. I'd highly recommend it but for the technical difficulty of the WBC format.

II Peter & Jude:

1. Richard Bauckham, WBC

Outstanding. There is much to be learned from Bauckham's massive work, but it is highly technical.

I, II & III John:

1. I. H. Marshall, NICNT

A straightforward exposition of the text with a good presentation of the balance necessary in understanding the Semitic language of John with his use of absolutes such as "light and darkness," "love and hate," etc.

Revelation:

1. **G. E. Ladd, Eerdmans** (not part of a series)
2. **Robert W. Wall** (NIBC)
3. *NIV Study Bible* and *The Harper-Collins Study Bible*

Any interpretation of the Book of Revelation should not be allowed to override the clearness and simplicity of Christian beliefs and practices that are set forth consistently throughout the rest of the NT. The first two commentaries recommended above set forth most of the various viewpoints on Revelation that are worth considering. Both of these are extremely cheap, readable and usable. Ladd's skill in understanding and explaining Revelation in the light of biblical eschatology as a whole is outstanding and his exposition of the text is always edifying and interesting, even if one disagrees with his interpretation. Wall's forty page Introduction and his End-notes at the end of each chapter are extremely useful and his exposition of the text is a good balance to Ladd's. Many other commentaries have a lot to offer. Robert Mounce's work (NICNT) is also generally solid throughout and David Aune's new commentary (WBC) in 3 volumes is by far the

most up to date, detailed, and scholarly, but it is too complex for most people. It should also be noted that Mounce provides the study notes for *The NIV Study Bible* on Revelation and Aune provides the study notes for *The Harper Collins Study Bible* on Revelation. I recommend buying Ladd's and Wall's commentaries and using the Study Bible notes for the other two.

Abbreviations (in order of increasing complexity):

- Tyndale: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
NIBC: New International Biblical Commentary
Interpr: Interpretation
Expositors: Expositors Bible Commentary
NCBC: New Century Bible Commentary (OP)
NICNT: New International Commentary on the NT
Anchor: Anchor Bible Commentary
WBC: Word Biblical Commentary
NIGTC: New International Greek Testament Commentary
ICC: International Critical Commentary

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