

# Ways You Can improve Your New Testament Translation

## A Follow Up Guide to the Book *Ten Ways to Improve New Testament Translations*

This document is a first draft presented to friends in Vienna, Virginia, August 2, 2014. Questions, corrections, and suggestions are all welcome. They can be sent to the author at [rdmccgirr@inbox.com](mailto:rdmccgirr@inbox.com).

### **Making improvements now**

The book *Ten Ways to Improve New Testament Translations* demonstrates the main problems with New Testament translations and describes the steps necessary to make translations more accurately reflect the original writings. Upon completion of the book, some readers have asked: *Is there anything I can do right now to improve the translation I am using?* The answer is yes.

The procedures on the following pages will demonstrate that no one has to be a linguist or a scholar to make several significant improvements to a New Testament translation. They are not difficult adjustments, but they will require time, effort, and focus.

### **What you need**

1. A New Testament translation. It's important that the text be on as heavy paper as possible. Avoid the typical thin pages of many expensive translations. Markings may be required on some of the pages and they should not show through. A paperback edition would be the easiest to work with.
2. Several soft-leaded pencils, a pair of scissors, and a utility knife.
3. The book *Ten Ways to Improve New Testament Translations*. Pages in it are often referenced, so it's important to keep a copy handy.

### **The tasks**

The first goal is to perceive each of the scripture writings as a single piece of literature. (See pages 133-136.) This explains why some of the writings will be separated from the binding. Before this is done, however, certain adjustments to the text can be made that will be easier with the pages still in the binding.

#### *Task one:*

Make the following corrections on all the pages of the translation: Blot out any additions to the texts in the form of subtitles and chapter titles so they are illegible. (See page 120.) They may be present on practically every page of

some translations and sparsely used in others. Though chapter numbers, verse numbers, and blank spaces indicating text divisions are also additions to the texts (see page 103), it is not practical to alter them. One should be constantly aware, however, that they are later additions and many do not correspond to original transitions in the texts.

*Task two:*

Remove the covers and all other pages such as title pages, prefaces, table of contents, appendices, indexes, etc. Nothing should be left but the texts of the scripture writings.

*Task three:*

Separate the following writings from the binding of the translation: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, I John, and Revelation*. You may need a utility knife or scissors or some other tool to do this work. In some cases, one page may have the end of a text from one writing on the front of the page, and the beginning of the following writing on the back of the same page. If this occurs, then a photocopy should be made of one of the sides to serve as a replacement page for one of the writings.

When the writings have been separated, and the extra copied pages have been trimmed to the correct size and added to each corresponding text, the pages of each writing should be stapled or glued into small booklets. (Anyone not adept at this kind of work, may need to find a member of the family or a friend skilled in arts-and-crafts to lend a hand.)

The writings that are still bound in the translation should remain there for now.

Separating the writings helps to recreate to some degree the situation of the first readers. It gives one an experience of handling, reading, organizing, and studying the scripture writings as would have been necessary in the time when they were being received and collected. Dealing with each writing as a complete unit helps to remove them from the religious “holy-book” aura that they have when perceived as parts of a *Holy Bible*. (See pages 106-108.)

Four of the separated writings (*Matthew, Mark, John, I John*) are formal pieces of literature written to kinds of readers rather than to specific persons. *Luke* and *Acts* form a two-volume historical work addressed to a man named Theophilus. A personal statement of purpose serves as preface to the first volume, and a personal note of continuation prefaces the second. *Revelation* should be placed to the side. It presents unique challenges and will be dealt with later.

In order to quickly locate one of the writings, place them in the following groups, and, in pencil, give them the following labels: Group 1: *Mark, John*; Group 2: *Matthew, I John*; Group 3: *Luke, Acts*. Group 4 includes all the letters still in the

binding: *Romans, I, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I, II Thessalonians, I, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I, II Peter, II, III John, Jude.*

Eventually, when the writings are all individually separated, they can be placed in any order or group according to the preference of the reader. This is what the first readers would have done. As they collected the various writings, they would have stored them in their own system. They could have put the letters together, for example, and further grouped them according to author, size, recipients, time of writing, or topic. There is nothing in the writings themselves—with the exception of *I and II Theophilus (Luke and Acts)*—that would demand a certain order.

Were the writings to be grouped according to recipients, then two of the writings are obviously for people who have not yet believed in Christ—*The Introduction to the Message of Christ (Mark)* and *The Testimony of a Disciple of Christ (John)*. All the others are meant for believers and could further be grouped into those meant for multiple recipients and those for a single recipient. Those for multiple recipients could in turn be grouped according to recipients in one locality as opposed to those meant for recipients in various localities. None of these suggestions are right or wrong. They simply reflect the way people go about ordering important writings.

The order of scripture writings in the *New Testament* was initiated by assumptions made by Roman authorities living two to three centuries after the authors. There's no reason why their decisions should be considered binding. The opposite is the case. There are many reasons why their decisions, along with changes they made to the texts, should be recognized as barriers to the understanding of the texts.

## Ways to Improve Each Individual Text

Apart from the changes facilitated by removal from the binding and marking out additions to the texts, there are certain other ways that each text can be adjusted to correspond more to its original. These include noting the use of misleading vocabulary, reinstating missing prominence codes, specifying unclear recipients, and repairing structural problems.

### The six formal writings

The following headings have been chosen to provide a unified approach to working through each of the six formal writings:

#### *TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:*

Includes the traditional terms that have been added to the text and often differ from the writer's own title.

#### *AUTHOR'S TITLE (AND PROMINENCE CODE):*

Words, phrases, or sentences used by the author to indicate a title. This information is usually in the initial position of a Greek text.

#### *TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:*

It is helpful with friends and family to refer to the scriptures in a way that best corresponds to the texts themselves. This becomes a learning experience for them. Sometimes, however, to avoid confusion or in situations when there is not enough time for explanations, it is necessary to use shortened terms that reflect the traditional titles. For example: With friends or family, it would be good to use the term *I Theophilus* instead of *Luke*. There may be certain situations, however, when it would be less confusing to simply use the traditional label of *Luke*.

#### *PROMINENCE CODE:*

The prominent information is always of utmost importance in understanding a text. (Carefully read pages 13-19, and 75.) This is the information that sets the stage for everything that follows. For those who have some skills in Greek, the Greek text is also included.

#### *INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE:*

A writing's genre and title usually reveal the purpose and intended readers in formal literature. A fairy tale, for example, is understood to be an entertaining story for young children.

#### *IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:*

These are textual adjustments that are necessary over and above those accomplished when the writings were removed from the binding, and when extra-textual information was removed from the texts.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

Translations sometimes use words that do not reflect the intended meaning of the author. They may be misleading because the terms are old, anachronistic, or in some other way inappropriate. Such words peculiar to each writing will be listed. To avoid repetition, problem words that are used in many of the scripture writings are included on a general vocabulary list on page 31. These words will not be repeated in the lists of the individual writings. This list should be reviewed periodically.

**This supplement to the *Ten Ways* book is a limited tool**

Please note that though this guide provides assistance with certain basic issues, it is far from being comprehensive. The intent of the guide is not to do the bulk of the work for a reader. Under the heading of *problem words*, for example, only a few are mentioned for each writing of scripture. The number of truly problem words will no doubt be greater and will vary from reader to reader.

In whatever translation is being used, there will be words and phrases that are either not understood or have an unfamiliar sense about them. Such words should be noted and singled out for extra scrutiny. When it comes to word usage in a translation, the reader is the big boss who should decide whether the choice has been a good one or not. (See pages 171-176.) No translation is a good translation until the reader understands what the writer has written. Reading without understanding should never be an option, but a challenge to search and learn. Effective reading is reading with a questioning mind.

**The formal writings of the Christian scriptures**

**Mark**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Gospel According to Mark*

*AUTHOR'S TITLE (AND PROMINENCE CODE):*

**The Beginning of the Message of Jesus Christ, God's Son**

αρχη του ευαγγελιου ιησου χριστου υιου θεου

Of the so-called four gospels (*evangelia*), this is the only writing with the word *evangelia* actually in its initial clause. The writing, however, does not call itself an *evangelia* but the “*beginning*” of the *evangelia*. (See pages 52-53.) This is the title that should be placed on this writing. It would not be wrong to translate *beginning* (αρχη) as *introduction*. It is quite common for an entire piece of literature to serve as an introduction to a topic.

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: Introduction to the Message of Christ* would be one possibility. Shorter possibilities would be *The Introduction* or *The Intro*.

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE: An introduction or a beginning is made with people who are without knowledge of something or someone. Thus, the intended readers of*

Mark are people who have not yet believed in Christ or who have not yet heard about him. The language usage supports the informative character of the text. Note that in the entire writing the vocabulary is basic and the sentences are mostly declarative.

Although one might think that mainly Jewish readers are in view because of the various references to the Jewish scriptures, it must be remembered that Mark was written in Greek, that a proper introduction to Christ and his message required some tie-in to the Jewish scriptures, and that the writing would be used by diaspora Jews (the majority of Jews who were Greek speaking and living in areas outside of Judea) who needed the message themselves and would have no difficulty providing non-Jewish readers with the meanings of unfamiliar terms.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* There is a short ending to this writing in several old manuscripts (ends at 16:8), and two other endings are recorded in various later manuscripts. Most scholars prefer the shorter ending. To be able to decide for oneself, it is necessary to study the evidence. (For comments regarding the work of text analysis see pages 123-125.)

For the most part, the text of Mark is straight-forward with little complexity. Apart from the ending, no significant adjustments to the text are necessary.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Gospel:* This is an old English word that no longer conveys the meaning of the Greek *evangelian*. The word *Gospel* today has come to mean a kind of music, a short message of salvation, a text from one of the so-called four gospels, or a literature genre that is generally considered a biography of Christ. None of these is an intended meaning of a writer of scripture.

*Evangelia*, taken quite literally, means the good message though it was used rarely and usually in a context of a victory or a triumph. *Good news* is not a good translation of *evangelia* because this phrase is often understood to mean some pleasant or fun item of information. Closer to the sense of the word would be a “good-for-you message” which allows for the more sobering aspects of the information. Neither *good news* nor *good-for-you message*, however, are recommended as translations since both have a somewhat humorous or trivial aspect to them.

*Preaching:* For anachronistic reasons, this is not a good word to use. To *proclaim* or *speak out* would be better alternatives.

*Baptizing:* It was common among the Jews to have various “washings” to make a person acceptable in the sight of God. *Clean* and *unclean* were concepts connected to the washings that represented *acceptable* and *unacceptable* in relation to God. It was sin or evil that caused a person to be unclean. The washings were reminders of the need for people to live in an acceptable way before God. The use of the word *unclean* as in an *unclean spirit* is related to this. The *unclean spirit* is the evil one that is unacceptable to God.

*Immediately*: An adverb that is used to move a narrative. It has a particularly heavy usage in Mark. Translating its every usage seems like linguistic overkill in English. In most cases, it can be left untranslated. (In this same vein, the heavy usage of the conjunction *and* to introduce sentences in Mark is another example of Greek narrative style that comes over as overkill in English. In many cases, the *ands* can be left untranslated as well. In English, the use of short sentences accomplishes the same purpose in a narrative.)

*Satan, demons*: The scriptures refer to various beings that are the actual instigators of opposition to Christ. They are not of “flesh and blood.” The influence of modern science casts doubt on such beings—though there is evidence enough for their existence. Both evil and evil beings are significant topics in the scriptures. Though both are uncomfortable subjects for modern man, it is interesting that Hollywood and the writers of much literature have an obsession with them.

## **John**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Gospel According to John*

*AUTHOR’S TITLE (AND PROMINENCE CODE):*

**In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was like God**

εν αρχη ην ο λογος  
και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον  
και θεος ην ο λογος

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING*: The word *gospel* (*evangelia*) is never used in the text. The comment at the end of the writing identifies it as a *testimony* (21:24). (See pages 72-73.) It could be given the title *The Testimony of a Disciple of Jesus* or it could be entitled with the above-mentioned first three sentences in the text, or shortened to the first sentence *In the beginning was the Word*. An elegant solution that combines all the relevant genre information would be to give it a title and a subtitle:

**In the Beginning Was the Word**

***The Testimony of a Disciple of Jesus***

A short way of referring to the writing would be *The Testimony* or *The Logos*.

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE*: A testimony is given so that a claim of some sort be believed. The claim is that *the Word (logos) became a man and lived among us and that this man is Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. The purpose is clearly expressed in 20:31: *...that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you have life in his name*. Clearly the intended readers are people who have not yet believed in Jesus Christ.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* Here should be mentioned the problems sometimes caused by dividing the texts of the scriptures into the so-called verses. They are not a part of the original texts and were not added until the sixteenth century. Sometimes the problem caused by the verse divisions is that they do not always refer to complete sentences. Other times the problem is that many of them are allowed to live a literary life of their own. That is, they are so often quoted outside of their context, that people sometimes think of them as independent sayings or principles.

John 3:16 is a familiar case that serves as a good example. It is so well known that few people realize it is in the middle of a section that measures twenty-one verses and is part of the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus. When read as a part of this conversation, John 3:16 takes on a very different slant than when it is simply quoted alone.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Believe:* It is interesting that in this testimony *believe* as a verb is used almost one hundred times which is far more than any other writing of scripture. It is just as compelling that *belief* or as it is often translated, *faith*, as a noun is not used a single time, though it is used hundreds of times throughout the other writings. This observation underlines the purpose of the writing, to lead a person to believe in Christ. Until a person has believed (verb), there can be no belief (noun).

No other scripture writing defines believing as comprehensively as does John, and no other writing so comprehensively describes the person of Christ as does John.

## **Matthew**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Gospel According to Matthew*

*AUTHOR'S TITLE (AND PROMINENCE CODE):*

## **Book of the Life of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham**

Some have translated these words *Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ*. There is, however, a perfectly good word for genealogy in Greek and it is the word *genealogy*. is not that word and is best understood in the broader sense of *life*. (See pages 51-52.) For some reason, translators have struggled with the meaning of . Two other occurrences of the word in I Theophilus (Luke) 1:14 and James 3:6 have also led to unusual translations. In all three instances, the general understanding of *life* is the best contextual fit. The translation *birth* in I Theophilus is not necessarily wrong, but in the context it is not the birth itself that is in view but the special kind of life that John the Baptizer led. The same is true of the James passage in which the cycles or the phases of life (*birth* makes no sense here) are addressed.

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* With family and friends, it would be good to call this writing the *Life of Christ*, whereas with other people it would be less confusing to refer to it as *Matthew*.

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE:* There is good reason to understand the *Book of the Life of Christ* as a legal document somewhat similar in genre to the Law of Moses. Christ's message replaced the Law of Moses with the law of love. Like Moses' writings, it is a book of instructions that includes a historical tie to God. It concludes with a manifesto (28:19-20) for the followers of Christ. The writing is for readers who have embraced Jesus Christ and provides the basic instructions for following him.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* It is not only important to avoid "verse hopping" in a writing of scripture, or even to focus on larger language units such as paragraphs, but to ultimately attempt to grasp the entire writing. The complete writing was created by the author and includes exactly the information that he thought was necessary. None of it can be left out without it impacting the whole.

The dividing of a text into verses often tempts readers to deal with it in bite-size pieces. This contextually harmful habit leads to others such as determining favorite verses and focusing on agreeable passages. A reader's goal should not be to cut the text down to size but to allow the entire text to chip away and form the reader.

No other writing in the scriptures contains such a tight concentration of the teachings of Christ on its pages. They impact a reader in many different ways, all the way from joyful thankfulness to shock and fear. It should all be accepted and digested. Though the writing is long, it should be read regularly all the way through.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Magi:* They were men who studied the stars, the planets, medicine, and the natural world in general. From diaspora Jews they had probably heard about a coming Messiah and an exceptional light in the heavens triggered this connection. Light coming into darkness was a way of understanding the coming of the Messiah. (Matt. 4:16, Lk 2:78-79)

## **I John**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The First Epistle of John*

*AUTHOR'S TITLE (AND PROMINENCE CODE):*

**What it was like at the beginning with Christ, the source of life**

*What we heard*

*What we saw with our own eyes*

*What we observed and touched with our own hands*

ο ην απ αρχης ο ακηκοαμεν ο εωρακαμεν τοις οφθαλμοις ημων ο εθεασαμεθα  
και αι χειρες ημων εψηλαφησαν περι του λογου της ζωης

(For a detailed explanation of this translation see pages 187-198.)

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* This writing has traditionally been entitled *I John* and considered a letter, although the writing has none of the characteristics of a letter. The authors identify it as an *αγγελιαν* (1:5) which is a message. Του λογου της ζωης (*the word of life*) is translated *Christ, the source of life*, because the phrase *Word of Life* was used as a title for Jesus and was understood as such by both the authors and the readers. The *Source of Life* or the *Word of Life* would be possible short references to this writing.

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE:* What is the genre of this writing? Eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ record what it meant to live in the light as he was in the light. Thus, it shares the same genre with all writings that are evaluatory in nature and are written to confirm the genuineness of something or someone. It follows then that it is written to men and women who profess to be followers of Christ, and have some track record of that, so that they would know that they are in the light.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* The various sections of the *Source of Life* are not connected to one another in a linear, consecutive sense. They correspond more to one another as pieces in a puzzle. Together they depict the kind of person who lives in the will of Christ.

The writing is heavily rhetoric coded (see pages 20-21) which in this case gives the text a sharp edge. The topics are of an either-or nature: *life/death, hate/love, light/darkness, for/against*. Repetition is often used to insure that statements not be misunderstood or fail to be grasped in their full consequence.

The writing addresses threatening topics: Light, darkness, worldliness, sin, hypocrisy, righteousness, love, obedience, antichrists, deception, and idolatry. Any reader of this scripture writing should note exactly what issues have been singled out, because these are the issues the men closest to Christ understood to be crucial to living in the light as Jesus is in the light. And since the issues impact such a critical matter, a reader should also take note of what the writers have NOT mentioned. Not a word, for example, is said about any religious practices.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Sin* (verb): At first look, the word *sin* in 3:9 would seem to require perfection. *No one who lives in him sins*. The verb in Greek, however, is a present tense. The better translation is that *no one who lives in him keeps on sinning*. This reflects the teaching in 1:9.

*Koinonia: Fellowship* is an anachronistic translation for *koinonia*. Today *fellowship* has a social get-togetherness about it that is foreign to the meaning in this text. The meaning in view is to have something compatible or in common. In this case it is the perspectives and understandings that are the topics of this writing. Thus, translations such as *sameness of mind* or a *common understanding* are more appropriate.

*Kosmos*: The world, not in the sense of creation, but, depending on the context, of the people in the world, as a sphere of Satanic principles and influences, and as a reference to the inherent susceptibility of human beings to desire the offerings of the world rather than of God.

*Antichrist, devil, evil one*: The reality of evil and a chief evil being is common throughout the scriptures. This writing, the *Source of Life*, has much to say about evil and darkness.

*Anointing*: This is a rhetorical language code that always alludes to a provision of the Spirit of God in some way. In this case, the anointing has enabled the readers to be *in the know* or *to know all things* (see comments under textual adjustments) ... *because they know the truth*. Thus the anointing refers to the words of God that Christ proclaimed and which allow people to know the truth.

*Abide*: To remain or stay somewhere. *To abide in him* means *to remain or stay with him*.

*Idols*: Idols are false representations of God. The use of this word in the very last sentence of the writing, *guard yourselves from idols*, is significant. The warning has the force of a summary statement. It can very well mean that the entire writing is an exposé of idols, that is, of false and deceptive representations of God which are typical of the darkness.

## **Luke**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Gospel According to Luke*

*AUTHOR'S TITLE: The First Eyewitness Report to Theophilus (See pages 54-63.)*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: First Theophilus*

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1:1-4*

*Most honorable Theophilus:*

*I'm writing you because of the fact that so many have set out to produce a writing about the matters that were accomplished among us, passing them on in the same way that those did who, from the beginning, were the eyewitnesses and servants of Christ. Since I've carefully followed everything from the start, I thought that I, too, should write to you about each matter from the first to the last so that you'd be able to recognize the authenticity of the scriptures that you've been taught.*

επειδηπερ πολλοι επεχειρησαν αναταξασθαι διηγησιν περι των πεπληροφορημενων εν ημιν πραγατων, καθως παρεδοσαν ημιν οι απ αρχης αυτοπται και υπηρεται γενομενοι του λογου, εδοξε καμοι παρηκολουθηκοτι ανωθεν πασιν ακριβως καθεξης σοι γραψαι, κρατιστε θεοφιλε, ινα επιγνωσ περι ων κατηχηθησ λογων την ασφαλειαν

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE:* It is the first part of a two-volume work addressed to a man named Theophilus who has been taught the scriptures. (See page 56.) Theophilus' problem is that he wants to be able to recognize which writings are those of the eyewitnesses of Christ and which aren't. It is an important question for all time. The genre of both is the combination of a personal introductory letter addressing a problem, followed by a historical account which serves as the resolution. Thus both are within the parameters of problem/solution literature.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* Bible translations separate I Theophilus (Luke) from II Theophilus (Acts). According to the author, they belong together and share the same purpose.

*PROBLEM WORDS:* (See pages 54-63.)

## **Acts**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The Book of Acts* or *The Acts of the Apostles*

*AUTHOR'S TITLE:* The Second Eyewitness Report to Theophilus (See pages 64-67.)

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* Second Theophilus

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1:1-2

*Most honorable Theophilus:*

*The first report that I wrote to you concerned everything that Jesus began to do and teach up until the day he was taken up, after he'd instructed his apostles, whom he had chosen through the Holy Spirit.*

τον μεν πρωτον λογον εποιησαμην περι παντων, ω θεοφιλε, ων ηρξατο ο ιησους ποιειν τε και διδασκειν αχρι ης ημερας εντειλαμενος τοις αποστολοις δια πνευματος αγιου ους εξελεξατο ανελημφθη

*INTENDED READERS AND PURPOSE:* It is the second part of a two-volume work addressed to a man named Theophilus who has been taught the scriptures. (See pages 64-71.) Theophilus' need is for clarity concerning the authenticity of the eyewitness accounts. In the first volume he is given an overview of the teachings of Christ as a standard of measure, and in the second volume he is given an overview of the history of the eyewitnesses. Thus, in two volumes he has a standard for the content of the scripture writings and a standard for the authors. Both are designed to give him the information he needs to be sure which writings he can trust.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS:* Bible translations separate I Theophilus (Luke) from II Theophilus (Acts). According to the author, they belong together and share the same purpose.

*PROBLEM WORDS:* (See pages 64-67.)

## The Thirteen letters of Paul of Tarsus

The categories for analysis of the letters are the following:

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE* : Used in most NT Translations

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING*: The author's own wording

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL*: For general use

*INTENDED READERS*: A brief description

*PROMINENCE CODE*: (See pages 13-19.)

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE*: Brief descriptions

*PROBLEM WORDS*

### Romans

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE*: *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* or *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING*: *Paul's Letter to Believers in Rome*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL*: *Romans*

*INTENDED READERS*: To all believers in Rome who are the called of Jesus Christ from many cultures who are loved by God and called to be holy.

Note: Later in the letter the Jewish believers are addressed specifically in 2:17, then the non-Jews in 11:13, and finally all believers once again in 12:1.

*PROMINENCE CODE*: 2:1

In a letter, the prominent code (see pages 13-19) that signals the topic and purpose is almost always found at the point where the writer ends any introductory words and turns directly to the readers. Rhetoric codes are often used for emphasis in this statement. *Romans* is a good example of both.

1:1-32 contains first-person and third-person introductory statements. The writer then changes to second person in a rhetorically charged statement in 2:1.

Therefore, you are without excuse, each and every one of you who is judging someone. When you do, you are condemning yourself, because you who are judging are practicing the same things.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE*: In general, each of the scripture writings has one of four main purposes: To teach, to encourage, to remind, or to correct. A lack of knowledge requires teaching. Problems with fear, perseverance, or lack of maturity require encouragement. Problems with distractions, deception, or lack

of focus require reminders. Problems with disobedience or obstinance require correction and warning. This is not to say that a writing cannot evidence various purposes, but they can almost always be understood as sub-purposes in relation to a main purpose.

*Romans* is a correction related to the problem of believers judging one another. There are also words of teaching, reminder, and encouragement in *Romans*, but they are in the context of sub-topics. (See pages 16-19.)

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Law:* When reference is made to the *Law* in *Romans*, it is the *Law of Moses* that is meant. In general, the *Law of Moses* is what the Jews call the *Torah*. It corresponds to the first five writings in an *Old Testament* translation. Some would say that only half of the *Torah* is actually law or instructions and the other half is narrative. It is, however, not unusual for legal documents either in antiquity or even today to include historical content as part of the text.

If one were to read the US Declaration of Independence, for example, as though it were the first book of US Law and the US Constitution as though each part of it were a book to follow, then one can understand how history and law can form a couplet. Many codes of law, in fact, seek to establish a link to a divine source or at least to principles anchored in nature.

*Jew, Gentile:* The Jew and the non-Jew. Both are often addressed in the scriptures. They are sometimes referred to as the circumcision and the uncircumcision, the Jew and the Greek, or the people of God as opposed to all other peoples (*ethnoi*). Key to understanding the disparities are the many “purity” issues that caused the Jews to separate themselves from others. Jewish influence is often mentioned in the scriptures as a cause of confusion and opposition. Scripture writings such as *Romans*, *Matthew*, *Galatians*, and *Hebrews* go into great detail in explaining how the life and message of Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses and instituted a new law of love to all the peoples of the world.

## **I Corinthians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The First Epistle of Paul to the Church at Corinth or The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* *The first letter of Paul and Sosthenes to the ecclesia of God in Corinth*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *First Corinthians*

*INTENDED READERS:* The ecclesia of God in Corinth, those made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be holy together with all those everywhere who call on the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1:10*

I am urging you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all be speaking with one voice, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be brought back together, having the same mind and the same understanding.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:*

The rest of the letter is basically a list of the issues causing the divisions and Paul's comments about them. Sometimes translations have chapter breaks that are at places where he introduces a new issue, but that is not always the case. Be sure to note these places.

This is a letter of correction.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Tongues:* Languages. Anyone knowing the language being spoken could translate it. These are not incoherent utterings.

## **II Corinthians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Church at Corinth or The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: The second letter of Paul and Timothy to the ecclesia of God in Corinth*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Second Corinthians*

*INTENDED READERS:* The ecclesia of God in Corinth along with those who are holy in all of Achaia

*PROMINENCE CODE: 2:8*

Therefore, I urge all of you to determine to welcome him with love.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:*

Many translations do not make it clear that the key statement of 2:8 in the middle of verses 2:5-11 and it is easily overlooked. It may, however, be one of the most powerful little sentences in all the scriptures. Though it may seem a small thing to determine to love another individual, it is in reality the very essence of the relationship between Christ and those who believe in him. This is where eternal life begins for man.

The determination to love is also the essence of the followers of Christ with one another. And as this letter emphasizes, it is also key for believers towards Paul, a writer of scripture. This reader-of-scripture/writer-of-scripture relationship occupies a great deal of space in II Corinthians. If the “determination to love and welcome a brother,” be it Christ or one of the writers of scripture or simply a fellow believer, is not made, then it becomes a huge barrier to faith.

2:8 should not be hidden away but made prominent as the head of the key paragraph 2:8-11. Then comes the long section in which the Corinthian’s acceptance of Paul is the issue. This is a letter to encourage to decisive action.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

The word \_\_\_\_\_ in 2:8 is difficult to translate. It is actually the verb of the noun *kurios* which means *lord*. It basically means to make a lordly decision or to be decisive like a lord. Imagine the head of a large household coming to the door himself to welcome and demonstrate acceptance to a person standing outside. That a servant is not sent to do this, is a demonstrative act that is clear for all to see.

## **Galatians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians or The Letter of Paul to the Church in Galatia*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: Paul and the brothers with him to the ecclesias in Galatia*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Galatians*

*INTENDED READERS: Various ecclesias in Galatia are turning to a false message of Christ. Paul refers to them as the foolish Galatians (3:1).*

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1: 6-9*

I am dumbfounded that you’re so quickly turning from the one who called you in Christ’s grace, to embrace a different message of Christ. There is no such other message. It’s just that there are some who are confusing you and want to distort the message of Christ. But if an angel from heaven or even one of us should proclaim a message different than the one that has been given to you, he should be accursed! I’ll say it again: If anyone proclaims to you a message of Christ that is different than the one you have received, he should be accursed.

θαυμαζω οτι ουτως ταχεως μετατιθεσθε απο του καλεσαντος υμας εν χαριτι χριστου εις ετερον ευαγγελιον, ο ουκ εστιν αλλο· ει μη τινες εισιν οι παρασσοντες υμας και θελοντες μεταστρεψαι το ευαγγελιον του χριστου. αλλα και εαν ημεις η αγγελος εξ ουρανου ευαγγελιζηται υμιν παρ ο ευηγγελισαμεθα υμιν, αναθεμα εστω. ωσ προειρηκαμεν, και αρτι παλιν λεγω, ει τις υμας ευαγγελιζεται παρ ο παρελαβετε, αναθεμα εστω

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* This is letter of correction. (The old word for *correction* is *rebuke*.)

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Accursed:* A powerful word that signals one condemned to death in darkness. It shows the seriousness of the topic and the intense displeasure of the writer.

*Spirit, faith, law:* These are important words not only in Galatians but in all the scripture writings. Rather than try to include a definition here, it is better to point out that the text of this writing provides a very good comparison and explanation of these terms and does it better than any lexicon.

*Only:* A weak translation for a word used several times in this writing such as in 5:13. It often introduces a warning or a “heads up.” In English one might say *but watch out that...or only be careful that... .*

## **Ephesians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* *Paul’s letter to those who are holy and faithful in Christ Jesus in Ephesus*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *Ephesians*

*INTENDED READERS:* Non-Jewish believers in Christ (2:11)

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 2:11-13

Therefore, remember that you were once non-Jewish people who were called the uncircumcised by the Jews. At that time you were without Christ, shut out of the citizenship of Israel, strangers of the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now with Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near because of the death of Christ.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* Eph. 5:18-21. In some translations these clauses are translated with four commands. The sentence, however, has one main clause with a command couplet (*don’t be drunk, but be filled with the spirit*), and it is followed by three dependent clauses, each introduced with a participle (*speaking..., giving thanks..., being subject...*). Thus there are not four or five commands as some translations record, but only one command couplet that is modified in three ways.

The writing is to remind non-Jewish believers of their special place in God's plan.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Us, we:* These pronouns are often used in the writings of scripture and are typically thought to be referring to the readers and the writer. This is not always the case. It is not at all unusual for the writer to mean himself and the other writers of scripture when he uses the word *we*. The context makes it clear if this is the case. Note, for example, the use of *we* in 1:3-12 and the change in 1:13 to an emphatic *you*.

## **Philippians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* Paul and Timothy's letter to those who are holy in Christ in Philippi including the overseers and servants

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Philippians*

*INTENDED READERS:* Believers in Philippi. The fact that overseers and servants are specifically mentioned serves to emphasize that they particularly should pay attention to the message of the letter.

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1:27-30 The verb in this command needs a better translation than the one most often used. (See the explanation in the *word meanings* below.)

Always live as citizens of your country who above all are worthy of the message of Christ, so that whether I come or not, I am hearing that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving together like one person for the faith of the message of Christ, and not intimidated in any way by your opponents, which is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation ...

μονον αξιως του ευαγγελιου του χριστου πολιτευεσθε, ινα ειτε ελθων και ιδων υμας ειτε απων ακουω τα περι υμων, οτι στηκετε εν ενι πνευματι, μια ψυχη συναθλουντες τη πιστει του ευαγγελιου, και μη πτυρομενοι εν μηδενι υπο των αντικειμενων, ητις εστιν αυτοις ενδειξις απωλειας, υμων δε σωτηριας ...

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* Take note that the prominent passage goes all the way through the end of 1:30. It is all connected. And note that the following sentences are 2:1-4, 2:5:-8, and 2:9-11. Mark them in some way so they stand out. Each is a very powerful, complex statement and provides the first instructions as to what Paul meant when he wrote they should live as citizens *worthy of the message of Christ*.

This is a letter to remind the readers how they should behave in a politically charged situation.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Overseer, servant:* It is only because of later traditions that these words became institutionalized as bishop and deacon. There were no offices or titles among the first believers in the same way that there were no sanctuaries, altars, holy days, priests, non-profit organizations, or rituals. There was no authoritative concept associated with these words, only functional ones. The episkopos was like an older brother who is told to watch after the young ones while the parents are busy. And the diakonos was one who could be trusted to be an example and serve others.

*Live as a citizen:* The Greek word is *politeuomai*. From it we get our words for *politics* and *police*; its noun is the Greek word for city. It refers to life lived as a citizen of a city or any political unit.

## **Colossians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* Letter of Paul and Timothy to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Colossians*

*INTENDED READERS:* Believers in Colossae and Laodicea (2:1) who are being influenced by religion, philosophies, and worldly influences (2:16-23)

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 2:6-7 (See pages 75-88.)

Therefore, since you've received Jesus Christ the Lord, keep on living with him, grounded and being built up in him, being established in the faith, and overflowing with thankfulness, just as you were taught.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* In the above command, the words *with him* are emphasized in the Greek text and they should be marked in some way.

It is helpful in all the letters to mark all the commands. They indicate the places where the author is talking to the recipients directly and forcefully. The readers would feel each command deeply and readers today should feel that as well. Translations are not always good at making imperatives clear, and sometimes they will translate participles as imperatives. A good way to be sure about the imperatives in a text is to use the book *A Parsing Guide to the Greek New Testament*. *Parsing* simply means to identify the parts of a verb. One need not know Greek to obtain this information. All verbs are listed in order of their use and their parts are labeled. Those labeled *imper* (imperative) in the end position

are the commands. Some computer programs can also deliver this information quickly.

This is a letter to remind readers not to stray from Christ.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

2:8 has some important yet difficult words that show what those things are that cause one to stray from Christ rather than live *with him*.

*Philosophy:* The Greeks were greatly enamored of philosophy and philosophers.

*Empty deceit:* Deception in all its forms

*Traditions of men:* Not only the collected knowledge of man but human teachings that become more important than the scriptures and replace them.

*Elements of the world:* Those things that ultimately undergird the perspectives and practices of “worldliness,” which in other places is referred to as darkness or the domain of Satan.

## **I Thessalonians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The First Epistle of Paul to the Church in Thessalonica*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* The letter of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the ecclesia of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *First Thessalonians*

*INTENDED READERS:* Believers in Thessalonica who live exemplary lives

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 4:1

In the future then, brothers, we are asking and urging you in the Lord Jesus, that you continue to live and please God just as you were instructed by us, so that you keep growing all the more, just as you are doing.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:*

4:1 may seem to be a late placement of the prominent code, but this is only because the letter is essentially one of encouragement. The readers are not being written because of some controversial issue, but to compliment their

behavior and to encourage them to continue on even more so. This explains the many introductory comments and the late placement of the command.

This is a classic letter of encouragement.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Vessel* in 4:4: Can mean *body* or *wife*. This is one of those unusual places where the context could be understood to mean either. Since both resulting meanings are taught in other places in the scriptures, an easy solution is to simply regard either or both as good advice.

*Defraud* in 4:6: To exploit someone

*Quench* in 5:19: Suppress, resist

*Don't despise prophecies* in 5:20: The prophet is often mistakenly thought to be a predictor of the future. The core task of the prophet, however, is to call people back to the words of God. Because warnings are used in this task, the future is often brought into play. This is not an unusual occurrence among all peoples. A father might say to a son: *Remember what I expect of you, or you'll be paying your own tuition next year*. This does not mean that there are not specific prophecies in the scriptures, but *to prophecy* is more often closely related to warn or to remind than to tell what will happen in the future. Resisting such warnings and reminders is a large part of what is meant here.

## **II Thessalonians**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Second Epistle of Paul to the Church in Thessalonica*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* The second letter of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the ecclesia of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Second Thessalonians*

*INTENDED READERS:* Believers in Thessalonica who are undergoing opposition (1:4)

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 2:1-2

We ask you, brothers, regarding the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our joining together with him, not to let yourselves be so quickly shaken in your mind, nor to be disturbed by a spirit or a report or a letter supposedly from us, claiming that the day of the Lord is here.

ερωτωμεν δε υμας, αδελφοι, υπερ της παρουσιας του κυριου ημων ιησου χριστου και ημων επισυναγωγης επ αυτον, εις το μη ταχεως σαλευθηναι υμας απο του νοου μηδε θροεισθαι μητε δια πνευματος μητε δια λογου μητε δι

επιστολης ως δι ημων

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* This is a letter to correct and warn about deceptive information sources.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

The phrase *a spirit or a report, or a letter* is key to the understanding of this command. All three nouns are communication sources purporting to be *from us*, that is from one of the writers of scripture or one of the eyewitnesses of Christ. *Report* and *letter* are the written forms of the scriptures. A *spirit* would refer to an information source that could be anything from a vision to an angel or an influence.

## I Timothy

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The First Epistle of Paul to Timothy*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* Paul's first letter to Timothy

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *First Timothy*

*INTENDED READERS:* Timothy, who was "Paul's child in the faith" and who had been left in Ephesus to correct people who were involved in false teachings. (1:3-7)

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1:18-19

Timothy, my son, I am passing this command on to you in accordance with the earlier prophecies about you, that with them in mind you fight the good fight, maintaining faith and a good conscience which some have rejected, destroying their faith.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* This is a writing to encourage a man to become a responsible "fighter for the faith" and all that it entails.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*Charge (parangelian):* Depending on the context the word can mean *command, instruction, or announcement*. The word *responsibility* would also capture the essence of what Paul is passing on to Timothy.

*Bishop, elder, deacon:* These translations all cause anachronistic understandings among readers who could easily understand them to be clergy or church officers of some kind. Some translations even include the word *office* in 3:1 though it is not there.

*Overseers* (ἐπισκοποὶ), *servants* (διακονοὶ), and *older men* (πρεσβύτεροι) are mentioned in the scriptures as the responsible men in Christ's ecclesia. (Pastors and priests as church leaders are purely traditional inventions.) None of these three, however, was intended to be a power position in a worldly institution and they were certainly never intended to be positions in a hierarchy of authority. Only men who had proven themselves in their own families and who fulfilled a list of other qualifications were considered eligible to be one of these men who could be entrusted with important tasks. They weren't there to fill positions of authority, but to provide examples and counsel, and do tasks of service.

## II Timothy

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* Paul's second letter Timothy

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *Second Timothy*

*INTENDED READERS:* To Timothy, whom Paul loved as his own child, and who because of fearfulness had ceased to carry out important tasks which he had been given.

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1: 6-7

For this reason, I am reminding you to take up once again the task of God's grace which has been yours from the time I placed my hands on you, because God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and understanding.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* This is letter of correction.

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

is translated *to take up once again* rather than the more literal *rekindle*. It makes clearer the fact that Timothy is seen as having ceased to do what he was supposed to be doing. He's being told to get back to it.

is translated *task of God's grace* instead of *gift* to avoid the common perception that is an empowering rather than a commissioning. This writing indeed makes clear the nature of Timothy's (charisma) and it has nothing to do with an inherent talent or specific enabling. When Paul placed his hands on him it was to emphasize the passing on of a responsibility. The text of the letter specifies how broad this service was.

## Titus

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Paul to Titus*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: A letter of Paul, the apostle...to Titus...*  
(The three dots are used here and in other places as reminders that other modifiers are used in the salutation.)

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Titus*

*INTENDED READERS: Titus, a man Paul had led to faith who had been left in Crete to do important tasks (1:5-16)*

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1:13-14*

For this reason, rebuke them severely, so that they'd have a healthy faith by not paying attention to Jewish myths nor to the commands of men who are rejecting the truth.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE: This is a letter of encouragement.*

## Philemon

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Paul to Philemon*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: Letter of Paul and Timothy to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the ecclesia in your home*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Philemon*

*INTENDED READERS: To Philemon and the believers in his household*

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1:17*

If you share the same mind with me, then accept him as you would me.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE: A letter of request (a subset of encouragement)*

*PROBLEM WORDS:*

*(koinonia)* is translated *same mind* rather than the traditional *fellowship* to avoid the “socializing” perception the term has come to have today. *Commonality* is the meaning of the word.

*Slave:* Slavery in the first century was not based on racial distinctions. In ancient Rome, for example, the slave population included Ethiopians, Gauls, Jews, Persians, and

Scandinavians. Another distinction between modern and ancient slavery was that slaves did not necessarily hold the lowest status in society. It is unlikely that Onesimus was a runaway slave. More likely he had been sent to serve Paul in some way and ended up staying longer than was expected of him.

*Oikos*: House, household, or family depending on the context

## Other letters and writings

### I Peter

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE*: The First Epistle of Peter

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING*: The first letter of Peter to God's chosen ones, foreigners dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL*: First Peter

*INTENDED READERS*: Believers living in a foreign situation who are now going through a difficult time of testing

*PROMINENCE CODE*: 1:13

Therefore, set your hope completely on the grace being brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed, by being serious and getting your mind ready to work.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE*: A letter of encouragement

*PROBLEM WORDS*:

*Grace*: A key word word in the prominence code. This writing is actually a thorough treatment of the concept of grace and the outworking it should have among believers under pressure in the world.

Note the word *diaspora* in the general list.

### II Peter

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE*: *The Second Epistle of Peter*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING*: A letter of Peter to those who have the same faith as ours

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL*: Second Peter

*INTENDED READERS:* To believers who need a reminder regarding the corruptions in the world

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1: 5-9

So therefore, by giving all the effort you can, add uprightness to your faith, along with knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, commitment to your family, and love, because if these things are present in you and growing, your knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ will be neither useless nor unfruitful. Whoever lacks these things is shortsighted and blind, forgetting the cleansing of his earlier sins.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* This is letter of reminder.

## **Hebrews**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* *God spoke long ago...in many ways, but in these last days He has spoken in His Son...*

Note: As is often the case, the first statement of a first-century Greek writing serves as a title. When the statement is long, it goes beyond what today would be expected of a title. *God Spoke in His Son* would be an abbreviated way of referring to the writing that would reflect to some degree the full title.

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *Hebrews* or *God Spoke in His Son*

*INTENDED READERS:* There are many indicators throughout the text that the recipients of this writing are Jewish believers “who need a good talking to.” Hard heartedness, sluggishness, complaining, lack of discipline, and other failings are mentioned and accompanied by stern warnings.

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 2:1-4

For this reason we must pay attention all the more to the things we have heard, so we don't drift away from them, because if the words spoken through angels became established and every wrong doing and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape when we neglect so great a salvation which when first received was spoken through the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard, as God bore witness through signs, wonders, various works of power, and works of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* The beginning is not like a letter. The ending is. It is the opposite of I and II Theophilus in which a personal statement of purpose introduced a report. In this writing, a report is followed by a personal statement of purpose. In each instance the readers are given historical information intended to solve basic perspectives towards the scriptures.

The author refers to this writing as a *short...word of reminder*. (13:22)

## **James**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE:* *The Epistle of James*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING:* James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL:* *James*. (It should be noted that the Greek name is *Jakobus* whose English equivalent would obviously be the name of *Jacob* rather than *James*. It is an example of a traditional translation practice that has never been corrected.)

*INTENDED READERS:* Why did the writer address *the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad*? It is rhetorical coding (see pages 20-21) referring to Jewish believers. This choice of terms would recall for them their situation of exile and lack of belongedness in the world. In a wider sense this is the situation of any believer—in the world but not of the world. It prepares them for the writer's topic.

*PROMINENCE CODE:* 1:2-4

My brothers, consider it all joy when you are confronted by temptations of any kind, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and endurance should do its ultimate work of making you mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE:* Begins like a letter but does not end like one, somewhat similar to I and II Theophilus. It is a writing of instruction.

*PROBLEM WORDS:* See the word *diaspora* in the general list.

## **Jude**

*TYPICAL NEW TESTAMENT TITLE: The Epistle of Jude*

*TEXT-BASED WAY OF REFERRING TO THE WRITING: Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, loved of God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ*

*SUGGESTED SHORT LABEL: Jude*

*INTENDED READERS: Believers in danger of being deceived*

*PROMINENCE CODE: 1:17-18*

You, whom I love, remember the words spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ and how they told you that in the end time there will be people living according to their own ungodly desires who ridicule us.

*IMPORTANT TEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS/PURPOSE: The letter is a reminder.*

## **Writings that have been questioned**

There are writings included in most New Testaments that at one time or another have been questioned as deserving to be called scripture. They include the following:

*Hebrews, James, Jude, II John, III John, II Peter, Revelation*

Of the seven, only one, *Revelation*, is clearly outside the testimony of the eyewitnesses writing in the first two-thirds of the first century. *I and II Theophilus*, in particular, were written to establish the reliability of the scriptures and nowhere do either of these writings substantiate the circumstance of the author, the unusual content of the writing, or the linguistic nature of a writing such as *Revelation*. It is universally recognized as being written much later than the other writings, and it contains flamboyant information that finds no parallel in the teachings of Christ as recorded in the eyewitness accounts. Its only justification for being counted among the scriptures is its inclusion in the lists of scriptures (at the insistence of Constantine the Roman Caesar) issued by Roman Church Councils which were initiated in the fourth century AD.

There is no reason to assign any authority to these councils. Any decisions regarding the scriptures should proceed from the writings of the eyewitnesses themselves who have spoken at great length in this regard.

All readers are free to do their own research and make their own decisions in these regards. (See pages 123-125.) There is no ecclesiastical authority assigned to determine what writings should or shouldn't be considered scripture. The only natural and historical authorities are the men who spent the last years of Jesus' life with him. The ones who wrote the following are the ones who should be consulted:

### **What it was like at the beginning with Christ, the source of life**

*What we heard*

*What we saw with our own eyes*

*What we observed and touched with our own hands*

## Problematic words often used in New Testament translations

*Apostle:* *The twelve apostles* is a term that Jesus used to designate the special relationship that he had with his closest group of disciples and the eyewitness character of their future lives. The introductory sentences of I John demonstrate what this eyewitness character means, as does the introduction to I Theophilus (Luke). There is nothing in the scriptures to indicate that apostleship was a task or title that could be passed on. In fact, the eyewitness nature of it would dictate that it was tied to those who were in Jesus' inner circle.

*Church:* This is one of the most anachronistically used words in Bible translations. Its usage causes later meanings of the word to be read back into the word *ecclesia* used by the scripture writers. In the first century, *ecclesia* did not mean a building, a denomination, an institution, a non-profit organization, or a hierarchical organization peopled by popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, superintendents, pastors, priests, or vicars. The *ecclesia* was understood to have the nature of a family into which a person was born and grew, peopled by brothers and sisters, mature adults, servants, and overseers. It was the equivalent of the Kingdom of God and as such could never be equated with an institution of this world.

There is no linguistic reason why the English word *church* should be deemed adequate as a translation for *ecclesia* and every reason why it shouldn't be. Any number of other options would be preferred. Household of God is one possibility as is God's family. Simply using the Greek word *ecclesia* is a better solution because it makes a reader think when reading it. It is not, however, a good choice in the Spanish language in which the word *ecclesia* itself carries the same anachronistic baggage as the word *church*.

*Dispersion of Jews (diaspora):* Though Jewish peoples were dispersed in an Assyrian captivity in the eighth century BC, the diaspora is generally thought to begin with the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC. Though Jews later returned to Jerusalem, many did not and over the centuries they spread to many parts of Persia, then throughout Alexander's Greek empire, and finally the Roman empire.

II Theophilus 2:9-11 records some of the languages spoken by these peoples in the first half of the first century AD in a document written by King Agrippa I, he mentions the following locations: ... *the adjoining countries of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, and Coelesyria, and into the more remote Pamphylia, Cilicia, the greater part of Asia Minor as far as to Bithynia and the remotest parts of Pontus; likewise into Europe—Thessaly, Bœotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, the Peloponnesus ...they are found also in the more important islands, Euboea, Cyprus, Crete... the countries beyond the Euphrates... Babylon and the fertile regions around it... In the west of Europe also they were not wanting; many thousands of them lived in Rome.*

Many diaspora Jews came to Jerusalem every year to visit the temple. Another Jewish diaspora was caused when the Romans defeated Judea in 70 AD. This diaspora continues to some degree until the present day.

*Gentile*: The word is seldom used in English. *Ethnoi* refers to all non-Jewish peoples and, as such, can simply be translated the *non-Jews* or more generally as the *peoples* or *other peoples*. The *nations* is an anachronistic translation because nations as we know them did not exist at the time of the writing of the scriptures.

Paul's letter to the Romans gives a good overview of the Jews (2:17-11:11) and the non-Jews (11:12-11:36). Both designations come up often in the scriptures so it's good to know the fundamental distinctions between them.

*Gospel*: This is an old English word that has lost its original meaning and come to mean either 1. one of the so-called four gospels, or 2. a salvation message. Neither meanings corresponds to that used in the scriptures. *Evangelia* taken quite literally means the good message though it was used rarely and usually in a context of a victory or a triumph. *Good news* is not a good translation because it is usually understood to mean some pleasant or fun item of information.

*Greeks*: They did not live in a country called Greece. In the first century there were Greek cities in various parts of the Roman empire in the area of modern Greece, the north coast of Africa, in Turkey, along the coasts of the Black sea, and less concentrated in many other areas.

*Spirit*: A word whose meaning can range from *influence* (spirit of the age) to the presence of God Himself (Holy Spirit). It depends on the context. Traditionally men have tried to tie the word down in creeds or theologies, but it is one of those terms that is best left to the scripture writers to represent to the reader. The *Testimony of a Disciple* (John), for example, deals with the Holy Spirit in great detail. In the end, the best way to ultimately understand any of the words used in the scriptures, is to allow the context of each individual writing to make the determination.

*Synagogue, scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, Sanhedran*: These are all words that have come to impress readers as being strongly related to Judaism. None of them, however, are rooted in the Law of Moses. They are products of Jewish traditions that, according to Jesus, the Jews had begun to prefer to the teachings of Abraham and Moses. Definitions of all of these can be found in a standard reverence work or on the internet. It's important to note that they all represent a Judaism that was a mockery of the messages in the Jewish scriptures.

Another distinction regarding Judaism is the relationship between the Jewish scriptures and the Christian scriptures. (See pages 45-49.) It is common for these writings to be used in a non-contextual way.

*Elder, bishop, deacon (Older man, overseer, servant)*: It is only because of later traditions that these words became institutionalized. There were no offices or titles among the first believers in the same way that there were no sanctuaries, altars, holy days, priests, non profit organizations, or rituals. No authoritative concepts were associated with these words, only functional ones. The *episkopos* (overseer) was like an older brother who is told to watch after the young ones

while the parents are busy. The *diakonos* (servant) was one who could be trusted with specific tasks, and the *presbuteros* (older, aged man) was to be an example who gives wise guidance to believing men.

*Old Testament/New Testament:* These terms was never used in the first century to denote either the Jewish or the Christian scriptures. The proper way to refer to the Jewish scriptures would be to call them the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets or for a short label the Jewish scriptures would be sufficient. The Christian scriptures should be referred to as the letters and reports of the eyewitnesses of Christ. A short alternative would be to refer to them as the *Christian scriptures*.

## **A Word About the Reader**

While it is important to have a text that is accurate, it is just as important that the reading skills of a person are equal to the language used in the writing. (See pages 29-37.)

When a reader can easily read and understand a written text, it's because all the key language codes and coding procedures of a text match those that are resident in the mind of the reader. Experienced mechanics, for example, can quickly grasp the information in a parts catalogue, whereas the information means little to someone who doesn't have the training of a mechanic. A pilot can fly an airplane he knows, but another plane may require different procedures and have a different set of instruments. The pilot will have to carefully learn the workings of the new layout. Any missing language codes must be supplied. This is the process of all learning.

### **Language codes and procedures specific to the Christian scriptures**

The language codes and coding procedures of the Christian scriptures have roots in the cultural parameters of the Greek speaking world of the first century. This world consisted of many different peoples, most of whom were encompassed by the borders of the Roman Empire. The Greek used was not the classical Greek of the earlier philosophers nor the mother-language Greek of those with Greek parents. It was the Koine Greek or the common Greek that was used and spoken as a lingua franca in a far-flung area stretching from India in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

Anyone who wants to understand the writings of the eyewitnesses of Christ will greatly benefit from learning as much as possible about the world in which the writers and the first readers lived. This is no small task because a cultural world of any sort is a multifaceted network of information, practices, perspectives, and relationships. There is a very real sense, however, that this is precisely what the Christian scriptures are all about. They are about entering a new world called the Kingdom of God which is in conflict with the powerful world system of darkness. Introducing followers of Christ to an understanding of the workings of both of these worlds is a major purpose of the scriptures. (See pages 223-224.)

### **Discovering the first century by reading**

The first century was one of the most remarkable of history. It was not only highlighted by the life of Jesus Christ, but by a unique political and cultural development. It was in the Roman Empire that a two-generation long time of peace and linguistic connectedness developed of the kind that the world had never seen. A man could travel on good roads from Spain to the middle of the fertile crescent. He had no need to worry about hostile borders, and was able to use one language the entire way.

It was in this window of time that the eyewitnesses of Christ learned their new life and penned their formal writings. And it was on these roads that they traveled and interacted with the people to whom they wrote their letters.

There is also one other reason why this period of history is remarkable: It is one of the best documented periods of ancient history. Not only are the Christian scriptures among the very best documented writings of antiquity, but today, millions of words that were written in many different kinds of literature in this century are available to be researched, studied, and read. It is a fact, that a person living today, has more written information available from the first century than any single person living at that time could have had. The first century is there to be discovered through the time-machine of reading.

It is basic to the task of becoming a skilled reader of the scriptures to also be a reader of sources that illuminate the age preceding and accompanying the lives of Jesus and his disciples. This will illuminate the geographical, historical, cultural, social, linguistic, religious, political, and military networks of language code used by the scripture writers. A student of the scriptures should always have a book relevant to the first century simmering somewhere nearby.

Which books would be the best ones to read? Only someone who has read all possible books could answer that question. It's best to become a hunter-gatherer of literature dealing with the time of Christ and his disciples.

There are many books that can add a piece of the fabric of the language, culture, and thought that were a part of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman world of the first century. *The Greek Way* by Edith Hamilton is a motivational introduction to the significance of the ancient Greeks. *The Greek Achievement* by Charles Freeman is five hundred pages of competent Greek history. *Who's Who in the Classical World* published by Oxford University Press introduces a reader to hundreds of Greek and Roman personalities. Reading about these men will convince one that the ancients were far more modern than normally thought. *From Alexander to Cleopatra* by Michael Grant covers three hundred and fifty years leading up to the birth of Christ. *Augustus* by Anthony Everett introduces the Roman who was Caesar before and after the birth of Christ.

There are, of course, plenty of e-books and websites that contain first-century information. Even many children's books can be recommended. They are good to have lying around for the kids in one's life.

Some have asked: *Rather than go to the trouble of reworking a translation, would it not be easier to simply create a new translation with all of the improvements built in to it?* Though this may seem logical, it can very easily become a repeat of previous problems. The scriptures need to be translated in a way that reflects the example of Christ. No greater translator ever lived. (See pages 161-164 and pages 177-183.) Going through the process of seeing the many changes that need to be made to a translation, and learning why those changes need to be made, are two big steps that become a part of the learning process and give students much insight in the scriptures.

The Christian scriptures are not merely writings that can and should be better translated, but they are writings that for many centuries have been the focus of controversies, manipulations, traditional influences, and the opinions of powerful religious authorities and institutions. Whether aware of this or not, a reader cannot help but have been influenced by the fallout from these influences. A hands-on experience in the nuts and bolts of the scripture texts will help any reader gain a more factual and original view of the scriptures.