

***“CARRIED ALONG
BY
THE HOLY SPIRIT”***

**A NEW TESTAMENT
READING GUIDE**

BY W. NICK BROWN, M.DIV.



It has been traditionally accepted throughout Christian History to attribute the four living creatures around the throne of Christ to one of the four gospels. Hence, the inclusion of this artwork.

***“KNOWING THIS FIRST OF ALL, THAT NO PROPHECY OF
SCRIPTURE COMES FROM SOMEONE’S OWN
INTERPRETATION. FOR NO PROPHECY WAS EVER
PRODUCED BY THE WILL OF MAN, BUT MEN SPOKE
FROM GOD AS THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.”***

2 PETER 1:20-21 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

This reading guide came about due to personal interest. I have long thought it would be both interesting and beneficial to have a New Testament reading plan that followed the theology, focus, and writing style of the human authors of the Biblical text. Although a “formal” guide is unnecessary for anyone desiring to read the New Testament Scriptures in such a format, I personally find having a schedule, check list, and structure quite helpful in keeping me faithful and on track in my Scripture reading and study.

That said, this guide is meant to be completed at the reader’s own pace and schedule as they see fit. However, one can easily read through the entire New Testament within a single year by reading one chapter a day, five days a week, so that is my personal suggestion. With that noted, it may be more beneficial approach this guide at a slower pace in order to note particular themes, but that is entirely up to the individual.

The purpose of this guide is simple: To read the entire New Testament in such a way that highlights each particular *human* author’s focus and theology on Christ, his earthly ministry, his heavenly ministry, as well as the life and practice of the Christian faith as each *human* author was divinely inspired and “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Soli Deo Gloria,
W. Nick Brown, M.Div

DISCLAIMER

A brief word is necessary here before moving forward: If you are reading this disclaimer then this means that you are currently reading the *first* edition of this guide. Meaning that this is an *ongoing* work which will be edited as I continue to read and think through the New Testament, the sections and headings presented herein, and the theologies of the human authors, etc.

Furthermore, I welcome any feedback from you, the reader, specifically as it relates to the purpose and focus of this guide as mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, allow me to suggest that you have a pen in hand and with a journal (or a keyboard and screen if that is your preference) as you make you proceed forward. For the seasoned Christian, my prayer is that you will find this type of study refreshing and edifying. For the newer believer or the believer seeking to take their reading of Scripture more seriously, my prayer is that you will find this study both engaging and challenging (in a good way!).

My desire here is to make this guide a helpful one for any Christian regardless of where they are in their walk with the Lord Jesus. Therefore, use it as you see fit, make adjustments where they make sense to you, add to the themes that you notice throughout your reading, and above all, let me know about them! But most importantly, learn to love the Scriptures as you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE QUADRIGA

This guide allows the reader the opportunity to utilize the ancient church method of biblical interpretation known as “The Quadriga.”¹ This method was inspired by a Roman chariot pulled by four horses, with each horse’s active role *necessary* for the chariot to be *effective*. As such, a four-fold method of biblical interpretation was adopted by the ancient church that sought to understand the multiple layers of a single biblical text. These methods are: Literal, Christological, Moral, and Mystical. Allow me to offer a brief explanation and example of each:

LITERAL

This method is also more commonly known as the “Historical/Grammatical” method in many Christian traditions. This method seeks the “plain meaning” or the “straightforward reading” of a biblical text.

Questions that a reader might ask here could be: What did God *intend* to be written by the human author within the historical and cultural context in which this text was inspired? What can I understand from a *simple reading* of this text? What is the genre of this text and the book it is in? Who was the original audience? What are the places and setting mentioned? Who is involved in this text?

¹ Much of the language used in this section has been adapted from Dr. Peter Leithart’s article, “Rehabilitating the Quadriga,” found at theopolisinstitute.com.

As an example, let's consider Matthew 16:13-20. Under this method, and using our questions, we see that the original audience was not only the 12 disciples, but also Matthew's original readers (primarily 1st century Jews as Matthew's is the most "Jewish" of the gospels). The historical and cultural context is first century Palestine with an Ancient Near-Eastern culture as well as a very Greco-Roman influenced culture. The genre, as with all four gospels, is narrative. A simple reading of this text tells us that the disciples are, for the first time in Matthew's gospel, proclaiming Jesus as Messiah instead of simply "one of the prophets," as well as Jesus praising the faith of Peter and explaining that he will build his church upon Peter himself (as well as the other disciples) as the first "members" of the church along with the subsequent benefits mentioned (eg. Keys of the kingdom, binding and loosing, etc.). Again, this is the *literal* interpretation. The text says what it means and means what it says. To go beyond this, we need the other three methods.

CHRISTOLOGICAL

This method is also sometimes referred to as the "Allegorical" or "Symbolic" reading of a text. The purpose of this method is to interpret people, places, and events in light of Christ, salvation, and the church (this is particularly true of the Old Testament, as this method is somewhat "clearer" in the New Testament). It is important to note that Jesus himself demonstrates this method in Luke 24:27 & Luke 24:44.

Questions that a reader might ask here could be: What does this text teach about Jesus as he fulfills Old Testament types? What does this text teach about the church?

Returning to our example from Matthew 16, we can take Jesus's proclamation to Peter about his faithful confession of Jesus as Messiah and his intent to build the church upon Peter to extend *beyond* Peter himself to all who confess that Jesus is Messiah. Similar is the subsequent benefits of kingdom life (keys, binding and loosing, etc) are also extended to every believer as they confess Jesus as Messiah.

MORAL

This method of interpretation is commonly understood to be the "Application" method of interpretation as it seeks to combine the lessons learned from the Literal and Christological methods in order to properly understand God's moral and ethical standards that he expects his people to obey, live out, and exemplify in the world.

Questions that a reader might ask here could be: How does this text display God's character, ethics, and moral standards? How does God expect me to respond to this text? How does this text direct me to live the Christian life in a more Christ honoring way?

Back to our example of Matthew 16, the authority given to Peter (and thereby the Apostles and the church) is a heavy responsibility to bear. But it comes *only* by faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, to exercise this authority that Jesus has given to his church one must not only confess Christ, but also be *obedient* to Christ and his commands. This text reminds us of both the benefits of life in the kingdom but also the morality and lifestyle that God expects his people to

adhere to as they exercise their kingdom authority in the world.

MYSTICAL

This method of interpretation can also be understood as the “Spiritual” method. The theological term for this method is “Anagogical.” Here, a reader seeks to understand how a text looks forward to the Second Advent of Christ (i.e. his return), as well as the Spiritual and mystical work of the Triune God. This method also commonly makes use of numerology in Scripture where it is appropriate.

Questions a reader might ask here could be: What does this text teach me to hope for in Christ? How does this text point me to the implications of Salvation and its end result? What does this text teach me about the *experience* of life in Christ and the *experience* of God? How does this text point me to the masters of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

Let’s consider our example of Matthew 16 one final time: As noted in the Christological method, the church is also in view here. And, as we saw in the Moral method, this has real life “application” ramifications as we go about our lives and proclaim Christ to the world. So, we as the body and bride of Christ have somehow been empowered and authorized by Jesus to “bind and loose” to open and close the kingdom of heaven to the world as we proclaim the Gospel. This *does not* mean that we cause salvation (that is a work of God alone) but rather when we withhold the Gospel message, we *bind* it away from the ears of those who need to hear it. When we proclaim it, we *loose* it out into the world. This work is a

mystery that has been determined by God, inaugurated by the Son, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Kingdom of Heaven which will be fully consummated at the end of the age when Christ returns for his bride.

A SECOND DISCLAIMER

A final word here is necessary before moving forward: this Matthew 16 example is very simplistic and not by any means meant to be comprehensive. I understand that believers from all streams of the Christian faith will have different interpretations of this text than what I have displayed above. This exercise was meant to give a *simple look* at how the Quadriga can be utilized in interpreting Scripture. Therefore, as you begin to move forward from here, make use of the pen and journal that you have collected and attempt to note these methods as you make your way through *this* particular New Testament Reading Guide.

GUIDE OVERVIEW

As mentioned in the Introduction, the purpose of this guide is to allow the reader to observe the theology, focus, and writing style of the human authors of the New Testament. However, a “hiccup” occurs very quickly as one thumbs through the Bible: there are some authors with *multiple works* to their name, some authors with *only one* work to their name, and *one work* that is anonymous! Therefore, I propose to handle this “hiccup” by allowing the Four Gospels to serve as the framework.

MATTHEW (SINGLE WORK AUTHORS)

Each of these works have many theological points as their focus. However, one particular area in which they are all similar is in the theme of *fulfillment* and *wisdom*. Jesus, as the Christ and Wisdom of God (Prov. 8), fulfilled the prophecies, types, and patterns of the Old Testament and Old Covenant in order to inaugurate the New Covenant. Matthew is very closely tied with Isaiah in many ways, particularly in the theme of a New Exodus found in the Messiah.² Much of the Sermon on the Mount feels like the book of Proverbs. The book of Hebrews is essentially a sermon on the entire “meta-narrative” of the Old Testament, with the human author using Psalm 110 as his focal point to illustrate Jesus as the fulfillment of the old covenant, types, and prophecies. Jude

² I am currently working through a comparative study of Matthew and Isaiah to explore this theme.

does something similar to both Hebrews and Matthew. Whereas James has consistently been referred to as the “Proverbs of the New Testament” throughout church history.

1. The Gospel of Matthew

- a. Author: Matthew the Tax Collector, also referred to as Levi.
- b. Themes: Fulfillment of prophecy and the Law, the “Law of the Kingdom” in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt. 5-7), and a New Exodus found in Christ.

2. Hebrews

- a. Author: Traditionally attributed to Paul. However, the letter is technically anonymous, hence its inclusion here. However, the reader may also include this letter in the Pauline section below.
- b. Themes: The focus of Hebrews is the fulfillment of Old Testament types and the roles of Prophet, Priest, and King perfectly displayed in the work of Christ.

3. James

- a. Author: James, the brother of Jesus
- b. Theme: Wisdom writing of the New Testament as James has been referred to as the “Proverbs of the New Testament.” James also stresses the necessity of providing evidence of faith through works.

4. Jude

- a. Author: Jude, the brother of both Jesus and James
- b. Theme: Completeness of Old Testament arcs, such as the Exodus. Part of Jesus's role as the "better Moses" [see Hebrews] is that he offers a "Complete Exodus" from the ultimate slavery and master – Sin and Satan. Jude also, quite interestingly, makes note of the Book of Enoch in vv. 14-15. Stressing that these "apocryphal" works were familiar to the 1st century church. Take from this what you will and use it or not.
- c. Jude also references the Book of Numbers quite heavily in vv. 8-13. Furthermore, every exile described in the Bible is symbolic of returning to Egypt due to Egypt's historical relationship to Yahweh's people. Having a minimal working knowledge of these references will be helpful while reading Jude.
- d. Note: Jude can also be read along with John's Gospel, letters, and Revelation as Jude has a very mystical/spiritual/symbolic tone and focus (doing so is entirely up to the reader). A simple solution is to read it twice: once here and then again with John's works so as to compare the themes that both authors draw upon.

MARK (PETER'S ACCOUNT & THEOLOGY)

It has been commonly accepted from the earliest testimonies of the church that Mark's gospel was most likely the first written (though much later than many of the letters) and was written under the authority of the Apostle Peter (apostolic authorship/authority being required for canonicity), hence its pairing with the two letters of Peter.

1. The Gospel of Mark

- a.** Author: John Mark, under the authority of Simon Peter (Cephas).
- b.** Point of Interest: This Gospel is centered on Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ in 8:27-30. The narrative builds up to Peter's confession and then flows out of Peter's confession through the rest of the Gospel.

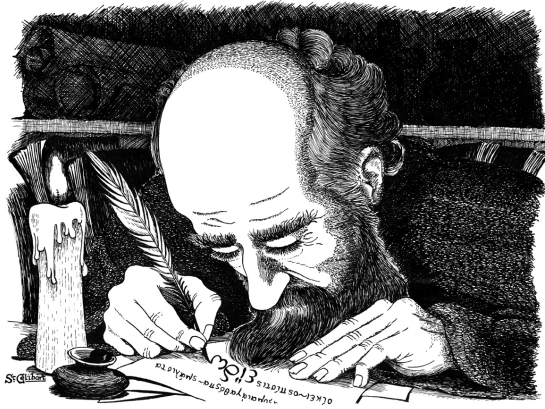
2. 1 Peter

- a.** Author: Simon Peter (Cephas)
- b.** Theme: A focus on the church in exile. Reminding present day Christians that we are still a church in exile and that we are not unique in our exilic existence. This theme is important as we consider what it means to be a people who will be hated for the name of Jesus.

3. 2 Peter

- a.** Author: Simon Peter (Cephas)
- b.** Theme: Continues the exilic theme of 1 Peter, while stressing the ability to live righteously by grace during persecution and oppression.

LUKE (PAUL'S ACCOUNT & THEOLOGY)



*"See with what large letters I am writing to you
with my own hand." Galatians 6:11, ESV*
Artwork by Craig Davis

Although Luke was both a physician and historian, and much of his Gospel and Acts were written based upon historically documented testimonies for a benefactor (Luke 1:4, Acts 1:1), it was accepted in the early church, and throughout church history that Luke's gospel and Acts were written under the authority of the Apostle Paul (apostolic authorship and authority being required for canonicity). Similar to the Matthew section, the theological themes of the works contained here are myriad in their focus, particularly in the letters of Paul as they are written to certain local/regional churches and individuals in order to address matters that pertained to them.

1. Gospel of Luke

- a.** Author: Luke, under the authority of Paul and via testimony from other Apostles and eye witnesses.
- b.** Theme: The Gospel for both Jew and Gentile. Luke focuses on an “orderly account” (cf. 1:3), seeking eyewitness testimony to give as accurate of a historical account as possible.
- c.** Note: A point of interest is the differences between Luke’s and Matthew’s genealogies. Not so much their placements, but their order and purpose. Matthew’s is numerological (14 generations x 3 - denoting numerological perfection) whereas Luke’s traces Jesus back to Adam stressing “Son of God.” Neither of these are arbitrary details.

2. Acts of the Apostles

- a.** Author: Luke, under the authority of Paul and via testimony from other Apostles and eye witnesses (including himself, take note of when the pronouns turn to “we” throughout the book).
- b.** Theme: A continuation of the Gospel of Luke, this gives the historical record of the early decades of the church’s history, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of OT promises of God to place his spirit in his people (Ezek. 36, Joel 2), and the

spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem and to the Gentiles.

3. Letters of Paul (in chronological order)

- a. Author: Paul (Saul) of Tarsus.
- b. Theme: Reading Paul's letters in this format allows us to not only grasp "Pauline" theology, but also how his focus on Christ's person and work remains the same throughout his life and ministry even as he matures and faces new challenges to the faith (primarily the Judaizers and Gnostics). This approach also allows us to note how Paul's personal concerns change as he nears martyrdom. **(A note for first edition readers:** I'm considering a brief blurb about each of these collection of letters to point to the themes, patterns, etc that are of note. I'm open to suggestions and thoughts in this area).

- * 1 & 2 Thessalonians (AD 50 & 52)
- * 1 & 2 Corinthians (AD 56)
- * Philippians (AD 56)
- * Galatians (AD 56 or 57)
- * Romans (AD 57 or 58)
- * Colossians (AD 61-63)
- * Philemon (AD 61-63)
- * Ephesians (AD 61-63)
- * 1 & 2 Timothy (AD 66 or 67)
- * Titus (AD 66 or 67)
- * Note: Hebrews can be read here again if the reader desires.

JOHN (JOHN'S ACCOUNT AND THEOLOGY)

While Luke's Gospel is easily approachable by a "Gentile" audience, John takes note to define certain "Jewish" terms for his readers. Furthermore, John takes the long established Greek philosophical principle of the "Logos" and applies it to Christ, in whom the philosophy finds its ultimate meaning and expression.

1. The Gospel of John

- a.** Author: John the Beloved
- b.** Theme: Christ is God, was in the Beginning with God, is the Light of God, the word of God, and God made Flesh.
- c.** Points of Interest: Unlike the Synoptics, John is more concerned with themes rather than chronology.³ We can see this clearly by his placement of the temple cleansing immediately following the Wedding at Cana in chapter 2. Although, oddly enough, it is from John that we receive the time frame of 3 years for Jesus' earthly ministry. Interestingly, John is the only gospel that contains the famous "I am" statements as well as Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. John's gospel also contains some miracles that the Synoptics do not (such as the aforementioned Wedding at Cana).

³ For more on this, see Craig Davis' study on the Gospel of John. (Insert digital link here when/if available)

2. 1-3 John

- a. Author: John the Beloved
- b. Themes: These letters are very theological and pastoral in nature (2 & 3 John are particularly pastoral). 1 John continues many of the same themes as John's gospel, most obvious is his use of the themes of light and dark. 1 John also consistently alternates between right teaching (orthodoxy) and the right practice of that teaching (orthopraxy) in the face of rising false teaching in the church.
- c. Note: *Jude can be read here again if the reader desires due to the similar nature of Jude and John's theology, and particularly as one approaches Revelation.

3. Revelation

- a. Author: John the Beloved
- b. Theme: Apocalypse and the End of the Age. However, there is more happening here than mere "End Times" theology as it is understood in many evangelical circles today. The Holy Spirit asks us to consider a few questions here, such as: What does this work teach the exilic church as she waits for the return of Christ and the consummation of the end of the age? What does this work teach us about the Lordship of Jesus and his return? What does it teach us about living

the faith in a world hostile to Christ and his Bride?

- c. It's also important to note that this work is replete with symbolic language. Therefore, regardless of where you might fall along the Eschatological spectrum, the symbolism, mysticism, and allegorical nature of this work *cannot be ignored* for the sake of mere "Historical Grammatical" interpretation. Nor can one attempt to interpret this work in light of modern worldview analysis. This is where the Quadriga can be of great benefit.

So then, we are forced to consider this work through the lenses of a *complete* Biblical Theology (i.e. the "meta-narrative" of Scripture). What does Revelation have in common with the prophetic works of the Old Testament? Quite a lot actually. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the reader to also read the works of Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel along with, before, or immediately after reading Revelation, or at the very least have a basic working knowledge of those works. A deep study into these things will aid any believer in better understanding how God uses apocalyptic literature for His glory, building up His church, and teaching us to rely on Him in uncertain times.

- d. One final word here. Although I have preached and taught some of Revelation over the years, my personal study of the letter as a whole is (at the present time) limited, particularly as I have

outlined above. Some of these notes are apt to change or be expanded upon in future editions of this guidebook. For now, benefit from my comments where you can. The purpose of the entire guidebook remains the same here: to grasp John's theology and his approach to the person and work of Christ.

CONCLUSION

With this framework laid out, the order of study is entirely up to the reader. You may find it helpful to work through this guide comprehensively or to begin by starting with your “favorite” gospel and making your way through its subsequent works. This is called a “guide” for a reason. My only suggestion is that, once you begin, stick with the works that “fit” together as laid out within the guide. I believe this will help you to keep the themes within their proper framework. I look forward to studying these things further myself and hearing from anyone who wishes to offer suggestions on how to improve this guide for future editions.

Peace of Christ to you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Brown is the minister of preaching and an elder of Christ Community Church in Jackson, Tennessee. He is married to Sharon, enjoys gardening, gaming, and reading. He holds a Master of Divinity from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and is the proud owner of a painting of the Starship Enterprise.

He blogs at thesouthtownpastor.com.