# Introduction

The books of the New Testament were written over a period of about 45 years, covering events from 4 BC to 95 AD. These books proclaim a new covenant: the good news that the Lord has come to deliver His people and establish His kingdom.

This lesson series will follow the following sequence: Lessons

1. Gospels 2-5
2. Acts 6
3. Paul’s Letters 7-15
4. Non-Pauline Letters 16 - 19
5. Revelation 20 - 21

Styles and Genres

Gospels: Combination of biographical history, proclamation and teaching

Acts: History of the early church, with a theological teaching purpose

Letters: Pastoral letters to churches and individuals, for persuasion and encouragement

Revelation: Apocalyptic genre, symbolically “unveiling” the spiritual reality behind history

Background, Themes and Purpose

The Jews were eagerly hoping for and anticipating the fulfillment of God’s promises: that He would return in glory (to fill the temple); that He would deliver them from the rule of the Gentiles (Rome); that He would establish his reign (kingdom) over all the earth, with Jerusalem / Zion as the center of all worship and authority. They expected this would be accomplished by the Messiah, the Son of David, they thought the time must be near, and they were trying to prepare themselves for His coming. The Pharisees, in particular, considered it their duty to promote the purification of the people, through strict observance of Torah, so that God would be able to return to them, to dwell amongst them in glory, and establish His kingdom through their nation. This is the salvation they were looking for and striving for.

*“In the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.”* - Isaiah 2:2

*“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea.”* - Habakkuk 2:14

*“And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.”* - Zechariah 14:9

As a counterpoint, Rome had extended its empire across most of the known world, claiming to bring peace and justice to the world, and promoting Caesar as Lord, Savior and Son of God. Virgil, in the Aeneid, had created a mythology that this was the divine destiny of Rome, foreordained more than 1200 years prior. This story, and the pervasive Roman culture, with the emperor cult, was the prevailing narrative of the world at that time. It was thus directly opposed to the narrative of Hebrew scripture.

*“Turn your two eyes this way and see this people, your own Romans.  
Here is Caesar, and all the line of Iulus, all who shall one day pass under the dome  
Of the great sky: this is the man, this one, of whom so often you have heard the promise,  
Caesar Augustus, son of the deified, who shall bring once again an Age of Gold  
To Latium, to the land where Saturn reigned in early times.”* - Aeneid, Book 6

The message of the New Testament is that God’s promised kingdom has arrived. The Messiah had come; but, unexpectedly, He was crucified and He was raised up from the dead. This was the fulfillment of scripture, but in a manner than none of the Jews had expected, and which overturned the Jewish establishment. He was *“appointed for the fall and rise of many”* – Luke 2:34. It was also a gospel that directly confronted and opposed the Roman narrative of their empire and their emperor. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar.

There are two major aspects of this gospel that were difficult to comprehend:

1. The scandal of the cross: a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles

2. The concept of “inaugurated eschatology”: this new age of the kingdom of God has been initiated, but it is concurrent with the old age, which is dying, but still present. The two kingdoms exist side-by-side, engaged in spiritual warfare. Victory has been pre-determined, but the battles continue.

The four gospels present this basic message, from various perspectives and emphases, addressing audiences with differing concerns and needs. The book of Acts continues the narrative to show the role of the church in carrying forward the Messianic mission, especially among the Gentiles – i.e. throughout the world.

The letters (epistles) address many issues and problems among the churches, but three dominant themes are: 1) the faithfulness of God in fulfilling all His promises through Christ, crucified and resurrected; 2) our incorporation into God’s elect by participation in Christ, by faith; 3) the essential and necessary unity of God’s people (the church), consisting of all tribes and nations, Jews and Gentiles; 3) the necessary purity, holiness and faithfulness of the church, to serve as the temple of His Spirit, to fulfill the mission.

Revelation (i.e. Apocalypse, meaning an unveiling) was addressed to seven churches in Asia. It reveals the glorified and reigning Christ, leading His people in spiritual warfare against all evil powers and principalities - particularly, imperial Rome. It is a book of encouragement for churches that face persecution.

The summary message of NT scriptures: all of God’s promises and His eternal purpose have been fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through His continuing work in His church, by the Spirit. This is our calling and our hope.

*“I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* – Luke 2:10,11

*“And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost… Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”* - Revelation 22:17, 20

**TWO COVENANTS, TWO AGES:**



# Mark

This gospel was written by John Mark (see Mark 14:51-52; Acts 12:12,25; 13:5; 15:37-39; Col 4:10), about 68 AD, probably from Rome, for the churches in Rome. According to tradition, he based it on inputs from the apostle Peter. Due to the large amount of material in Mark that is repeated in Matthew and Luke, it is highly likely that Mark was the first gospel, and that Matthew and Luke used Mark, making some revisions and additions. These three books are therefore known as the “synoptic” gospels (having a common view).

Each of the four gospels has its distinctive style, emphases and purpose:

Mark — the Messiah and his kingdom have arrived! (1:15)

Matthew - the new covenant is established, fulfilling the old covenant

Luke - our Savior has come: a corporate salvation in Christ, as we bond with His people.

John - believe in Him, to have eternal life (individual salvation)

Mark introduces itself as *“the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”* (1:1). The word “gospel” means “good news”. It is a term used in various OT prophecies, such as:

*How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,*

*Who announces peace and brings good news of happiness,*

*Who announces salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”* — Isaiah 52:7

Style, Themes, and Summary of Content

Mark is distinctive in its vibrancy and excitement, as an action-oriented narrative. Events follow one another with very few pauses for comments, and often punctuated by “immediately” (1:18,20,28,29,30,42; 2:8,12; 3:6; 5:2,29,42; 6:25,27,45,54; 7:25; 8:10; 10:52; 11:2,3). Mark emphasizes how amazing Jesus’s works and teachings were. Never before had anyone done such things - especially the healings (1:30-34,40-42; 2:3-12; 3:1-10; 5:22-42; 10:46-52) and casting out of demons (1:23-26; 5:1-13) - or taught such things (1:22-28). Similarly, He showed His divine authority by forgiving sins (2:5-12), by commanding the wind and the sea (4:37-41), walking across the water (6:45-52), and by feeding the multitudes (6:33-44; 8:1-9). In both word and deed, He exercised an authority that could only belong to God, and everyone was amazed.

The first theme of Mark is the kingdom. It was the core of Jesus’s early teaching (1:14-15) and the subject of His parables (4:1-34). This kingdom would come during the lifetimes of the disciples: *“there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power”* (9:1).

The theme of opposition from the Pharisees is established early in the Gospel, and continues throughout. They criticized Him for presuming to forgive sins (2:5-12), for sharing meals with sinners and tax collectors (2:15-17), for violating the Sabbath (2:23-28; 3:1-6), and for eating with unclean hands (7:1-5). His responses were 1) He had authority to forgive sins (2:10); 2) the physician came for the sick, not for the healthy (2:17); 3) the *“Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”* (2:28); and 4) they were setting human tradition above God’s law (7:6-13).

Another recurring idea is the mystery and secrecy. Jesus gave instructions to not widely reveal His healings or His identity (1:34, 40-45; 3:11-12; 5:41-43; 8:29-30). Also, His use of parables temporarily obscured His teachings for outsiders (4:10-12,33-34), but these hidden things will eventually be revealed (4:2-22).

The critical turning point in Mark is Peter’s confession: *“You are the Christ”* (8:27-30). From then on *“He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things…”* (8:31; 9:12, 31-32; 10:32-34). He had to be the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (see 10:45).

The passion narrative begins with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-10). This is followed by His cursing the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-21) and driving the moneychangers from the temple (11:15-18). Because of this, the chief priests began seeking how to destroy Him. He then taught the parable of a vineyard owner (12:1-11), whose son was rejected and killed by the vine-growers. This represented the Jews’ rejection of Jesus, *“The stone which the builders rejected”*. In the context of their questionings, one of the scribes asked: “What commandment is the greatest of all?” Jesus’s answer (1:28-34) was from Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18 – to love God and to love your neighbor.

In Mark 13 (compare Matthew 24 and Luke 21), Jesus revealed to His disciples things that were yet to come. The temple would be destroyed, there would be great tribulation, and all the political powers would be overturned by the Son of Man (13:24-27). This would be followed by gathering the elect from the farthest ends of the earth. These things would all occur during that generation. But the final end of the age, when heaven and earth will totally pass away, will be at a time that no one knows except the Father (13:31-32).

In chapter 14, at a Passover meal, Jesus took some bread, and said, *“Take; this is My body.”* And he gave them the cup and said *“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many”*. He thus identified His death as a sacrifice, on behalf of His people. He is the Passover lamb of the Exodus, and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12. They then went to the garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed *“remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will”* (14:36). He was then arrested and taken to the Council for trial (14:53-55). During this trial, Peter denied Him three times (14:30, 66-72).

The Council delivered Jesus to Pilate, demanding crucifixion (15:1-15). Pilate was reluctant, but eventually relented and handed Him over to the soldiers, bearing the inscription “The King of the Jews”. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”* (see Psalm 22:1). When He breathed His last, the veil of the temple was torn in two, and the centurion declared *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”* (15:39).

Mark 16:1-8 then tells of the resurrection. On the first day of the week, the women brought spices to the tomb to anoint the body; but the stone had been rolled away, and an angel told them that He was not there, but had risen. The women then fled, with fear, and said nothing (16:8). Verses 9-20 were later appended from other sources, which indicate that Mary Magdalene reported it to the disciples, and that this was followed by resurrection appearances, and the commission to *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation”* (16:15).

**Sources of the Synoptic Gospels**



# Matthew

This gospel was written about 80 - 100 AD, probably from Antioch, Syria, to a community of Hellenistic Jewish Christians. It was written anonymously, but was later attributed to the apostle Matthew. Matthew (or Levi) was a tax collector (publican), called by Jesus to be a disciple and apostle (Matt 9:9; 10:3; Mark 2:14; 3:18; Luke 5:37; 6:15; Acts 1:13). There is some evidence to support a Palestinian-Jewish source, in Aramaic, but also contradicting evidence for a Greek-speaking Hellenistic author. A plausible explanation is that the material unique to this Gospel came from Matthew, in Aramaic, and that a student, perhaps a Greek-Gentile in Antioch, used his writings, plus Mark and Q, to compose this Gospel. This would be compatible with a date of composition that may be after Matthew’s death.

Structure — At the top-level, the gospel can be divided into three parts:

I. Pre-ministry (1:1 - 4:16)

II. Galilean ministry (4:17 - 16:20)

III. Passion and triumph (16:21 - 28:28)

At a lower level, there are five major blocks of teaching: Sermon on the Mt. (chaps. 5-7), discipleship (chap. 10), kingdom parables (chap. 13), church relationships (chap. 18), and the end times (chaps. 23-25).

Some important Q Material (common to Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark):

Temptations of Jesus (4:1-11)

Beatitudes (5:3-12)

Lord’s prayer (6:9-13)

Treasures and anxiety (6:19-33)

Remainder of Sermon on Mount (7:1-29)

Healing a Centurion’s servant (8:5-10)

Instructions to the 12, for their mission, and on discipleship (10:7-40)

The lost sheep (18:12-13)

Woes to Pharisees, and lament over Jerusalem (23:23-39)

Some items that are unique to Matthew:

Genealogy, from Abraham (1:2-17)

Birth of Jesus, focusing on Joseph, with Magi and flight to Egypt (1:18 - 2:21)

Fulfilling the law (5:17-20)

Contrasts of “you have heard it said, but I say” (5:21-24, 27-37)

Invitation to rest (11:28-30)

Parables of weeds, treasure, pearl, net (13:24-30,36-52)

Peter walks on the water (14:28-31)

Recovering the sinful church member (18:15-20)

Forgiveness, and parable of unforgiving servant (18:21-35)

Parable of laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16)

Parable of two sons (21:28-32)

Prohibiting titles (23:7-12)

Denouncing Pharisees (23:15-22)

Parable of bridesmaids (25:1-13)

Last judgment, separating sheep from goats (25:31-46)

Great Commission (28:16-20)

Themes and topics

Matthew makes a special point that everything was “according to scripture”. Following are passages pointing out fulfillments: 1:22; 2:5,15,17,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14,35; 21:4; 27:9. Matthew has 41 quotes from the OT, twice as many as in Mark and Luke, and a quarter of them are found nowhere else in the NT. In the early chapters, Matthew follows the Exodus pattern, with Jesus as the new Moses / law-giver: Herod slaughters the infants, just as Pharaoh had done; as a child, Jesus goes down to Egypt and returns; His baptism corresponds with crossing the Sea of Reeds; He goes into wilderness for testing; the Sermon on the Mt corresponds to law-giving at Sinai; and He then heads towards Jerusalem and the cross, which is the path to the promised land.

Matthew shows a special concern for righteousness - perhaps to counter a lax attitude in the church, and/or to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, in that Jesus sets a higher standard.

*“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” –* 5:17

*“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” –* 5:20

Some of the ways in which we are called to a higher standard of righteousness and piety:

1. Obedience is to be from the heart, not merely in outward appearance (5:21 – 37)

2. Love is to be for enemies, not only for friends (5:38-47)

3. Beware of hypocrisy – doing things to be seen by others (6:1-18)

4. Look for heavenly rewards, rather than earthly (6:19-32)

It is a way of life that is God-centered, rather than self-centered (e.g. 6:9-10). Also, we are to seek first His righteousness (6:33) and we are to be perfect (5:48). Jesus’s words are the foundation for a house that will stand (7:24-27).

An associated idea is that of the corporate identity of God’s chosen people. This is seen, for example, in the genealogy (1:1-17); that what you do for others, is for Christ (25:40); those who receive His people, receive Him (10:40-42; 18:5); one must forgive others, to receive forgiveness (6:14-15; 18:23-35); and in the plural pronouns in the Lord’s prayer (6:9-13). On the other side, there is also a corporate solidarity among those who reject the Lord, who share in the guilt of their ancestors (23:34-36).

The Beatitudes (5:3-12) address another particularly Jewish concern: who is under God’s blessing, and who is under the curse (Deut. 27, 28). Jesus’s teaching turns things upside down. It is the poor, the deprived, the humble and oppressed who are blessed.

Finally, Matthew emphasizes mission, to the entire world (8:11; 21:43; 24:14; 26:13).

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* – 28:19-20

**The Star in the East**

* Jesus’s birth is believed to have been in the Spring, between 7 BC and 4 BC.
* The most likely type of event observed by the wise men was a conjunction of planets.
  + The phrase “in the east” meant the appearance of a planet above the eastern horizon, just prior to sunrise. The word “stood over” also had a specific astrological meaning: when a planet stands still, reversing its direction of motion.
  + Such a “rising star” appeared on April 17, 6 BC, and it ‘stood still’ on December 19, 6 BC . It was Jupiter, which was occulted by the moon on the day of its initial rising. Jupiter, the moon and Saturn were all in conjunction, within the constellation Aries.
  + This rising of Jupiter, in conjunction with the moon, represented the birth of a ruler; Saturn represents life-giving; Aries was the zodiac sign associated with Judea.
  + This kind of rising star is rare: once in 16,000 years; to occur in Aries: > 500,000 years

# Luke

Luke was written about 80 - 100 AD, probably from Rome. It was written to Theophilus (1:3), who is otherwise unknown, but was probably a patron who financed its publication. It was originally written in conjunction with Acts (see Acts 1:1-2), but as a separate scroll, and therefore appears separately in the New Testament. It was written anonymously, but was traditionally attributed to Luke, the physician and missionary companion with Paul (see Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philemon 24; as well as the use of 1st person plural pronouns in Acts starting at Acts 16:10). It would be expected for a physician to give careful attention to factual details, and to have a special compassion for the afflicted, and that is what we find in this gospel. His stated purpose was to present an accurate and orderly account of the events (1:3,4), where “orderly” does not necessarily mean chronologically consecutive, but organized in a manner that facilitates understanding – i.e. appropriate groupings of events and teachings. It is sound history, with a pastoral purpose.

Structure — The gospel of Luke can be divided into four parts:

I. Childhood and preparation (1:5 – 4:13)

II. Galilean ministry (4:14 - 9:50)

III. Journey from Galilee to Judea (9:51 - 19:44)

IV. Passion and resurrection (19:45 – 24:53)

Summary of Contents

About 40% of Luke relies upon Mark, 20% from Q, and 40% unique to Luke. Following are some items that are unique:

Birth of Jesus and John, focusing on Mary (1:5 - 2:52), and including the following

hymns: Magnificat (1:46-55), Benedictus (1:68-79), Gloria in Excelsis (2:14), Nunc Dimittis (2:29-32)

Genealogy back to Adam (3:23-38)

Reading of Isaiah 61:1, in the synagogue (4:16-21)

Raising the widow’s son (7:11-17)

Parable of Good Samaritan (10:30-37)

Healing a crippled woman (13:10-17)

Healing the man with dropsy (14:1-6)

Parables of the Lost Coin (15:8-10), the Prodigal Son (15:11-32),

the Shrewd Steward (16:1-9), the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31)

Cleansing 10 lepers (17:11-19)

Prayer of the Persistent Widow (l8:1-8)

Zacchaeus’s conversion (19:1-10)

Healing the high priest’s servant’s ear (22:50-51)

Penitent Thief on the Cross (23:39-43)

Resurrection appearances and Ascension (24:13-53)

Themes and topics

Luke speaks of Jesus’s saving mission and salvation much more than any other gospel (e.g. 1:47,69,71,77; 2:11,30; 3:6; 19:9-10). This is related to his special concern for social justice, especially for the poor. This begins with the righting of wrongs in the Magnificat:

*“He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.”*- 1:52-53. Also, John the Baptist counsels justice and generosity to those who have things to share, to the tax collectors and to soldiers (3:10-14). This theme is established as central to Jesus’ mission when He reads from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”* – 4:16-21. The “favorable year of the Lord” would be the year of Jubilee, when debts are forgiven, and all land reverts to original family ownership. The intent of Jubilee was to prevent the development of any permanent economic under-class. It is also of interest that this quote from Isaiah 61:1-2 stops short of mentioning “the day of vengeance of our God”.

Jesus blesses the poor, and curses the rich (6:20-25). The poor are favored in the parables of the Rich Fool (12:13-21); Lazarus and the Rich Man (16:19-31); and the Persistent Widow (18:1-8). Zacchaeus’s repentance (19:1-10) is the example given for the rich.

Luke also gives more attention to the work of the Spirit than do the other synoptic gospels. The Spirit, especially the Spirit’s prophetic activity, is directly linked to the arrival of the kingdom of God (1:15,41,67; 2:25-27; 3:21-22; 4:1,14,18; 10:21; 24:49). This is carried forward in the book of Acts.

Prayer is another topic that Luke emphasizes more than the other gospel writers. When John’s birth was foretold, the whole assembly of the people was praying (1:10). Mary’s Magnificat was a prayer. Jesus was praying when the Spirit descended on him at baptism (3:21). Jesus was in prayer before all crucial events, such as choosing the Twelve (6:12), Peter’s confession (9:18), and at the transfiguration (9:29). Jesus often sought quiet places to retreat and pray (4:42; 5:16; 6:12). The Lord’s prayer is given in response to the disciples’ asking Him to teach them how to pray, after Jesus had been praying (11:1). The point of the Persistent Widow parable was *“to pray always and not lose heart”* (18:1). Two other parables unique to Luke that are about prayer are the “Pharisee and the Publican” (18:9-14) and the “Friend at Midnight” (11:5-8). Luke gives more detailed emphasis on the intensity and agony of His prayer in the garden, prior to His arrest (22:43-44). And, it is in Luke that Jesus prays from the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* - 23:34.

Similar to Matthew, he emphasizes the universal reach of the gospel: Jesus will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (2:32); “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (3:6); His descent from Adam, the “son of God” (3:38); and that repentance must be proclaimed to all the nations (24:47). This is reinforced by the favorable mention of Samaritans in the healing of the 10 lepers and in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Luke, more clearly and forcefully than any other gospel, presents Jesus as the one who *“has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* – 19:10.

# John

The author: Although written anonymously, we can be confident that the apostle John was the author of this gospel, as well as the letters of John and of Revelation. In John 21:20-24, he identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2-3; 21:2,7-8). This disciple is in the “inner circle”, closely associated with Peter. John is the only one who fits this description.

The occasion: It was probably written in the 90’s, from Ephesus, to recipients in nearby churches. The purpose [1] is *“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”* - 20:31.

Theme: While the synoptic gospels emphasize the kingdom, the promise to God’s people at a corporate level, John focuses on eternal life for the individual believer. Two major categories of teaching in John pertain to:

1) Jesus’s relation with the Father: He perfectly reveals the Father, is one with the Father, the only one who knows the Father (1:18; 3:13; 10:38; 14:6-11). The seven “I am…” statements fall under this category (6:35; 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1) [2].

2) Our personal relationship with Jesus: for us to have life, we must believe into Jesus, and abide in Him (3:16,36; 6:40,55-58; 8:31-32; 11:25-26; 15:4-7,9-10). This category includes His statements about witnesses (5:31-40), and especially the seven signs (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-47; 6:1-15; 6:16-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-44).

In the narrative prior to the passion (1:19 – 17:26), the cross is foreshadowed in all His teachings and works. In the first phase (1:19 - 11:57), His hour has not yet come (2:4; 7:6-8,30; 8:20), but in the second part (12:1 - 17:24) his hour has arrived (12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1). The transition point was when he leaves Ephraim and goes to Bethany (11:54-12:1), presenting himself again to the public.

Summary of Contents

The prologue (1:1-18) introduces most of the important themes of the Gospel. It begins with the Word (Logos), which was with God, and which was God. God’s Word has creative life-giving power. In Genesis 1:1, God spoke the creation into existence. See also Psalm 33:6-9, where His power and wisdom as Creator proves He is able to be our Savior. This Logos surpasses Wisdom and Torah, which were also agents of creation (Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 119:89-91). John then says *“the Word was God”*. This is indeed the proper translation; it is not just a claim that the Word was “divine”, but rather that “the Word was God”. This is essential to Christian doctrine.

1:4 - *“In Him was life and the life was the light of men.”* Abiding in His life imparts a knowledge of God that illuminates all things. [3] Compare other references to life (5:26; 6:35,57; 11:25; 14:6) and light (3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36,46).

1:5 - *“The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”*. This is usually translated as *“the darkness did not understand it”.* But, in this context, the better translation is that the darkness did not overcome it. In the contest between light and darkness, the Light is victorious (John 16:33).

1:13 – *“who was born, not of bloods nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a man, but of God.”* In this alternative translation, the verse refers to Jesus, as a statement of His virgin birth. He was begotten solely by the will of God, fitting with the theme that all He did was from the Father (5:19-20,30; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10).

1:14 - *“And the Word became flesh.”* Jesus, in the flesh, was fully God.

*- “We saw His glory… full of grace and truth”*, in contrast to the law (1:17).

1:29 – He is *“the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*.

2:1-22 – His first sign, in Cana, is turning water into wine. After this, He cleanses the temple. These events teach the priority of compassion over ritual.

3:1-13 – Nicodemus is told that one must be born from above, to see the kingdom of God, and that it is a mysterious work of the Spirit.

3:14-18 – The Son of Man must be lifted up, and this is how God loves the world. [5] This is in order that all who believe into Him shall have eternal life.

4:7-42 - Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman, revealing Himself as the living water (4:14; 7:37-39) and as the Messiah (4:26), and teaching that true worship will be in spirit and truth (4:23-24). [4] This is an important example of reaching out beyond the Jews, breaking down barriers between peoples.

5:2-18 – Jesus heals a lame man at Bethesda, provoking opposition because it was on the Sabbath (5:9-10), and because He called God His Father (5:18).

6:32-58 - After feeding the 5,000, Jesus teaches that He is the true Bread from heaven; one must eat His body and drink His blood in order to have eternal life.

8:1-11 - Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery, opposing hypocritical judgment.

31-36 - *“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* [6,7]

9:1-41 – Jesus heals a man who was born blind and teaches that the blindness was not the result of either his or his parents’ sins, but to glorify God. Jesus came so *“that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind”* (9:39).

10:1-30 – Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep (10:11,15-18). He knows them, they know him, and they follow (10:14,27).

11:1-44 - Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead: *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (11:25).

13:2-17 - During the Lord’s Supper, Jesus washes His disciples’ feet, teaching that they must accept His cleansing sacrifice, and follow His example of humble service.

14:1-3 - Jesus assures the disciples that there are many rooms in the Father’s house (temple), and He is preparing a place for them. See Psalm 23:6; 27:4; 84:10.

4-14 -- He is the way, truth and life; to know Him is to know the Father.

14:16-18,26 – He will send the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth. See also 16:7-15.

15:1-8 - He is the true vine and we are branches . We must abide in Him to bear fruit.

17:1-26 - Jesus prays that we shall be united, with Him, and with one another.

18, 19 – Throughout Jesus’s arrest, trial and crucifixion, He is always in control (18:4,6,36; 19:11,28,30). This was on the Day of Preparation (19:14,31,42), when the Passover lambs were killed. He also makes a special point about the blood and water that poured out from His side (19:34).

20, 21 – In the resurrection appearances, John adds the breathing of the Spirit (20:21-22), and the account of Thomas being finally convinced when He sees the Lord (20:24-29). He also adds an appearance to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee. Jesus then told Peter that if he loves Him, He must tend His sheep (21:15-17).

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

Notes on John:

[1] This pertains not only to initial belief, but to the continuing deepening of faith. This gospel was primarily addressed to those who were already believers, in order that their faith might be increased.

[2] These “I am” statements are emphatic assertions of identity. They are written literally as “I, I am” (*Ego eimi*).

[3] This teaching that receiving His life is the basis of knowledge and understanding is a development of the Old Testament teaching that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. It is our relational knowledge of God that is the foundation of all true understanding, and under the New Covenant this knowledge comes from sharing in the life of Jesus Christ.

[4] This is the teaching that we find God’s presence not by going to a particular holy location where He dwells, but by opening our hearts to Him, in spirit and truth. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

[5] The phrase “God so loved the world” is not intended primarily to indicate how much He loves, but the manner in which He loves. Love consists in actions and deeds, and God’s action was to give His only begotten Son.

[6] The idea of knowing “truth” is not primarily acquiring new information, but unveiling the hidden meaning behind what we already “know”. It is to add understanding to our knowledge. This is an especially important distinction in this age where so many are flooded with information, but lack understanding.

[7] The scriptural meaning of freedom is not our modern idea of independence from all authority. It is rather to be delivered from manipulative deception, so that you can live with integrity, true to yourself.

# Acts

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke, about 80-100 AD, from Rome, as the second volume of Luke-Acts. It is interesting to note the “we” sections, which seem to indicate Luke as the travelling companion of Paul, and therefore an eyewitness (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:6).

One way to describe the structure of Acts is according to three geographical divisions:

I. Jerusalem (1:1 – 8:4)

II. Judea and Samaria (8:5 – 12:25)

III. Beyond Palestine, to Rome (13:1 – 28:31)

On Pentecost, the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit, poured forth in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32; and Peter delivered the first sermon, concluding with the means of salvation: *“Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* – 2:38. Thus the new covenant was inaugurated, with 3,000 converts. There are important parallels here to the covenant of Sinai, also initiated on the day of Pentecost (Exodus 19-20), where the Lord descended upon Mt. Sinai in fire (Exodus 19:18). Philo speaks of the giving of the ten commandments:

*“Then from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience…”* – Decalogue 46

This new community *“were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”* (2:42). Peter then heals a lame man, in the name of Jesus (3:1-10). The Jewish Council arrested Peter and John, and warned them to do no more speaking in the name of Jesus, but their reply was that *“we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (4:20). The congregation was of one heart and soul, providing for all who were in need. Seven men were appointed to be in charge of distributing food to the needy, setting a precedent for Deacons. One of them, Stephen, was accused by the Jews of speaking blasphemies, and was brought before the Council for trial. After his speech of defense (7:1-53), they drove him out of the city and stoned him to death.

The second part concerns those scattered throughout Judea and Samaria due to increasing persecutions. This includes the accounts of Philip’s ministry in Samaria (8:5-24), and his conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40). Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus to apprehend any belonging to the Way, was suddenly struck down by a blinding light from heaven. It was Jesus, who told him to see Ananias, in Damascus. Ananias then restored his sight, baptized him, and conveyed to him the Lord’s commission “to bear my name before the Gentiles” (9:1-19). However, it was Peter who opened the door to the Gentiles, by preaching the gospel to Cornelius, and baptizing him. This was in response to a vision revealing that *“God is not one to show partiality”* (10:1– 48). Herod then arrested Peter, but he was delivered by an angel, in response to fervent prayer by the church (12:1-17).

In the third part, Saul (Paul) is the main character. He and Barnabas are sent by the Antioch church on their first missionary journey, to Cyprus and Asia Minor (13:1-14:28). His first recorded speech was at Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-41), and they then proceeded to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. At Lystra, he was stoned and left for dead, but recovered after the disciples prayed for him (14:19-23). Chapter 15 recounts a council at Jerusalem, where agreement was reached endorsing Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. Paul and Silas then embarked on a second mission, to revisit the cities of the first journey. In response to a vision, they crossed over to Macedonia, and arrived at Philippi. They were then seized, beaten, and thrown into prison. That night, while praying and singing hymns, there was a sudden earthquake that opened the doors and unfastened their chains. The jailer and his household believed the gospel, and were baptized. They then continued to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth, where he settled for 1 ½ years (chapters 17, 18). They then passed through Ephesus, and returned to Antioch.

Departing again, on a third journey, Paul passed through the Galatian region and Phrygia, and then back to Ephesus, where he stayed another two years (19:1-10). They then passed through Macedonia and Greece, then to Troas and Miletus, from where they set sail for Tyre. After arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was seized by the Jews, and then handed over to the commander of the Roman cohort, who subsequently sent him to Caesarea to escape a plot by the Jews. Paul there appeared before Felix (24:1-27), Festus (25:1-22), and king Agrippa (25:23- 26:29). Having appealed to Caesar, he was then sent to Rome. After surviving shipwreck, they arrived at Rome, and he was held under house arrest. He stayed there two full years, *“welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered”* (28:30-31).

In the composition of Luke-Acts, the ministry of Jesus is clearly linked to that of the apostles, with special parallels between Jesus, Peter and Paul. The same Spirit that led and empowered Jesus was also given to the apostles (Acts 1:8). Some of the corresponding events are baptism by the Spirit (Luke 3:21-22; Acts 2:1-4), their inaugural sermons (Luke 4:16-21; Acts 2:14-40; 13:16-52), and healings (Luke 7:11-17; Acts 9:36-42; 20:8-12). They each had initial popular success (Luke 6:17-19; Acts 5:12-16; 13:42-43), followed by resistance, opposition, arrests (Luke 19:45-48; 22:54; Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-26; 21:27-36) and trials (Luke 22:66-71; 23:6-12; Acts 4:5-22; 5:27-42; 12:1-19; 23:1-10; 26:1-32). The story of each of these concludes with the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 12:24; 28:23-31).

The church was initially regarded as a Jewish sect, the “Way” (9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22), and their expectation was that the kingdom would be restored in Jerusalem, and all nations would literally come to Mt. Zion to be saved (Isaiah 2:2-4; 25:7; 49:6; Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:20-23). The original eleven apostles therefore thought it their duty to remain in Jerusalem, to be there when Christ returns. But Paul’s calling, on the Damascus road, revealed a different plan and strategy: he was to go forth into all the Roman world, taking the gospel to the Gentiles (9:15-16; 26:15-18). The peoples of the world would not be coming to the kingdom via Jerusalem, but via churches that would be established throughout the world.

The book of Acts challenges the church in its mission: a mission both to continue Paul’s preaching and teaching, and in our community life to be a witness to the kingdom. As a community that loves one another, we are to be a counter-culture, the “salt of the earth”. In our ministry of the word, and in our fellowship, we continue the apostolic mission to the ends of the earth.

**Paul’s Journeys**



**Chronology of Paul**

34 AD Conversion, Arabia, Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; Gal 1:16-17)

37 Jerusalem visit; 14 years in Syria & Cilicia (Acts 9:26-30; Gal 1:18-2:1)

First Missionary journey (Acts 13:1 – 14:28)

49-51 Second Missionary journey; 18 months in Corinth; wrote Thess.

(Acts 15:36 – 18:22)

51 2nd Jerusalem visit, conference (Gal 2:1-10)

52-57 3rd Missionary journey, Ephesian ministry; wrote Gal., Phil,. Col., & 1 Cor;

final Macedonian visit; wrote 2 Cor. & Rom. (Acts 18:23 – 21:16)

57 Final Jerusalem visit; 2 years imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 21:17 – 24:27)

59-62 Voyage to Rome, 2 years imprisonment; wrote pastorals & Eph.

(Acts 25:1 – 28:31)

# First and Second Thessalonians

Background

Thessalonica was founded about 315 BC by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great. As a “free city”, with an independent local government, Greek culture was dominant. Paul established the church there in his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9), about 49 AD. After a brief stay, he was forced to leave due to intense persecution, and he went on to Berea, and then Athens (Acts17:10-15). The Jews were accusing him of opposing Rome, and their persecution was partly a political move to show loyalty to Rome. *“These men who have upset the world have come here also…”* (Acts 17:6). While in Athens, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-2, 5), who one year later returned to Paul, in Corinth (Acts 18:1,5; 1 Thess 3:6). Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians at this time (AD 50), in response to Timothy’s report, and 2 Thessalonians probably a few months later.

Purpose

In response to Timothy’s report, Paul found it necessary 1) to encourage them as they endured persecution (1 Thess; 2:14-16; 2 Thess 1:3-5; 3:13); 2) to oppose false prophets (1 Thess 5:20-21; 2 Thess 2:1-2; 3:17) and defend his own reputation and authority (1 Thess 2:1-16); 3) to provide corrective instructions pertaining to the expected return of Jesus Christ (*parousia*) (1 Thess 4:13-5:2; 2 Thess 2:1-17); and 4) to exhort them to proper Christian living while awaiting His return (1 Thess 4:1-12; 5:4-22; 2 Thess 3:6-15).

Structure of 1 Thess / 2 Thess:

1. Greeting (1:1 / 1:1-2)

2. Thanksgiving and prayer (1:2-10 / 1:3-12)

3. Main body (2:1-3:13 / 2:1-17)

4. Exhortation (4:1-5:24 / 3:1-16)

5. Closing (5:25-28 / 3:17-18)

This structure generally follows the traditional structure of Greek/Roman letters of the time, and is characteristic of all of Paul’s letters.

1 Thessalonians Summary

In the thanksgiving and main body, Paul commends their *“work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope”*, and asks them to remember their response of faith. This is characteristic of all scripture: instructions are based on a foundation of recalling the past, and clinging to our future hope. Present life is to be understood within the context of this historical and personal narrative. Paul assures them of his heartfelt love for them, so they may be receptive to his instruction. He appeals for their trust, and for them to imitate his example.

*“We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children… you had become vey dear to us. For you recall, brethren our labor and hardship…how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers…imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you…”*  - 1 Thess 2:7-12

This gives him the moral authority to instruct them, and to oppose the false teachers. In 2:3-6, he also contrasts himself with the false teachers in that *“we speak, not as pleasing men, but God.”* (2:4). Compare 1 Corinthians 2:1-9, where he also contrasts himself and his message to false teachers. He then explains why he had not yet returned to revisit them (2:17-18), which may also have been an issue for them.

In his exhortations, there is first an appeal for their sanctification, particularly concerning sexual morality (4:1-8). It seems that in their misguided pre-occupation with Christ’s return, they were neglecting to behave responsibly in this present life. Some of the false teachings of the time were to the effect that in our new spiritual life, our behavior in the flesh doesn’t matter. Paul says, to the contrary, that our salvation and our freedom are for the purpose of sanctification. See Romans 6 for similar teaching. Secondly, he exhorts them to excel further in love: to *“lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands…so that you will … not be in any need.”* (4:11-12)

The next item, addressed in 4:13-18, pertains to their concern about those who had died. This suggests they were misinformed: expecting that their new eternal life was totally accomplished at baptism, and no one would henceforth die before Christ’s return. This would lead them to think that those who died were not “really” Christian, and had no hope. It was therefore important for Paul to make clear that there are true Christians whose bodies will in fact die prior to Christ’s return, but that their hope is in the resurrection.

They also apparently had questions about when Christ will return - they were becoming anxious about the delay. The answer is what Jesus had taught: *“the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night”* (5:2; Matthew 24:42-44), and the consequent instruction is simply to be always ready. *“Let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober”* (5:6).

This is followed, in 5:12-22, with a comprehensive summary of instruction in Christian living. The outcome that Paul prays for is their sanctification, to be prepared for the Lord’s coming.

2 Thessalonians Summary

2 Thessalonians covers similar ground as the first letter. In 1:6-10, Paul particularly addresses the issue of their persecution, assuring them that the day of the Lord will be the time for justice and victory over all evil.

In response to false teachings that the day has already arrived, and they missed it, Paul reminds them that there are other events that must first occur (2:1-12). There must first be a great apostasy, and the “man of lawlessness”, who is presently restrained, shall be revealed. Some commentators interpret this as one individual who will perfectly fulfill the description: *“the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god…displaying himself as being God*” (2:4), *“with all power and signs and false wonder”* (2:9). But it is more likely an archetype, that has been fulfilled in part by many persons at many times in history. We, today, should not assume that it remains to be fulfilled, but should expect that the day of the Lord could occur at any time, without any further necessary delay.

Paul reminds them that the objective is sanctification (2:13). He then asks for their prayers (3:1-2), and exhorts them to live a disciplined life, working to support themselves: *“if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either”* (3:10). There is much work to be done in this life, we have a mission, therefore *“do not grow weary of doing good.”* (3:13).

# Galatians

Paul sent this letter to Gentile Christians in Northern Galatia, about 51-54 AD, from Ephesus (see Acts 19).

Purpose and Themes

The reason for this letter was that false teachers were claiming that the Gentiles must first become Jews, by circumcision, and continue as “Jews”, by works of the Law, in order to be saved by the Jewish Messiah. Paul’s gospel, to the contrary, is that salvation is by union with Christ: initiated by faith (2:16; 3:11,26), maintained by the Spirit (3:2-5; 4:6-7; 5:16-22), setting us free from the curse of the law (3:13-14; 4:21-31), with no distinction between Jew and Gentile (3:28).

Summary of Content

1:1-5 – As usual in his letters, Paul combines the standard Greek greeting of “grace” and the Jewish greeting of peace. He follows this up with the teaching that Jesus *“gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age”.* This mention of rescue introduces the theme of freedom (4:21-31; 5:1,13).

1:6-9 - Here is the issue that prompts this letter: outside teachers have turned some of them away to another gospel, which is not a legitimate alternative, but a false distortion. Those teachers are accursed, and their teachings cannot be tolerated.

1:10-24 - Paul then defends his motives and his authority. He was seeking to please God, not man, and his teaching was from God, by revelation, not from man.

2:1-10 – Paul recounts events that substantiate his claim to authority. Seventeen years after his calling, Paul met with church leaders at Jerusalem and shared with them the gospel that he had been preaching (see Acts 15). They had nothing to add (2:6), and they acknowledged the grace given to him, thus endorsing his gospel and his mission. It was “false brethren”, not the leadership, who had been urging Gentiles at Antioch to be circumcised (2:3-4; Acts 15:1,24).

2:11-14. – Paul recounts an occasion in Antioch where Cephas (Peter) and other Jewish Christians were sharing a meal with their Gentile brothers, but when some visitors from Jerusalem arrived, they withdrew, to eat separately from the Gentiles. Paul severely reprimanded him for thus making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Peter had been living “like a Gentile”, i.e. simply by faith in Christ. It was therefore hypocritical for him to suggest to the Gentiles that they were not fully equal members of the new covenant because they did not “live like Jews”.

2:15-21. – The underlying doctrine is: *“A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2:16). Paul then asks: if sinners are thus justified, is Christ a minister of sin (justifying the unjust)? No! Because, being crucified with Christ, we died to the law, and so the penalty has been fully paid. It would be a transgression to then rebuild what had been destroyed (to revert to a life under the law). Our present life is the life of Christ, in us, by faith. *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me”* (2:20). Our justification is by grace, through faith, not through the Law.

3:1-5 – Paul reminds them that they had received the Spirit by faith, not by works of the law. So why would they turn back to the law to be “perfected by the flesh”?

3:6-14 - Since Abraham’s faith was reckoned as righteousness (3:6), it is therefore *“those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham”* (3:7). Paul cites the promise to Abraham that *“all the nations will be blessed in you”* (3:8). Those who live by faith, from all nations, are therefore the sons of Abraham, heirs of the promise (see 3:14).

3:15-18 – Since the law arrived 400 years later, it cannot restrict or supersede the prior promise. The promise to Abraham takes precedence over the Law of Moses.

3:19-25 - The shortcoming of the law is not that it is contrary to promise, but that it has no power to deliver on the promise. The Law was a tutor to bring people to Christ. But now that faith in Christ has come, we are no longer under the tutor.

3:26-4:11 - Baptism unites us with Christ, bringing us into God’s family by adoption. In Christ, there are no more ethnic or national divisions: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (3:28). The Jews were formerly slaves, like children under a guardian. But by faith in Christ we are now set free, adopted as sons, heirs of the promise.

4:12-20 – Paul makes a personal appeal, to restore the relationship of trust and love that they had when he was with them, and thereby to accept his instructions.

4:21-31 – He then refers to Sarah and Hagar, the free woman and the slave. Hagar represents Mount Sinai and the earthly Jerusalem, while Sarah represents the Jerusalem above, which is free. It was the free woman who bore the child of promise. He concludes that we are not children of a bondwoman but of the free woman.

5:1-12 – It was *“for freedom Christ has set us free”.* But to follow the law, especially circumcision, would be a return to bondage, forsaking Christ, and falling from grace. *“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love”* (5:6).

5:13-26 - However, *“do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”* (5:13). It is a freedom with a purpose, for self-fulfillment, by fulfilling the promise. It is the freedom, in the Spirit, to fulfill the Law through love, summarized in one command: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (5:14). This takes place when we walk according to the Spirit, for *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (5:22). That fulfills the law, and it fulfills our personal destiny.

6:1-5 – Paul instructs them on how to restore transgressors: with gentleness, and with humble self-examination, being careful to avoid temptation.

6:6-10 - Paul further exhorts them to share with those who teach, for “*whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*”. More generally, he encourages them: *“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people”* (6:9, 10a).

6:11-18 *-* In the conclusion, Paul explains the motives of the false teachers: “*Those who desire to make a good showing … so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”* They wish to boast in the flesh, but Paul boasts only in the cross of Christ. He extends peace and mercy for all who walk according to his instruction. Paul thus complements the opening curse against the false teachers, with a closing blessing upon those who walk by the true gospel — the gospel of faith, by the Spirit.

**Two Gospels**

**True Gospel**

* The Law leads to Christ, as a tutor
* Unite with Christ, by faith, baptism
  + For justification, reconciliation
* Sanctification - by the Spirit
  + Freedom of the Spirit
* The Law has no power to transform. We must come to Christ as sinners, and be born again by the Spirit
* Become a Jew by works of Law, circumcision
  + For justification, reconciliation
* The Messiah reigns over a Jewish kingdom
* Sanctification - by Torah observance
  + Bondage to Law
* The works of Law are required to make us worthy to enter the Messiah’s kingdom

**False Gospel**

# Philippians

This letter from Paul was written while in prison (1:7,13-14). The traditional view is that it was from Rome (Acts 28:16-31), about 61 AD. An alternative view is that it was in Ephesus, about 51-54 AD. There are sound arguments for each, but for this lesson series an Ephesus imprisonment, at the earlier date, is assumed. Paul had established this church during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-15). Philippi was a Roman colony, which had been settled by Roman army veterans, and its citizens were especially loyal to Rome and to the emperor. This is the background for Paul’s arrest in Philippi, for him being driven out of the city, and for the continuing persecution of the church (Acts 16:16-40; Phil 1:29-30).

Philippians is a combination of two standard types of letter: “friendship” and “exhortatory”. The particular occasion was to thank them for a gift that Epaphroditus had just delivered to him (2:25; 4:10-18). As a friend, driven by the gospel mission, Paul exhorts them to excel even more in their love and knowledge. (1:9)

1:1-11 - In the opening greeting, Paul singles out the overseers (elders) and deacons. The likely reason is that it is especially important for the church leadership to set examples for the church. Traditionally, the greeting would be followed with a health-wish. Paul, however, routinely replaces this with a prayer. He thus acknowledges that all good things come from God. He first gives thanks, and he focuses on the gospel, rather than health. What he considers most important is that their *“love may abound…in real knowledge and all discernment”*. (1:9)

1:12-20 - Paul assures them that in spite of his imprisonment, and his opponents, the Lord is making all things work out for good. Paul’s chains lead the brothers to place greater reliance upon the Lord, resulting in greater confidence and boldness. What matters is the success of the gospel mission, and in this he rejoices.

1:21-29 - To further explain “how he is”, Paul says that *“To live is Christ, to die is gain”* (1:21). His life on earth is the life of Christ, for the sake of the gospel; and His personal gain and reward is in the resurrection. Therefore, for himself, to die is gain; but for the sake of others, it is necessary for him to continue his mission.

1:27-30 - Paul asks them to walk “in a manner worthy of the gospel” (1:27). This means, first of all, being of one mind, to walk in unity. Secondly, they must not be frightened by their opponents. Conflict and persecution is a part of God’s plan, for their salvation and for the enemies’ destruction.

2:1-11 - Paul then further explains how to live “in a worthy manner”. The basis is in what they have received from God: “*encouragement in Christ, ... consolation of love, ... fellowship of the Spirit*”. They are to be like-minded; instead of selfishness, they are to give priority to each other. The supreme example of such behavior was given by Jesus Christ. Although He was God, He gave Himself (*kenosis*), to become a man, and humbled himself in obedience, to the point of death on the cross. The consequence for Jesus was exaltation, and in the end, every knee shall bow. All who belong to Jesus are to have the same attitude. This is the prophesied suffering servant (Isaiah 53), fulfilled both in Jesus and in His church.

2:12-13 - Paul tells them to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (1:12b-13). He is not telling them to work for salvation, but to work out the intended consequences of their salvation, bearing fruit. This is both our work and God’s work, Christ in us. The “fear and trembling” refers to humble acknowledgment of human weakness and vulnerability before our enemy. We cannot stand up against evil without the power of God’s presence. He thus warns against false confidence in self-sufficiency: we need His Spirit, and we need the full armor of God.

2:14-18 - To be of “one mind” means, in part, to “*do all things without grumbling or disputing*”. Regarding persecution, Paul describes their faithful service as a sacrificial gift to God, and Paul’s sufferings as a drink offering. Like the whole burnt offerings of the old covenant, these sacrifices are occasions for joy before the Lord.

2:19-30 - Here we learn that the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul, who is now sending him back to them with this letter. Later, he will send Timothy, who would then report back to Paul an update of their situation.

3:1-16 - Paul says again to rejoice, and then warns them about those who place confidence in the flesh (works of Law). Paul says he had more reason than anyone to place confidence in the flesh, but now counts it all as worthless. The one thing he now treasures is knowing Christ, seeking *“the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection.”* Although he has not yet fully attained the goal, he presses on.

3:17-21 - Paul urges them to follow his example, rather than the example of the “enemies of the cross”, who “set their minds on earthly things” (3:19). Those who belong to Christ have their citizenship in heaven (3:20). The residents of Philippi were especially loyal to Rome, but those who belong to Christ have a different allegiance and hope – a different citizenship.

4:1-3 - Paul exhorts them to thus stand firm in the Lord, and he particularly appeals to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to live in harmony.

4:4-7 - He again tells them to “*rejoice in the Lord always*” - regardless of present circumstances, to rejoice in the present fellowship and future hope in Christ. They are to be gentle - practicing patience and forbearance - because the Lord is near. They are to be anxious for nothing, but turn to God in prayer, and He will grant them peace.

4:8-9 - Paul then tells them the good things that they should set their minds upon. This is not just a matter of meditation, it means to desire and to pursue such things. If they also follow Paul’s teachings and example, the God of peace will be with them.

4:10-19 - Paul now specifically thanks them for their gift, delivered by Epaphroditus. But he wants them to understand that the reason for his gratitude is not his physical needs, for he has learned to deal with either poverty or abundance, in that “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*”. The reason for his gratitude for their gift is that it credits to their spiritual account, as a sacrifice well-pleasing to God.

4:20-23 - In the closing, he passes on greetings from the saints, especially those of Caesar’s household: another comment intended to give encouragement.

In this letter of friendship, Paul urges the Philippians to pursue unity and harmony with one another, to follow the example of Christ in humble self-giving, and the example of Paul in rejoicing through tribulations.

# Colossians and Philemon

**Colossians**

This letter from Paul was also written while in prison (4:10,18), assumed here to be in Ephesus, about 51-54 AD. Colossae was located about 120 miles East of Ephesus, in Phrygia, near Laodicea and Hierapolis. The church was founded by Epaphras (1:6-7), a disciple of Paul, who was presently in prison with him. It was a predominantly Gentile church, exposed to influences of Hellenistic Judaism, Greek philosophy, and local mystery religions. The purpose of the letter was to warn them against such false teachings, because they diminish the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

1:1-14 –Paul follows the greeting with a statement of thanksgiving, for their faith, their love, and their hope (1:4-5). He then tells them he has been praying for them: that they be filled with knowledge, and thereby “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”. And he gives thanks to the Father who: “*rescued us from the domain of darkness,* *and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son”* (1:12,13).

1:15-17 – This is one of the most important passages in the New Testament for establishing a “high Christology”, i.e. for declaring the absolute cosmic supremacy of Christ over all creation and over all beings. He is the perfect visible representation of the invisible God, and He is the “firstborn” of all creation (1:15). The meaning of “firstborn” here is His pre-eminence and authority over all the inheritance. The following verses expand and elaborate. Firstly, all of creation is by Him, through Him and for Him (1:16). He is the origin, the means and the goal of all creation. He is before all things, probably in the temporal sense, of being prior to the beginning - or, more precisely, He transcends time. Furthermore, all things “hold together”, or cohere, in Him. He is the sustaining power by which all things continue to exist; He is the one through whom God, as the “ground of being”, brings forth and maintains everything that exists.

1:18-20 – This exalted role applies equally to the new creation, in that He is the head of the body (the church), and the firstborn from the dead (i.e. the first to be resurrected). The basis for all this is that “all the fullness of God dwells in Him” (1:19). The consequence, in the end, is that all things shall be reconciled to Him. These are the verses that establish the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, and the argument against anyone who teaches that we need to turn elsewhere to supplement Christ, to pursue a knowledge or a power from some source other than Him.

1:21-29 – Paul reminds them that they have been reconciled to God, in Jesus’ death. Furthermore, this relationship is maintained by continuing in the faith, by not moving away from the hope of the gospel. He then speaks of his ministry of the word, revealing this mystery, which is *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (1:27).

2:1-7 – To know God’s mystery, one must know Christ, for in Him “*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (2:3). He says this to dissuade them from looking elsewhere to find wisdom, knowledge, or answers to mysteries. Just as they had received Christ, they should continue walking in Him. Similar exhortations, to continue as you started, were also given to the Galatians (Gal 3:3) and the Philippians (Phil 3:16).

2:8-15 – Here is the warning to not be taken captive by the deceptive traditions of men, contrary to Christ. This refers to a mixture of Greek and Jewish teachings that they could be tempted to turn to, in a quest for some kind of higher spiritual knowledge or experience. Paul tells them there is nothing higher than what must be attained in Christ. *“In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells”* (2:9). “*In Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority”* (2:10). They have no need of physical circumcision, for they have had a spiritual circumcision, when they were buried with Christ in baptism. The meaning of the cross is described here as disarming the rulers and authorities, thereby cancelling our debt of sin, forgiving us our transgressions. (2:13-15)

2:16-23 – The consequence of the cross is that no one can act as judge, regarding provisions of the law, nor tell us to rely upon self-abasement, worship of angels, or visions. Such things are of man-made religion, and have no value.

3:1-17 – We who have been raised with Christ, dwelling in Christ, are to set our minds upon and pursue the things of Christ (compare Phil 4:8). We are to consider ourselves as dead to the immoral things of this world, and set them all aside. Then put on the new self, which is being renewed to conform to the image of God, which is Christ. Paul lists the virtues that we are to “put on”, and exhorts them to “*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*” (3:16), and to *“do all in the name of the Lord Jesus…”* (3:17).

3:18-4:6 – In family and social relationships, the new self, in Christ, is manifested by humble submission to one another, loving one another, and serving one another “*as for the Lord rather than for men*” (3:23). The fact of being in Christ is to govern all human relationships.

4:7-18 – In his closing remarks, Paul commends to them Tychicus and Onesimus, who will be delivering this letter. He sends greetings from his companions, and asks them to share this letter with the church at Laodicea, and to read another letter that he is sending to Laodicea.

**Philemon**

Paul’s letter to Philemon was written and sent at the same time as the letter to the Colossians. The occasion was that Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, had run away and found refuge with Paul. In this letter, Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

1:1-7 – The greeting and thanksgiving is addressed primarily to Philemon, as a personal letter, but also including his household and the church that meets in his house.

1:8-20 – Paul appeals to Philemon to take Onesimus back, to receive him as a brother in Christ; he further hints that it would be good to set Onesimus free, and send him back to Paul. Instead of ordering him to do what is proper, he is making an appeal, for love’s sake (1:8-9), “*so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.*” (1:14). This is the proper way, as far as possible, for fellow Christians to deal with one another, which also is how God relates to us.

1:21-25 – In his closing, Paul expresses confidence that Philemon will do the right thing, and asks him to prepare a lodging place for an upcoming visit.

In accordance with his teachings in Colossians about family and social relationships, this relationship between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus is to be governed by their unity as brothers in Christ.

**Map of Colossae**



**Colossae**

**Ephesus**

# Ephesians

This is another letter from Paul written from prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), closely connected with the letter to the Colossians, and probably written very shortly after that letter. The first verse indicates it was written to the saints at Ephesus, but some of the best early manuscripts do not include “at Ephesus”. Whether or not Ephesus was one of its destinations, it was probably a “circular” letter, intended for distribution among several cities, and perhaps first delivered to Laodicea (per Colossians 4:16).

This letter takes up some of the same themes as Colossians: the supremacy of the exalted Christ, and that all our blessings and hope are to be found in Him. But these ideas are further developed here, with broader scope, without focusing on the specific issues that were problems at Colossae. The central teaching is expressed in Ephesians 1:10b, that God’s will and purpose is *“the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth”*, i.e. the cosmic reconciliation of all things, in Christ. In the heavens, all spiritual beings shall be subjected to Him. On earth, He is the head of the church, through which all things on earth are being reconciled to God. The church thus has a special mission of reconciliation, requiring that we practice the unity that we preach.

1:1-14 - A brief greeting is followed by thanksgiving to God: for all blessings, for our election and our redemption, all of which are “in Christ”. He then says that the “mystery of His will” (1:9) is that all things shall be summed up in Christ (a further development of what he had said in Colossians 1:16-20). It is within this cosmic context that we obtain an inheritance, and that *“you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance…to the praise of His glory”* (1:13,14). We can properly understand our individual blessings and hope only as a part of God’s eternal cosmic plan to reconcile all things “in Christ”.

1:15-23 - Paul then tells the saints that he gives thanks for them, and prays for them: *“that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe”* (1:18-19). Paul’s most important prayer concern is that they would know the hope that is before them, and the power of God that is presently among them. The foundation for our hope, and for “His power toward us” is the resurrection of Christ (1:20). By this, all powers are subjected to Him, and *“He is the head over all things to the church…”* (1:22-23).

2:1-10 – Paul reminds them of who they were, and who they have become, in Christ. They were dead in their sins, subjects of the evil powers, but God *“made us alive together with Christ…and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* (2:5-6). And this is all by the grace of God: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”* (2:8-10). We are not saved as a result of works, but for good works.

2:11-22 – God’s purpose is to establish peace, reconciliation and unity. It is therefore God’s plan for the Gentiles to be united with the Jews as one people, and the barriers to such unity were broken down by Christ on the cross. This new household of God is a holy temple, *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone”* (2:20), which is now the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

3:1-21 – Paul explains his calling, as an apostle, and the mysteries revealed to him, that *“Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus”* (3:6). This is all *“in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord…”* (3:11). Two important points are: 1) this new revelation is in continuity with what God has been doing and has intended from the beginning; and 2) it is all accomplished in Christ Jesus. The chapter closes with a prayer: that they be strengthened through His Spirit, that Christ may dwell in their hearts, that they be rooted and grounded in love, and able to comprehend the love of Christ.

4:1-16 – In this exhortatory section of the letter, Paul implores them to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” - to “preserve the unity of the Spirit” - and he identifies the virtues conducive to unity: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance. Note that this unity cannot be created nor imposed by man. Our role is simply to permit the Spirit to do His work. This unity is based on a foundation of *“one body and one Spirit,…one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all…”* (4:4-6). Within this unity, however, there is a diversity of gifts and ministries. Some have been given to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These ministries are for the equipping of the saints, that they may all grow up to a unity of the faith and maturity in Christ.

4:17- 5:21 – More specific instructions are now given on how Christians should live. They are to lay aside their old ways, the old self, and *“be renewed in the spirit of your mind”* (4:23), putting on the new self. The things to lay aside include falsehood, sustained anger, stealing, unwholesome speech, bitterness and malice. The things to put on are kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness to each other. In this new walk, they are to be *“imitators of God, as beloved children”*. Our new status as children demands that we faithfully represent the character of our Father. Immorality, impurity or greed *“must not even be named among you”*; such ones will not inherit the kingdom (5:5). They are to consider that *“you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light”* (5:8). We are therefore to make the best use of our time: instead of getting drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit, speaking and singing psalms and hymns to the Lord, giving thanks.

5:22-6:9 – This new way of life is now applied to family and social relationships, within the context of being *“subject to one another in the fear of Christ”* (5:21). The husband – wife relationship is supposed to model the relationship of Christ to the church: Christ loving the church, and the church being subject to Christ. Other relationships, such as between children and parents and between slaves and masters, are also to be characterized by mutual love and respect, in Christ.

6:10-17 – The concluding exhortation is that they *“put on the full armor of God”* (6:11). The Christian walk requires more than our own human resources, because we are not struggling against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers and forces of darkness. For this we need the full armor of God (compare Isaiah 59:17). It is only by these gifts and powers from God that we can prevail against the enemy.

6:18-23 – In the conclusion, Paul asks that they pray for one another and for him: not for his release, but that *“I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”* (6:20). His priority concern, as always, is the gospel. He closes with a benediction of peace, love, faith, and grace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

# First Corinthians

Paul founded the church at Corinth in 51 AD (Acts 18:1-17), and spent 1½ years there. This letter was written a few years later, while he was at Ephesus. He is responding to several reported issues (1:11) and some items they had written about (7:1). There were partisan divisions, issues of sexual immorality, questions about marriage and meat sacrificed to idols, issues regarding the Lord’s Supper and use of gifts in worship services, and questions about the resurrection. All these issues stem from one over-arching problem: they were drifting away from the gospel, reverting to a pagan-based wisdom and spirituality. They thought that elements from their Greek-Roman philosophies and religions could improve upon the gospel of Christ crucified. It was a form of cultural elitism. Paul’s answer to this is: *“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* - 1:25

Chap 1-2 - In the greeting and thanksgiving, Paul notes that they are not lacking in gifts, but reminds them that they are *“awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ…”* (1:7). This introduces one of their issues: they were glorying in their “gifts”, rather than in the hope of the resurrection.He exhorts them to *“all agree and that there be no divisions ....”* (1:10), because they were quarreling with each other, claiming allegiance to various leaders.Paul says he did not rely on “cleverness of speech”, but simply preached the “foolishness” of Christ crucified. Rather than seek a higher spirituality through human “wisdom”, Paul redirects them to this “foolishness of God” (1:25). *“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”* (1:31).Accordingly, Paul had come to them, not with superior rhetoric or wisdom, but with the power of the Spirit. True wisdom and power are given by revelation, through the Spirit (2:10).

Chap 3-4 - Their partisan strife was a sign of spiritual immaturity. Their principal allegiance should not be to those who plant or water the field, but to God who causes the growth (1:7-9). Using the metaphor of a building (the temple of God), the foundation is Jesus Christ, and various teachers build upon that foundation. But each one’s work will be tested by fire, and materials such as wood, hay and straw shall be destroyed. The refining fire will destroy everything that is of this world. They should therefore not boast in the servants who labor in the field, or who build the temple, but they should boast only in Christ. Paul is merely a servant, and they should imitate him in this attitude of humble servanthood.

Chap 5. He then admonishes them for tolerating sexual immorality (incest) in the church. They must not fellowship with those who engage in willful, blatant sins (5:11), but they are to *“remove the wicked man from among yourselves”* (5:13). Their refusal to have exercised such discipline is regarded as arrogance and boasting (5:2,6).

Chap 6 – Paul rebukes them for taking lawsuits against each other before outside courts. It dishonors the church for disputes between believers to be adjudicated by unbelievers. Paul repeats a slogan they liked to use *(“all things are lawful”*), but he reminds them of its qualifications: liberation from the law is not a liberty to sin, but liberty for righteousness; it is thus not a license for sexual immorality. The Corinthians thought that they were so “spiritual” that it does not matter what they do with their bodies. Paul says, to the contrary, that sins against the body are offensive to God, because *“your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit”* (6:19).

Chap 7 – Concerning things about which they had written, Paul first addresses questions about celibacy and marriage. Within marriage, the partners should not deny each other, because they belong to each other. He advises that when a person becomes a Christian he should *“remain in that condition in which he was called”* (7:20). So the unmarried and widows should remain so, unless they lack self-control (7:8-9). Those already married should not divorce (7:10-11), but if an unbelieving partner leaves, then “the brother or the sister is not under bondage” (7:15). Divorce is generally acceptable when the other party has in some way already broken the vows.

Chap 8-9 – A second question pertained to eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul says we generally have liberty to eat meat, but we should not cause a brother to stumble by giving the appearance of practicing idolatry. Similarly, Paul has rights as an apostle, but He does not exercise all his rights, so that he may be a fellow partaker of the gospel. This is as an example to them of self-denial for the sake of others.

Chap 10 - He refers them to the example of Israel in the wilderness. They were all “baptized”, and all received spiritual food and drink, but God was displeased with them because of their idolatry and sexual immorality. This is a warning for us all: *“let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall”* (10:12). He then adds the encouragement: *“God…will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able…”* (10:13). Finally, *“whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”* (10:31).

Chap 11 - Regarding the tradition of women covering their heads in worship, and men leaving their heads uncovered, Paul points out the symbolism of authority and subjection, and that a violation of these traditions would therefore by a source of destructive contention. Another issue in their worship was that during the Lord’s Supper, the wealthy members were feasting separately from the poor. In doing so, they fail to “judge the body rightly”, they partake in an unworthy manner, and are thus guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

Chap 12 - 14 - There is a great variety of gifts and ministries, but all from one Spirit, just as there are many members of the body. Each one is to respect and care for all the others, and the differences should never be a cause for pride or strife. In chapter 13, Love is presented as more excellent than any gift. No gifts or deeds are of any value without love. Prophecy, tongues and knowledge will not endure, but love never fails. Faith, hope and love are to abide, but the greatest of these is love. Giving priority to Love, gifts must always be used “for the edification of the church” (14:12), and *“all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”* (14:40)

Chap 15 – Paul now restates the gospel he had originally preached: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised, all according to scriptures (15:1-4). This is of first importance, and by this they are saved. Key to this is our hope of resurrection. Without that, not even Jesus was raised, and all is in vain (15:13-14). Some were asking how the dead can be raised, and with what kind of body (15:35). Paul answers that our present body is sown, like a seed, but will be raised an imperishable body, in glory and power (15:42-43). This is absolutely essential to our faith. Herein is true wisdom and power.

Chap 16 - Paul then asks them to plan for a collection and upcoming visits, and concludes with a conventional greeting.

# Second Corinthians

After sending the “1 Corinthians” letter, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), and when he returned, he reported opposition from outsiders who were challenging Paul’s authority (2 Cor 10:10; 11:12-15,18-23). Paul then makes a second visit to Corinth (2 Cor 1:15-16; 13:1-2), returns to Ephesus, and follows up with a “severe” letter (2 Cor 2:4-9; 7:8-13). Paul later receives a good report from Titus that the opposition is mostly quelled (2 Cor 7:6-16). Paul then writes 2 Cor 1-9, seeking reconciliation. After this, he receives news of increased resistance, prompting his final letter, which is 2 Cor 10-13.

Paul’s purpose in the first section, chapters 1-7, is to re-establish his bonds of fellowship with the Corinthians (6:11-13;7:2-3), by sharing the comfort that comes from God (1:3-7; 7:4,6,13). This is within the context of his ministry of reconciliation (5:18-20). In chapters 8 and 9, he asks them to prepare a gift for the church in Jerusalem. Paul then concludes by reproving his opponents, and defending his apostleship, in Chapters 10-13.

1:1-11 -- After the greeting, Paul speaks of the *“Father of mercies and God of all comfort”*, saying that as they share in one another’s afflictions, in Christ, they also share in each others’ comfort. When we receive comfort in our afflictions, it is so that we can share that comfort with others in similar affliction. This word for comfort means “coming to one’s aid”, and is the same word that John uses for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16).

1:12-2:17 -- Paul explains that his failure to return for a second visit (1:15-16) was not a failure to keep his word (1:17), but was in order to spare them more sorrow (1:23-2:1-2). Paul then commends their exercise of discipline (against the sexual offender of 1 Cor 5:1-5), and he asks them to forgive the person and reaffirm their love for him (2:7-8).

3:1-18 —Paul’s opponents had letters of commendation, but he explains why he does not need such letters: their own life in Christ is a “letter of commendation”, written in their hearts, which testify to the power of the gospel Paul had delivered to them. He thus defends not his own adequacy, but the adequacy of the gospel he preaches. He contrasts this gospel to the old covenant; it is not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (3:6). God’s glory was veiled under the old covenant, but the veil is lifted under the new covenant, and we can now behold His glory (3:18).

4:1-18. — Paul says *“we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants”*. The gospel is a treasure that is delivered in earthen vessels. He says: *“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing”*. He offers this as encouragement also for them, in their afflictions: *“momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (4:17-18). This is the comfort that God provides, and that we share with each other.

5:1-15 -- Continuing to contrast present weakness and affliction with our eternal treasure, he says our present earthly tent is being torn down, but God is preparing *“a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (5:1). Paul is not seeking to commend himself (the earthen vessel) to them, but to persuade them regarding the eternal treasure of the gospel, which is that: *“one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf”* (5:14b-15). This is how Paul lives, and it is how they too should live.

5:16-21 -- We are to see ourselves as new creatures, according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh: *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (5:17). Paul then says that this is from God, *“who reconciled us to Himself through Christ”*. Furthermore, this reconciliation is being performed through the apostles, who serve as “ambassadors for Christ” (5:20).

The basis for this reconciliation is what God had done in Christ on the cross: *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (5:21). This verse, sometimes known as “the sweet exchange”, has a number of interpretations and layers of meaning. It should be understood in the light of Isaiah 53 -- Jesus bore our sins, suffering the consequences of our sins, giving Himself as a sin offering (Isaiah 53:4-6,10a,12b). Consequently, *“the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many”* (Isaiah 53:11b). We become His righteousness in three respects: 1) we receive a legal and relational status of being “right” before God; 2) we receive the benefits of God’s righteousness (salvation and life); 3) we receive Christ in us, who is our life and our righteousness, performing good works through us. In the present context (2 Cor 3-6), the third meaning is the most relevant: the work of reconciliation is the righteousness of God, working through Paul, in Christ.

6:1-18 -- Paul then exhorts them to not receive this grace in vain; they are to become obedient to the gospel. In verses 3-10 he describes his selfless service, and asks them to respond by opening up to them (6:13), and to not be bound to unbelievers (6:14-18).

7:1-16 -- Paul asks them to cleanse themselves, perfecting holiness, and to “make room for us” (7:2). He is comforted, and rejoices, that their sorrow has led to repentance: *“for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death”* (7:10).

8:1 – 9:15 -- In these two chapters, Paul asks them to prepare an offering for the church at Jerusalem. He shares the example of the churches of Macedonia, who *“according to their ability, and beyond their ability, gave of their own accord”* (8:3). He also references the provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness: *“He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack”* (8:15). Compare this to the sharing in the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35). God rewards generosity, and is able to provide amply for continuing generosity (9:6-11).

10:1 - 13:14 -- In chapters 1-7 Paul “comforts the afflicted”, while in chapters 10-13 he “afflicts the comfortable”. In these chapters, he more forcefully confronts his opponents. His weapons of warfare *“are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful… destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God…taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (10:4-5). Although it is foolishness for us to compare ourselves with one another, in order to defend his apostolic mission and authority against his opponents’ false claims, he is compelled (see 12:11a) to speak of his own credentials. *“In whatever respect anyone else is bold – I speak in foolishness -- I am just as bold myself”* (11:21). He then proceeds in 11:22-33 to speak of his Jewish pedigree, his personal sacrifices, labors and hardships. In 12:1-6, he says he was taken up into heaven and received unspeakable revelation. He then explains that he was given a “thorn in the flesh”, to prevent him from exalting himself (12:7-10). It is thus in this attitude of humble service that he will once more visit them (12:14); and *“I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”* (12:15). The main thought that he leaves them with, prior to his upcoming third visit, is: *“We rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete…. Be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace”* (13:9,11).

# Romans

Background: Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, about 57 AD. The church at Rome was most likely founded by Jewish converts returning from Jerusalem after Pentecost. In 49 AD, the Jews were expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2), but five years later were allowed to return. This likely resulted in a predominantly Gentile church, with tensions and disputes between the Gentile majority and the returning Jews.

Theme: The central theme is the righteousness of God, revealed in the gospel, and its equal applicability to both Jews and Gentiles. “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*” (1:16-17).

1:1-17 -- In the greeting, Paul summarizes his apostolic mission and makes some doctrinal points. He identifies Jesus Christ as 1) a descendant of David, according to the flesh, and 2) Son of God, as declared by the resurrection, according to the Spirit. The gospel has the power to save, for all who believe (both Jews and Greeks). It reveals God’s righteousness, which is: 1) His faithfulness, demonstrated in the crucifixion and resurrection; 2) our legal/relational status as right-with-God; and 3) the indwelling of Christ, whereby His righteousness is manifested in our lives. This process is “from faith to faith”, i.e. initiated from God’s faithfulness and completed through our own faith and faithfulness. Paul then quotes Habakkuk 2:4 – *“the righteous shall live by faith”*.

1:18-32 -- Because God is righteous, He judges all unrighteousness. Since the nations have rejected God’s natural revelation, and have worshiped false gods, He has handed them over to degrading passions and a depraved mind. Paul points to homosexuality as a degrading passion, and to a list of sins of a depraved mind (1:29-31). These are not simply sins of ignorance or lost-control, for *“although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them”* (1:32).

2:1- 29 -- But Paul warns any who may pass judgment: *“in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”* When Jews judge the Gentiles, they shall also be judged, for *“there is no partiality with God”* (2:11). Both Jews and Gentiles are guilty under their own laws. He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, for the true circumcision is not in the flesh, but in the heart (2:28-29).

3:1-20 -- Paul asks: “what advantage has the Jew?” The answer is their privilege of being entrusted with revelation from God. They have thus served a godly purpose, in spite of their unfaithfulness. However, they are all under sin (Psalm 5:9; 14:1-3; 36:1; 53:1-3; Isa 59:7-8), and no flesh can be justified by works of the Law (3:20).

3:21-31 -- But faith in Christ has done what the Law could not: *“now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested…through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (3:21-23). We are justified as a gift, by the blood sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

4:1-25 -- Paul then asks about Abraham: *“What shall we say then? Have we found Abraham, our forefather, [to be justified] according to the flesh?”*  Paul’s answer is ‘no’, not according to the flesh. Referencing Gen 15:6, *“Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness”* (4:9). Descent from Abraham is therefore based on faith, not genetics or circumcision. This is a faith in Jesus, “*who was delivered over because of our transgressions and was raised because of our justification.”* (4:25).

5:1-21 -- As a result of justification, we have peace, and we exult in hope. We also exult in tribulation, for it leads to perseverance, proven character, and a hope that does not disappoint. This hope is grounded in God’s love: *“in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him”* (5:8-9). In Adam, all have sinned, resulting in death; but all who are in Christ shall live. *“Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men”* (5:18).

6:1-23 -- Since grace abounds, Paul asks: “*are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*” The answer: “*May it never be!*” His grace is for a purpose: that we may serve God rather than sin. He tells them to consider their baptism, by which they were united with Christ, and thus united into His death and into His resurrection. Therefore, they are *“dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus”* (6:11). We have been liberated, so that we can freely choose whether to serve God or sin. And this choice has life or death consequences: *“the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life”* (6:23).

7:1-25 -- Paul then considers life under the Law. Since we have died to the Law, we have been released from the Law (7:6). He then asks: “Is the Law sin?”, and answers: “May it never be!”. The Law is holy, righteous and good (7:12), but sin has used the Law to bring death (7:9,13). A person who tries to live according to the Law (7:15-25) finds it impossible, because of bondage to sin, and cries out: *“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”* (7:24).

8:1-39 -- And the answer is: *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death”* (8:1,2). The Spirit liberates us to serve God, and makes us His sons (8:14) and heirs, eagerly awaiting redemption and glory. We can be assured of our hope, because 1) the Spirit intercedes for us (8:26-27); 2) God causes all things to work together for good (8:28-30); and 3) nothing can separate us from His love (8:31-39).

9:1 – 11:20 -- Paul now addresses the situation of Israel. He says that only a remnant will be saved, which consists of those who trust in Christ, rather than in works of law. *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (10:9). Just as Gentiles have been grafted into God’s “olive tree”, any Jews who accept Christ can also be grafted in. Conversely, just as Jews were cut off for their unbelief, the same can happen to any Gentile. For either Jew or Gentile, belonging to God depends upon continuing faithfulness.

12:1- 13:14 – Our response to His righteousness should be *“to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God…and be transformed by the renewing of you mind”* (12:1-2). We are to humbly serve one another, as one body in Christ, united in love. Also, we should live in subjection to the government, and love our neighbors, *“for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law”* (13:8).

14:1 – 15:13 -- Paul urges them to not judge one another, and to pursue the things which make for peace (14:19). Those who are strong in their faith must not cause the weak to stumble; we must rather accept one another (15:7), for their edification (15:2).

15:14-16:27 -- Paul says he plans to visit Rome on his way to Spain. He commends to them Phoebe, who delivers this letter, and exchanges greetings. In the benediction, Paul states the desired outcome: “obedience of faith”, as he had said in the opening greeting (1:5). It is this obedience of faith that now manifests God’s righteousness in the world.

# First & Second Timothy and Titus

Background for the “Pastoral Epistles”: A plausible reconstruction of the historical context, based on early church traditions, is as follows: 1) Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment (see Acts 28) about AD 62; 2) Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, to provide continuing teaching and oversight as Paul’s representative; 3) Paul visits Spain; 4) Paul and Titus establish the church in Crete (Titus 1:5-16); 5) Paul urges Timothy to remain in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3); 6) he writes the first letter to Timothy, and a letter to Titus; 7) he is imprisoned a second time, and writes the second letter to Timothy (2 Tim 1:16-17; 4:6, 16-18); 8) Paul is executed, AD 67/68.

Purpose of 1 Timothy is to provide instruction and encouragement to Timothy to deal with serious problems in the Ephesus church. Opponents were teaching false doctrines and setting bad examples of behavior, resulting in strife and disorderly worship.

1 Tim 1:3 - 20 – Paul urges Timothy to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines”, involving myths and genealogies, which were contrary to the gospel, and a distraction from the proper goals of instruction: “*love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (1:5). These false teachings included speculations about the Law (1:7-11), not based on understanding. To counter their false teachings, Paul gives himself as an example of a sinner saved by grace through faith (1:12-17).

1 Tim 2:1 – 8 -- He then urges that prayers “be made on behalf of all men…” The emphasis is upon “all”, i.e. Gentiles as well as Jews, including ruling authorities. This is because God desires all men to be saved; and because there is only one God and one mediator, Christ Jesus. They are to pray “lifting up holy hands…”. The point of this instruction is that they be “holy hands”, i.e. without wrath and dissension.

1 Tim 2:9 – 15 -- Similarly, the behavior and appearances of women should be conducive to decent and orderly public worship. They are to be modest and respectable, not disrupting the order by arguing or teaching in opposition to the elders. He supports this by referring to Eve, who was created after Adam, and who was deceived by the serpent. Women are to accept the gender roles given to them by their culture, for to do otherwise brings reproach upon the church. For the situation in Ephesus, instead of exercising authority over men, the positive role of women is represented by Eve, who bore a child, eventually leading to the birth of a Savior, Jesus Christ. Similarly, all women in the church serve the role of bearing and raising the children for future generations of the church. This subordinate role does not in any way diminish their worth before God. To the contrary, “the last shall be first”.

1 Tim 3:1 – 16 -- One of Timothy’s duties, as a representative of Paul, is to appoint overseers (bishops) and deacons. The qualifications here mostly pertain to moral character, intended to address the moral failings of the false teachers. The main point is that they be “above reproach”, for the sake of the reputation of the church.

1 Tim 4:1 – 16 -- Paul points out that the false doctrines being taught at Ephesus are characteristic of the “later times”, forbidding marriage and abstaining from foods. It was a mistaken view of sanctification.

1 Tim 5:1 – 6:2 – Paul gives instruction for what widows should be “put on the list”, i.e. accorded special honor and duties and support from the church. Similarly, he instructs that elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, and financial support.

1 Tim 6:3 – 21 -- He gives further instruction that slaves are to honor their masters. This, too, is under the general principle of living peaceably within their society, to not bring reproach upon the church. He then speaks of how his opponents are argumentative and cause strife, and how they use religion as a means of financial gain. To counter this, Paul says we should be content with or without money, “*for we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either*” (6:7). Those who desire money fall into temptation and a snare, “*for the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil*” (4:10). He urges Timothy to flee from such things, and to fight the good fight of faith (4:12).

Purpose of the letter to Titus: The problems in Crete were similar to those in Ephesus, but not quite as serious. The churches there were just recently established, and Paul’s opponents were not as entrenched as they were in Ephesus. This letter therefore gives similar instructions to Titus, to counter the same kinds of false teachings, and to continue the task of setting things in order (Titus 1:5).

Titus 1:5-16 -- Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders, having essentially the same qualifications as were listed in 1 Timothy 3. Again, this is to counter the false teachers, who must be silenced.

Titus 2:1-3:15 -- Titus is instructed to teach the proper virtues of godliness and peaceableness, and that salvation is not on the basis of deeds, but “*according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*” (3:5). He is to avoid foolish controversies, and to reject and oppose those who are factious.

Purpose of the Second Timothy letter: This is a more personal letter, giving more general instruction and encouragement, motivated by Paul’s knowledge that he will soon be executed. They are his parting words of counsel to his beloved son in the faith (2 Tim 1:2).

2 Tim 1:1-18 -- Paul compliments Timothy on his sincere faith, and encourages him to rekindle his gift, with a spirit of power and love and discipline. Paul gives himself as an example, who in spite of sufferings and persecutions, is unashamed, *“for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day*” (1:12).

2 Tim 2:1-26 -- Knowing that he will soon die, Paul urges upon Timothy the responsibility to pass on the teachings of the faith to others who will be able to teach others also. We must maintain a continuing chain of teaching, from generation to generation. He urges Timothy to suffer hardship, and to discipline himself for the task, as a soldier or an athlete. It is especially important that he learn to “*accurately handle the word of truth*” (2:15). Furthermore, in addition to teaching ability, he must be kind, patient and gentle.

2 Tim 3:1-17 -- Paul lists the vices of the “last days”, which correspond to what is happening in Ephesus. Furthermore, the godly will be persecuted, just as Paul had been persecuted. He then urges him to continue in what he had learned from scripture, for “*all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (3;17-17).

2 Tim 4:1-22 -- He finally urges Timothy to preach the word: to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with patience, and thus fulfill his ministry. Timothy is to carry forward the work, for Paul’s work is done: “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith*” (5:7).

# Hebrews

Background: This letter was written by an anonymous author, probably in the 80s or early 90s AD. There is a tradition that it was written by Paul, but there is considerable evidence against this. As Origen said: “…but who wrote this epistle, in truth, God knows”. However, it is evident from the content that both the author and the recipients were Hellenistic Jews. The statement that *“those from Italy greet you”* (13:24) suggests it was written either from or to Italy.

Theme and purpose: Hebrews is a sermon, as indicated by its rhetorical style, written to some specific unidentified church (13:22-25). It appears that the church had become weary, and was tempted to drift away from the faith, into Jewish beliefs and practices, perhaps to avoid persecutions. This sermon exhorts them to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, to rely solely upon Him as their hope and salvation, especially as they face more severe persecutions in the future. It is a call to persevering endurance, by faith and hope in Christ alone.

The arguments are based on 1) the superiority of God’s revelation in His Son, compared to Mt. Sinai and the prophets; 2) His higher status and power as compared to the angels; 3) His greater authority than Moses; and 4) His priesthood and sacrifice that are superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. The new covenant is altogether better than the old. The old covenant was good and necessary, and continues to be relevant in many ways, but its cultic practices were meant from the beginning to be temporary and preparatory, and have been fulfilled in Christ. There is a continuity in God’s plan, and a continuity of God’s people from the old to the new. But the call to faithfulness is now a faithfulness to the Son, who has fulfilled all things, and is seated “*at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (1:3).

1:1 - 4 -- “*God…in these last days has spoken to us in a Son…”* This is the foundational statement for this sermon. It was recognized that all the promises of the old covenant would be fulfilled “in the last days”, and it is asserted here that these are the last days, and the final fulfillment as well as final revelation are “*in a Son*”. This revelation is not just from another prophet, but it is embodied in the life, death, resurrection and glorification of a Son. This Son is the heir of all things, and the One through whom the world was created; i.e. He is the beginning and the end (purpose) of all things. Verse 3 adds that He is the perfect revelation, so that we should not seek any further or better revelation of God; and He “upholds all things by the word of His power”, so that we should look nowhere else for help, for His is the supreme and total authority and power. This is the conviction that is both necessary and sufficient to undergird faithful endurance, which is the goal of this sermon. When the Son completed His earthly work (purification of sins), He ascended to “*the right hand of the Majesty on high*”. This means His temporary mission as a humble suffering servant is completed, and He now exercises the full authority and power of God. He is now higher than the angels, because He is the exalted Son.

1:5 – 2:9 -- Among the strange teachings of the Hellenistic Jews was a special fascination with and veneration of angels. This was apparently an influence that was threatening to draw these Hebrew Christians away from a pure faith in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. In answer to this, the author quotes several scripture texts to show how the Son is superior to the angels. Verses 1:5-14 begin with a quote from Psalm 2:7 - “*You are My Son, today I have begotten You*”. This section then concludes with a quote from Psalm 110:1 – “*Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet*”. The Lord had never said such things regarding angels. On the contrary, the angels are “*ministering spirits, sent out to render service …*” (1:14). One consequence is that if the word spoken through angels (i.e. from Sinai) demanded obedience, then how much more the word that has been spoken through the Lord, and confirmed by the Spirit. He then quotes Psalm 8:4-6, regarding the authority given to man: “*You have put all things in subjection under His feet*” (2:8). He applies this to Jesus, who was temporarily made to be lower than the angels, but was crowned with glory and honor because of his death.

2:10 – 18 -- It was necessary that the author of our salvation be perfected through sufferings, and it was through death that He achieved victory over death. This was not done for angels, but for the sake of humankind, whom He accepts as His brothers. And, since He was made to be like us, He is able to serve as our high priest. His humanity was the necessary means by which He has been exalted above the angels, and which qualifies Him for priesthood.

3:1 – 4:13 -- Another comparison is made between the authority of the Son and the authority of Moses. The false Jewish-based teachings appealed to the authority of Moses. But it is demonstrated here that Jesus has the authority of the Son over the household, thus surpassing the authority of Moses, who was only a servant. The author then exhorts his hearers to not fall away in unbelief. The children of Israel who were disobedient in the wilderness are an example of the consequences of falling away. That generation perished in the wilderness, and were not allowed to find rest in the promised land. Since we have received a greater revelation, from a greater authority, we have a greater obligation to be faithful. “*Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest…for the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword*” (4:11-12).

4:14 – 10:31 -- In this section, Jesus is presented as the one who gave Himself as the perfect once-for-all sacrifice, and who is now making intercession for us, in the heavenly sanctuary, as our High Priest. His priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek (5:5-6; 7:11-17), which is superior to the Levitical priesthood, in that He is without sin, and He remains forever (7:23-25). His sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices of goats and bulls, and He performs priestly service not in an earthly tabernacle, but in the heavenly tabernacle (9:1-14; 10:1-14). We therefore have a better hope (6:17-20; 7:18-22) and a better covenant (8:6-13), by which we can draw near to God (4:16; 7:19,25). These words of positive encouragement are balanced by warnings of judgment for those who willfully reject or fall away from the faith (6:4-8; 10:26-31).

10:32 – 13:19 -- “*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence*” (10:35). He urges them to “*not…shrink back to destruction*”, but to “*have faith to the preserving of the soul*” (10:39). This is followed, in chapter 11, by a description of faith as “*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (11:1), and examples of faith from God’s people of the old covenant. Their faith was demonstrated by obedience, especially through suffering, even unto death. Given this, we must “*lay aside every encumbrance,…run with endurance the race …, fixing our eyes on Jesus*” (12:1-2). Why must we endure suffering and persecution? It is for discipline (12:7). Quoting from Proverbs 3:11-12, he explains that God deals with us as sons, and His discipline reveals His love. He urges them to pursue peace and sanctification, through moral and godly behavior. The high calling of the new covenant is underscored in 12:18-24. We have come to something much greater than Mt. Sinai. We have come to “*Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem…to the general assembly and church of the firstborn…and to God, the Judge of all…and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood.*” Therefore, they are not to be carried away by strange teachings, but must remain faithful to “*Jesus Christ, [who] is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (13:8).

# First & Second Peter and Jude

Background: Peter wrote his first letter from Rome (“Babylon” in 5:13) to Christians in the province of Asia (1:1). Shortly after, he wrote the second letter to the same churches (2 Peter 3:1). This was probably in the early 60’s, since he was executed during the persecutions by Nero, 64/65 AD. Jude, a brother of James and Jesus, wrote his letter to an unidentified audience, covering similar content as in 2 Peter 2. 1 Peter addresses persecution from outside the church, while 2 Peter and Jude are concerned with false teachings within the church: threats from without and from within.

1 Peter

1:1-12 -- Peter addresses his audience as those who are “*chosen according to the foreknowledge of God… to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood*”. They were “*born again to a living hope...to obtain an imperishable inheritance*.” This establishes their identity: chosen, to serve a purpose, and destined for an eternal inheritance. This self-knowledge can prepare them to endure persecution. Their present trials serve to prove their faith, with the outcome being the salvation of their souls. This fulfills the prophesies of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow”.

1:13-25 -- Peter therefore urges them to: 1) “prepare your minds for action”; 2) fix your hope on Jesus Christ; and 3) as obedient children, be holy, because they were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1:17-19). They are to love one another, because they have been born of the imperishable seed of the word of God. “*The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever*”.

2:1-10 – He then calls upon them to set aside malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander, and to “*long for the pure milk of the word*” (2:1-3). He describes them as living stones, being built up as a temple, where Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. They are “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession*” (2:9). Because God has mercifully chosen them (Hosea 1:10), they are to live a holy life.

2:11 – 3:17 -- Peter then refers to them as “aliens and strangers”, regarding their relationship to this world. They are not of the world, for their true home and citizenship is in heaven. They must therefore abstain from the lusts of this world; and they are to refute slanders by good deeds. Their response to persecution should be submission and meekness, following Jesus’ example. In their relations towards governing authorities, to slave-masters, and to unbelieving husbands, they are to be submissive and harmonious. When challenged by false accusations, they are to make their defense “with gentleness and respect” (3:14-16). And, when they suffer, it must be for doing what is right, not for doing wrong.

3:18-20 -- Such righteous suffering follows the example of Christ, who died for our sins, “*the just for the unjust*” (3:18). Christ was then made alive in the spirit “*in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison…*” (3:19). These were the spirits of those who were disobedient in the days of Noah. The best interpretation is that Jesus’ proclamation in the spirit refers to His speaking through OT prophets (1:11). In this case, the Spirit of Christ made proclamations through Enoch, in accordance with the “Book of the Watchers” (1 Enoch 1-36). In that book, Enoch proclaimed God’s judgment against the “sons of God” who took wives from the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1-4). Enoch declared to them “*you are to be bound in the earth for all the days of eternity*” (1 Enoch 14:5). Peter says that it was the spirit of Christ who made this proclamation, thus demonstrating the authority of Christ over all spiritual powers. He has judged them and bound them in prison; so those who are in Christ have no need to fear any evil spiritual powers (3:14).

3:21-22 -- As a result of this victory, God’s people are saved. In the time of Noah, it was the salvation of Noah’s family in the ark, through the water. In our time, it is also a salvation through water, in baptism. The source of salvation is the resurrection, but it is received during baptism. This is “*not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience*” (3:21). Compare to Hebrews 9:13-14, where the blood of goats and bulls sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, but the blood of Christ will “*cleanse your conscience…*” He thus associates baptism with the application of the blood of Christ.

4:1-19 – Therefore, Peter urges them to live no longer according to the flesh, but for the will of God (4:2,6). And, since the end is near, there is special urgency to live prayerfully, resulting in works of love. Peter then returns to the issue of persecutions, saying they should not be surprising, and they serve a good purpose. When persecuted, we share in the sufferings of Christ, and so we will also share in His glory.

5:1-14 -- This is followed by instructions to the elders: to shepherd the flock according to God’s will, not lording it over, but by being examples. The younger men are to be subject to the elders, and all are to be humble towards one another, under the mighty hand of God, “*casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*” (5:6). Finally, they are to be sober and alert, resisting the devil, confident that in the end “*the God of all grace…will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you*” (5:10).

2 Peter

1:1-15 -- In his greeting, Peter says that God’s grace and peace, and all that pertains to life and godliness, are founded upon a true knowledge of Him. In verses 5-7, he lists a sequence of virtues that they are to develop, starting with faith, and ending in love. These are fruit of the Spirit, but they must apply diligence for this fruit to grow. They will then become useful for God, and they will enter the kingdom.

1:16 - 2:22 -- Peter’s teachings are based on being an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, and upon scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is contrasted to the false teachers, who introduce destructive heresies. God will judge them, just as He had judged the angels in the time of Noah, and Sodom and Gomorrah. He knows how to rescue the godly, and how to punish the unrighteous. These false teachers, characterized by lawless sensuality and greed, had been believers, but have fallen away, as “*a dog returns to its own vomit*” (2:22).

3:1-18 -- Peter says that there will be mockers who will cast doubt about Christ’s return, because it is delayed. However, the Lord is not slow. For Him “*a thousand years is like one day*” (3:8). He is patient, “*not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*” (3:9), but His day of judgment will assuredly come. The present heavens and earth will pass away; and our hope is in the “*new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*” (3:13; Isa 65:17). Therefore, be diligent, and “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (3:18).

Jude -- This letter is an appeal that they “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints*” (3). He defends the apostles’ doctrine against false teachers, addressing a situation similar to that of 2 Peter, reminding them of God’s judgments in the OT. He quotes a prophesy (1 Enoch 1:9) against the false teachers, and reminds them that the apostles had warned that there would be such mockers (18). He then urges them to build upon their faith, and to keep themselves in the love of God, “*waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (20-21).

# James

This is a letter of exhortation from James, brother of Jesus, leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17;15:13). It was probably written in the late 40’s AD, making it the first book of the NT. The letter is addressed to the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad”, probably indicating Jewish Christians outside Palestine. The Greek style suggests that the original letter was later edited by someone well educated in Greek.

The main exhortation is to be doers of the word, perfecting faith with deeds. The letter is in the tradition of wisdom literature, with an emphasis on speech (with special applicability to teachers), and relations between the rich and the poor. The first 4 chapters place these exhortations in the context of trials and temptations, while chapter 5 has reference to the coming day of the Lord.

I. Introduction

1:2-8 -- “*Consider it all joy…when you encounter various trials*”. The challenge to faithfulness, and the process of spiritual growth, are usually in the midst of trials. So the first counsel is to understand their purpose. As had been noted in Hebrews 12:11, “*discipline seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful*”, indicating that trials do not feel joyful. But James says we should nevertheless know and understand that they are a cause for joy, by understanding their purpose and intended outcome: endurance, and “*that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*”. If anyone is lacking in wisdom, they should ask of God, and He will give it. The assumption is that wisdom is always the answer to our needs, or at least it is the most important thing to ask for. The condition is that we ask in faith, which means being single-minded in our trust and reliance upon God.

1:9-11 -- A single-minded person will glory only in God and what comes from God. Therefore the poor and humble will glory in their God-given exaltation, and the rich will glory in humiliation – i.e. how God has delivered them from a false faith in the things that will perish.

1:12-18 -- James returns to the results of perseverance: the crown of life. He then distinguishes temptations from God-given trials. Temptations never come from God, but we are vulnerable to being tempted due to our own desires, resulting in sin and death. It is a deception to think that we can obtain anything good by turning away from God. Every good gift is only from “the Father of lights”, and He gives only good gifts.

II. Be doers of the word

1:19-25 -- They know the above things, but must learn self-control, laying aside moral filth and evil, and humbly receive the word. They must not merely hear the word, but also do what it says.

1:26-27 -- To be truly “religious”, they must control their tongues, visit orphans and widows, and keep from being polluted by the world. Stated more generally, they are to pursue self-control, love, and holiness.

2:1-13 -- An example of “true religion” is to not show partiality for the rich over the poor, which was apparently an issue in the churches receiving this letter. They are rather to fulfill the “royal law”, which is “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*”. If they violate one provision of the law, they are guilty of all. Therefore, if they show partiality, they are subject to judgment by the entire law of liberty.

2:14-26 -- It is useless to claim to have faith if there are no resulting deeds. Such a so-called “faith” is dead. He then gives Abraham and Rahab as examples of faith that resulted in good works. It was their works that demonstrated living faith.

III. Exhortations and instruction to teachers

3:1-12 -- James warns that “*not many of you should become teachers*”, because of the greater responsibility and accountability of those in a position of influence, especially through the things that they say. The tongue is exceedingly difficult to control, and it is capable of great things – like the bit in a horse’s mouth or the rudder of a ship. It is like a small spark that can set off a huge fire. It is a restless evil, as when someone blesses God, yet curses men, made in the likeness of God. Such duplicity is another example of false religion.

3:13-18 -- If someone claims to be wise, they should show it by good deeds of gentleness. Selfish ambition comes from earthly wisdom, but “*the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits...*”

4:1-6 -- The strife of worldly wisdom arises from desires and covetousness. One reason they don’t receive is because they don’t ask; another reason is that they ask with selfish motives. The root problem is spiritual adultery: loving the world instead of God. But He gives us grace to overcome this, for those who are humble.

4:7-10 -- The answer, therefore, is to submit to God, and to resist the devil. Draw near to God, and He will come near to you. The way to draw near is to repent, in humility, washing your hands (turning away from evil deeds), and purifying your hearts, to become single-minded in your love for God.

4:11-16 -- A specific item of such repentance is to not slander one another. And an example of humility before God is to acknowledge His sovereignty. We have hardly any knowledge or control over the future, and all of our plans should be subject to His will.

IV. Patiently endure until the coming of the Lord

5:1-6 -- The rich are told to weep, for they will lose all their treasures, and they shall be judged. These are non-believers who have been oppressing the Christians (see 2:6).

5:7-12 -- Those who place their hope in the coming of the Lord are told to be patient. He asks them to consider the prophets as examples of suffering and patience, and to consider the perseverance of Job and what the Lord did for him.

5:13-18 -- A single-minded faith and devotion to the Lord means that if we suffer, we should turn to Him in prayer; if we are blessed, we should offer Him praise. As a more specific example, if someone is gravely ill (bed-ridden), he should ask the elders (representing the church) to pray for him. The prayer of faith - i.e. single-minded, with right motives (1:6-8;4:3) - will save the person, and his sins will be forgiven. More generally, Christians should confess sins to one another and pray for one another, to be healed. The saving and healing are spiritual as well as physical. The effectiveness of prayer is demonstrated by the example of Elijah, who prayed for a drought, and later for the drought to end.

5:19-20 -- If you lead someone to repent, you will save his soul from death. This is a natural follow-on from the previous verses on praying with those who confess their sins.

In summary, James calls us to endurance, by a single-minded, practical, living faith.

**Go in Peace**



**Quotes from Ben Sira**

**“*Do not say, ‘It was the Lord’s doing that I fell away’; for he does not do what he hates. Do not say, ‘It was he who led me astray’ ” -* 14:11-12**

**“*Be quick to hear, but deliberate in answering. If you know what to say, answer your neighbor; but if not, put your hand over your mouth. Honor and dishonor come from speaking, and the tongue of mortals may be their downfall.” -* 5:11-13**

# Letters of John

The author of these three letters identifies himself, in second and third John, simply as “the elder”. But there is strong attestation from the early church fathers that they were written by John the apostle, who had also written the gospel, and would later write Revelation. According to early tradition, after the Jewish insurrection of 66 AD, John left Jerusalem and moved to Ephesus, where he assumed leadership of the churches of that region. He wrote the gospel about 85-90 AD to oppose false teachings about the identity of Jesus. The first letter may have been written shortly afterwards, to address divisions in one of the churches arising from those teachings. The second and third letters deal more specifically with the same issues.

1 John

1:1-4 – In this introduction, John identifies the one whom he proclaims: what we have heard, seen, touched – the Word of Life – i.e. the incarnate Son of God. This parallels the prologue of John’s gospel (John 1:1-5,14). He proclaims this Word of Life so that they may have fellowship with one another, based on their fellowship with the Father and the Son. And he is writing this letter “so that our joy may be made complete”, i.e. to fulfill his God-given purpose and hope by leading his people to full maturity.

1:5 - 2:2 — John teaches a clear-cut moral dualism, between light and darkness. God is purely light, and there is no darkness in Him. It is therefore a lie to claim fellowship with God if one walks in darkness. He urges the alternative: to walk in the light, so that we can have fellowship, both with God, and with one another. Because of this fellowship, Jesus’ blood cleanses us from all sin. Anyone who denies having sin is a liar; but when we confess our sins, He will forgive us and cleanse us (1:7-10).

2:3 - 17 — The way to know that we have fellowship with God, is by our obedience (keeping His commandments). To abide in Him is to walk as He walked. The commandment is an old commandment, but it is also a new commandment (see John 13:34-35; 15:12-17). To love one another was part of the old covenant law. But under the new covenant we are to love with a greater depth and intimacy, because we know Jesus who gave his life for us, and we have been adopted into His family, as children of God and brothers and sisters of one another. To walk in this special family-fellowship is evidence of abiding in the Light. He makes this appeal to people at three levels of maturity, who on the basis of their knowledge and their liberation from the power of sin, are equipped and enabled to respond to John’s exhortations.

2:18 - 28 — They had previously been warned that antichrist would come, and he says that already many antichrists have appeared, who have left the church. They have opposed Christ, denying that He has come in the flesh, and thereby denying that Jesus is the Christ. Such false teachers were never truly part of the fellowship. They are not to be deceived or discouraged by these false teachers. If they abide in Christ, in accordance with their anointing (i.e. original reception of Christ), then they have eternal life.

2:29 - 3:10 -- John assures them that they are children of God, if they practice righteousness. However, they are not yet perfected, but rather they live in the hope of being made perfect when He returns. They will then behold Him, and become like Him. Meanwhile, we are purified by focusing on this hope. On the other hand, those who practice sin and lawlessness do not abide in Him, and are not born of God. Anyone who does not practice righteousness, or who does not love his brother, is not of God.

3:11 - 24 — We know that we have life and are of the truth if we love our brothers. Those who do not love are of the evil one, and abide in death. Jesus showed the meaning of love when He laid down His life for us. We are therefore to do the same for others: to “*not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth*” (3:18). The commandment is “*that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another*” (3:23). By this, we know that He abides in us.

4:1-6 — Do not believe every spirit, but test them. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; every spirit that denies this is the spirit of antichrist.

4:7- 5:5 — John continues with exhortations to love. Love is not based on our initiative, but God’s: He first loved us, by sending his Son (4:10,19). God is love, so to abide in love is to abide in God (4:16). When perfected in love, they can have confidence in the day of judgment, without fear (4:17-18). They have also overcome the world, because they are born of God, and by their faith (5:4-5; John 16:33).

5:6-15 — Jesus Christ came not only by water, but by water and blood. “*There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood*” (5:7-8; John 19:34). The intent here may be to refute the false teaching that the human Jesus received the eternal Christ when baptized (of the water), but that the spirit of Christ departed before his death on the cross (shedding blood). What John contends is that the eternal Son of God remained in the flesh through death. Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, died on the cross; and the Spirit testifies to this. Because of this, God gives us eternal life, in the Son (5:11-12), and God hears our requests for anything according to His will (5:14-15).

5:16-17 - With this confidence, we should pray for brothers who commit sins “not unto death”. Sins “unto death” and “not unto death” correspond to two categories of sin: 1) willful sins, in which a person persistently refuses to accept correction and refuses to repent; 2) “stumbling” sins, where the person has a “heart of flesh”, receptive to correction, and capable of repentance. These two categories are well defined in the OT (Lev. 4:22,27;5:1; Numbers 15:22-24,27-31; Deut. 17:12-13). The first type is addressed in Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-27, and Matt 22:31-32 (blasphemy against the Spirit). Under the old covenant, such sinners were cut off, excluded from access to God and atonement. Christians are not in this category (1 John 3:4-10). Sins of the second category are the kinds of sins that Christians continue to commit, and must confess (1 John 1:8-2:2). When they confess, they are covered by Christ’s blood, and are forgiven. John does not forbid praying for those who “sin unto death”, but we are not specifically instructed to pray for them; we should give priority to others who are more likely to respond.

5:18-21 – Those who are born of God, who abide in Christ, are protected from the evil one. It is therefore of utmost importance to not fall away from Him and turn to any other god: “*guard yourselves from idols*.”

2 John -- In this letter, to an unknown church, John repeats the exhortation to keep the new commandment of love. He also warns against the false teachers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ in the flesh, who are the antichrist (7). They must not even receive anyone who so teaches, lest they lose their reward.

3 John -- This letter is written to Gaius, whom John commends for “walking in truth”, and for showing hospitality to “fellow workers in the truth”. On the other hand, Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, refuses to show such hospitality, and even forbids others to do so, casting them out of the church. In these matters, John encourages Gaius to continue to imitate what is good, not what is evil.

**Life in the Son**

**Accept Apostles’ Doctrine**

**Faith**

**Obedience**

**Love**

**Fellowship with Son & Father**

**Fellowship with One Another**

**Forgiveness, Cleansing**

**Eternal Life**

# Revelation, Chapters 1 -12

This book was written by the apostle John to seven churches in “Asia”, about 95 AD. The Greek title, “apocalypse”, means an unveiling, or revelation. It is a revelation “of Jesus Christ”, which means “from Jesus Christ”. It is written as a letter, but its main body is a form of prophecy in the tradition of Jewish “apocalyptic” literature. Examples of this genre from the Old Testament are found particularly in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah, which provide much of the symbolic imagery in Revelation.

These churches had been experiencing persecution both from the Jews and from Rome, and many of them had problems of weakening faith, false teachings, and immorality. The purpose of the letter is to urge some of them to repent, others to remain faithful, and for all to be prepared for increased persecution and tribulations yet to come, to persevere in the hope of final victory. The main theme is that their experiences in the world are ultimately driven by the spiritual warfare between Jesus Christ and Satan. In this war, the church must remain faithful to Christ, and not defect to the enemy.

Revelation has been interpreted in several different ways: as being fulfilled 1) during the generation of the original audience (preterist); 2) over the course of history, with each section corresponding to a particular period of history (historicist); 3) mostly at some time in the future (futurist); 4) in various ways throughout all history (symbolic-idealist). The approach taken here is the last one: that it symbolically portrays the spiritual warfare that continues throughout the church age. Chapters 5 – 20 depict concurrent events, in various perspectives and emphases, which take place throughout history.

1:1-8 -- This revelation was “signified” to John, i.e. using symbolic “signs”; it pertains primarily to things that shall soon take place; and blessed are those who heed, “for the time is near”. The message is from God, from the Spirit and from Jesus Christ, who is identified as the ruler of kings, who has made us to be a kingdom, and who is “coming with the clouds” (the warrior executing judgment). The Lord God identifies Himself as the Alpha and the Omega “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (1:8). There can be no question that He will win the war.

1:9-20 -- John was exiled on Patmos when he received these visions, and was instructed to write it down and send it to seven churches in Asia. The voice speaking to him was the Son of Man, clothed as a high priest, in the midst of seven lampstands, which represent the seven churches. The symbolism of the number 7 indicates that these churches are representative of all churches, and that the individual messages in chapters 2 and 3 have universal application to the entire church throughout history.

2:1 – 3:22 -- A similar formula is used in each of the 7 messages: a description of Jesus Christ, commendation for what they have done right, rebuke for what they have done wrong, an appeal to repent and/or remain faithful, and a promise for those who overcome. Ephesus is commended for opposing false teachings, but rebuked for leaving “your first love”. Smyrna is commended for their faithfulness under poverty and persecution. Pergamum is faithful, but they tolerate false teachings that permit idolatry and immorality. Thyatira is commended for good deeds, but they also tolerate idolatry and immorality. Sardis is almost spiritually dead, and is urged to wake up and repent. Philadelphia has been faithful in the face of Jewish persecution, and is assured of vindication. Laodicea, who think they are rich, are in fact poor. They are lukewarm, and Jesus will spit them out of His mouth if they do not repent. “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock*” (3:19).

4:1-11 – In this vision (compare Ezekiel 1), God is seated in splendor on his throne. He is worshipped by four living creatures (representing all creation) and by 24 elders (representing all of God’s people), because “*You created all things, because of Your will they existed, and were created*.” (4:11).

5:1-14 – The One on the throne has a 7-sealed book, which no one was worthy to open except “the Lion from the tribe of Judah” who “*has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals*” (5:5). This book is a will and testament, and the opening of the seals to read the book corresponds to laying claim to the inheritance. That is why there is such great joy that One was found Who is worthy: “*Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals, for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” (5:9). And then the multitude of angels sang out: “*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*.” (5:12). The remainder of Revelation reveals the process by which He lays claims to this inheritance.

6:1-17 – The first four seals are the “four horsemen of the apocalypse”. The first, on a white horse, is Christ, going forth to conquer. He is then followed by war, famine and death. This is how the enemy fights back; these are the trials that God’s people must endure, as they engage in the warfare of the present age. Under the fifth seal, the martyrs ask how long this must last. The answer is to wait until the full number of martyred saints is complete. The sixth seal is the Lord’s counter-attack, deposing the spiritual powers and principalities, and terrorizing the kings of the earth.

7:1-17 -- In this vision, it is shown that God’s people, represented as a remnant of 144,000 (12x12x1,000), will be spiritually protected while on earth. The next vision, in heaven, shows God’s people after their deliverance – clothed in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Their destiny is to dwell with God in His temple forever.

8:1-13 -- When the seventh seal is opened, we see seven angles with trumpets. In answer to the prayers of the saints, these angels then sound their trumpets, resulting in catastrophic events intended to bring unbelievers to repentance. The first four are directed against nature: earth and its vegetation, the sea, fresh waters, and heavenly bodies.

9:1-21 – The fifth trumpet brings forth locusts, from the abyss. These are Satan’s angels – demons - who bring affliction upon those who are of the world (9:4). The sixth trumpet lets loose armies of horsemen, representing the ravages of human warfare. In spite of all this, the survivors still did not repent.

10:1-11 – An angel declares that during the sound of the 7th trumpet, there will be no more delay (of judgment) – that the mystery of God will be finished. The angel gave John a book to eat, which was sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the stomach (see Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). It is “sweet” to see the fulfillment of His kingdom, but it is “bitter” to see the destiny of the lost.

11:1-19 -- The temple of God is measured, establishing the boundary between the inner and outer courts, indicating God’s protection of His people while the people of the world are judged. The next vision is of two witnesses, which represents the church. Their mission and their destiny parallels that of Christ. They proclaim the gospel, with power, they are persecuted and killed, but they rise again from the dead.

12:1-17 -- This is another vision of the church. The woman (Israel) gives birth to a child (Jesus), whom the dragon (Satan) seeks to destroy. In the heavenly warfare, Satan is cast down to the earth (see John 12:31), and God’s people “*overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb...*” (12:11). After this, the dragon persecutes the woman, and then “*went off to make war with the rest of her children*”, i.e. to wage war against the church. This is the spiritual background for the warfare in which the church is presently engaged.

**Outline**

**Introduction (1:1-20)**

**Letters to Churches (2:1 - 3:22)**

**Seven Seals (4:1 - 8:1)**

**Seven Trumpets (8:2 – 11:19)**

**Deeper Conflict (12:1 – 14:20)**

**Seven Bowls (15:1 – 16:21)**

**Final Judgment (17:1 – 21:8)**

**Glorified Church (21:9 – 22:5)**

**New creation**

**Things that will be**

**Things that are**

**Conclusion (22:6 – 21)**

**Seven Churches**



**Series of Sevens**

**Seven Seals**

**Seven Bowls**

**Seven Trumpets**

**Concurrent Events, throughout all History**

**Executing the Will**

**Judgment**

**Call to Repentance**

# Revelation, Chapters 13 -22

13:1-4 -- John sees a beast rising up out of the sea, with similarities to the vision of Daniel 7:3-8,19-27. Daniel’s fourth beast corresponds to this beast of Revelation 13 and 17. The significance of coming out of the sea is that it arises from the realm of “chaos”, the peoples who are of the world (see 17:15), but his power and authority are from the dragon (i.e. Satan). One of the heads was fatally wounded, but was later healed (see also 13:12). This is developed further in 17:8-11.

13:5-10 -- This beast has authority for 42 months (13:5, compare 11:2,3; 12:6), during which he blasphemes God, and wages war against the saints. The 42 months are the “time, times and half time” of Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14. The literal, quantitative interpretation is 3 ½ years. But it is better to apply a qualitative interpretation: it is a time interval that 1) is ordained by God (a “time” or “season”); 2) seems too long, from the perspective of the saints (“times”); and 3) is abruptly cut off while the oppressor is at the height of power (“half”, or “divided”). It is a time of tribulation that extends throughout the entire church age. During this time, the kingdoms of the world have power to persecute the church, but the church is spiritually protected (11:2-3; 12:6,13-14).

13:11-18 -- Another beast arises from the earth, performing signs to deceive people, and forcing them to worship the first beast. This refers to the cult of emperor worship, which was enforced by the provincial council in Asia. Those who offered incense to Caesar, acknowledging him as God, were accepted in the trade guilds. The number of the beast, 666, is to be “calculated”, meaning to sum the numerical values of the letters in his name. The most widely held view is that it is ‘Nero Caesar’, which in Hebrew adds up to 666.

14:1-20 -- John then sees the Lamb, on Mt. Zion, with the 144,000 (see 7:4-8). Their “new song”, celebrating victory, is a song of thanksgiving for redemption – something only they could sing. The meaning of their chastity is that they have not worshiped false gods (e.g. Caesar). An angel, with the gospel, then warns all peoples to fear God, for judgment is at hand. Another angel announces the fall of Babylon (Rome), and a third angel proclaims judgment upon all who worship the beast. The Son of Man then appears on a cloud and reaps the world with a sickle. Judgment is also executed by an angel, who gathers grapes and throws them into the wine press of the wrath of God (see Joel 3:13).

15:1- 16:21 -- Seven angels come forth from the temple in heaven, and they are given seven bowls full of the wrath of God. The first four are poured out upon the earth, into the sea, into the rivers, and upon the sun. These are similar to the plagues upon Egypt in Exodus. The fifth was poured onto the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened. The sixth bowl was poured onto the Euphrates, to open the way for invading armies from the east. These armies, inspired by deceiving demons, assemble at Har-Magedon to war against God. This is the place of battle mentioned in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:19-21), and it would be associated with the threat posed by the Parthians, on the empire’s eastern frontier. With the seventh plague, there was a great earthquake, Babylon and all other great cities fall, islands flee, and “mountains were not found”. This is judgment against all institutions of human civilization.

17:1-18 -- An angel then shows John the judgment against Babylon, the great harlot, seated upon the beast. This is the city of Rome (17:18), supported by the kings of the empire, guilty of idolatries and of shedding the blood of the saints. The seven heads of the beast represent both the seven mountains of Rome, and seven successive kings. A likely interpretation is that these are the emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and Titus. The fifth one, Nero, is the one who “*was and is not and will come*” (17:8,11). It was earlier said that he had a fatal wound that was healed (13:3,12). This refers to the “Nero Redivivus” legend, which held that Nero, who had committed suicide in 68 AD, was actually still alive, and gathering an army in Parthia for a future invasion. This myth is transformed here to say that the spirit of Nero will possess the emperor Domitian, who is the 8th king (17:11). The 10 horns are later kings who will wage war against the Lamb, and who will also destroy the harlot (Babylon).

18:1-24 -- This chapter focuses upon Babylon: the dwelling place of demons and immorality, and the source of wealth for the kings of the earth. Because of this “*her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire*” (18:8). This is followed up with a lament from the merchants of the earth. Compare Isaiah 13.

19:1-21 -- In response to this judgment, a great multitude in heaven shouts “Hallelujah!”. They rejoice and give praise, for the Lord God reigns, and because it is now time for the marriage of the Lamb to His bride. John then sees the Word of God on a white horse leading the armies of heaven, going forth to strike down the nations. The beast and the false prophet were seized and cast into the lake of fire, and all their followers were slain.

20:1-10 --This vision presents the entire drama from a different perspective, focusing primarily upon the dragon. One should interpret this highly symbolic vision in a way that is fully consistent with all other scripture, without introducing radically new doctrines. The 1,000 years represents the entire church age, in which we are reigning with Christ. Satan is “bound”, in that he is not allowed to spiritually harm God’s people (we are sealed, for protection), and his deceptions are restrained, so that people will be able to receive the gospel. The first resurrection is the gift of eternal life received at baptism. Satan is then “released” so that he can deceive those who reject the gospel - those whose hearts are hardened - for whom nothing remains but judgment. So they are handed over to Satan, who drives them into the war that they will lose. For some people, Satan is bound; for others, he is loosed; and the two situations occur simultaneously throughout this age.

20:11-15 -- The dead are now judged before the throne of God, according to their deeds. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, along with those whose names are not found in the book of life. The fact that the entities “Death and Hades” are thrown into this fire, indicates it is figurative: a metaphor for permanent destruction.

21:1 - 22:5 -- Our eternal destiny is not on this earth, nor is it in the present heavens. It is rather in a new creation. The observation that there is no more sea means that all chaos and evil are eliminated. Our dwelling place will be a Holy City, the bride of Christ, where we shall dwell with God. “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.*” This holy city is precious, imperishable and perfect: a suitable dwelling place for God. The new creation also restores all the blessings of the garden of Eden - a river of life, a tree of life - and there is no more curse and no more darkness of night.

22:6-21 -- The conclusion is that He is coming quickly, and those who heed these words shall be blessed (22:7). Jesus then reinforces the need to repent: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city*” (22:14), and He offers the invitation: “*let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost*” (22:17). And scripture closes with John’s final response, the frequent prayer of the early church:

“*Come, Lord Jesus*”.

**Nero**

* **Seven (and eighth) heads:**
  1. **Augustus**
  2. **Tiberius**
  3. **Caligula**
  4. **Claudius**
  5. **Nero**
  6. **Vespasian**
  7. **Titus**
  8. **Domitian**

**redivivus**

**Number of his name:**

**Nero Caesar in Hebrew:**

**נרון קסר‎**

**200+60+100+50+6+200+50 = 666**