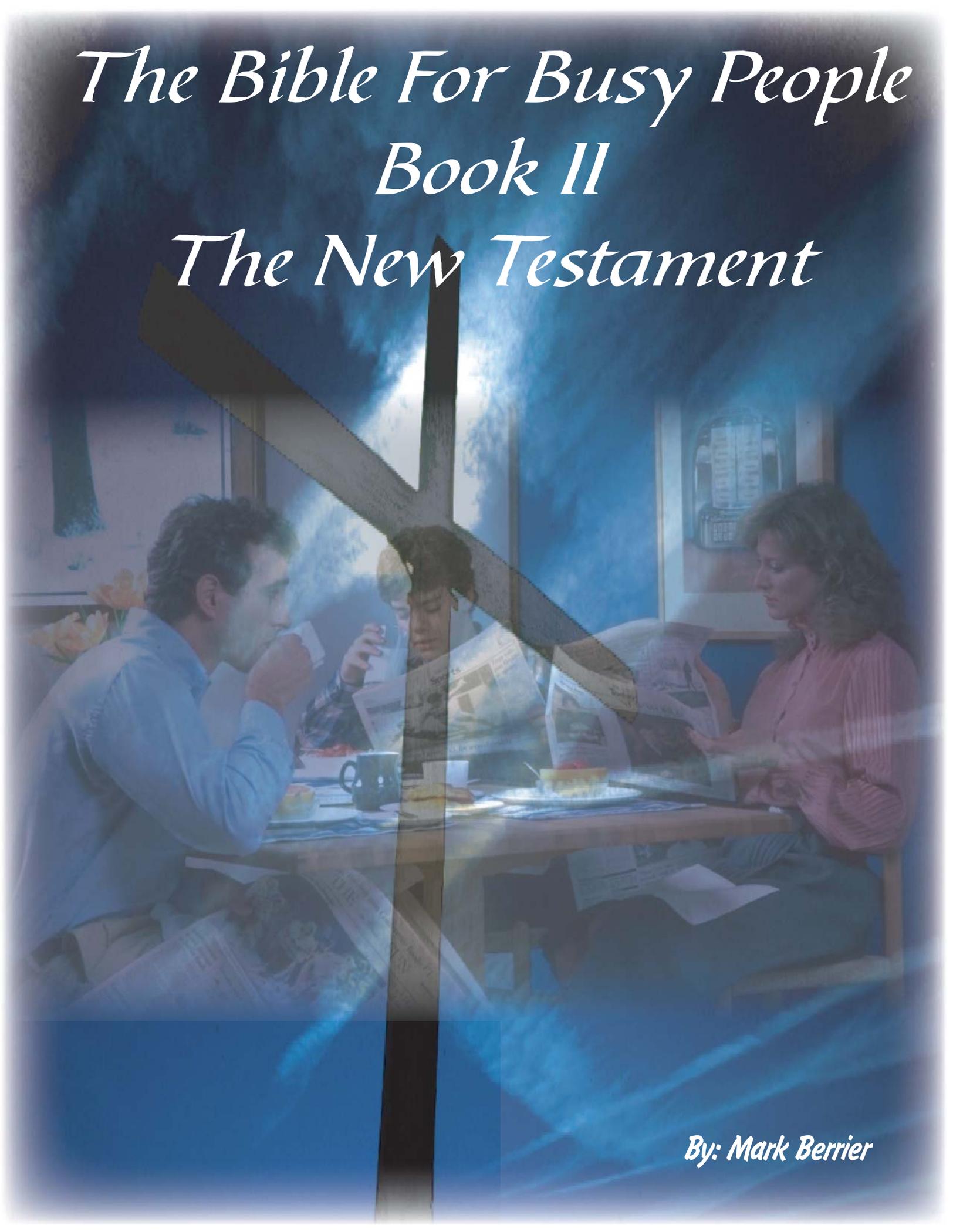


The Bible For Busy People
Book II
The New Testament



By: Mark Berrier

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Thank You...

to Paula, my wife of 26 years, a gift from God. Without her love, encouragement, and commitment to me, this book would not exist.

to my parents, who first showed me God.

to Larry Cawood, brother, friend, elder. Without his hard work this book would not exist.

to Bobby Stephens for her computer work.

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to Dallas Christian College, its faculty and administration, who gave me the freedom to think, speak, and write.

to Valley View Church for their forgiveness and support.

to Harold Hampton, whose last words to me were, "Mark, teach them Jesus!"

The Plan of This Book

The following order is used in the chapters of this book:

1. A short summary of each book, beginning with Genesis;
2. A brief outline of each book;
3. A brief, clear, simple overview of each *Old Testament* book, including important or best-known key verses that help us to understand that book;
4. Exciting points of interest or special studies that apply to us as we grow to be like Jesus.

Helps in reading this book:

1. The first time an unusual word or name appears in the book an asterisk or star (*) is placed after it. These words are in the glossary at the back of the book. For example, asterisk is a word you can look up in the glossary.
2. As you read, you will sometimes see †. This tells you about a special study. These special studies are at the end of each chapter. They are marked 1, 2, etc. These special studies are called "Lessons from ..."
3. Scriptures are listed in the order of book, chapter, and verse. For example, Genesis 1:1 means the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1.
4. Sometimes an "f" or "ff" follows the book, chapter, and verse. If you see "f," it means one verse following; if you see "ff" it means more verses following. For example, Genesis 1:1f means verses 1 and 2; Genesis 1:1ff means more than two verses.

Preface

When people want to know Jesus Christ, they usually will go to church. They also become serious about studying the Bible. But this often doesn't help. Most sermons and Bible classes take for granted that people *already* know a lot about the Bible. When a friend of mine first became a Christian*, he kept hearing about Paul from his teachers and pastors*. He thought Paul must be another man in his church. He didn't know the Paul they talked about lived and served Jesus nearly 2,000 years ago. Nor did he know that this Paul wrote a lot of the Bible. My friend had never even read the Bible, let alone understood it!

So where should I start in a book like this? Let me first answer four questions:

1. What is the Bible?
2. What is the *Old Testament*?
3. What is the *New Testament*?
4. What is the *Gospel*?

The answers to these should give you a place to start from. Then you can begin your fascinating journey through the Bible.

1. ***What is the Bible?*** The Bible is a large book; in fact, it is a library of 66 books. It was written by at least 40 authors over a period of 1600 years. It was written in three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Bible is written to help bring us back to God.
2. ***What is the Old Testament?*** The *Old Testament** is the first 39 books of the Bible. It was first written in Hebrew and Aramaic. It tells the story of God creating the world, mankind's sin*, and God's actions to help us come back to him. The *Old Testament*

* Indicates words found in glossary.

contains *two major acts of God* after creation and sin: 1) God called one man, Abraham, to worship and obey him, and 2) God called one nation, Israel, to worship and obey him. Israel was to prepare for God's Son, who would come later to save all people. The one man, Abraham, began a family who finally became the great nation of Israel. Israel prepared the world for the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The *Old Testament* was put together in three parts: law, prophets, and writings; so the books are not in order like a history book.

3. **What is the New Testament?** The *New Testament** scriptures contain the story of *God's greatest work*—the life, death, and resurrection* of his Son, Jesus Christ. The first four books of the *New Testament* scriptures tell Jesus' story; the other twenty-three books tell what Jesus' story means to us. The first four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are like a life story; the next book, Acts, tells of the start and growth of the early church; but the last twenty-two books were written to different people and churches to help them live as Christians, to live for Jesus.

The *New Testament* is actually our personal relationship with Jesus. (See II Corinthians 3 in the *New Testament* and Jeremiah 31:31-33 in the *Old Testament*.) The *New Testament* scriptures guide us in our relationship with Jesus as we grow up to become like him.

4. **What is the Gospel?** The Gospel is *good news*: God has actually come into our world. He came into our time and space, in our history. He lived bodily in Jesus his son. After a sinless life, Jesus was murdered on the cross. He is the perfect sacrifice* to take away our sins*. He was taken down dead from the cross and was buried. He was raised on the third day to live forever to make us right with God. After Jesus' resurrection, He showed He was alive for many days. In the sight of His followers, He went up into heaven. Now He sits on the throne with God and pleads with God for us, so we are saved from hell. One day He will return. He will change us to be like Himself and take us home with Him. This is the Gospel; this is what Christians believe. Most of it is already done. We wait on the last part—Jesus' return. He is already our Savior; now let's let Him be our Lord, our Boss! We have been saved by what *He* has done; now, let's live it!

To the Reader:

Just as the Bible is different from other books, so our faith in God is different from all other religions of the world. *All* other religions are based on the thinking or private meditations of a man or men. Other religious writings contain these thoughts. NOT SO THE BIBLE. The Bible may contain men's thoughts, but faith is not based on thoughts or words. Our faith is based in history and in *acts*. Once an *act* is completed, it becomes a *fact* which nothing can ever change. So our faith is based in acts of history, not some human being's thoughts or ideas.

Teachings, thoughts, meditations may come and go, but the historical *facts* recorded in the Bible can never change! As in a court of law, *facts* make the case. As in a court of law, our faith is based on eyewitness accounts. Besides this, we have the miracle of predictions coming true, of fulfilled prophecies*. The Bible is believable, not because it is the thinking of a man, but because it is a record of facts which were seen and done out in the open. These facts are the work of God. There is, however, one WARNING:

A Warning to the Reader:

There is one thing you *must* avoid. You should not trust any group who believes that they alone have the truth. Any group who listens to only one leader or teacher, or any group who claims to be the only "true church," is dangerous. This is one of the marks of a *cult*—a group of people who allow no individual thinking, no freedom, and no differences of opinion. Avoid such groups. Instead, listen to more than one teacher; read everything you can. Then make your own decision to commit your life to Christ, totally, and find a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church. Never stop studying and growing in your relationship with Christ; the Christian who stops growing dies. And always test what you hear, comparing it to what the Bible actually says. God's Holy Spirit, who lives in every Christian, will give you understanding.

The Bible for Busy People

Book II: The New Testament

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The Bible for Busy People: Book II

THE NEW TESTAMENT

SUMMARY OF TIME BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

In our Bibles there is a break between the OT and the NT. This break was over 400 years long. During that time many things had happened:

1. The Jews had returned from exile* to their homeland. They had rebuilt Jerusalem, its temple and its protecting walls. (King Herod the Great also added to the walls and expanded the temple buildings.)
2. Alexander the Great conquered the world. He had spread the Greek language and culture all over, so Greek was spoken everywhere.¹
3. Rome had taken over Alexander's kingdom. The Romans had built roads and aqueducts* all over the then known world.
4. The Jews fought many wars with their enemies. They had become part of the Roman Empire in 63 B. C., but they still had their temple and religion in Jerusalem.
5. The Pharisees* came into control of the Jews' religion. The people believed in angels, the resurrection, and the spirit world. The Jews were ready for Messiah (Jesus Christ) to come.

¹ The story of much of this era is found in I Maccabees 1-12 in the Apocrypha.* It also appears in some of the writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote about A. D. 90 or so.

FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

After the prophet Malachi closed his book, the OT ended. Most of our Bibles have nothing written in them between the Old and New Testament scriptures. The 400 years between the testaments are called the “silent years.” God did not speak through any real prophet during this time. But much was written and much was done.¹

Daniel 2 and 7 in the OT had prepared the Jews for the “silent years” between the Old and New Testament. Daniel had said that there would be four special kingdoms. Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome were the four great kingdoms. Sure enough, after Babylon fell, a great Persian ruler named Cyrus freed all slave nations that Babylon had conquered.² One of these slave nations was Israel. They returned (See Ezra and Nehemiah in the OT.) and rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple.

Some half-breed Jews came back to Palestine, but they were not accepted by the full-blooded Jews. These hated half-breeds settled in central Palestine in an area called Samaria. These Samaritans* set up a different temple and worshiped the God of Israel in their own way. So the full-blooded Jews hated the Samaritans and would have nothing to do with them.

Next came Alexander the Great. He was a Greek. He began to gather an army about 335 B. C. His army marched against the Persian Empire. Even though Alexander’s army was greatly outnumbered, he was able to defeat the Persians. In fact, at the battle of Arbela, Alexander destroyed Persia’s army of one million soldiers. He marched from there through Palestine. The Jews did not resist him, because they knew Daniel’s prophecies. They opened the gates of Jerusalem and let Alexander and his army camp there. So Alexander gave the Jews freedom and peace. Alexander conquered the whole known world and then died, still young. His four generals took over his empire.

One general was a man named Ptolemy. He became ruler of Egypt and southern Palestine, the area called Judea (or Judah in the OT). General Ptolomy was kind to the Jews. So the Jews worshiped freely and in peace for over 100 years.

Another general of Alexander’s, named Seleucus, got control of Syria, at the north edge of Palestine. In 198 B. C., one of the later rulers of Syria, named Antiochus the Great, got control of the Jews. Antiochus the Great left things as they were. But the next ruler of Syria was an evil man, also called Antiochus. This man believed he was a god, so he called himself “Epiphanes,” which means, “the appearing of a god.” Antiochus Epiphanes conquered the Jews and, beginning in 168 B. C., he tried to destroy their religion and their faith in God. He robbed the temple of all its gold and silver, and he killed all the Jews who tried to stop him. In the temple he sacrificed a pig on God’s altar of incense.* The sacrifice of the pig was to his false Roman god, Jupiter. This was *horrible* to the

¹ See the Glossary note on the Apocrypha at the back of this book.

² See the Glossary note on the Exile at the back of this book. Isaiah even predicted Cyrus by name long before Cyrus was born. See Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1.

Jews! Antiochus Ephipanes forced the Jews to eat pork, which the Jews considered a sin. (See Leviticus 11:7 in the OT.) He would not let them offer sacrifices to God, and he tried to stop all Jewish customs, even circumcision.

Finally the Jews had had enough! The Syrians tried to force one Jewish priest to sacrifice a pig in the little town of Modin, 15 miles west of Jerusalem. This priest, Mattathias Maccabeus, refused, and he killed a Syrian and an evil Jew. Then he ran for the hills. He and his sons were the Maccabees.* They led a long revolt against Syria, and were finally able to get free of Syria. Antiochus Epiphanes (the Jews called him, "Antiochus the Pig") finally died. So, in 164 B. C., the Maccabean family made the temple holy to God again.¹ From that time on, the Jews' worship in Jerusalem was almost back to normal. But the Sadducees,* who rejected the spirit world, were in power. These Jews believed only in Moses and the first five books of the OT.

After this the Pharisees came to power in Jerusalem. They were a very religious group who believed in the spirit world. They believed in God, Satan, angels, and even resurrection from the dead. They mistreated the Sadducees, as the Sadducees had done to them. The Pharisees believed in the whole OT.

During this time, the Roman Empire was growing in power. In 63 B. C. the Roman general, Pompey, conquered Jerusalem. The Romans respected all religions, so Pompey did not destroy the temple. Finally Herod came from Rome to be ruler over Judea and Jerusalem. He was the ruler there when Jesus was born.

¹ This was called Chanukah (or Hanukkah, as in "Happy Hanukkah"), meaning *dedication*. This became the Jewish holiday that is celebrated around Christmas time. It is an 8-day feast because their great, golden, 7-prong lamp burned for eight days, even though there was enough oil for only one day. At least, that is how the story goes.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Like the OT, the NT has three parts. They are *Gospels*, *History* and *Letters*. The New Testament opens with four Gospels.* They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They give us a good picture of Jesus' life. But each Gospel is different. Each one is unlike the other three. All of them have the story of Jesus' ministry, his death, burial and resurrection. Matthew and Luke have different parts of his birth story. Matthew, Mark and Luke are often similar, but John is very different from them. All four tell Jesus' life story in their own way.

After the Gospels comes History—the early history of the church called "The Book of Acts." It is called "Acts" because it tells of many things done by some of the apostles.* Usually this book of history is called "The Acts of the Apostles." Maybe a better title would be "Acts of the Holy Spirit," or "Acts of God," or even "Some of the Acts of Some of the Apostles." Anyway, it tells us about the last words of Jesus before he went to heaven, the beginning of the church and the spread of the Gospel. The Gospel, God's good news about Jesus, spread from Jerusalem into the whole world. And it's still spreading.

After Acts are twenty-two letters written mainly by the Apostles. Some of the letters were sent to churches. Others were sent to individual Christians. These letters are like love letters God wrote to us. They are different from each other, but they all explain how we are to live. Because we believe in Jesus, we can read and understand these letters. They will help us live as Jesus wants us to. These letters are also called "Epistles."*

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

Matthew was a tax collector, a very rich man in the first century. Because of his business he would have known shorthand,* so he could write down Jesus' words in detail. Matthew's Jewish name is Levi. The book of Matthew was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. (See Matt. 27:8 and 28:15.) Jews who were believers in Jesus or Jews who were thinking about becoming believers should read Matthew. Matthew's main theme was to show us that Jesus is the Messiah (or Christ);¹ Jesus alone fulfills the promises of the OT. He will establish God's kingdom. When a Jew believes in Jesus, it does not mean he stops being a Jew; rather, he becomes a completed Jew, a believer in the true Messiah.

OUTLINE

- A. Jesus' family tree and birth (1:1-2:23)
- B. Ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus' baptism and temptation (3:1-4:11)
- C. Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:12-18:35)
- D. Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (19:1-20:34)
- E. Jesus' last week and death on the cross (21:1-27:66)
- F. Jesus' resurrection, appearances and the great commission (28:1-20)

OVERVIEW

We are not usually very interested in our family history, but the Jews were always concerned about their parents, grandparents and all their family tree. Since Matthew is writing to Jews, he spends the first 17 verses on Jesus' family tree.² The Jews knew all the promises God had made in the OT. So Matthew shows that Jesus fulfilled all these promises of God—even his family line, from Abraham (Genesis 12:1-25:11) through King David (I Samuel 16 - II Samuel 24). Many people are mentioned in Jesus' family line—a prostitute, an illegitimate* son, a Gentile woman, an adulterous woman, a woman pregnant outside of marriage—which shows us that God can and will use anyone to glorify himself. His grace really is great!

Both Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' birth, but some parts of Matthew's description are only in Matthew:

¹ Anytime in this book you see the word "Messiah" or "Christ," please recognize that they mean the same thing. The word *messiah* is the Hebrew word used in the OT; the word *Christ* is the Greek word used in the NT. Both mean "king," "anointed one" or "chosen one" and refer to Jesus, God's son.

² Matthew, because he is a priest, is a scholar. He knows the Midrashic style of writing (see pages 24ff below). He divides Jesus' family tree into three parts (3 is God's signature) of 14 names each (14=2X7 and means "salvation") leading up to Jesus. His point in arranging it that way is that Jesus is God's salvation. But he purposely leaves out several names from Jesus' family tree to get those numbers.

A section on the meaning of numbers to the Jews is in our study of Revelation on pages 105ff.

- a) (1:20-24) Joseph's dream of an angel who told him to marry Mary;
- b) (2:1-2) the visit of the Wise Men from the East;
- c) (2:3-15) another dream and the escape of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt;
- d) (2:16-18) Herod's killing of babies in the Bethlehem area;
- e) (2:19-23) two more dreams and Jesus' family's return from Egypt to Nazareth.

Only in Matthew is there a "Sermon on the Mount" (chapters 5-7). Parts of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon are scattered through Luke, but only Matthew has it all together. Matthew organizes Jesus' teaching into groups, followed by his miracles.

Matthew tries to prove Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) by showing over and over that he fulfilled the Old Testament. In his gospel, he refers to the OT over 100 times, but he quotes directly from the OT several times to prove who Jesus was.

Here is a list of the main OT quotations Matthew applies directly to Jesus:

	<u>MATTHEW</u>	<u>CONTENT</u>	<u>OT REFERENCES</u>
1.	1:23	He would be born of a Virgin.	Isaiah 7:14
2.	2:6	He would be born in Bethlehem.	Micah 5:2
3.	2:15	He would leave Egypt.	Hosea 11:1
4.	2:23	He would be called a Nazarene.	Isaiah 11:1 (Hebrew)
5.	4:15,16	He would be a Great Light.	Isaiah 9:1-6
6.	8:17	He would carry our sicknesses.	Isaiah 53:4
7.	11:5	He would heal people and raise the dead.	Isaiah 29:18
8.	11:10-14	"Elijah" would come first to prepare his way.	Malachi 3:1
9.	12:18-21	He would be God's humble and gentle servant.	Isaiah 42:1-4
10.	13:14,15	Many would not understand his teaching.	Isaiah 6:9,10
11.	13:35	He would teach in parables.	Psalms 78:2
12.	21:5	He would enter Jerusalem on a young donkey.	Zechariah 9:9
13.	21:9	People would praise him as "Son of David."	Psalms 118:26
14.	21:16	Children would praise him.	Psalms 8:2
15.	21:42	God would choose him, but the leaders would reject Him.	Psalms 118:22-23
16.	22:44	He would be David's Lord as well as his son. ¹	Psalms 110:1
17.	23:39	People will praise him when he returns to earth.	Psalms 118:26
18.	26:31	He would be called the "Good Shepherd."	Zechariah 13:7
19.	26:64	He will be seen in the clouds.	Daniel 7:13
20.	27:34	He would be given bitter wine to drink.	Psalms 69:21
21.	27:35	People would gamble for his clothing.	Psalms 22:18
22.	27:39,43	People would make fun of him.	Psalms 22:7
23.	27:46	God would abandon him.	Psalms 22:1
24.	27:48	He would be given vinegar to drink.	Psalms 69:21

¹ Only Jesus could say that he was *both* David's Lord and David's son. This means that Jesus is greater than David and before David, but it also means that he came out of David's family. Being before David means Jesus is God; being after David and from his family means Jesus is Man.

These twenty-four evidences show that Jesus really was the promised Messiah. Jesus fulfilled all the OT. But the best proof is Jesus' resurrection. When God raised Him from the dead, never to die again, this demonstrated once and for all that Jesus really is the Messiah (Christ).

All the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) describe Jesus' ministry, death, burial and resurrection, but Matthew has some of the story that no other Gospel recorded:

- a) Only Matthew tells us that Pilate's wife asked Pilate not to have anything to do with Jesus, because Jesus was an innocent man. She had just had a nightmare about Jesus (27:19).
- b) Only Matthew tells us of Judas' suicide (27:3-10; compare Acts 1:18,19).
- c) Only Matthew mentions that other dead people were raised and seen when Jesus was crucified (27:52).
- d) Only Matthew says that the Roman guards who watched over Jesus' grave had to be bribed to cover up the truth of the resurrection (27:62-66 and 28:11-15).
- e) The Great Commission is recorded in no other Gospel (28:18-20).

At least one interesting miracle is not in any other gospel: The Jews demanded that Jesus and the disciples pay a "temple tax." They didn't really have to pay, but Jesus decided to pay it. He told Peter to go fishing. The first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth! With that coin he paid the temple tax (17:24-27).

At least nine parables in Matthew are not in the other gospels:

- a) The parable of the wheat and the weeds (13:24-30);
- b) The treasure hidden in a field (13:44);
- c) The best pearl (13:45);
- d) The fishnet (13:47-50);
- e) New and old truth (13:51,52);
- f) The unforgiving slave (18:21-35);
- g) The workers in the vineyard (20:1-15);
- h) The two sons (21:28-32);
- i) The ten girls (25:1-13);
- j) The parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46).

Finally, recorded only by Matthew is Jesus' pun in 16:18 – "I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."¹

¹ *Peter* is the Greek word for *rock* or *pebble* [*Petros*]. But Matthew interprets for us what Jesus meant by that when he used the Greek word *Petra* [which means *boulder* or *cliff of rock*] on which the church would be built. The church is built, in some sense on Peter, but also on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, which Peter had just said. (See I Corinthians 3:10-12; Ephesians 2:20 and Revelation 21:14. These scriptures say that both Jesus and the Apostles [Disciples] are the foundation of God's kingdom.)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

INTRODUCTION

John Mark was the son of Mary and helper of the apostles, Paul and Peter. (See Acts 12:12; 13:5 and 13; 15:36-41 and II Timothy 4:11.) He failed on his first missionary trip with Paul and returned home, and later Paul refused to take him again on another missionary trip. So John Mark went instead with his cousin, Barnabas, on another missionary journey. Later on in his life, though, Mark had become useful to Paul in ministry (II Timothy 4:11). [Note that a failure can become useful to the Lord and that even apostles can make mistakes.]

Mark's Gospel was probably written between 45 and 80 A. D., though most would say 60-66. Mark most likely wrote it in Rome. Mark's Gospel was for the Romans, who were probably not familiar with Jewish customs and terms. (See Mark 5:41.) Mark's Gospel begins abruptly and ends abruptly.¹

Comment [MB1]:

In his Gospel, Mark tells about the ministry of Jesus, his actions and some of his teaching, leading up to his death and resurrection.

OUTLINE

- A. The public ministry of Jesus (1:1-9:50)
 1. His preparation for ministry (1:1-13)
 2. His ministry in Galilee (1:14-9:50)
- B. Across the Jordan River and the Road to Jerusalem (10:1-52)
- C. His Final Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1-16:8)
 1. He enters Jerusalem and the temple (11:1-26)
 2. His arguments with the Jews (11:27-12:44)
 3. His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world (13:1-37)
 4. The plot, the Passover, the prayer (14:1-42)
 5. His arrest, trial, death and resurrection (14:43-16:8) (16:9-20 contains a later ending of Mark).¹

OVERVIEW

An early Christian writer, Papias (around A. D. 120-130), says that Mark was the Apostle Peter's interpreter. So Mark probably wrote down Peter's sermons about what Jesus said and did.

Another early Christian, Clement of Alexandria (about A. D. 200), wrote that the people in Rome who heard Peter speak asked Mark to provide a written account of Peter's sermons. And as I read Mark, I can certainly see a series of sermons on Jesus. These sermons centered more on Jesus' power in action than on his teaching. The story moves rapidly from healing to teaching to driving out demons. In fact, Mark's key word is "immediately," used thirty-five times

¹ We have apparently lost the original ending of Mark's Gospel, if there was anything after 16:8. There are four different endings in the Greek manuscripts, and none of them is the original.

(NIV), while the same Greek word appears over forty times in Mark. The whole brief Gospel reads like a series of eyewitness accounts. Notice especially the specific details given by Mark that no other gospel includes: see 1:13, “with the wild beasts;” and 6:39, “and they sat down in ranks of hundreds and fifties.” There are many other examples.

Mark does not record much of the teaching and work of Jesus that Matthew and Luke include. He is more interested in what Jesus did—especially his miracles. For Mark’s Roman readers, what Jesus *did* proves who he *was*—the Son of God. (1:1)

In Mark’s Gospel, what did Jesus do?

1. He called followers (1:16ff)
2. He drove out a demon (1:23ff)¹
3. He healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever (1:29ff)
4. He healed many sick and drove out many demons (1:34, 39)
5. He touched and healed a leper (1:40-45)
6. He healed a paralyzed man (2:1-12)
7. He healed a man with a crippled hand (3:1-6)
8. He calmed a storm at sea (4:35-40)
9. He drove out a legion* of demons from a man into a herd of pigs (5:1-20)
10. He healed a woman after she had bled for twelve years (5:25-34)
11. He raised a twelve-year-old girl from the dead (5:21-24, 35-43)
12. He healed a few sick people (6:5)
13. He fed over 5,000 people from only five biscuits and two small fish (6:33-44)
14. He walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee (6:45-52)
15. He healed all the sick brought to him (6:53ff)
16. He drove a demon out of a Gentile woman’s daughter (7:24-30)
17. He privately healed a deaf-mute man (7:31-37)
18. He fed about 4,000 people from only seven biscuits (8:1-10)
19. He privately healed (in a very unusual way) a blind man (8:22-26)
20. He was transfigured* (9:2ff)
21. He healed a boy with an evil spirit (9:14-29)
22. He healed a blind man named Bartimaeus (10:46ff)
23. He rode a young donkey into Jerusalem (11:1-11)
24. He put a curse on a tree without fruit, and it died (11:12-14 and 11:20-26)
25. He cleansed the temple (11:15-18)
26. He prepared for and started his Last Supper (14:12-31)
27. He prayed in the garden (14:32-42)
28. He was arrested, tried, mocked and crucified (14:43-15:47)
29. He arose from the dead (16:1-8)

¹ See the brief special study of demons on the page 14.

Mark is the briefest, simplest and clearest of the gospels. Mark omits Jesus' early life (about thirty years), and tells only of his ministry, as though he were presenting a series of snapshots, hit-and-miss, covering about 3½ years. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as "one who is more powerful than I am," who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (1:7f). The book leads quickly then to Peter's statement, "You are the Christ." (8:29). Up to this point in Mark, Jesus had never even mentioned the cross. Now, after Peter's confession, he mentions it four times, warning his disciples that he will die on a cross, but rise again. They did not understand him (8:31ff; 8:34ff; 9:30ff; 10:32ff).

What About Demons?

When I studied Mark with a new Christian recently, he had written down more questions about demons¹ than anything else. They are mentioned more than fifty times in the NT, nearly 40 of which are in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Mark also calls these devils “unclean spirits.” Apparently, when God’s Son came to earth, Satan increased his actions to try to prevent Jesus from his purpose. As God has many angels, messengers who serve him, so Satan* has many demons to serve his desires. There is a symbolic picture of Satan’s rebellion in the Book of Revelation, chapter 12, which I will talk about later in the Revelation section. Demons may enter people who are open to them or who want them to enter. Probably these people are tricked into thinking that demons are not evil. (See II Corinthians 11:3f.) Many people believe that there are no devils or demons, but if that is so, then is there no God or angels? No, these beings are real. There are many documented cases in which people have had demons enter them—especially in places where the gospel of Jesus has not yet been preached. There are even some instances in American culture. Information is available on this subject in any good library.

However, I warn you that you’re better off not pursuing this too far. Satan is an ancient trickster; he might even be able to trick *you*. But don’t worry, demons cannot live where Jesus Christ’s Spirit is, and if you’re a follower of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit in you (Acts 2:38 and Romans 8:9). His Spirit is much stronger than the evil one.

Look at Jesus’ warning in Matthew 12:43-45. When we have been forgiven and cleansed of evil, we must be sure to fill up with God’s Word and Spirit!²

¹ I recommend C. S. Lewis’ book, [The Screwtape Letters](#). It is a fanciful story about demons, yet it is very realistic in its treatment of how demons behave.

² If you want to read more on demon activity, I recommend Ben Alexander’s book, [Out From Darkness](#), or Raphael Gasson’s book, [The Challenging Counterfeit](#).

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

INTRODUCTION

Luke was a doctor, a traveler, an evangelist, a historian and a writer. (See my introduction to Acts. Also see Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24.)

The date when Luke wrote his Gospel is unknown. But he certainly wrote it before Acts, which is usually placed before A. D. 65. Perhaps he wrote it in Rome, just before he wrote Acts, or perhaps during his travels recorded in Acts. Theophilus¹ was the first reader of Acts and then the ancient church read it.

The main theme of Luke's Gospel is a history of Jesus' life from before his birth to some of his resurrection appearances. For Luke, Jesus is the greatest of all doctors.

OUTLINE

- A. Historical introduction (1:1-4)
- B. The birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (1:5-2:52)
- C. The ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-20)
- D. Jesus' early ministry (3:21-9:50)
 - 1. His beginnings (3:21-4:15)
 - 2. His Galilean ministry (4:16-9:50)
- E. Jesus' later ministry (9:51-22:38)
 - 1. His trip to Jerusalem (9:51-19:44)
 - 2. His final teaching in Jerusalem (19:45-22:38)
- F. Jesus: crucified, raised and ascended to heaven (22:39-24:53)

OVERVIEW

Luke says more about Jesus' early years than any other gospel. He tells of several events that no other writer does. For example, Luke alone tells us about the following:

- a) the angel who came to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, to announce John's birth (1:5-25);
- b) the angel who announced Jesus' birth to Mary, Jesus' mother (1:26-38);
- c) Mary's visit to Elizabeth, John's mother (1:39ff);
- d) many events surrounding the birth of Jesus—even the angels and shepherds (2:8-20) are unique to Luke. In fact, in the first two chapters of Luke, only 2:1-7 is in another Gospel (Matthew 1:18-25). So Luke shows us the most about Jesus' early life. He shows us that Jesus knew he was the Son of God, even at the age of twelve (2:41-52).

¹ He was probably a Roman official who was a friend of Luke. Luke refers to him as "most excellent Theophilus" in Luke 1:3. His name means *one who honors God*.

Much of the rest of Luke's gospel is like Mark's, but he often goes into more detail. Where Mark shortens the account of Jesus' temptation in the desert, Luke explains in more detail (Luke 4:1-13). Luke has many parables of Jesus.

Below, I will list all the other events and teaching that Luke has in his Gospel that the other writers omit:

1. Jesus raised a widow's son from death (7:11-17).¹
2. Jesus ate at the home of a judgmental Pharisee named Simon; a sinful woman showed her love to Jesus there, and Jesus told Simon a parable of forgiveness (7:36-50).
3. As Jesus went about preaching and teaching, several women provided for him from their own resources (8:1-3).
4. As Jesus was on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem, he had to pass through Samaria. The Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus, so two disciples wanted to call "God's fire from heaven to destroy these Samaritans." Jesus corrected them (9:51-56). [They knew about II Kings 1, where Elijah called down fire on his enemies.]
5. Jesus gave directions for their journey, then sent out seventy-two workers to heal people and to preach the Kingdom of God. When they returned to Jesus, they were very happy and excited, because they even had power to drive out demons. Jesus said for them to rejoice more because their names were written in heaven.²
6. In answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the "Good Samaritan." Your neighbor, he said, is anyone in need. We are to love our neighbors, which means we are to help people with anything they need (10:29-37).
7. Jesus visited with Martha and Mary. Mary sat and listened to Jesus, but Martha was upset about the kitchen work that needed to be done. Jesus gently corrected Martha (10:38-42).
8. Jesus said that true happiness is obeying God's Word (11:27f).
9. In discussing worldly wealth,³ Jesus told the parable of the rich fool. This was a man who should have shared his wealth with others, but instead he was greedy. He kept his wealth, but he lost his life (12:13-21). Of course this means he lost everything!⁴
10. Jesus said that as the Lord's servants, we should always be ready for him to come to us, because no one knows when he will come again (12:35-40).⁵
11. Jesus said that if people don't turn away from their sins, they will be destroyed. Repent or perish! (13:1-5)

¹ Jesus actually interrupts a funeral procession on its way to the graveyard!

² This means rejoice more because you are saved than that you can overcome devils or do good deeds. For the "Book of Life," see also Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 and in the OT, Isaiah 4:3.

³ Nearly one-third of the words of Jesus are about wealth and possessions. How we use our *things* and our *money* must be very important to Jesus!

⁴ If you choose anything besides Jesus, you lose not only Jesus—you also lose what you choose. Where is the rich young man's wealth today?

⁵ Even Jesus himself does not know when he will return to judge the world. (See Matthew 24:36.)

12. Jesus told the parable of the unfruitful fig tree. We must “bear fruit”¹ or we will be destroyed. But the parable also shows us God’s grace (13:6-9).
13. Jesus straightened up a bent and crippled woman on the Sabbath day (13:10-17). (Jesus’ enemies condemned him for healing on the Sabbath. Remember, the Law told the Jews not to work on the Sabbath.)
14. Again on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a person. This man was suffering from dropsy, a disease that causes water to build up in the body (14:1-6).
15. Jesus said people shouldn’t choose places of honor, but being humble is better. If you sit at a low place, then the host might move you up to the head table. That is far better than sitting in the high seat and being asked to move back down (14:7-14).
16. In Chapter 15, Jesus answered a statement made by the religious leaders about himself: “This man welcomes sinners and even eats with them!” Jesus answered by telling three parables in a row—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (15:1-32). In all three parables Jesus was saying, “Yes! Yes! Yes! I do welcome sinners!” The last parable teaches two lessons really. The first lesson is that when people are rebellious sinners, but return to God, he will run to them, hug them, and rejoice that they have returned (15:11-24). The second lesson is that God *wants* to accept everyone, even those who reject the sinners who do return (15:25-32). Jesus even wants to welcome the Pharisees who are attacking him! He loves *all* people.
17. Jesus told the parable of the shrewd manager. The main lesson is that we should use our money not for ourselves but for *other* people, to make friends for God. Then God will welcome us into heaven (16:1-13).
18. Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the sick beggar who lived and died at the rich man’s gate. The lesson is similar to #17 above. Jesus then said that if the Jews did not listen to Moses, they would not listen even if someone rose up from the dead (16:19-31).
19. Jesus taught us that no matter how hard we work in serving him, the best we can be is still just unworthy servants (17:7-10).²
20. Jesus healed ten men of leprosy, but only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank him (17:11-19).
21. Jesus told the parable of the stubborn widow and the evil judge. Because the widow kept begging the judge to help her, he finally did, just to get her off his back. The lesson is that God, who is *not* unjust, cares for and helps his people, if his people keep asking (18:1-8).
22. Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee proudly offered his prayer, telling God what a good Pharisee

¹ This first parable is also in Matthew 18:12-14. *Bear fruit* may mean many things, but most often means *do good deeds*.

² We may be unworthy, but Jesus died for us. That makes us of great value.

he is. But the tax collector begged for mercy. Since he humbly repented, God forgave him and not the Pharisee (18:9-14). [This is a hard lesson for many people to learn: *God receives sinners* if only they will repent and turn to him.]

23. Luke included here the unique story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector. Again, Jesus ate and taught at the home of a sinner. Zacchaeus repented and paid back all those he had “ripped off” in his tax collecting. When Jesus saw his desire to repay, he told Zacchaeus that salvation had come to him (19:1-10).
24. Jesus cried over Jerusalem, before his final entry into the city (19:41-44). He wanted to show his love to all the people there, but they would not have it.
25. Jesus warned his followers to be careful not to become too burdened with worries or drunkenness; instead, we should be ready for him when he comes to judge at the end of the world (21:34ff).
26. At their last meal with Jesus, the disciples argued about who was the greatest among them. Jesus told them the one who is youngest and the one who serves the most is greatest (22:24-30; see also John 13).
27. During Jesus’ trial, the Roman governor, Pilate, sent Jesus to King Herod, who was visiting Jerusalem at that time. Herod and his soldiers dressed Jesus in an royal robe, mocked him, spit on him and hit him with their fists, then sent him back to Pilate (23:6-12).
28. The last event that Luke alone recorded is the story of the Road to Emmaus. Two sad disciples were walking along the road, discussing Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus suddenly joined them, and they did not recognize him. They were very sad and told him how hopeless they were. But Jesus began to explain what had really happened, based on the OT promises and prophecies. They stopped to eat, and Jesus gave thanks for the meal; they recognized him then, and he disappeared. They hurried back to Jerusalem that night to report to the disciples and others that they had seen him (24:13-35). They said, “Didn’t our hearts burn when he explained the Scriptures to us?” Luke ends with Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, appearances, and his going up to heaven.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

INTRODUCTION:

John was a fisherman. He and James the Apostle were sons of Zebedee (Mark 1:19; compare John 21:2). Zebedee was a wealthy man with a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. John was called "the beloved disciple," "the elder" and "John." This same apostle wrote I, II and III John and the Book of Revelation. Jesus called him and his brother, James, "Sons of Thunder." This may be because they wanted to call fire down from heaven on the Samaritans. (See Luke 9:51-56.) By the time he wrote his five works, he had become "The Apostle of Love." He is the only apostle, according to the early church, who died of old age. (The others were all killed for their faith.)¹

The Gospel of John was probably written between A. D. 80 and 90. It was most likely written in Ephesus (in Southwest Turkey) where John lived. Either new believers or people who were wondering about Jesus were the readers of the book. These new believers may have wondered how Jesus could be both God and man. John wants his readers to meet Jesus and to believe in him. (John 20:31)

In his Gospel, John tells about the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus left his father in heaven to become a man. This is John's main point—Jesus was a man of flesh and blood. He records seven different miracles (or signs) Jesus did and much of his private teaching to his disciples. John shows Jesus' ability to deal with different kinds of people. (See chapters 3 and 4.) The Gospel of John can be divided about in half. The first half is Jesus' public ministry; the second half is his private ministry with his disciples along with his death, resurrection, and his appearances to his followers.

OUTLINE

- A. Introduction to Jesus' Ministry (1:1-51)
 - 1. Prologue: God's eternal Word became a man (1:1-18)
 - 2. John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' ministry (1:19-51)
- B. Jesus' Public Ministry: The Seven Signs (2:1-12:50)
- C. Jesus' Private Ministry to the Disciples (13:1-17:26)
- D. Conclusion of Jesus' Earthly Ministry (18:1-21:25)
 - 1. The Arrest, Trial, Death and Burial (18:1-19:42)
 - 2. The Resurrection and Appearances (20:1-21:25)

OVERVIEW

A. Introduction:

- 1. Prologue: God's eternal Word became a Man (1:1-18)

¹ See John 21:22f, where Jesus seems to predict that John will live longer than Peter.

John begins where Genesis begins—in the very beginning. Even then the Word already existed.¹ His nature was the same as God's. John wanted to correct the false teachers who said that Jesus was not really God.² So John said that God's true nature became a man. God had foretold his own coming to the Jews for hundreds of years (1:4 and 5).

John the Baptist³ came to witness about Jesus. John the Baptist even prepared the way, as the OT had promised (Malachi 4:5f). But most of Jesus' own people, the Jews, still refused to accept Jesus (v.11).⁴ But whoever did believe in Jesus, God gave them the power to become his own children. Like Jesus, they are born by God, not by men (v. 11-13). He became flesh, so we can become like him! No one but Jesus has ever been so close to God. So Jesus, God's son, reveals more about what God is really like than any other word from God.

2. John the Baptist and the Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (1:19-51).

When John the Baptist came, the Jews questioned him. He told them clearly that he was not the Christ. He said that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God. Christ will take away the world's sin, he said. John the Baptist knew Jesus. When he baptized Jesus in water, the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. The Holy Spirit coming down was John the Baptist's sign that Jesus is the Son of God.

Just after that, Jesus got his first five disciples—Andrew and his brother Peter, Philip and his friend Nathaniel (who is called Bartholomew⁵ in the other Gospels), and one other disciple, probably John, the author of the book.

B. Jesus' Public Ministry: The Seven Signs (2:1-12:50)

(Jesus did many other miracles that John did not record. See John 20:30.)

(Chapter 2) - At a wedding in Cana, near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus changed water into wine (SIGN # 1).⁶ He did this to show his power to his disciples (2:1-11), and they believed in him.

¹ . "Word" means "God's message," "logic," or even "mind." In the OT it was *God's wisdom* or *God's spirit*. See Proverbs 1:23 and 8:22-31. Jesus is the Word of Creation, God's agent in Genesis. Look at Genesis 1, where God speaks 10 times; all God's creative acts there are in spoken words.

² The Gospel and the three epistles were all written to correct false teaching. The false teachers were called Gnostics. Some of these false teachers said God *could not* become a man, because Spirit is all good, and flesh is all evil. But John says that the Divine Word *became* flesh. (John 1:14)

³ Some people get John the Baptist and John the Apostle and John Mark mixed up. In John's Gospel, John the Apostle never mentions himself by name. So whenever "John" appears, it is the Baptist. John Mark is the author of Mark's Gospel, usually, he is just called *Mark*. [*John* means *gift of God*.]

⁴ This is not really surprising. If you'll study the OT, you'll see that most of the Jews were usually unbelievers. Read the long prayer in Nehemiah 9, for example, or study the Book of Numbers.

⁵ His name was probably Nathaniel Bar Tolmai, meaning "Nathaniel, Son of Tolmai." Many people then, as now, had more than one or two names.

⁶ John connects each of Jesus' "signs" (miracles) with a symbolic interpretation, except this one. It is interesting, though, that Jesus used the pots of water usually used for cleansing to make the wine. And wine is a symbol for blood in the new covenant. And blood "cleanses" us of our sin!

Then Jesus made the Jews angry. He drove some sales people out the temple. They had been making money in the Court of the Gentiles, selling animals there for sacrifice. But Jesus was angry because they were crowding out the Gentiles.

(Chapter 3) - Jesus taught Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher, about how to be born by God, born from above, by the Spirit. The most important verse in the New Testament is John 3:16. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Do you want to live forever? Then believe in Jesus and follow him.

The relationship of John the Baptist and Jesus is seen in 3:22-30. Jesus began winning more converts than John the Baptist. John said that's the way it should be. "Jesus must increase, and I must decrease," he said. Jesus came from heaven (John 3:13 and 31). This makes Jesus more important than all others, even a true prophet like John the Baptist.

(Chapter 4) - Jesus' disciples were baptizing many believers in water. (Jesus himself baptizes in the Holy Spirit, not just water.) (See John 1:33 and 4:2.)

On a trip through Samaria (the middle of Palestine), Jesus met a woman at Jacob's Well.¹ He talked with her, and she was *very* surprised; normally, Jews rejected Samaritans. Men didn't even speak to women in public. He taught her and transformed her life, and the people of her hometown, too. They believed in him, after he stayed with them for a while.²

Once again in Cana, Jesus healed a Roman official's son. (SIGN # 2)³

(Chapter 5) - In Jerusalem, at a pool known for healing water, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. (SIGN # 3) This made the Jewish authorities angry, because the man carried his mat. It was a religious Sabbath day, and the Jews thought it was wrong to do any work, even carry a mat. But Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He went on teaching. He said he has the full right to judge people, and he will judge when the resurrection of all people happens at the end of the world. His judgment is what God tells him it should be. He told the Jews that if they had believed Moses in the OT, they would believe him, too. In 5:30-47 he lists witnesses to himself:

- 1) His own witness;
- 2) His father's witness;
- 3) John the Baptist's witness;
- 4) The witness of the miracles he did;
- 5) Moses' and the OT scriptures' witness.

¹ This well had been dug clear back in Genesis 33, so it was about 1800 years old. The well is *still* there, even after all these years. I have been there; people still drink from it!

² This was unheard of in Jesus' day. Jews never stayed with Samaritans. I imagine it was a great shock to Jesus' disciples! They would have to eat off "unclean" dishes in the homes of "unclean" people. Jesus is a tradition-breaker, especially when the tradition is wrong.

³ Jesus' miracles were not limited to the Jews only. Here he does a miracle for a Gentile, but he does it from a distance. The man felt that he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his house, so Jesus just said the word, and far away at the man's house, his son was healed. This man may have known that Jews did not normally enter a Gentile's house. It would make them "unclean."

The key idea in this passage for us is that in studying the Bible, we must be sure not to miss Jesus. *He is the true meaning of scripture.* (See John 5:39f.)

(Chapter 6) - A large crowd of about 5000 men had gathered after seeing Jesus' miracles. Jesus took five barley biscuits and two small fish and broke them in pieces and fed all the people. (SIGN #4) Twelve baskets full of bread and fish were left over. The people he had fed wanted to make Jesus king by force, so he hid himself in the hills. That evening, the disciples tried to row a boat across the Sea of Galilee against the wind. About 4 or 5 miles out on the sea, Jesus came walking to them on the water! (SIGN #5) Later, the people he had fed came looking for him. They wondered how Jesus had crossed the lake. Instead of answering that or feeding them again, he told them he was the true bread, the heavenly bread. He said, "I am the bread of life who came down from God."¹ Most of the people complained about this teaching and went away. Only his disciples remained.

(Chapter 7) - Jesus' own brothers didn't believe in him at this time. They told him to go to the celebration in Jerusalem, a harvest feast. Later he went and taught in the temple. The Jews were divided over him. Some thought he was the Christ, but others wanted to kill him. The Pharisees* sent temple guards to arrest Jesus, but when they heard him teach about the Holy Spirit (as streams of living water), they went back without him, amazed. The Pharisees were furious, but Nicodemus stood up for Jesus and tried to correct them.

(Chapter 8)² - Jesus taught the Pharisees again. He said they didn't know him or his father, because they belonged to this world and not to God. He said that he obeyed his father in everything. Many people believed in him there. Jesus went on to tell them that he could set them free, that they wouldn't be slaves to sin any more. "Those who reject me do not belong to God but to Satan," he said.

The Jews accused him then of having a demon in him. He answered that if they obeyed him, they would never die. He said, "Before Abraham was born, I am,"³ and they picked up rocks to stone him to death, but he hid from them.

(Chapter 9) - Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. (SIGN # 6) This had never been done before. It is one of the proofs that Jesus really is the Messiah. (See Isaiah 61:1ff and Luke 4:16-30.) This healing caused the Pharisees to investigate. After questioning the healed man, they kicked him out of their synagogue, because he definitely believed in Jesus (9:38). The man

¹ He compared himself to the manna in the desert in the OT. But he is better than the manna because the people who ate the manna in the desert died. If we "eat" of Jesus, we will live forever.

² The first part of this chapter is like Mark 16:9ff; it's probably not really a part of the Bible. This story (the woman caught in adultery) is probably true, but is found in different places in the ancient manuscripts—sometimes on the end of Luke or John, and often here in the middle of John. [In the OT, Leviticus says that *both* the man and the woman caught in the act of adultery should be stoned to death. Why do you think the man is missing? By this time the men may have decided that the woman alone should be punished. Men ruled women in Jewish culture back then. It is still like that in some places today.]

³ There are seven major "I am" statements of Jesus in John. Here, he is claiming to be God. The name "I am" is the name God gave to Moses from the bush (Exodus 3:14 and context). So in the OT his name was "Yahweh" (which some versions have as "Jehovah"), which means, "he is" or "he will be" or "he causes to be" or many other meanings.

didn't care if he was kicked out, because for the first time in his life, he could see! It was the Pharisees who were really blind, Jesus said.¹

(Chapter 10) - Jesus taught: "I am the gate where the sheep come in." (We are the sheep.) "I am the good shepherd," he said. A hired hand or a thief might run from a wolf, but not the good shepherd. He will lay down his life for his sheep. His sheep gladly follow him, for he knows them and they know him.

The people were divided over Jesus. Finally, when he told them plainly that he and his father are one, many rejected him. But he said that their own scriptures called them gods (Psalm 82:6), so why should his teaching be such a problem? Again, the people were divided over him, but many believed.

(Chapter 11) - Jesus got a note from two sisters, Martha and Mary. The note said their brother, Lazarus, was very sick. Jesus said that Lazarus' sickness would bring glory to God and God's son. Then he waited two more days where he was.² Finally, he and the disciples went to Bethany. Jesus' friend, Lazarus, had died and been buried for four days. Jesus told the sisters, "I am the resurrection and the life." He stood before Lazarus' grave and cried. Then he ordered them to roll the stone away from Lazarus' tomb. When they did, he called, "Lazarus, come out!" He raised Lazarus from the dead. (SIGN # 7) Many saw this and believed in him, but some of the leaders wanted to kill both him and Lazarus.

(Chapter 12) - At Lazarus' home, Mary poured a very expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Jesus said it was to prepare him to die. (He knew the time of his own death.)

When Jesus went into Jerusalem the next day, the people met him and praised him. They spread out their clothes and palm leaves on the road before him, as he rode along on a young donkey. The Pharisees were jealous and wanted even more to kill him. When some Greek men came looking for him, Jesus knew his time on earth was nearly over. Soon he would die.

Many people still refused to believe, even after all he did. So he told them his own message would be their judge at the end of the world.

C. Jesus' Private Ministry to the Disciples (13:1-17:26).

(Chapter 13) - Jesus knew the end of his earthly ministry was near, so to show what his kingdom is like to his disciples, he got up from eating the Passover meal. He wrapped a towel around his waist, and there in that upstairs room, he began washing the disciples' feet. This was a very lowly job, a slave's job. When he finished, he returned to his place and reminded the disciples that

¹ Jesus uses the physical sight of the man he had healed to teach the Pharisees about "spiritual blindness." Real blindness is rejecting Jesus.

² We don't know why Jesus waited where he was. Sometimes we just can't figure out why God or Jesus do what they do. Why doesn't he answer our prayers the way we want? He is God; he will do as he pleases. Perhaps, like Lazarus and Martha and Mary, we will find even a greater blessing later on.

he was their teacher, but he had just served them. He told them they should be that kind of leader—a servant.¹

Jesus predicted that Judas would betray him, and Judas left the room and went out into the night. Since Jesus knew he was about to die, he told his disciples to love each other as he loved them.

(Chapter 14) - Jesus did not want his disciples to be worried. He told them that he was going to prepare them a place. They wondered how to get where he was going, so he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except by me.” Philip, a disciple, said, “Show us the Father.” But Jesus said, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” Jesus then promised to send the Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit would be their helper. The helper, the Holy Spirit, will help them remember all of Jesus’ teaching after he is gone. He told them not to worry when he is gone; he will return to them. Then they all got up from the table and left the upper room.

(Chapter 15) - He told his disciples that he is the real vine and his father is the gardener. All disciples are branches of the real vine. They must bear fruit. The father will take special care of them as long as they remain in the vine. Jesus connects “bearing fruit” with obeying him. And how do we obey Jesus? By *believing* in him and by *loving* one another.

Just as the world hated Jesus, so the world will hate his followers and mistreat us. But the helper, the Holy Spirit, will come to teach Jesus’ followers the truth about Jesus. The helper doesn’t talk about himself; his job is to teach people about Jesus.²

(Chapter 16) - The disciples were sad, because Jesus was about to return to his father. But Jesus said that it was better for him to go, so he could send the helper. The helper’s job will be to teach the world three things:

- 1) about sin (not believing in Jesus),
- 2) about righteousness (which was found in Jesus, but he will be gone),
- 3) about world-wide judgment which is coming. (Satan is already judged.)

The Spirit—the helper—will show all the truth to Jesus’ followers.

The disciples did not understand when Jesus said that he was going away, but he will return. Jesus said they would have sadness, but then great joy. Whatever the disciples ask the father in Jesus’ name,* they will receive.

He told the disciples that the Father loves them just as he loves Jesus! “So be brave,” Jesus said, “I have overcome the world.”

(Chapter 17) - Jesus’ prayed his prayer as God’s high priest:

He prayed *first* for himself, that God would restore him to his original glory he had with his father, before the world was made. He also said, “This is eternal

¹ Jesus’ kingdom is not about ruling; it is about serving others. This is the opposite from the world’s view of a kingdom. Even the disciples didn’t understand. They had been arguing about who was the greatest just before Jesus did this. See Luke 22:24ff.

² Any church that emphasizes the Holy Spirit over Jesus is not full of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit’s job is to reveal Jesus to us; the Spirit won’t point to himself or call attention to himself.

life—that people will know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.”

Second, he prayed for his disciples, that God would protect them and keep them in his word, because his word is truth. He asked God to protect them from the world and from Satan.

Third, Jesus actually prayed for us, because we believe in him through the disciples’ teaching. He prayed that we would all be united, just as Jesus and the Father are one. He wants all of us who believe to be unified in him¹ and then to live in glory with him.

D. Conclusion of Jesus’ Earthly Ministry (18:1-21:25)

1. The Arrest, Trial, Death and Burial 18:1-19:42

(Chapter 18) - Jesus and the disciples went to a garden to pray. (The garden is named Gethsemane—“the olive press,” Mark 14:32.) Judas brought a group of Roman soldiers to the garden. They arrested Jesus, but Peter attacked with a sword. Jesus made him put the sword away.² (See Luke 22:49-51.)

The soldiers took Jesus to trial before the old Jewish high priest, Annas, where Jesus was questioned and slapped. They took him to Caiaphas, the new high priest. (During this time Peter denied Jesus three times, as Jesus had predicted.) Then they took Jesus to Pilate, because only Roman authority could put anyone to death. Pilate questioned Jesus, and declared him innocent three times. He wanted to free him, but the Jews shouted, “Crucify Jesus! Free Barabbas!” (Barabbas was a thief. He was also a traitor against Rome.)

(Chapter 19) - Pilate publicly washed his hands. He freed Barabbas and had Jesus beaten. The soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head and a purple robe on him and mocked and slapped him. The temple guards and Jewish leaders shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” They told Pilate that Jesus must die, because he claimed to be God’s son. Pilate was afraid. Again he questioned Jesus and could find no crime in him. Finally, because of pressure from the Jews, Pilate released Jesus to be crucified. So they crucified him with a sign over his head that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews” in Greek, Latin and Hebrew. The soldiers gambled over his clothes. This fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy. (See Psalm 22:18.)

While he was on the cross, he told his disciple John to care for Mary, his mother.³ He cried out that he was thirsty; they tried to give him sour wine, and he died. The soldiers checked the body of Jesus, along with the other two men who were crucified there. They broke the two men’s legs, because they were not dead yet.⁴ They stuck a spear in Jesus’ side, but he was already dead. Blood and

¹ This means that *wherever God has a child, I have a brother or sister*, even if they belong to some other group!

² Satan’s power is always outward and forceful; God’s power is always inward and submissive.

³ It is amazing to me that even when he was dying on the cross, Jesus was thinking of other people.

⁴ This is called *crurifracture*. The bones just above the knee were broken, so the people hanging on the cross would not be able to raise themselves up to breathe out. They would die from lack of oxygen. [See the article about Jesus’ death on page 27.]

water gushed out of the hole in his side. This fulfilled another prophecy, that no bones of Jesus would be broken (Exodus 12:46 and Psalm 34:20). After this, two important Jews, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took Jesus' body down and quickly buried it, wrapped up with spices. They hurried because the sun was setting, and when it set, the Jewish Sabbath began. They had to be home when the Sabbath began. They had to rest then and do no work.

2. The Resurrection and Appearances (20:1-21:25)

(Chapter 20) - Early Sunday morning after the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene* was the first to see the empty tomb. She was probably also the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. She reported it to Peter and John. They ran to see the empty tomb, and John believed in Jesus' resurrection from the dead (20:8). Later, Jesus' disciples were hiding behind locked doors, out of fear of the Jews. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the room. Another disciple, Thomas, wasn't there. Later, he said he doubted their claim that Jesus had come to them. So Jesus came and joined them again when Thomas was there. He believed! (See John 20:28.)

John tells us the purpose of his book in 20:30f. "*These things are written so that you may believe.*"

(Chapter 21) - Some of the disciples went fishing and caught nothing all night. In the morning, Jesus called to them from the beach. He told them to fish on the other side of the boat. They didn't recognize Jesus, but they threw the net on the other side of the boat. They caught so many fish they could not lift the net. Then they knew it was Jesus. When they got to shore, he had a breakfast cooked for them. Jesus ate breakfast with them. Then Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. (He had denied Jesus three times.) He then told Peter how Peter would die.

John concludes: "Jesus did many other things that are not written here. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

HOW HE DIED

Jesus first experienced *hematidrosis* in the garden where he prayed. This means that the pressure on him was so great, that he bled through his pores! Tiny capillaries must have broken inside the pores of his skin. Then, after Judas betrayed him, he was beaten with a Roman *flagrum*, a short club with leather belts connected to it. Each belt had a lump of lead or other weight in the end of it. It was more like being beaten by clubs than by a whip. The blows bruised the skin, then broke the skin and bruised the muscle, then broke the muscle and bruised the bone! Often, men didn't live through the beating.

Then after his mock trial, he was led away, forced to carry the beam of the cross (the cross piece, not the upright part) over his torn shoulders. The beam was so heavy, that scripture says he fell down. Another man was forced to carry the crosspiece on out to the place of crucifixion, *Golgotha* in Hebrew, "The place of the skull." There, he was forced onto his back and his hands were stretched out on the cross. Large, square, wrought iron nails were hammered into the base of his palms, through between the bones of his wrists. (Not in his palms, as some pictures show. The weight of the body would rip out the nails.) [Only one of these nails has ever been found. It was driven through the heel bone of a young man who was crucified with his heels against his buttocks. The nail was bent and could not be removed from his heel bone. In those days, people took the nails as good luck charms. That's why only one has been found. It was seven inches long and square.]

Then Jesus was lifted up on the cross with ropes, just a foot or two off the ground, and the cross-piece was fastened into the upright. Then his feet were placed one on top of the other, and another big square nail was driven through between the metatarsal bones of both feet. Imagine the horror and pain of such a death! Here he is, the Son of God, the King of kings, rejected by the earth and abandoned by the heavens! God did turn away from him because, as Paul says, "he became sin for us." (II Corinthians 5:21) For the first time in all eternity, he is utterly alone. His friends leave him, in terror. His Father could not look upon him. No wonder the sun went out like a candle in the wind! No wonder the earth shook! The Creator was dying! The veil of the temple, six inches thick and thirty feet high, was torn in two from top to bottom. God was opening the way to the Most Holy Place through the blood of his only Son. Now, thanks to Jesus' suffering and death, we can enter the Most Holy Place, and talk face to face with our Father in Heaven. Thank you, Jesus.

But the story doesn't end there, as you know. Three days later, the tomb was opened, and Jesus was alive—beyond death—alive forever, and he has the keys of death and hell! We live because he lives.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

INTRODUCTION

(Date of events: about A. D. 30-60) In the Gospel of John you learned about seven miracles Jesus did. Each miracle had special teaching connected with it. You also learned about some amazing things Jesus did and said after his resurrection. In the Book of Acts you will learn how quickly the good news about Jesus spread. The Gospel spread first to the Jews, than to the Gentiles, then to Rome, the center of the Empire.

OUTLINE

- A. Jesus' last words and his ascension; a replacement for Judas (Acts 1)
- B. The Gospel spread among the Jews (Acts 2:1-6:7)
- C. The Gospel spread among the Gentiles who knew God (Acts 6:8-12:25)
- D. The Gospel spread among the Gentiles who did not know God (Acts 13:1-19:20)
- E. The Gospel goes to Rome (Acts 19:21-28:31)

OVERVIEW

Acts is a history of the earliest churches, beginning with Jerusalem. (See Acts 1:8.) Luke the Doctor, after he wrote the Gospel of Luke, wrote Acts. (Compare Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:1.) The main actors in the book are the Holy Spirit of God, Peter, and then Paul (also called Saul).

(Acts 1) - After Jesus' death and resurrection, he came to meet his followers outside Jerusalem. (Luke 24:50) In verse 8 Jesus gave an outline of how the Gospel would spread out from Jerusalem. He said to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them powerfully. Then they saw him go up toward heaven and disappear behind a cloud.

As they waited in Jerusalem, they chose someone named Matthias to take Judas' place. (Judas had committed suicide by hanging himself.) All the believers were together in Jerusalem on the day of the great Jewish party called Pentecost.

(Acts 2) - Finally, the Spirit of God came upon the disciples like a mighty wind. Peter got up and brought the Jews a powerful sermon, showing that Jesus fulfilled the OT promises about Christ. He said, "God has made this same Jesus you crucified both Lord and Messiah!" About three thousand people believed and were baptized. Those believers¹ stayed together, worshipping and learning and sharing together. The church began to grow.

¹ Several words are used in the NT to describe people who believe in Jesus. Some of them are: **1)** "Believers"—this is probably the best word because it includes all who believe in Jesus and follow him. **2)** "Disciples"—this word is used often in Acts. It means "learning followers" of Jesus. **3)** "Christians"—this word is used only three times in the NT (Acts 11:26 and 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). It means "one belonging to Christ." It is not usually used for Jewish believers, but only for Gentile believers. This is because "Christ" is a Gentile name for Jesus, but "Messiah" is the Jewish name for him. **4)** Another way people who believed in Jesus were described was "followers of the Way." In John 14:6 Jesus called himself "the Way." (See Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25f; 19:9 and 23: 22:4; 24:14 and 22.)

(Acts 3:1-6:7) - The Gospel was spreading very fast. The Apostles,* especially Peter, did many miracles and preached several sermons. Many of the Jews believed and began to follow the Way of Jesus. The Jewish authorities tried to make them stop preaching the good news, but Peter just preached to them, too.¹

The Jews saw how much the believers loved each other. The believers began selling their land and sharing with any who had need. All the church was afraid and worshipped God. (See 5:1-11 to see why the church was afraid.)

Finally, the Jewish authorities had the apostles thrown in jail. That night an angel came from God and set them free. They began teaching openly again. The Jewish authorities wanted them to stop so badly that they arrested the apostles again and had them beaten. But they were happy to be beaten for Jesus, and they kept right on preaching and teaching.²

When a problem came up in the church, the apostles told the church to choose seven men to take care of the problem. So Luke wrote, “The word of God kept spreading. The number of disciples kept growing. Even the Jewish priests began accepting the faith!”

(Acts 6:8-8:40) - One of the seven men chosen to help with the church problem was Stephen. He was a miracle worker, filled with the Holy Spirit and God’s wisdom. The unbelieving Jews hated and feared him. When they could not beat him with arguments, they hired some liars to accuse him. He spoke before the Sanhedrin.* (See Acts 7.) He reviewed the history of the Jews. He showed them from their own scriptures (the OT) that their forefathers had murdered the prophets. Then he showed them that *they* had fought against God’s Spirit and had murdered God’s Righteous One. The Jews could not stand listening to this. They quickly stoned Stephen to death. A young man named Saul* held their coats as they killed Stephen.³ This was the beginning of the worst persecution yet!

¹ Something has always been amazing to me. It was Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Everyone saw him die there. But Jerusalem is also the place where the church began. It was *there* that his resurrection was first preached! All that the Jewish leaders would have had to do to *stop* the church in its tracks was to produce Jesus’ body! Don’t you think that if Jesus were still dead, they would have found his body? But his resurrection and eternal life was preached right where he had died. This is more proof that Jesus is alive.

² There is a difference between *preaching* and *teaching*. In the NT, *preaching* does not take place in the church. *Preaching* is what the church does in the world, among unsaved people. Preaching is spreading the gospel, telling people the good news of forgiveness and salvation. Preaching is about Jesus—his death on the cross and his resurrection. If people believe that, then salvation comes to them. *Teaching* is helping them see what the gospel means for their lives. *Teaching* is what happens within the church. By our faith, *preaching saves* us (I Corinthians 1:18 and 21), but *teaching keeps* us. Now that I’m forgiven, what does God want me to do? That is what the *teaching* is about—how to live as God wants us to. (See Acts 2:42: 5:21ff; 20:20 and many other places.) Jesus died to take away our sin, not ours only, but the whole world’s sin! (Look carefully at the following passages: I John 2:2, II Corinthians 5:19, John 1:29 and Romans 4:25.) This is the good news they preached. “Jesus died in my place”! I believe that, so I obey him, and I will live forever with God. Isn’t that GOOD news?

Sometimes some churches turn the gospel into “bad news.” They may say, “If you don’t agree with me on certain things, then you’re going to hell!” This is not the gospel. The gospel declares that God has forgiven the whole world in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus brought us good news, not bad. So we must keep believing in Jesus.

³ “Saul” is the name of a man who wanted Stephen to be killed. This is Luke’s way of introducing Saul—as a persecutor* of the church. “Saul” is his Hebrew name (meaning *asked*). His Greek name is “Paul.” He is the hero of

So the believers scattered everywhere, preaching the good news about Jesus. Philip was another one of the seven chosen men. He preached to the Samaritans, and many of them believed and obeyed. Then God told him to preach to an Ethiopian* who worked for the queen of Ethiopia. His conversion is recorded in 8:35-39.

(Acts 9) - Then a great miracle happened. Saul of Tarsus,¹ the man who was there at the stoning of Stephen, met Jesus! He was on his way to kill some more believers in Damascus.* Suddenly, he was blinded by a bright, flashing light. Jesus spoke to Saul out of that light. Saul had to be led into the city of Damascus because he could not see. For three days he waited in darkness, fasting, until Ananias² came to him from God. Ananias was afraid of Saul, because Saul had been killing Christians. But he put his hands on Saul, and God gave Saul back his sight. Saul knew he had been wrong. He believed in Jesus and was baptized. Then Saul, the one who had persecuted the church, began preaching Jesus right there in Damascus! The Jews wanted to kill Saul, so the believers put him in a big basket and let him down over the city wall at night. He went back to Tarsus, his hometown. And the church kept on growing and more miracles were done.

(Acts 10 and 11) - Cornelius was a leader in the Roman army in Caesarea.* He was not a Jew, but he still believed in God and prayed to him every day.³ During his prayers one day, an angel suddenly appeared! The angel told him to send men to get Peter from the city of Joppa.⁴

Meanwhile, in Joppa, God was using a vision to teach Peter that Gentiles are not “unclean.” Peter went with the men who had been sent. At Cornelius’ house was a big crowd waiting to hear Peter. So Peter preached the gospel to them. While Peter was saying, “Everyone who believes in Jesus will be forgiven” (Acts 10:43), the Holy Spirit came upon all the listeners just as on the Apostles in Acts 2. Peter and the Jews with him were amazed. God had even accepted the Gentiles! So they baptized these new believers in water.⁵

the last half of the Book of Acts. “Saul the Persecutor” wanted to kill believers and destroy the church. But Saul became “Paul the Apostle,” the one God chose to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Saul the Jew, the Persecutor, became Paul the Apostle. What a change! Acts 9 begins Paul’s story, which is told four times in Acts.

¹ A Greek city, capital of Cilicia, a country in what is now Turkey. It had both Greek and Hebrew universities. Paul was prepared in both cultures and languages.

² This is a different Ananias from the one in chapter 5. The name means *the Lord is gracious*.

³ It is interesting to me that Cornelius was not a Jew or a Christian, yet God heard his prayers. Some believers don’t want to think about this. Does God hear the prayers of a Hindu* or a Buddhist* or other people of other religions? Many Christians would say “No!” But here, God is listening to the prayers of a non-Jew, non-Christian man. God even sends an angel to him! Maybe the real question should be, “Is God God?” How big is your God? If he is really God, then doesn’t he know *everything* and hear *everything*? (See Psalm 139 in the OT. Also see Isaiah 55: 6-9; Psalm 92:11; I Corinthians 3:20; Luke 11:17; Hebrews 4: 12f.) C. S. Lewis said that our greatest thoughts about God are like idolatry. God is greater than we can ever think or imagine! See Ephesians 4:6.

⁴ Joppa was a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Today it is called Haifa.

⁵ In Acts 2:38 Peter told the Jews, “Repent and be baptized...and you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.” There, for the Jews, baptism in water came first, followed by the Holy Spirit. But in Acts 10, with the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit came first, then they were baptized in water.

I Corinthians 10:1f says the Jews had been “baptized into Moses...” in the OT. Could it be that they needed to be baptized out of Moses and into Christ to receive the Holy Spirit? Could it be that the Gentiles did not need the same thing the Jews did? What was Peter saying to the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house when the Spirit came upon them? He

But then the Jerusalem church found out what had happened with Peter. They said, “You went to the home of Gentiles. You even ate with them!” (That was against their tradition.) So Peter told them how God taught him in a vision. He told them that the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles. The Jews were quiet then. They were amazed that God accepted the Gentiles, too.¹

The church of Antioch in Syria* began spreading the word of the Lord among the Gentiles.² Saul and another great leader, Barnabas,* were there. They even took an offering from mainly Gentile believers for the poor Jewish believers in Judea.

(Acts 12) - The persecution of the new believers got worse. James the Apostle, John’s brother, was killed by King Herod in Jerusalem. Then Peter was thrown in jail. The believers were at Mary’s house praying for Peter, and an angel came to Peter in jail. The angel woke him up. Peter’s chains fell off. He got up and followed the angel out of the jail and then went to Mary’s house.³ He told the believers he was out of jail, then went away to hide. Herod killed all the soldiers guarding the jail because they had let Peter get away. Then Herod died a terrible death too.⁴ (See Acts 12:18-25.)

(Acts 13 and 14) - The Holy Spirit sent Saul and Barnabas with their helper, John Mark, to preach the Gospel to the Jews and then the Gentiles. They

was saying, “Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sin [See bottom of next page.] through his name” (Acts 10:43). Right then the Spirit came down on the Gentiles. Peter and the other Jews saw it happen! This way they knew for sure that God accepts Gentiles as well as Jews.

I see no pattern in the way the Holy Spirit works with believers in Acts. Apparently, he works with each group or each person personally and individually.

¹ One of the hardest things for anyone to overcome is prejudice. *Prejudice* means thinking bad about people, even if you don’t know them. For example, some white people think all black people are bad. And some black people think all white people are bad. Prejudice is usually not based on anything real. It is a learned feeling. Some parents teach their children to hate those who are different—whether they are different in color, in language or in religion. The world is filled with “hate groups.”

In the Book of Acts, as well as the rest of the Bible, many Jewish people were prejudiced against all non-Jewish people. They called them “pigs” and “dogs.” They would not eat with them or talk with them or share with them in any way. So when Peter went into a Gentile’s house (Cornelius), the members of the Jerusalem church were upset. These Jewish believers did not yet know that God doesn’t care about our family tree. God is interested in our hearts. He doesn’t care what race or color or language we are. Even Peter had to be taught this. (See Acts 10:28) In Acts 10:34f, Peter says, “I finally understand that God treats everyone the same. God accepts anyone from anywhere who worships him and does what is good.”

This is an important lesson for us all. We should love, accept, and forgive everyone, especially other believers. We should be like God. He accepts anyone who comes to him. (Compare this to John 6:37 and its context.) If we are all children of the same parents (Adam and Eve), then we are all *brothers and sisters*.

² In Antioch of Syria believers in Jesus were first called “Christians.” The Antioch church apparently had many Gentiles in it. As mentioned before, *Christ* is a Gentile title; it is a Greek word for the Jewish word *Messiah*. *Christian* means *one who belongs to Christ* (usually a Gentile who belongs to Christ, that is).

³ The story of Peter’s escape from prison in Acts 12 is funny, I think. The Church was praying for Peter in prison, so God sent an angel to get him out of prison. When Peter arrived where they were praying, a girl answered the door. When she told the people praying that it was Peter, they said, “You’re out of your mind! It must be his angel.” I guess they didn’t really believe their prayers could help Peter. Peter kept knocking until someone finally let him in.

Sometimes we are like the believers in Acts 12. We may not really believe prayer has power with God. But God does answer prayers—sometimes in surprising ways!

⁴ Luke says Herod “...was eaten by worms and died.” God punished Herod because he took the credit for his great speech, instead of letting God get the glory.

Josephus was a Jew who wrote in the late first century, about 90 A. D. He, too, said that Herod was eaten by worms. He said that it took Herod several days to die. How terribly Herod must have suffered! He should have given God the credit for his speech. And we should always give God the credit for anything good that we do, too.

traveled and preached all over the northeast parts near the Mediterranean Sea. They also did many miracles. But John Mark left Paul and Barnabas at Perga* and returned home.

The Jews often hated Paul and Barnabas and argued with their message, though some believed. The unbelieving Jews even tried to stone Paul to death, but after they stoned him, he got up and went to the next town to preach. The Gentiles were quick to believe, and they honored God's word. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, they reported that the Gentiles where they preached had quickly believed.

(Acts 15) - Some believers who had been Pharisees began to teach that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved.¹ So the leaders had a meeting in Jerusalem. Peter said, "No! We believe we are saved the same way Gentiles are—by God's grace. God showed that he accepted Gentiles when he gave them the Holy Spirit, just as he did us." (See Acts 15:6-11.)²

Then Paul and Barnabas told about the miracles God did among the Gentiles. The leader of the Jerusalem church stood up. He was James, the half-brother of Jesus (son of Mary and Joseph). He showed from the Old Testament that it had always been God's plan to use the Gentiles. Then the Jews wrote a letter to the Gentile believers, asking them to avoid food sacrificed to idols, bloody meat, and sexual sins.³

¹ Some Jews were teaching that Jesus was not enough to save us. They said the Gentiles had to be circumcised, too. But Jesus is enough by himself to save us. Faith in Jesus is what saves us. I believe in him. By that faith I am saved. But some people today still want to add something to Jesus and what he did. Here are some of the things people have wanted to add to Jesus for our salvation:

- Jesus + a certain gift from the Holy Spirit
- Jesus + circumcision
- Jesus + a certain form of baptism
- Jesus + the right interpretation of Scripture
- Jesus + only one cup for communion
- Jesus + no musical instruments in worship
- Jesus + some special doctrine or opinion.

The truth is, Jesus is enough. Nothing we can add will make us any more saved than we already are, if we believe in him and follow him. When we add something to Jesus, we are adding to the Gospel. If you say, "Jesus + anything," you are wrong. This is why there are so many different kinds of churches. This is why there are so many denominations. "Jesus +" is wrong. Yes, I have much other teaching about Jesus; I believe many other things. I believe that when a person believes Jesus is Lord, he should be baptized. I accept many other truths from the Bible. But I'm not saved by these things; I'm not saved by being right. *I am saved by Jesus*. He is enough for me. So I can love and accept and share with believers from all different groups. I don't have to agree with them on all their doctrine. I don't have to give up my doctrines either. It is Jesus who binds us all together, not doctrine. Unity is "of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). So I will hold on to Jesus forever, but I'll always be open to re-think anything else I believe. (See John 3:16 and 14:6. Also see Genesis 15:6 and read Galatians.)

² John the Baptist had already said that Jesus would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. This means that when God accepts people, the Holy Spirit baptizes them. That is how we all become part of the church. (See 1 Corinthians 12:13.) So now we have the Holy Spirit; now we live in Jesus and he lives in us. (See Galatians 2:20.)

³ The Jewish leaders in the Jerusalem church wrote a letter. They told the Gentiles not to eat food sacrificed to idols or eat bloody meat. They also said to stay away from sexual sin. [This will be dealt with in several places in I Corinthians.] Jews and Gentiles came together in the church. The Jerusalem leaders didn't want the Gentiles to hurt the Jewish believers. Since Jews were told in Moses' Law not to eat idol sacrifices and not to eat blood, the leaders asked the Gentiles not to also. That way the Gentiles would not hurt the Jews, and they could all worship together. Jesus did say that all foods are okay to eat (Mark 7:18f), but the Jews were not ready to change that quickly. It takes us time to grow. We can't accept too much freedom all at once! Just don't do anything that will hurt anyone else. I limit my freedom so I won't hurt anyone. I try to do everything to help others, not hurt them.

Barnabas wanted to take his cousin, John Mark, with them on another preaching trip. Paul would not do it, because John Mark had left them on the first trip. Paul was angry and would not give John Mark another chance. So Paul took Silas* and went one way, and Barnabas took John Mark and went another.¹

(Acts 16 -20) - On Paul's second trip, he visited some of the places he had visited before. He met a young man named Timothy. He circumcised Timothy² and took him along on the rest of the trip. One night Paul planned to go East, but he had a vision to turn West, to Macedonia.* Paul and his friends did well in Philippi of Macedonia, until they were thrown in prison. The Lord did a miracle and freed them by an earthquake. The jailer and his family were saved because of this. (See Acts 16:25-34.) The people who threw them in prison had to apologize to them. (See Acts 16:16-40.) From Philippi they traveled on in Macedonia and many people believed the gospel. Then they went south into Achaia, Greece, where Paul argued with the leaders of Athens, a great university city.³

From Athens, they went on down to Corinth. In a vision, the Lord encouraged Paul to stay there. He preached and taught in Corinth for more than two years. Then they went across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus* in Turkey. There they met a powerful speaker named Apollos.⁴ He defeated the unbelieving Jews in public debates. Paul stayed in Ephesus a long time. God was doing many great miracles through Paul. (See Acts 19:11ff.) While Paul was in Ephesus, there was a riot. The merchants of the city were very angry because the gospel was about the true God, who is invisible. They made their money by making and selling idols of Diana,* the goddess of Ephesus.

¹ Paul would not give John Mark a second chance. Remember, John Mark had quit on their first journey. Paul had not yet learned the lesson of forgiveness. (This shows us that churches and believers are not always agreeable and peaceful.) Later, though, Paul did accept John Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). It is good that he did, because John Mark is the man who wrote the second book of the NT, the Gospel of Mark! So if you fail (and you will), remember Mark. God always gives a second chance, and a third, and a fourth.... (See Matthew 18:21f.)

² Paul circumcised Timothy because Timothy's father was a Greek, and Greeks practice no circumcision. However, Timothy's mother was a Jew, so Timothy was considered a Jew. Paul didn't want Timothy to hurt the Jewish believers just because he was uncircumcised. This is a case where Paul limited his and Timothy's freedom, so he wouldn't hurt others (Romans 14:19: 15:2). But later, when some Jews told Paul he had to circumcise another young Gentile named Titus, Paul refused (Galatians 2:1-5). This was to show the Judaizers [Jews who wanted Gentiles to obey Moses' Law] that they were wrong. They wanted to mix Gospel with Law. They told people that to be true Christians they had to be circumcised and obey other OT laws. (This is just another example of "Jesus +" (See footnote #1 on page 30.)

³ Paul preached the Gospel in the great university city, Athens. Most of the crowd were teachers and educated men, even philosophers (wisdom-lovers). Their only interest was in learning things newer and newer. (See Acts 17:21.) Paul took all the Stoic* teachings and showed where they were wrong. The most obvious one was that the Stoics believed they knew all the truth. But Paul showed them their own idol altar—to *an unknown god*. They couldn't know all truth if they had an unknown god, could they? The unknown god, Paul said, is the true God. Based on that, he told them about Jesus. He even quoted their own "scriptures," writings by wise men who were pagans. (See Acts 17:28.) Paul knew their own writings and their own teachings. Shouldn't we know the writings and teachings of scholars today? That way, we could share the gospel even with the pagan university professors.

⁴ Apollos was a powerful speaker. But if you read Acts 18:24-28, you will see a believing married couple, Priscilla and Aquila. They heard Apollos speak. Then they invited him to their home to teach him more accurately about baptism. They did not condemn him or rebuke him. They only showed him a more complete understanding of baptism. We should learn several things from this: **1) Lovingly correct those who are wrong.** Do it in private. Never condemn someone who teaches about Jesus, even if he is not right on everything. **2) No matter how great a speaker you are or how much you know, you still must be teachable.** Be open to correction. I have been teaching for many years, but sometimes I am still corrected by my students. It doesn't hurt; it *helps*.

After the riot, Paul wanted to leave Ephesus and head for Jerusalem. He wanted to get there by Pentecost. But before he left the area, he met with the elders of the Ephesian church on the beach. Paul spoke to them, and they cried and prayed together.

(Acts 21-22) - Paul and Luke headed for Jerusalem.¹ On the way, a prophet warned Paul that his life was in danger and that he would be captured if he went on to Jerusalem. But Paul had made his decision; he went anyway.²

In Jerusalem, Paul reported on his work to James and the other church leaders. Then a mob of unbelieving Jews tried to kill Paul, but Roman soldiers saved him. (See Acts 21:26-36.) Then Paul got to speak to the mob. The Jews quieted down when they heard him speaking their own language. He told about meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, the same story Luke told earlier in Acts 9. They all listened quietly until he mentioned that God had sent him to preach to the Gentiles. They screamed, "Kill him! Kill him!" The soldiers could not even tie him up,³ but they did keep him safe.

(Acts 23 -24) - The next day, Paul went to court before the Jewish judges. (The Roman soldiers were standing nearby.) Even though the Jews wanted badly to kill Paul, he got to defend himself several times before Roman leaders.

(Acts 25-28) - Finally, Paul appealed to the Roman Emperor. This meant that the soldiers had to guard him until he got to Rome. He spoke again before the Jewish and Roman leaders, too.

The rest of Acts tells about Paul's trip to Rome. It was late for a sailboat trip at sea. Paul warned the Roman officer that it was too dangerous to travel now, but the officer listened to the owner of the ship and not Paul. So they traveled on. A great storm drove them across the water for two weeks, way off course. They should have listened to Paul. The ship was finally destroyed, but everyone aboard was saved. They were able to swim to the shore of an island named Malta. (See Acts 27:21-26.) A poisonous snake bit Paul, but God protected him. Paul did many miracles on Malta. Then they sailed to Rome.

In Rome, Paul stayed in a rented house under Roman guard, and he spoke to everyone who came to him. Acts ends with many Jews refusing to believe in Jesus. But some believed, and the Word of God kept on spreading. *Nothing* can hold back the spreading of the Word!

¹ As you read Acts you will probably notice several places where Luke says "we." These are the places where Luke joined Paul in his travels. [They are called the "we sections."] See Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18 and 27:1-28:16.

² Paul needed to go to Jerusalem to deliver the offering he had collected from the Gentiles to the persecuted Jewish believers there. Many Jews who believed in Jesus had lost their jobs and property in the persecution in Jerusalem.

³ Being a citizen of Rome in the first century meant Paul could not be kept tied up or be questioned by Roman soldiers. Paul often was saved from rough treatment by his citizenship. He was born a Roman. (See Acts 16:35-40; the riot in Acts 21:30-32 and 22:22-29; a letter written by one Roman official to another in Acts 23:23-35. There are also other places where Paul's Roman citizenship helped him.)

ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

In Acts, we learned about the start and growth of the church. The Holy Spirit worked through some of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul. In Romans we will learn what it means to be a Christian; we will learn all about what believing in Jesus and belonging to God mean. Paul wrote Romans probably in Corinth around A. D. 56 or 57.

OUTLINE

- A. Opening: Paul's prayer and plans: Romans 1:1-15
- B. Saved by faith: 1:16f [*This is the theme of the book.*]
- C. THE SIN OF MAN: 1:18 - 3:20
- D. BUT THE GRACE OF GOD: 3:21 - 8:39
- E. (Does the Jews' unbelief make God's promises to them empty? No! 9:1 - 11:36)
- F. THEREFORE, THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: 12:1 - 15:13
- G. Closing and greetings: 15:14 - 16:27

OVERVIEW

Romans is the only book Paul wrote to a church he had not visited. It is as though Paul is telling us everything he knows about being a Christian.

A. OPENING: PAUL'S PRAYER AND PLANS: 1:1-15-- First he prays for them.¹ He tells them he plans to visit them.² Then he writes like this:

B. SAVED BY FAITH: 1:16f—I am not ashamed of the good news; it is God's power to save everyone who believes in Jesus. God accepts everyone who believes and follows Jesus. Just because we believe, God counts us right with him! This is the best message in the world for us. It means that we no longer have to worry about pleasing God; we already do please him because we believe in his son, Jesus. That is how Jesus is our savior. So that makes us want to live for him.

C. THE SIN OF MAN: 1:18-3:20-- But people are terrible sinners. People know about God; we know we should thank him and praise him. Everyone knows this. But people don't do it. They think they're so smart that they don't need God. In their pride they refuse to serve or worship God. So they end up being idol-worshippers, and they practice evil. They sin and sin until God has to give them up in the sin they keep doing. God never *forces* anyone to obey him; he gives people freedom to do what they want. So people get worse and worse. They start with adultery and sexual sins that hurt their own bodies. Then they get tired of doing that, so they become perverted in their sin. Men start having sex with men, and women with women. Many begin to get sick and even die. But that's not the end of it. What comes next is even worse: they even begin to think they're

¹ This is the standard way to open a letter in the first century; it's called the "epistolary form."

² Paul tells more of his plans in Romans 15:23-25. After he went to Jerusalem, he did come to Rome. He was put in jail there, and that's how Acts ends. However, he later got out, made a fourth missionary journey to Spain, and then was arrested again. This time he was put in a cold prison in Rome [probably the Mamertine Dungeon], instead of a private house, as in Acts 28. (See II Timothy, 4:9-13, 16-18.)

right in what they're doing. Their minds become so evil that they try to get other people to join them in rebelling against God. Even though they know it's wrong, they keep doing more and more evil until truth can't get through to them any more. Their minds *cannot* see the truth any longer.

It is not only the non-Jews who behave this way; it is the Jews too. Even good people are hopelessly sinful. Good people sit back and condemn those who do evil, but they do the same things. And even condemning others is wrong. So all people are under God's judgment as sinners. There may be someone somewhere who doesn't have law who still lives right. But even their conscience bothers them sometimes. God judges the heart.¹ *Wanting* to please him is more important than any outward act or behavior. But for our own good, we *must* learn to obey.² We are all sinners; we are so bad that we can't even know how bad we are!

D. BUT THE GRACE OF GOD: 3:21-8:39 -- No matter what advantages we have, we are all under sin. We are all without hope of being saved. All of us have sinned and keep on falling short of what God wants for us. But listen to this! God shows us that faith in Jesus Christ makes us right with him (Roman 3:23f). We are continually acceptable to God as long as we believe in Jesus. Even if we sin, we are still saved as long as we believe. But, of course, this does *not* mean we should keep sinning. People who say that deserve to be condemned. God judges our hearts; he knows if we believe in Jesus. If we do, we're safe.

How do I know for sure that we're safe if we believe? Look at Abraham in the OT. What did he find with God? Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham believed what God promised, and God began to think of Abraham as a righteous man. What a great promise that is! When anyone believes God's word, God sees him as righteous. God forgave even David, who committed adultery and murder. David wrote Psalm 51 just after he sinned. There, David was afraid that God would take the Holy Spirit away from him because of his sins. But David says next in Psalm 32: "*O the joys of the man whose sins the LORD has forgiven; O the joys of the one whose sins have been covered!*" So even David knew about God's forgiveness. This means that we all are forgiven when our hearts trust Jesus and what he has done for us.

And as for Abraham, even when he was going through hard times, when it seemed impossible that God could help him, he still believed God. He trusted that God would give him a son through Sarah. Sarah had already gone through menopause.* It was impossible for her to have a child. And Abraham was so old, it was almost as though his body was dead. But God still gave him Isaac by his wife, Sarah. Isaac is the son God had promised 25 years before. So Abraham became the father of many nations by his faith. He is our father, if we believe and follow Jesus. (See Galatians 3:26-29.) Here is what we believe: *Jesus died for our sins; he was raised to make us right with God.* So we are forgiven of all our sins. (*Romans 4:25*)

¹ All we can do is look at the outside of people. God is the only one who can see our hearts and judge with truth. He even sees people who don't know about Jesus; he can judge their hearts, too. There may be someone somewhere who loves truth and wants to do what is right, but who has not heard the Gospel. Only God is capable of judging these people. Could it be that Jesus is able to save even these people?

² The *only* way to happiness is through *obedience*.

Since we are forgiven through our faith, we are now at peace with God. We owe him nothing; Jesus paid it all! We are debt free (Romans 5:1-11¹). So we are filled with joy—joy that gives us hope that one day we will be like God. We even have joy in our suffering;² when we try to overcome sin, we have joy. Even when we seem hopeless, we have joy. This is because we know that when we suffer we are overcoming sin. And when we overcome it, we grow stronger just as Abraham did. We become so strong in our faith that we have more joy and hope. Thank God! He has poured his Holy Spirit into our hearts so we can love God and each other. Now there are two ways to live (Romans 5:12ff). We have a choice. We can live a fleshly life and end up in Hell; or we can live a spiritual life, overcome sin, and end up in Heaven. Do we follow Adam and sin, or do we follow Abraham and live a life of faith? We have decided; we will live a life of faith. Sin no longer rules us. Grace rules our lives.

That's what our baptism means; we are no longer under sin, but we are under grace (Romans 6). When we believed and were baptized, we were buried with Christ. We died with him; we were taken down from the cross with him, by our faith. We were buried with him in his death, by our faith; we arose with him from the grave, by our faith! This is what our baptism means. We no longer are slaves of sin. We have been set free from sin. When a Christian sins, it is because he *chooses* to do so! So stop choosing to sin. Live for God instead. His grace and the Spirit inside us give us the power to live for him and to stop letting sin rule us. We died back there in our baptism. Dead people don't sin. We are now free not to sin. When people keep on sinning, they will die and be punished for it. But when believers are overcoming sin, they can look forward to eternal life.³ (See James 1:2 and 12.)

We are free from all the rules and regulations of the law. Baptism means we have died to the law. We have died to sin. We have died to slavery. We are free. God has done all this for us; he has changed our hearts, and we are *free!* But then, why do I find myself in such a struggle? (Romans 7) There was a time when I didn't know the law. I was ignorant of sin back then. God didn't hold my sin against me. But now, since I know what wrong is, why can't I live the way I want to? It seems that every time I try to do good, sin is right there beside me. *I can't live the Christian life.* I want to do good, but I find myself sinning. What is the matter with me? In my spirit and in my mind I *want* to do what is right, but in my flesh I keep on sinning. How hopeless I am! Well, this is what Jesus meant when he said, "O the joys of those who realize they are hopeless! They have the most hope of all." (See Matthew 5:3.) "Who will save me from this body of death?"⁴ The answer is; *Jesus has already done it!*¹

¹ Romans 5:1-11 is some of the best scripture in the Bible. Not just because it's one of my favorite sections; it is great because it makes clear to us that we are saved by faith in Jesus.

² "Suffering" has a special meaning in Romans and other places. It means, *overcoming temptations*, or *putting to death sin in our bodies*. Suffering is part of the growth of every Christian—overcoming sin.

³ Overcoming sins leads to eternal life. We are no longer helpless sinners; we now have the Holy Spirit and the Word and Faith living inside us. Those are able to help us stop sinning. You can tell if you're saved; you are sinning less and confessing your sins more. My favorite scripture in the whole Bible is Hebrews 10:14. It says, "By one sacrifice, Jesus made perfect forever all those who are becoming holy." In other words, if you are sinning less, that means God sees you as "perfect forever." The words, "becoming holy," mean that God and you are working together to make you holy, different from the world. With his help we can overcome sin; as we do, he sees us as perfect because of Jesus. When he looks at us, he sees Jesus!

⁴ In some places in the first century, when someone committed a murder, the people who caught him would tie him face-to-face with the dead body of his victim. They would lash the murderer to the dead body of the person he had

If you believe in Jesus, you have *nothing* to be afraid of. No one can ever condemn you or punish you. The Holy Spirit in you will never let anything destroy you. You will live even if your body dies. It is for this very reason that Jesus came here. He died to set us free. We will not die now, since he died in our place. (See John 11:26.) He also showed us that we can live without sinning. The key is our minds. What do we think about all the time? Do we think of fleshly and worldly things? No! We are sons of God; we have our minds set on heavenly things. We keep thinking about his word and doing good. We know that those who live by the flesh cannot please God, so we live by his Spirit. His Spirit helps us in so many ways. He raised us from the dead just as he did Jesus. He gives life to our death-bound bodies even now. He helps us live by his power and not our own. If we are overcoming sin with his help, we prove God is our father. We received the Holy Spirit when we believed and were baptized. That Spirit teaches us to call God our “Daddy” and to ask him to help us. He has made us heirs* with Jesus. Everything that belongs to the father is given over to Jesus; and Jesus will share everything with us. Soon we will be transformed from the lowly physical people we now are, and we will be like Jesus. We will be in glory with him.

Even though it seems Satan is winning in this world, he isn't. God is winning. But the fallen creation seems to groan because it is dying. We even groan because we want to be like Jesus so badly. And the Holy Spirit groans, too, as he interprets our prayers. God knows what we mean when we pray. We don't know what to say, but God's Spirit knows our hopes and dreams and all our thoughts. God is so wonderful. He makes even our bad times end up good for us. He makes everything work together for good for us. We love him and want to please him. God has done five things for us:

- 1) he *knew* us before the world was created;
- 2) he *chose* us and made us to be like Jesus, so he would be our big brother;
- 3) he *called* us to himself by sending us the good news of Jesus;
- 4) he *made us right* with himself by the death and resurrection of Jesus; and
- 5) he *glorified* us to be like Jesus.

Do you see that all those words are past tense? That means that in God's eyes all these things are already done. We already have the victory. We have already *won!* (Romans 8:28-30)

If God did all this for us; if he gave his only son for us, won't he give us anything else we need? Who can condemn us? God himself is on our side. No one can ever hurt us

murdered—arm to arm, leg to leg, body to body. There was no escape. Then they would throw the two tied together into the garbage, or they would stone him to death. Paul is saying that he is tied face-to-face with *his own dead self!* He “killed” himself when he was buried in baptism; but wherever he goes, he is dragging his own dead self with him!

We can't live the Christian life by ourselves. It takes God's help. God's help, the work of the Holy Spirit, is what chapter 8 of Romans is all about.

¹ In Romans 7 and 8, Paul is making a comparison of flesh and Spirit. Basically, there are two sets of motives, two things that make us what we are. These are flesh and Spirit. If we follow the flesh, we sin; if we follow the Spirit, we live right. We can live Adam's way and sin, or we can live the Spirit's way and do what God wants. Which way do we choose?

There is a story of a man who traveled from town to town with fighting dogs. He would place a bet on one dog or the other in each fight. He never lost money on the dogs. Finally, a man who had seen him in several towns asked him, “How do you always know which dog will win?” The man replied, “It's the one I feed.” We have “two dogs” in us; one wants to do right and one wants to do wrong. Which one will you feed? If you look at pornography or do other evil, you will think and do evil. But if you look at the Word or other good things, you will think and do good. Whichever “dog” you feed the most will win. So feed the Spirit! Also read Philippians 2:12f.

again. Even when we suffer, even when we struggle to overcome sin, no one can condemn us. Nothing in all of creation—nothing at all can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus our Lord. Even when we seem to be losing, we *win!* In Christ, we are greater than the greatest conqueror. Thank you, God, for all you have done for us.

E. *(DOES THE JEWS' UNBELIEF MAKE GOD'S PROMISES TO THEM EMPTY? NO! 9:1-11:36)* - I am so concerned about my physical brothers, the Jews. They have all the reasons to believe, but they don't. And all believers owe them a great debt: they are the physical family that our Jesus came from. But in spite of their unbelief, God's word in the OT will never fail. The Jews failed, but God *won't* fail. God made his own free choice of the ones he will bless. Here are seven choices God made to show us that his promises are true:

GOD'S CHOICES IN THE OT:

1. Not Ishmael, but Isaac (9:6-9) - Even though Ishmael was born first to Abraham, God chose Isaac as the promised son. Abraham even begged God to let Ishmael be the one, but God said, "I will bless Ishmael, but he is not my choice. Isaac will be the one who has my greatest blessing."
2. Not Esau, but Jacob (9:10-13) - Again, even though Esau was born first, God chose Jacob to carry on the blessing. It is God's choice, not a man's choice! And God had already made the decision before Esau and Jacob were even born. (See Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2f in the OT. Also see Romans 9:11.)
3. Not Pharaoh and the rulers, but Moses and the slaves (9:14-18) - God could have chosen the ones with the power to carry on his blessing, but he chose the weak to be his chosen people. God was shown to be great because of Pharaoh's stubborn and hard heart. (Read the Book of Exodus.)
4. Not the clay, but the potter (9:19-26) - God is the potter and Israel is the clay. If the potter thinks the clay has the wrong shape, he smashes it and starts over. God may make someone who will be rejected and destroyed, or he may make someone who will be blessed. *He* is the one who makes the choice, not the clay.
5. Not law, but faith and confession (9:27-10:21) - Isaiah 10:22 in the OT makes it clear that not all Israel will be saved; only those who believe. They are the "remnant." If it weren't for the remnant, Israel would have been just like Sodom and Gomorrah. They would have been destroyed. (See Genesis 18:16 -19:29, Isaiah 1:9ff and Revelation 11:8.) The Jews who tried to work their way to heaven did not believe, so they were lost. The Gentiles, who did not try to be saved by works, believed, and so were saved. Because the remnant believe in the Rock (Jesus), they will be saved. Jews and Gentiles are both saved the same way—by faith.
6. Not Elijah alone, but 7000 faithful (11:1-10) - Even though it seemed to Elijah that he was the only true believer left, God had chosen to protect 7000 others. (1Kings 19:9-21)
7. Not the tame olive tree only, but the mix of tame and wild (11:11-24) - Israel, even though most did not believe, has not been finally rejected. When they rejected the Savior, it opened the way for the Gentiles. Israel is the root of the olive tree. Israel was chosen by God. But most of the Jews (tame branches) of the tree did not believe. They were broken off and God inserted the Gentiles (wild branches) in their place.¹ But the

¹ In West Texas we have many farmers who harvest pecan nuts. These people know how to grow big pecans. If they take a branch from a tame pecan tree and put it in a strong, wild pecan root, they will get huge pecans from that branch.

Gentiles had better watch out! Since they replaced Jews, they may one day be replaced by Jews again. It is *faith* that keeps the branches firmly in the tree. Whoever believes will be grafted into the tree, whether Jew or Gentile. This is how all “Israel” will be saved; all who believe will have their sins forgiven. God loves the Jews because of their forefathers. He hasn’t changed his mind; he has just made a choice. And his choice will never be changed. Those who believe in Jesus will be saved—Jew or Gentile. God has judged the whole world as disobedient so that he can show his forgiveness to all. Who could ever know God’s mind on such things? The whole universe is his. Praise him!

F. THEREFORE, THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: 12:1-15:13 -- The following few chapters are about how we should live. Since God has done so much for us, what should our response be?

First, your relationship with God and the church. (Romans 12) You should live your life for others in the church. To do this, you must make sure your own life is right with God. How do you do this? Give your body and your mind to God. (v. 1f) Stop sinning, and let God lead you in all you do. Use your mind to learn the word. Keep yourself pure in all ways by obeying the word. That way your mind will be made new, and you will discover God’s will for your life.

Whatever your gifts are, use them to help others and not for yourself alone.¹ (See 12:3-8) We serve God by serving other people. Just be sure you serve with all your heart. Don’t worry when you don’t get credit for the good things you do. Remember that God knows what you’ve done. He will give you credit. Help others in every way you know how.

When you are mistreated, pray for those who mistreat you. Just as Jesus said, try to be friends with everyone you can. God will judge those who reject you. Don’t you try to be the judge. Forgive everyone. Be willing to let God’s love inside you overcome all the evil that is done to you. Good will overcome evil.

Second, your relationship with the powers over you. (Romans 13) You must obey the government. Obey whatever or whoever is over you in your job or in your country. Pay the taxes you owe; drive at the proper speed; honor the police; be a good citizen. The rulers are servants of God.² Don’t fight against them unless they tell you to do something that you know is wrong. (See Daniel 3 and 6 in the OT.) Treat your neighbors with respect and love. The only debt we Christians owe anyone is love. Live a good life

The wild root is much stronger than the tame one, so its life will strengthen the tame branch to bear large fruit. But God breaks the rules of gardening. He takes branches from the *wild* olive tree and grafts them into the *tame* olive tree. He is God; he can do what he wants. It’s just like him to “break the rules.” He planted the Jewish “root” long ago; now he takes wild branches (us Gentiles) and grafts them into the tame root. The main reason he did this is that most Jews don’t believe in Jesus as the true Messiah. Paul warns us that if we quit producing good fruit, God will pull us out of the tree, and graft the original branches back in. It is by faith we remain in the tree. (Compare Jesus’ teaching of the vine and the branches in John 15.) So let’s bear fruit for God!

¹ Paul gives us four rules for the gifts God has given us. (See Romans 12:3-8.) The first rule is, *know yourself and your gift*. If you don’t know your gift, ask your best friend which one(s) you have. Or ask your spouse, if you’re married. The second rule is, *accept yourself without envy or regret*. Realize that whatever gift you have is God’s gift to you. The third rule is, *deny yourself; use your gift for others and not for yourself*. The last rule is, *accept others and their gifts*. So, 1) know yourself, 2) accept yourself, 3) deny yourself, and 4) accept others. If you follow these rules, there will be peace in the church, and the church will be built up by the use of the gifts.

² Here in Romans 13, the word translated “servant” is the word *deacon*. This means that we must obey the authorities above us, whether we are at home, on the job or in school, or we are disobeying a deacon of God. Always obey the authorities, unless they ask you to do something that you know is wrong or evil. (See Daniel 3 and 6 in the OT.)

among the unbelievers in hope that they will see what you do and turn to God. If you love your neighbors, you will do everything for their good.

Third, your relationship with other Christians. (Romans 14:1-15:13) Love your brothers and sisters in the church most of all. Don't judge their different opinions. God will judge them, and they will be saved right along with you.

If one believer eats meat or drinks wine, don't judge him. If another is opposed to meat or wine, don't judge him either. Let your opinions on these things be between you and God alone. If you really love your brother, you will do everything to build him up and nothing to hurt him.

Some Christians feel it is wrong to meet together any day other than Sunday. Other Christians think it doesn't matter. God accepts both of them! The key to your relationship with others is not a day, or meat, or wine; the key to being with others is your relationship with God. God rules by righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the important things, not days, or meat, or wine.

Whatever you do, do everything with love, so you'll always build up your brother and not hurt him.

Never do anything that your faith tells you is wrong, even if your brother or sister does it. It may not be wrong for them. God will judge that.

If you're a strong Christian, and you feel it is okay to eat meat or drink wine or meet on another day than Sunday, don't force that on others. In everything you do, please Jesus and try to please your Christian friends.

Jesus came as a servant to the Jews, so he wouldn't turn them off to the truth. He was free, but he tried to please his fellow Jews. He lived as they did, but he didn't let their human traditions make him a slave. He did God's will, but the legalists condemned him. (It is impossible to please legalists.) But he did fulfill the OT promises, so the Jews should have believed in him. But the Gentiles were the main ones who believed. So let us all, Jew and Gentile, praise God together for what Jesus has done for us.

G. CLOSING AND GREETINGS (15:14-16:27) -- Let me remind you of all Jesus has done through me among the Gentiles—signs and miracles in the power of the Spirit wherever I have gone. I preached the gospel where Jesus was not known. That is why I have not yet come to see you.

I now plan to go on to Jerusalem with the money I have collected for our poor Jewish brothers there. Then I want to go to Spain. I'll come to see you on the way, if the Lord allows. Please pray for me and for the offering to those in Jerusalem.

Phoebe, a minister of the church in the Corinth area, will deliver this letter to you.

I have never been to Rome. But my friends with me here and I know many people there. We greet them in the Lord.

The only other thing I want you to watch out for is people who cause division. If they use different teaching to divide the body, have nothing to do with them. These people are evil and are just trying to satisfy their own appetites.

Soon the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet.

God is able to protect you and lead you on to obey your faith. All praise be to him! Amen. Love, Paul

I CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: ca. A. D. 54.) In Romans you learned that to be a Christian means grace and forgiveness from God. In I Corinthians you will learn about a gifted, immature church that was also immoral and divided. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to try to help the people learn to love each other, stop their sexual sin, and to be united in Christ.

OUTLINE

- A. Information from Chloe's family (I Corinthians 1-6)
 - 1. Divisions in the church (I Corinthians 1-4)
 - 2. Sexual and legal problems in the church (I Corinthians 5-6)
- B. Questions from the Corinthians to Paul (I Corinthians 7:1-16:4)
 - 1. What about married people? (I Corinthians 7:1-24)
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OVERVIEW

(I Corinthians 1) I, Paul the Apostle, and my friend Sosthenes are writing this letter to you in Corinth, as well as to *all* other believers. (Compare Acts 18:17.)

We thank God for you. Look at all the blessings and gifts God has given you. But I beg you to unite in Christ. You are divided over who your favorite preacher is! (1:10-17) Whoever baptized you does not matter. You have divided Christ's body.

I remind you that the cross of Jesus is what saves us. *He* is the basis of unity, not some worldly wisdom or mere human being. The message of Christ's death on the cross may not be miraculous enough for the Jews. It may not be "wise" enough for the Greeks. But it is salvation for whoever believes it. After all, God is not limited to our silly, human "wisdom."

Look at your own selves, brothers and sisters. Nothing is really special about any of you, from a worldly point of view. But God chose you anyway. He chooses whatever is unimportant or foolish or shameful or weak. And he uses them. He takes them and makes them important and wise and glorious and strong. And he has made Christ all those things for us. If you want to brag, brag about Jesus! (See Jeremiah 9:24.)

(I Corinthians 2) When I came to you with the message of God, I didn't use worldly wisdom on you. No, your faith is based on *God's* power, not

something of mine. But I *do* have wisdom for those who are mature enough for it. The wisdom I have is *spiritual* wisdom. The wise of this world can't understand spiritual wisdom. If they *had* understood, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory! Up to now, *no one* really understood what God had in store for us believers; but now God's own Spirit has shown it to us.

So when we talk about spiritual truth, whoever has God's Spirit understands us. Whoever doesn't have God's Spirit can never understand us. Only people who have the Spirit can really understand spiritual things. We have Christ's Spirit and Christ's mind, so we will understand.

(I Corinthians 3) When I first came to you in Corinth, I had to talk "baby talk" to you. You never could have understood spiritual talk. The sad part is, you *still* can't.¹ You are still living like the rest of the world lives. You are still divided over silly things, like who baptized you or who is your favorite preacher, Apollos or Paul. But we are only servants of God. I planted the seed and Apollos watered it. But it is *God* who keeps making it grow. The ones who plant and water are not important. God will reward us for the work we did, but *you* are the ones who are supposed to be growing up.

I began the work with you, building you up as though you were a building. Jesus is the foundation you are built on. There can be no other foundation. Anyone who builds on that foundation will be saved, but God will test his work by fire! If it is good work, it will last. If not, it will burn up, but the worker will still be saved—just barely.

What kind of building are all of you? Aren't you God's temple? Doesn't God's Spirit live in you? *Don't divide God's temple or he will destroy you.*

If you think you're wise, don't forget: to God all human wisdom is worthless. So don't divide over men—who your favorite preacher is, or who baptized you, or whatever. But realize this: all your teachers belong to you all. In fact, everything is yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Peter or life or death or the future—everything belongs to you. But you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

(I Corinthians 4) So you should think of us as servants² of Christ. Not that I care what you think of me. I don't even care what I think of myself. All that matters is what

¹ According to Paul, there are four kinds of people:

- 1) unspiritual ones (unbelievers) [2:14]
- 2) baby Christians (or "fleshy" ones) [3:1]
- 3) immature Christians (or "fleshy" ones) [3:3]
- 4) spiritual Christians (mature ones) [2:15]

The first ones (#1 above) are not Christians; they are still living in sin. The second ones (#2 above) are so immature that Paul says they need milk and not solid food. These are babyish believers who do what they feel, rather than what they should. The third ones (#3) are still living like they are in the world, even though they are believers. The fourth ones (#4) are the wise ones. Like Paul, they are strong, mature believers. The Holy Spirit rules their lives.

We should try to be like the fourth group. We should study the Bible every day and pray regularly for wisdom. (See James 1:5-8.) We should share with other church members every chance we get. We should treat all other people with love and respect, especially our own families. If we do this throughout our lives, God will give us wisdom. ("Wisdom" means we can see life as God sees it.)

² Paul uses a unique word here to refer to himself and other church leaders. The verb means, "to be helpful." The noun means "helper" or "assistant." The literal meaning of the word is "under-rower," like in the galley ships of the ancient world. The ship master had a slave-driver who beat a drum in the stern of the ship, and those men who were chained to

God thinks of me.¹ He will judge everyone and reward each of us as we deserve, according to our deeds.

I talked about Apollos and me because I wanted you to learn something. Every gift you have, and even what you are, God gave to you. So you are no different from other believers in other places. I wish you *were* richer and in control. I *wish* you were.

God has made us Apostles to be in last place, to be weak and on the way to death. How ridiculous that you people would think that you are better than we are! We are hungry and thirsty, and clothed in rags; we are beaten and homeless and worn out. We are the scum of the earth. But we treat all people with respect and love, even if they hate us.

I hope you're ashamed of yourselves! I was the one who gave you birth through the gospel. I'm like a father to you. How could you think you were in charge? You are like little babies!

(I Corinthians 5) That man who is having sex with his dad's woman—you tell him that is a terrible thing. How can you brag about such a thing? You should get rid of him. In fact, Jesus says to kick him out of the church there. I hope then he'll repent and return to you again.²

I can't believe you let such things go on among you. Remember this: "One rotten apple spoils the barrel." I know my first letter said to avoid evil people. But I didn't mean evil people *outside* the church. I meant avoid evil

the oars had to row the ship to the beat of the drum. Paul places himself and other church leaders in the position of a mere oar-slave, working hard to obey the Master and doing what is best for those he serves.

¹ Paul reveals three levels of maturity here. I call them:

- 1) *Junior high level* - All these people care about is what their friends think. They no longer care what their parents or teachers think. If their peer group thinks they are okay, then they feel okay. (This is true immaturity.)
- 2) *High school level* - These people care only about what they think of themselves. "If I think I'm okay, then I'm okay!" (This is a higher level of immaturity, but it is still not maturity.)
- 3) *College level* - Here begins true maturity: "All I care about is what God thinks of me. And I know he loves, accepts and forgives me, so I really am okay."

Some day I want to write a book entitled, *I'm Not Okay, and You're Not Okay, But That's Okay!* You are okay because God says you're okay. If you believe, you're safe in his son, Jesus. (See Colossians 3:1ff.)

² In I Corinthians 5:5 Paul says, "Hand this man over to Satan." When you first read this, it appears very harsh. But when "church discipline" is done properly, it follows the rules Jesus laid down in Matthew 18. The purpose is always to cure the problem and save the person. Here, because this man was doing something horribly immoral, they had to "kick him out of the church." Again, the purpose was to shock him, so that he will repent and come back to the church. And guess what! He *did* come back. II Corinthians 2:7-11 records the man's return. Paul says there that they should welcome him back and comfort him, for he has repented.

Often, though, today, church discipline doesn't work, because the person confronted about sin will just go down the street and attend another church. It is a shame when people refuse to repent of their known sin.

² Paul uses the OT image of Passover here for the church. He says that Jesus is our Passover Lamb. When the Jews celebrated Passover, they had to get all the yeast (leaven) out of their houses. Yeast is a symbol for "sin." That's why I wrote, "Get rid of all rottenness." As the Jews removed yeast, the church must remove all sin and any known continuous sinner from the church.

Do you want to find out what can happen if there is even one unconfessed sin in your life that you know about? Read Joshua 7 in the OT.

people *inside*. Don't have anything to do with them. Don't even eat with them.

Christ has been our special Passover sacrifice, a lamb without sin. So get rid of the rottenness among you.¹

(I Corinthians 6) Are you people actually going to court against each other? Don't you know that unbelievers run the courts?

In the future we will judge the world; we will even judge angels! Can't we handle these little problems within the church? Shame on you! Don't you know you'd be better off to be cheated or robbed? You are putting a spot on the holy name of Jesus. Stop suing each other in pagan courts.

You all *used* to be evil in your behavior. Now, you've been washed and purified by God's Spirit. Do you think you are superior to me? Instead, you need to follow my example. Timothy will come soon to remind you how you should live, just as I teach in all the other churches. So don't be proud, or I'll come to you myself. I'll either spank you or treat you peacefully. It's up to you.

You may think you're free in Christ. Well, you are. But not free to do evil. Don't you know that if you have sex with a prostitute, you are one body with her? How can you be joined with Jesus and have sex with a prostitute? Your body is a holy place. God lives in you. You *must* stop this immoral behavior.

(I Corinthians 7) Now I want to answer the questions you sent to me:

Question # 1--*Is it good for a man not to touch a woman?* (7:1) First, let me say that if you're married, you do not have the gift of celibacy.* Married people need sex, otherwise they would not be married. So realize that in each marriage, each one's body belongs to the other. Don't withhold sex from each other, or Satan will soon have you in his power.

Married people should stay married. If an unbeliever leaves a believing wife or husband, the believing one is free to remarry. But if the unbeliever decides to remain married, God will accept your marriage and your children because one of you is a believer. About this I have 2 words of advice: "Don't seek." If you're married, don't seek divorce; if you're unmarried, don't seek a mate.² God wants your life to be orderly and easier. It's best to remain as you are.

² I wish someone had told me Paul's two words of advice when I was single. I was searching frantically for a wife. One summer, my mother told me she had counted the number of girls I'd dated that summer—19. If I had known Paul's advice, "don't seek," I might have trusted God to give me the woman for me. God knew what I needed, anyway. When I finally did give up searching, *he gave me* the one woman who could stand to stay with me for the last 35 years. Paula is a wonderful, beautiful Christian woman, the only wife for me.

For those of you who are single, "don't seek" a mate; ask God to provide the right one for you. He knows much better than we do what we need. Your job is to prepare yourself, your body and your mind, for God's use. (See Romans 12:1f.) Then let him provide what you need. God will provide!

My son, Mark II, made a list of what he wanted in a wife. He committed himself to be a virgin until marriage, and that was one of the things he wanted in a wife. He prayed and did not seek; God heard him, and gave him a beautiful Christian virgin for his wife.

Now, if you're married, "don't seek" a divorce. Read Gary Smalley's books--*If Only He Knew* for the husband, and *For Better or Best* for the wife. Then begin to practice the things in those books. Help each other grow; build each other up; stop speaking to each other in anger, and treat each other with love and respect.

Even if you've stopped loving your mate, you can begin to love again. How? By doing one simple thing—treat your mate the way you did when you loved your mate. If you do that for only two weeks, you *will* love that person again, just as you used to! *Feelings always follow actions*. Paul Meier, an excellent Christian psychologist of the Minirth-Meier Clinic, also says so. And I have seen it work several times.

Question # 2 -- What about unmarried people? (7:25) My opinion as an apostle is that it is easier and better to remain single. But if you feel a need for sex, then marry. This is a rule for all the churches. If you're married, stay together.¹

Question # 3 -- What about food sacrificed to idols? (8:1) We know there is only one God; we need not fear idolatry or idol sacrifices. However, some believers are weak; they may think idols are real living devils or "gods." If so, we should avoid eating food sacrificed to idols so we don't hurt their conscience. *If eating meat makes my brother or sister sin, I'll never eat meat again.* If you really love your brothers in Christ, you won't do anything to hurt them. Instead, you will only help them.

(I Corinthians 9) Don't I have rights like other Apostles? Don't I have the right to eat and drink what I want? Can't I have a wife like anyone else? Do I have to work for a living? Can't my preaching and teaching be my work? Can't I be paid for it if I want? Even Moses' Law says, "Let the ox eat as he threshes the grain." I have all the rights anyone else has. But I have not used these rights. I always preach and teach free of charge. I never even took an offering for myself! I am free of any guilt.

All I do is try to live as others do. When I'm with the Jews, I am a Jew so no one will condemn me. When I am with the Gentiles, I'm like a Gentile, so I can fit in. When I'm with weak believers, I become like one of them. Whoever I'm with, I try to fit in, so I can win some of them to Jesus. I do everything for the sake of the gospel, so that by all

¹ In Biblical times, there were three levels of engagement to be married:

- 1) The parents of the boy and girl decided who would get married in the future.
- 2) The parents brought the boy and girl together with a chaperon* to let them get to know each other.
- 3) When they were old enough, the boy and girl lived together *without sex* for a time, usually in an apartment in one of their parents' homes. (Often, it was for six months, at least.)

You can imagine the problems that could cause, especially in a place like Corinth. People in the church in Corinth were living together without sex, but they were strongly attracted to each other, sexually. That's why Paul says, "They *must* marry." (7:9 and 36) The purpose for marriage is so that two people who love each other can enjoy sex and can produce children.

This third level of engagement is the situation Mary and Joseph were in when Joseph found that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. That is why Joseph thought he should *put her away privately* (that is, *divorce her*). But God revealed to him in a dream that he should marry her.

In our culture this "waiting period" would not work. Nor did it work in Corinth. In our culture, young people who want to get married should stay pure until marriage. Sex is a wonderful thing that is meant *only* for marriage. God has three rules for sexual happiness:

- 1) No sex before marriage.
- 2) No sex outside of marriage.
- 3) Anything both partners want between just the two of them in marriage is okay.

Anyone who breaks these rules is making a big mistake. What will you say when your son or daughter asks you about yourself: "Were you a virgin until you were married?" What will you tell your child?

God's rules are *never* to take away our fun; the rules are there because God knows us. He knows what's best for us. He knows what will make us happy. If you want to be happy in marriage, don't break these rules. A good marriage takes work. Both partners have to compromise. Both need to obey God's rules for happiness.

But if you've already broken one or all of these rules, you can still become happy. If you will repent, change your mind and your behavior, and ask God to help you to keep those rules for pure sex, you can be happy. You are weak, but God is strong. Turn to him when you are tempted; he has the "way of escape." (See I Corinthians 10:13.)

I had two students, a young man and woman, who became Christians while they were living together. They had been having sex, without the benefit of marriage. The day they both became believers in Jesus, they stopped having sex, moved to separate apartments, and committed to "virginity" until they were married. When they finally did get married, the young man came to my office and said, "I can't believe how great sex can be when you do it right!" God blesses those who obey him. That young man is now a minister to youth in a church in Texas.

means I may be able to save some people. It is okay to compromise everything, except the gospel. But I have to control myself at all times, so after I preach to others, I myself may not be lost.

(I Corinthians 10) Let me warn you, my brothers. Israel in the desert, after they'd left Egypt, were all blessed by God in many ways:

- 1) They were all guided and protected by God under the cloud.
- 2) They were all delivered from their enemies by passing through the Sea.
- 3) They were all unified with Moses by “baptism” in the cloud and the sea.
- 4) They all ate supernatural food—the manna.
- 5) They all drank supernatural drink from the Rock in the desert. Jesus Christ was that Rock!

But even with all those blessings, that first generation from Egypt rebelled against God and died in the desert. Only Joshua and Caleb entered the Holy Land with the new generation. In spite of those five blessings, they also failed in five ways:

- 1) They lusted for evil things.
- 2) They worshiped idols.
- 3) They committed sexual immorality.
- 4) They tested God, to see if he would really do as he said to them.
- 5) They grumbled and complained over and over.

God punished them for these failures many ways. They had to “take another lap” around the desert. We *must* not be like them. If you think you're strong against temptation, watch out! You could easily fall. But if you think you're weak, and you can't help sinning, remember this: *God is faithful!* Every time you're tempted, look to him, and he'll have the way out.¹

When you sit down at the Lord's Supper, realize that it is his body and blood you are sharing in.² We all are one body, just as we all eat from one loaf of bread. You must

¹ God's way out of temptation is always scripture. Look at Jesus in Matthew 4, when Satan tempted him. Jesus never used his deity or his own strength to combat Satan. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy! Jesus had memorized scripture. So should we. If I'm tempted to get drunk, I quote Ephesians 5:18ff, and meditate on that. If I'm tempted to view pornography, I quote Colossians 3:1ff. There are scriptures for every temptation. Memorize them, and use them on Satan whenever he tempts you. If you argue with yourself when you're tempted; if you keep thinking about the temptation, you will probably do the sin. It is better to shift your focus *away* from the sin and onto the scripture. Remember, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. He will also provide a way out.” (10:13) Paul doesn't say, “You be faithful,” because he knows we aren't. But God is!

² The NT's teaching on the Lord's Supper (also called “Communion” or “Eucharist”) is mostly in chapters 10 and 11 of I Corinthians. Paul teaches that there are “Five Sides to the Communion Table:”

- 1) The Inward Look: Paul says, “Let a man examine himself.” This means, we should go back over our motives, thoughts and behavior in our minds. When the Jews celebrate the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), they have to pray and fast for 24 hours, remembering all their sins of the past year. Fortunately, we need only go over the past week! That's hard enough. For me to remember all the things I've done or said or thought that were wrong—that takes some time. Confess your sins to God. That's the “Inward Look.”
- 2) The Outward Look: Paul says we must “recognize the body” when we take the Lord's Supper. “There is one loaf of bread, just as we are one body.” He means this: recognize that all of us are members of the same body—Christ's body. So we should not do what the Corinthians did when they met together. We should realize that we are all brothers and sisters—all over the world.
- 3) The Upward Look: The bread and the cup are reminders that Jesus is *with us* in the Supper in a way he is not with us at other times and places. When he ate with sinners during his life, he showed his full acceptance of them. When he eats with us now, in His Supper, he shows us that he fully accepts *us*, too.
- 4) The Backward Look: Paul says, “. . . you proclaim the Lord's death . . .” when you share in the supper. (See “How He Died,” on page 26.)

not eat and drink of him in the same way you used to eat and drink before the idols! Everything is legal, but not everything *helps* other believers. We must think about helping others.¹

You people aren't sharing in Christ's meal! Instead, you are eating without sharing with others. You're not even waiting on others to get there. Some of you eat too much. Others of you bring jugs of wine and get drunk. You are acting like it's an idol feast! You are shaming the church. You should eat and drink in your own homes, and not do that in church. What you *should* do is realize that this is the Lord's own teaching which he gave to me:

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance² of me." In the same way after supper, he took the cup and said, "This is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink this, do it in remembrance of me."

So whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are telling of the Lord's death, until he comes again.

You people who are getting drunk at church, and who are not sharing with others or waiting on others to get there—you are *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord!* That is why some of you are sick and others have died. God is judging us. Repent, so you will not be condemned with the rest of the world. Share in the Lord's body and blood as you are supposed to. Don't get drunk or refuse to wait on your brothers and sisters to get there. Share the Lord's Supper in a decent and orderly way.

I need to talk to you about your worship, too. Some of the bald women who are from Aphrodite worship have come into the church. They want to pray and preach just as they did on the mountain of Aphrodite, outside the city.³ They must not do this! Such

5) The Forward Look: Jesus will one day return; Paul says to do this, "... until he comes." Remember that judgement is coming. We will escape his condemnation of the world, if we believe and obey him.

¹ The word "love" is used only four times in I Corinthians, up until chapter 13. Then it is used 12 times. This was the Corinthians' problem. They did not love. In chapter one Paul talks to them about their faith and hope, but love is not mentioned. "Love" in the NT (*aga'pe*) means, "helping others." The people in the Corinthian church were so immature, they thought they were the only true Christians; they even doubted their own Apostle Paul! They were on an "ego trip." They couldn't even realize that they were the most immature church, with the most problems of all the ancient churches. But we have no excuse; we know that "love" means "helping people." So we should use our gifts for others and not for ourselves the way the Corinthians did.

² The word "remembrance" in the Lord's supper is an unusual word. It does *not* mean "in memorial" to the late, great Jesus! Rather, it means, "recall" or "to call (Jesus) to the present." He is alive and present in a unique way in Communion.

³ Aphrodite worship in Corinth was similar to Baal and Astarte (Asherah) worship in Canaan in the OT. It was fertility worship gone wrong. According to scholars, up to 2,000 prostitute-priestesses worked in the temple of Aphrodite during the life of Paul. These women were the leaders of the religion. They shaved their heads as a phallic symbol (a symbol of a man's penis). They worshiped sexually, whether heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual. Male prostitutes were everywhere in Corinth. These are the longhaired men Paul talks about in 6:9 and 11:14. They were pederasts* and catamites* in the false worship. The word Paul uses in 6:9 means "soft" men.

When I came into Corinth a few years ago, I could see the Acro-Corinthus (the mountain with the ruins of Aphrodite's temple on it) from more than 30 miles away. It would probably have taken most of a day on a donkey to make the trip to the temple at the top in the days of Paul. While I was in the old city of Corinth, I could see the temple of Apollo just behind the line of shops and stores. At this temple a bull was sacrificed to Apollo every day when Paul lived there. Then the meat was sold at the market place nearby. (See I Corinthians 8.) Why was this bull sacrificed? Again, Apollo was part of the religious mess at Corinth. The followers of his cult would be in a deep hole below the sacrifice. The bull would be killed on a grate just above the followers, and they would "baptize" themselves in the blood of the bull. They were careful to get the bull's blood into their mouth, ears and eyes, to share fully in Apollo's religion.

women must cover their heads with a veil, to show that they are in submission to the elders of the church. This is the rule in all the churches. *No one can dominate the church.* All must be in proper order.

God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of men; men are the head of women, and women are next. This is what “headship” means. If a man covers his head to pray, it is wrong. Men should always pray with their heads uncovered. If a woman has long hair, she is allowed to pray or preach. Her long hair is her glory, and it shows she is in submission to the men. Corinthian men with long hair are usually practicing evil behavior. Most are even homosexuals or male prostitutes. Men should have shorter hair. No one should pray or preach out of proper order. Even angels have a certain order of authority. They are offended if one of us does something out of order in the church. Question # 4 -- What about spiritual problems?¹ (I Corinthians 12 - 15) Brothers and sisters, I want you to know something: you used to do whatever you wanted because you were worshiping empty idols. Now I tell you this: if you want proof that someone has the Holy Spirit, here it is—whoever says, “Jesus is Lord” has the Spirit. Anyone who says bad things about Jesus does *not* have the Spirit.

As for the gifts the Spirit gives, *all* are given by the same Spirit. There are three types of gifts:

- 1) supernatural wisdom and knowledge;
- 2) supernatural faith, healing, power, prophecy, and knowing kinds of spirits;
- 3) supernatural languages and translating languages.

Just as in Romans 12, I say to use the gifts¹ according to the rules. We are all one body, even if we do have different gifts. If we all had the same gift, how could we help each other grow?

The order of importance of the gifts is:

- 1) Apostles,
- 2) prophets,
- 3) teachers,
- 4) miracle-workers,
- 5) healers,
- 6) helpers,
- 7) administrators,
- 8) those who can speak foreign languages they had never studied to learn.
- 9) those who interpret (translate) the foreign languages

Different people have different gifts. No matter what gift you have, you should use it to help others.

But above all the gifts is love. If anyone can speak in many different languages, even heavenly language, if he has no love, all he is, is noise. Even if someone knows everything, has all knowledge of all mysteries, and miraculous faith to be able to move mountains, if he has no love, he is nothing. Even if anyone sells all his worldly goods and

¹ The word "gifts" does not appear in the Greek text until 12:3. Under this heading, Paul is talking about more than just the gifts. Chapter 15 talks about the resurrection, too.

gives the money to the poor, and if he lets his body be burned up, without love, it means nothing at all.

Love has all good things in itself; all bad things are not in love. No matter what gifts a person has, love is greater. Three things are most important: faith in Jesus, hope for the resurrection, and love for God and people. The most important of all is love. One day, faith will be sight; we'll see Jesus face-to-face. One day, hope will be realized; we will be raised from the dead. Only love will go on forever. Love can never fail.

So you go on and long for the gifts, especially prophecy. But know this: *the purpose of all the gifts is to help the church grow.*

When you come together, do whatever you do in decent order. Don't all speak at once. If the Holy Spirit gives someone a message in a foreign language, make sure there's a translator there. If there is no translator, then he should stop speaking. (If you have the gift of a foreign language, ask God for the ability to translate that language.)¹

If someone has a prophecy, let all the prophets get together. When one is speaking, if another gets a message from God, and he stands up, let the other who is speaking find a stopping point, so the second one can give his prophecy.

If a woman wants to speak, she must not dominate. She must do as the first prophet did; she must find a stopping point and stop talking. You know who it is I'm talking about. If a woman has a question, let her ask her husband at home. It is wrong if she speaks on and on in the church. [For more on women, see the article on page 53f.]

Stop being babies and grow up. If all of you speak at once, and a visitor comes in, he'll think you're all crazy! Do what I tell you. All your worship *must* be done in proper order.

(Chapter 15) Some of you people believe that the resurrection has already happened, or that there is no resurrection at all. How foolish! Jesus did die for our sins; he was buried; he rose from the dead on the third day. This is what the Scriptures had told us. He showed himself to be alive to many people, including me. He came to Peter, to the Twelve, to over 500 believers at once. He even appeared to his younger half-brother, James. Jesus rose from the dead, *never to die again.*

Without the resurrection, your faith would be totally empty. Resurrection is what the gospel is all about. What "good news" would there be without it? Jesus is the promise of a worldwide resurrection to come. It was in his resurrection that God put all things under him; he is victorious over all, even death. He will continue to rule over the universe until he has conquered death forever *for us.*

Some people ask what our new bodies will be like in the resurrection; others ask whether we'll know each other then. The answers are simple: we will know each other in ways we can't here. And our new bodies will be like Jesus' glorious body. Our mortal bodies will be buried; our immortal bodies will rise from the grave. At the end of this world, when the last trumpet sounds, we will be transformed from lowly humanity to being like gods. What is perishable will be made imperishable; what is mortal will be made immortal. God will swallow up death forever. (See Isaiah 25:7f.) We have the victory through Jesus Christ. This means that any good work we do will be added to our reward in the next life. So keep working hard for the Lord.

¹ The gift of translation is the only one they are told to pray for—if they have the gift of a foreign language.

Question # 5 -- What about giving to Jewish believers? (I Corinthians 16) Each week set aside whatever money you can for the Jewish believers in the Jerusalem area. They are undergoing persecution from unbelieving Jews because of their faith in Jesus.

I hope to visit you soon. Be sure to welcome Timothy if he comes to you.

Stand firm in your faith; do all you do in love.

Others here send their greetings. Greet one another for me.

Amen. Love, -Paul

Women in the Church

The ministry of women in the church today is one of the most difficult areas to write about. There are those who believe women can't do anything in the church. There are others who believe women can do anything they want in the church. What is the truth of the matter?

In I Corinthians 14, Paul instructs women to "remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak." (NIV) This is poor translation because it is misleading. In chapter 11, Paul has already allowed women both to pray and to "prophesy" (or, "to speak before an assembly" or "to preach") as long as their heads were covered to show they submit to the men. So "remain silent" and "they are not allowed to speak" is not true translation of Paul's meaning. The word translated in NIV "remain silent" (Greek: *sigato*) is also used in v.30, translated "should be silent" (NIV) or "must stop talking." There it refers to the prophets of the church. Of course, prophets were allowed to speak. Paul just told them to stop talking when another prophet received a message. What Paul is actually saying, therefore, is that women should stop talking on and on in the assembly. It is obvious that certain women from the Corinthian religions were attempting to dominate the church meetings by talking all the time, probably in tongues. (The Greek word "speak" [*laleo*] is most often used in I Corinthians 14 for speaking in tongues and prophecy.) A better translation of the latter saying is "they are not allowed to keep on speaking," since it is a present active infinitive. [*Speaking in tongues* was known in Corinth 600 years before Paul preached the gospel there. It was not unique to Christianity.]

The rule of silence is certainly not universal. Women were already seen as prominent leaders—Phoebe (see Rom. 16:1, where she is a minister [deacon] of the church in Cenchrea), Lydia (Ac. 16:14,40), Priscilla (Ac. 18:2,18,26 and Rom. 16:3 and ICor. 16:19), Junia (who is called an apostle in Rom. 16:7), and others. The Holy Spirit had already expressly stated that both men and women would be preachers of the Gospel of God in Acts 2:14-18. The need for women even in the ministry of Jesus is clear. (Cf. Luke 1:42; 8:2,3; 10:38ff; 23:49,55; et al.)

It is significant that it is only in two problem cities (Ephesus and Corinth), where women were the religious leaders, that the apostle is forced to correct those women who are misbehaving in the church. Such teaching is unique and limited to those two cities, where the two goddesses, Diana (Artemis) and Aphrodite, were worshipped. Women were priests and ruled those religions. Not so in the church!

As for I Timothy 2:8-15, [Timothy was in Ephesus.] the Greek text does not read like the NIV translation. Paul is writing to a church where false teaching and even heresy (myths and genealogies) is growing. His concern throughout I Timothy is maintaining and protecting the true faith. He is apparently concerned that it is certain women who believe the false teaching; in fact, they may be the ones who are teaching it. (See I Timothy 2:12.) Paul did not want women to teach men or to take authority over the men. (See Manfred T. Braunch, *Hard sayings of Paul* (IVP, 1989), p. 256.) That is the real intent of I Timothy 2:12;

women were deeply involved in myths and genealogies. The gospel would be hurt wherever such teachings are considered important.

If we make this a universal statement, that women are not allowed to teach men, would that mean a woman could not even lead her husband to the Lord? To think that might be Paul's meaning would be foolish. Are women not even able to teach their own children at home? That would contradict Paul's pride in Eunice for teaching Timothy in II Timothy 1:5 and 3:14ff. Such legalism also rejects Titus 2:5ff. And how could Priscilla have a part in teaching Apollos a more complete understanding of the Gospel? (Acts 18:26ff)

The main principle being taught here is that of submission. Women who want to dominate men do so as a result of the Fall. God warned Eve, "your desire will be for your husband." [This same phrase is used in Gen.4 in regard to Cain. God warned Cain that Sin's "desire is for you, but you must master it." This means that Sin's purpose (as though "sin" were a person) is to conquer and dominate Cain.] After Adam and Eve sinned, a woman might want to conquer and rule over her man. This is the wrong: that a woman would rule her husband or that a woman would rule the church.

Let us all learn in humility and submission.

II CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 55.) In I Corinthians you learned of the immoral and immature church in Corinth. Paul had started the church in Corinth, and was trying to correct their behavior and their attitudes. In II Corinthians, Paul writes to correct the teachings of false “apostles.” These people had followed Paul to Corinth, and had told the believers there that Paul was not a real Apostle.

OUTLINE

- A. Why Paul had not returned to them yet (Chapters 1-7)
- B. Getting ready for the offering in Corinth (Chapters 8 and 9)
- C. Paul’s certainty of coming to Corinth and proof of his apostleship (Chapters 10-13)

OVERVIEW

(II Corinthians 1-2) Paul and Timothy, to the church in Corinth: greetings in Jesus’ name. We want to use the comfort God gives us to comfort others, no matter what pain life sends our way. If God can raise the dead, then he can certainly help us through all our trials.

I want to tell you why I haven’t come to visit you yet. I had plans, but God had other plans. Whatever promises I make are all under God’s control. I did not lie to you. I still plan to come. The main reason I haven’t come yet is that I don’t want it to be a painful visit. I love you so much. I don’t want to grieve you. But the Lord will allow me to fulfill my promise to you. I will come to see you.

The person who did such a great sin (I Corinthians 5:1-5) has repented and returned to you. Please welcome him back with open arms. He has suffered enough.¹ He is forgiven. Just don’t let Satan hurt him or yourselves further.

All of God’s promises are fulfilled in Jesus. It is he who makes us both, you and me, stand firm. His Holy Spirit is God’s seal of ownership on us. He is the promise of our future in heaven with God.

(II Corinthians 3) *You* are the result of my ministry. Doesn’t that mean I am a true apostle? And you yourselves are a letter written by Jesus Christ—a letter not written by pen and ink on stone, but on your own hearts. God has made me a minister of this new covenant. This covenant is not written on stone, like the Law in the Old Testament. (The Law brings death; it is the Spirit who brings life.) The glory of this new covenant is that it is written on our hearts by the Spirit of the Living God.

So we are not like Moses, whose face shone after talking to God face-to-face. He put a covering over his face after telling the people what God had said. When you read Exodus, you might think he put the veil on his face because the people were afraid of him. But the real reason Moses covered his face is so the people couldn’t watch the brightness there *fading away*. (See Exodus 34:29-35.) This means the OT faded away. But we’re not like Moses; the glory on our faces is not fading away. In fact, the glory we have is getting brighter and brighter. The Spirit of the Lord is transforming us from one

¹ You may remember the man in I Corinthians 5 who was being immoral, the man Paul told them to kick out of the church. This is probably that man who has repented and is now returning.

level of glory up to a higher and higher glory. So we get brighter all the time in the spirit.¹

As a result, we reject all evil ways; we will not lie or make false promises when we preach the gospel. There are those who say, "All your troubles will disappear if you'll just become a Christian." Some also say, "Becoming a Christian will make you rich and healthy." Maybe they should preach that at nursing homes! We reject that kind of false teaching. We reject the "health and wealth gospel," which is no gospel at all; it is a lie. We tell the truth to all people when we tell them about Jesus.²

(II Corinthians 4-5) We have the treasure of God's glory and God's gospel in jars of clay. (Our bodies are the jars of clay.) You look at us and you can't see how bright we shine, because our bodies are slowly dying. Outwardly, we grow old and die a little more every day. But inwardly we are growing in glory; we are being made new by God every day. And this glory is much greater and heavier than all our suffering in the body.³ One day soon God will clothe us with an eternal body, a heavenly home, which will be beyond suffering! The dying body we have will be changed by God to be a glorious one in the heavens. "We will be like Jesus, for we will see him as he is." (I John 3:3) But here, we live by faith, not by sight. We know we appear before God's judgement, so we make it our goal to please him always.⁴

Since we always try to please him, we must lead others to God through the gospel. Since Jesus died and rose again, we know we are to live as he did; we are to live for others. If anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation. The old way of life is gone; the new has come. God has done all this for us. God was *in Christ*, making friends with the whole world. He no longer counts people's sins against them. He forgives all. And he has given this message of friendship to us—the gospel which says: "God made Jesus, who had no sin, *to be sin* in our place, so through Jesus we can become God's goodness." What a message! Please, brothers and sisters, don't ignore this grace. Obey him now; don't wait. Today is the day to be saved.

(II Corinthians 6-7) Of all people, we Apostles are the most mistreated. Even so, we open our hearts to you Corinthians, hoping that you will do the same for us. Don't share with those who are idolaters. Instead, do what God says in Isaiah 52:11 in the OT: "Don't be friends with what is impure."

My joy is great because Titus has told me about your concern for me. I'm sorry that my other letter hurt you, but it was necessary to help you to repent. Thank you for punishing those who kept doing wrong in the church. This makes us feel even better about you. Now we have full confidence in you.

(II Corinthians 8-9) Brothers, I want to tell you how God has blessed the Macedonian churches because of their giving. Even though they are poor, they gave richly. And you know that Jesus gave up his heavenly wealth for you; by grace he

¹ C. S. Lewis said that if you could see yourself as you really are in the spirit world, you would want to fall down and worship yourself—or you'd want to run away in horror.

² Literally, Paul is saying, "We don't 'water down' the gospel." In other words, Paul tells the truth when he preaches the gospel. Often, the gospel actually *causes* problems. (See Matthew 10:34.) When a person turns to the Lord, persecution often follows, especially if the person's family is of another religion.

³ When we get to heaven, we will look back on all our suffering and struggling with sin, and we will know that the glory there is so great that it's not worth comparing with our easy and temporary troubles.

⁴ We Christians always stand under God's judgement. We are under the judgement of his word in this life. That's why we work hard to please God at all times. It is a great blessing that we are forgiven because of Jesus—even when we don't please God. (See II Timothy 2:11-13.)

became poor on earth. Now, through his poverty our lives become rich.¹ God hopes you will want to give. If you plant little seed, you gather little crop. If you plant a lot of seeds, you will gather a great crop. I know that you're eager to help. Please get a generous gift ready for our poor Jewish brothers in Judea.² We'll pick it up for them when we come through your town.

(II Corinthians 10-12) I don't understand why you need it, but I must defend my ministry with you. Even though we believers live in this world, our weapons are not of this world. We have God's power to destroy strongholds.³ We wipe out all arguments and false teachings that come against God's truth. We lead every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

You're forcing me to brag. I was taken to paradise fourteen years ago! I saw and heard things I can't even tell you about. Even if I brag about that, I'm speaking the truth. But all I really want to brag about are my weaknesses.

I will brag only about the authority Christ has given us Apostles. We don't compare ourselves to others. Those who measure themselves by each other are stupid. We would be boasting too much, if we did not boast about you. We came as far as you Corinthians when we were preaching the gospel. Now we want to preach even beyond you. But our real boasting is in the Lord who approves of us.

When you question my apostleship, you are questioning yourselves. I am afraid you will be tricked by Satan just as Eve was. If you think I'm less than these "super-apostles" who have tricked you, you may be rejecting the true gospel! Should I have charged you money for the gospel as these false apostles do? You have never once supported me financially. God knows I love you. All I can do is keep doing what God has sent me to do. These false apostles are like Satan himself! They are faking being apostles. They will be judged for what they're doing.

I know these false apostles brag to you. I could brag too, if I wanted to. I have done more than any of them. I have been through so much for the gospel! I am a true Jew who has worked harder than them all. I have been in prison again and again, beaten with whips many times; I have been beaten with rods and stoned and left for dead. I have been chased from town to town; I've been shipwrecked three times; I've been lost at sea; I've always been attacked by my own Jewish brothers, by robbers, by Gentiles and by false brothers. I've been in danger wherever I have been. I often have had no sleep, no food and no drink. I've been cold and naked. And besides all that—I'm so concerned about the churches. Did I really wrong you? I did you no wrong.

I'm ready to visit you a third time. I will take no pay from you. I only want you, not your money. I would give everything I have for you simply to believe me. Titus treated you the same way I did. He did everything for free, too.

¹ Some teachers and preachers say this verse means God wants us rich. But Jesus didn't give up his heavenly wealth, his glory with God, so that we would make more money! In fact, when Jesus was here, he had no home at all. (See Matthew 8:20.) We are to imitate him. The wealth he gave us is his grace, not mere money.

James warns rich people that their money will eat their flesh like fire. (James 5:3) And Jesus said you can't serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24 and see Luke 12.)

² In Romans 15:27 Paul said the Jews shared their spiritual wealth with us Gentiles by giving us Jesus; so we should share our material wealth with them.

³ God's power allows us to show the wrong in all false religions and teachings (although there is also much truth in other religions). We are to take captive every teaching or thought that rejects Jesus as Lord and King.

God and Jesus Christ know me. They watch over everything I say. When I get there, please let me find you at peace in the church. I hope all those who were being sexually immoral have repented, too.

(II Corinthians 13) This will be my third visit to you. I will punish those who are disloyal and who are acting immorally. I may have seemed weak when I was with you before, but so was Jesus when he was crucified. Look closely at yourselves; is Jesus living in you? Do you pass this test? Is he in you? We will keep on doing what He wants us to do. We can do no other. I hope you take this warning to heart, so I can be gentle when I am with you. God's authority in me wants to help you grow, not hurt you.

Listen carefully to what I have written. Be at peace when I come. And the God of peace will be with you.

All the other believers greet you. May the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the sharing of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Love, -Paul

GALATIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 53) In II Corinthians we learned more about Paul's job as an apostle. In Galatians we will learn that grace is far better than legalism.

OUTLINE

- A. The only true gospel already rejected (Chapter 1:1-10)
- B. Paul's personal preparation by God (Chapters 1:11-2:10)
- C. Paul's correction of Peter (Chapter 2:11-21)
- D. Faith and freedom contrasted with law and slavery (Chapters 3 and 4)
- E. How to be free and live free [the flesh fights against the spirit, and the spirit fights against the flesh (5:17)] (Chapters 5 and 6)

OVERVIEW

I am amazed how quickly you've changed. I want you to experience grace, but someone has preached law to you. Our gospel is the only true one, but you have turned from it. *No other gospel is true!*

I want you to understand: the gospel I preached to you came directly from Jesus. It was a revelation. You know I used to attack the church. I thought I was right. But God had set me apart before I was born and called me to preach to the Gentiles. No *man* taught me at all. Jesus taught me personally. It was later that I met Peter and James. The Jews in Judea knew me only as one who *used to* persecute believers. They praised God because of my change.

Fourteen years after God changed me, the legalistic Jews tried to get me to circumcise Titus (Titus is a Greek.), but I refused to do it. You must realize this: *circumcision means nothing!* God has never judged by externals. Jesus is the one who does *real* circumcision—to our hearts. (See Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4.) James, Peter and John fully accepted me as an apostle. They sent Barnabas with me in order to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Later in Antioch, when some Jews came in, Peter pulled back from the Gentiles and ate with the Jews. But I called Peter out and confronted him in front of everyone. He was wrong in what he had done. Peter knew he was wrong. *People are not justified by obeying law, but by faith in Jesus.* So God saves sinners, whether Jew or Gentile.

This does not mean that we can keep on sinning. "I have been crucified with Christ; I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live is by faith in the Son of God. He loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

If the law could save us, Christ died for nothing. You Galatians are foolish. You began in the Spirit; you trusted Jesus and were made right with God. Are you now trying to work your way to heaven? Did God do miracles among you because you obeyed the law, or because you believed in Jesus?

Look at Abraham: "He believed God and God counted him righteous." (Genesis 15:6) Everyone who believes in Jesus is a child of Abraham. God foresaw this: "All nations will be blessed through you," he said (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). The law brought a curse because of our disobedience; "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23). This means Jesus took the curse upon himself when he was

crucified “on a tree.” The promise was given to Abraham’s seed. The scripture does not say “seeds.” It says “seed;” Christ is the “seed” that fulfills that scripture.

So you are all sons of God by faith in Jesus. Since you were baptized into Christ, you have put Christ on, the way you do clothing. Jew or Gentile means nothing; slave or free means nothing; there is no such thing as male or female; you are all one in Christ. If you believe in Jesus, you belong to Jesus. You are Abraham’s child.

I am so concerned about you Galatians! You turned away from legalism and received the gospel. Why have you gone back to legalism again?

My dear children! It's as though I'm in the pain of childbirth again. I want Christ to be formed in you. It's as though you people were born by Sarah as free children; but now you've chosen Hagar as your mother, and you're slaves again.¹ But through the gospel we were born free. Like Isaac, we are children of the promise. However, if you go back to the law, Christ can't help you. You started out with grace. Why have you turned back now? Why are you trying to be made right by law? If you trust law to save you, you have fallen from grace; you are separated from Christ. Law never saved anyone.

Law causes us to practice sexual immorality and all other kinds of evil, even addiction to drugs.² But the Spirit produces in us love, joy, peace, and all other good things. (See Galatians 5:19-22.) If you belong to Christ you have crucified your flesh with all its evil desires. Let's live by the Spirit!

(Galatians 6) Mature Christians need to help immature Christians with their sin problems. If you work together this way, you are fulfilling Christ's desire.

You should also pay something to anyone who teaches you.

Live your life the way the Spirit inside you wants you to, and the Spirit will give you eternal life. I'm writing this part myself. I want you to know that circumcision does not matter; all that matters is: *Christ makes you new because of your faith*. Anyone who follows this rule is a child of Abraham and a true Israelite. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you all. Love, -Paul

¹ You probably remember, if you read my first book or the Book of Genesis, that Sarah was Abraham's wife, so her child would be the promised one, the free child—Isaac. But Hagar was a slave wife of Abraham. Even though Ishmael was born first, he was only a slave's child. God blessed him, too, but he was only a slave. Paul is saying that if people go back to the Law for salvation, they have gone back to being slaves. But by faith, we are free people, like Isaac. We are the sons of God's promise. (See Galatians 3:26-29.)

² Yes, drug addiction is one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. The word translated “witchcraft” or “sorcery” is actually the Greek word, *pharmakeion*, which, as you probably noticed, is like “pharmacy.” It means “use” or “addiction to drugs.” (The reason it is translated “witchcraft” is that witches in the old days used drugs in their work.) So it is wrong to be addicted to *anything*, especially to nicotine, alcohol, other drugs, or even food. These may not only be addictive; they may also be dangerous to your body. They may cause cancer, cirrhosis, heart disease, or other deadly diseases. We must be good managers of our bodies.

EPHESIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 60) In Galatians we learned of a church that was in danger of falling away from grace. In Ephesians we will learn about the Christian hope.

OUTLINE¹

- A. We sit in heaven in Christ. (Chapters 1-3)
 - 1. All our blessings are in Christ. (1:1-14)
 - 2. God wants to enlighten us to know our hope. (1:15-23)
 - 3. We can do nothing to save ourselves. (Chapter 2)
 - a. God made us alive with Christ.
 - b. God raised us up with Christ.
 - c. God seated us with Christ in heaven.
 - 4. We are one unity in Christ. (Chapter 3)
- B. We walk on earth with Christ. (Chapter 4:1-6:9)
 - 1. We walk in unity. (Chapter 4)
 - 2. We walk in love. (Chapter 5:1-6:9)
- C. We stand against Satan. (6:10-24)

OVERVIEW

(Ephesians 1) I want you to know that God chose us before the world was created. He planned to adopt us through Christ. He redeemed us; he forgave us. He did all this so we could live to praise him.

You came to be in Christ when you believed the gospel. You heard it, you believed it, and you were sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit.² The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our hope—heaven.³

I pray that God will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation so you can come to know him better.⁴ I also pray that he will open your hearts so you can understand the

¹ I struggled with the great Book of Ephesians for years. I knew the Greek text and much about the epistle, but could not get a clear overview. Finally, I read a little book by Watchman Nee, entitled *Sit, Walk, Stand*. In this book and its title is a fine, simple outline of Ephesians. Everything made sense to me suddenly, after I read this 64-page book. He shows that Paul's outline is:

- 1) We sit in the heavenly places with Christ and in Christ. (Chapters 1-3)
- 2) We walk on the earth with Christ in us. (4:1-6:9)
- 3) We stand against the devil. (6:10-24)

The main teaching is: We can do nothing to save ourselves; God already did it. Christianity is not like other religions, where you have to *work* to get your salvation. Nee says, "Christianity begins *not* with a 'do' but with a 'done'." Christ enters us as we enter him. He "walks" in us on earth. Finally, we stand against the devil. We don't need to advance against him; God has already won the war, so all we need to do is keep what we've been given. Nee says that Christians don't *fight for* victory; we *fight from* victory! If we keep the faith, we have the victory already.

² Ephesians 1:13f says that we 1) heard the word, 2) believed the word, and 3) "were sealed" by the Holy Spirit. All the church writers of early centuries who spoke about this passage said that it refers to baptism. As you are baptized, in the ancient form of baptism, you go below the water. The water "seals" over you. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit "sealing" you in Christ. You did not do it yourself; the Spirit does it to you.

³ The word "guarantee" in 1:14 is not even a Greek word in the text; it is an Aramaic word. It means "down payment." But there is even a better meaning in the word. It also means "an engagement ring." This indicates that our baptism is where we are engaged to Jesus. The wedding is yet to come; he will one day come to earth for his bride.

⁴ Part of the Holy Spirit's work is to teach us wisdom and knowledge, "so we may know God better." This is what eternal life is all about—knowing God. Jesus prayed as our High Priest in John 17. He said, "And this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent."

Christian hope. His power is so great in us who believe. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. God seated him at his own right hand in heaven. So Jesus is above everything in the universe, and he is the head of the church.

(Ephesians 2) You used to live under Satan's power, doing whatever you wanted. You were like animals; God's anger rested upon you. But God stepped in! When Jesus came alive in the tomb, God made *us* alive with him. When God raised Jesus up from the grave and he ascended to heaven, God raised *us* up with him. When Jesus sat down in heaven on God's throne, God caused *us* to sit down in him and with him. In the spiritual world we are already sitting in heaven. God does it all by our faith. He wants to show us his future, the plans he has for us.

You are saved by grace through faith. This whole process is done by God and not by us. We could do nothing to save ourselves. God did it all.

And now he has made us all to be one. Jesus himself is our peace. We used to be outside, hopeless in the world, and without God. But God has made the Jews and the Gentiles, all of us, one body. We can come to the Father by his one Spirit.

(Ephesians 3) God has even given *me* grace. The riches of Christ were once hidden from me, but now he has revealed it to us all. And I pray that you Ephesians will understand by the Spirit that Christ lives in your hearts because of your faith. And I want you to understand the cross—God's love is like the cross, greater than knowledge—wide and long and high and deep.¹

God is able to do more than you can ask or even imagine by his power at work within us.

(Ephesians 4) So we must live as God wants us to live—humble, gentle, patient, loving. He wants us to keep the unity that he has given us by his Spirit. There are seven foundations of unity: one body (the church), one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father who is over and through and in all.²

Jesus has given four gifts to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. These four are to get *every* Christian in the church to serve and to build up the body. Then we will become unified, believing and knowing the Son of God.³

So stop living like pagans who give themselves over to more and more sin; start letting God create your mind and behavior to be like himself—righteous and holy. Always tell the truth. When you're angry, deal with it that day. Don't hold grudges. If you have been a thief, stop stealing and get to work with your hands. Then you can help

¹ When I was studying another ancient Christian writer, Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in Turkey in the late fourth century, I ran across what he said about Ephesians 3:18. He said that the height, depth, length and breadth of God's great love is a picture of the cross. I believe that. The cross is the last bridge from God to humanity and the last bridge from humanity to God; and the cross reaches out to all people.

² Whenever Paul talks about unity in the Body of Christ (the church) he always has "seven" of something. Here in Ephesians 4 he has seven "ones." In Romans 12:3-8 he has seven gifts, and in I Corinthians 12:4-11 he has "the seven spirits of God," that is, seven mentions of the same Spirit. He is the source of all the gifts. The number 7 is the number of perfection or completion. Paul sees the Body of Christ is perfect and complete.

³ Ephesians 4:11-16 is the Biblical doctrine of ministry. Christ gives leaders to the church to prepare *everyone in the church for some kind of ministry*. If you are not serving people in some way, you should ask God to show you what ministry you are supposed to be involved in. Don't miss out! God will show you a place to serve. It may not be where you want to end up, but it will be a place of service. I have noticed one thing in my years of serving: God uses people who are already serving; he will give you a better place if you stick with it. Keep serving! When everyone in the church is serving, it brings unity of faith in Jesus and in knowing Jesus. And when you're serving, you won't be so worried about yourself and your own problems.

those in need.¹ Keep your speech clean. Don't make the Holy Spirit sad by what you say or do. (See Psalm 19:14 in the OT, and let that be your prayer.) The Spirit is the one who sealed you in Christ. Get rid of all the bad things in your personality and forgive each other.² (Ephesians 5) Imitate God, and love everyone just as Christ loved us (read 5:3-21).

Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord.³ Husbands love your wives the way Christ loved the church. He *died* for her.⁴ He cleansed the church the same way you should cleanse your wife—by “washing her in the word.” Marriage is a wonderful mystery, just like the relationship between Christ and the church.⁵

¹ In the ancient city of Ephesus, many people were professional thieves. Many had never had a real job. [Sort of like Washington.] Paul tells them to stop stealing and work with their hands.

Some years ago I taught a band of Gypsies here in Dallas. They were turning from stealing, magic arts, psychic visions and other con games to the Lord. Some of them were rich when they became Christians, but had never worked for a living. Now they are struggling to make ends meet. Many do hard labor (as Paul says, “work with your hands”) to make money for their families and to help others. They are very sweet and generous people. I admire them greatly, because they have obeyed the Lord. As for the wealth they've given up here—don't you think God will repay them in heaven? I do.

² The only thing I can think of that could keep a believer out of heaven is refusing to forgive someone. Jesus says that his heavenly Father will not forgive us if we don't forgive our brothers and sisters from our hearts. (Matthew 18:21-35) If you have trouble with anger or forgiveness, read Part III (only) of *Happiness is a Choice*, by Frank Minirth and Paul Meier. They are completely Biblical in their approach to forgiveness and anger. (They are Christian psychologists with a clinic here in the Dallas area.)

³ There is one command here: “Be filled with the Spirit.” Under that are 5 actions of people who are filled with the Spirit: (five participles in the Greek text) 1) Speaking the word; 2) Singing; 3) Making melody in their hearts; 4) Giving thanks in all things to God; 5) Submitting to one another because we fear the Lord. It is interesting, ladies, that there is no command here to submit to your husbands (in the Greek text). The command is “Be filled.” Submitting is what people who are filled with the Spirit do. (If you want a command to “submit” to your husband, look at I Peter 3:1-7.) The next command in the Ephesians text is “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.”

⁴ Real love means to help others with their needs. If a husband loves his wife, he will try to do the things his wife asks him. He will make himself help with household chores, like vacuuming and washing dishes. (Guys, I don't enjoy it either, but I do it.)

⁵ Marriage, Paul says, is a great mystery. I have been married for 35 years as I write this. My wife, Paula, and I are a unit. We do love each other; the love is growing every day. We understand a *little* bit about what Paul means, when he says, “I take marriage to be a great mystery, and it refers to Christ and the Church.” Marriage can be wonderful if it is based in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, it can be hell.

(Chapter 6) Children obey your parents as the Ten Commandments say. Fathers, don't irritate your children but teach them about the Lord.

Employees, respect your employers and obey them as you would Jesus. Maybe some of them will become Christians because of your behavior.

Employers, respect your employees and realize that you are all brothers.

Finally, we stand against the devil. We stand with God's power. It is his power, his armor and his victory, but it's our fight. I say, "stand against the devil; stand your ground; stand firm. Put on all God's armor,¹ and Satan can not harm you."

May you have peace, love and faith from our Father and our Lord Jesus. Grace to you all. Love, -Paul

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May you have peace, love and faith from our Father and our Lord Jesus. Grace to you all. Love, -Paul

¹ Every part of God's armor is defensive. All we need to do is stand our ground against Satan. He is our enemy. (Not people from other churches or religions; not *people* at all.) Each part of the armor covers an important part of the body. The shield of faith is not a small buckler or shield; it is a "body shield," covering us from eyebrows to feet. Faith is our most important weapon against Satan.

The "sword of the Spirit" is not the Bible; it is the *spoken* word. The Bible must be memorized and spoken against Satan to conquer him. Even Jesus quoted scripture against Satan (Matthew 4) when he was tempted. We must know it to quote it. So memorize as much of the Bible as you can. See Psalm 119:11.

PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 60; Paul wrote this in Corinth.) In Ephesians we learned that God has saved us so we can live right and stand against the devil. In Philippians we will learn about Paul's "thank you letter" to one of the best churches in the first century.

OUTLINE

- A. Paul's prayer (Chapter 1:1-26)
- B. Paul's encouragement (Chapters 1:27-2:18)
- C. Paul's friends who work with him (Chapter 2:19-30)
- D. Paul's warnings against legalists (Chapter 3:1-16)
- E. Paul's warnings against lawless people (Chapters 3:17-4:1)
- F. Paul's conclusion (Chapter 4:2-20)
 - A. Encouragement (4:2-9)
 - B. Gratitude (4:10-20)

OVERVIEW

(Philippians 1) Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ, to the saints, shepherds and servants¹ in Philippi: I thank God for you and long to be with you. Even though I am in chains, the gospel is not bound. Preachers who preach for the wrong reason are still preaching the gospel. I rejoice in this and thank you for your prayers. I know that you stand firm in the gospel and in unity. And I know you're struggling just as I am for the gospel.

(Philippians 2) There are so many wonderful things about being united with Christ—love, fellowship, and tender hearts. The most important part is, we all should have the same attitude Jesus has.

He was the same as God, but did not hang on to that.

He emptied himself and became the same as a slave.

He became a man—a man so humble that he died on the cross.

So God raised him to the highest place in the universe;

He gave him the name above every name, so that all people will bow before him—people in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord, and this will bring glory to God.²

Jesus considered us more important than himself. I thank you that you do that too. You are saved; now keep working out your salvation, always aware that it is God who is doing the work in you.³ He will help you *want* to obey, and he will help you obey. Never complain or quarrel. That way you will shine like stars in this dark world. Hold on to the word of life.

Soon I will send Timothy to you. I have no one else like Timothy. He cares about what Jesus cares about. Epaphroditus will come also. He is my brother, my fellow

¹ *Shepherds and servants* are also called *elders and deacons* elsewhere in the NT.

² This hymn is called *Carmen Christi*, "Hymn to Christ." It is probably the greatest hymn to Christ in the Bible.

³ Notice that we don't work to *get* salvation; we keep on working to the end because we *have* it.

worker, a real Christian soldier who longs for you all. Welcome him in the Lord because he was so sick that he risked his life for you.

(Philippians 3) Watch out for those legalists. They think circumcision is as important as faith. I have more reason to brag about my flesh than they do about theirs. I am more fully a Jew than any of them! But I consider all my background as garbage, compared to what I have in Christ. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection. I want to share in his sufferings; I want to become like him—to die so that I may gain the resurrection from the dead.

As good as I had tried to be, I am still not perfect. But I strain every muscle trying to win the prize of knowing Jesus and his resurrection. (All mature Christians hold this view.) Watch out for the lawless ones. All they care about is their appetites. They think only of earthly things. But we are citizens of heaven. So stand firm in the Lord, my dear friends.

(Philippians 4) Tell Syzygus to help the disagreeing women to get along with each other.

Rejoice and rejoice and rejoice. Let God know all your requests and give thanks to him. His peace goes beyond our knowledge. That peace will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus.¹ So keep your mind on godly things. Do what you've seen me do, and you will learn to be content whatever the situation. I can do everything because of Jesus, who gives me strength.

Thank you again for your gift to me.² Our God will meet all your needs. The brothers here in Rome greet you, especially those in Caesar's household. God bless you all. Love, -Paul

¹ In Isaiah 26:3f Isaiah said almost the same thing. He said that if we will keep our minds on God and trust him, we will find the greatest peace!

² While Paul was working in Corinth, making tents and preaching part of the time, he received a money gift from the Philippian church. It was enough so he could quit his job and preach and teach fulltime.

COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 60) In Philippians we learned about a church that gave money to Paul and that loved to serve the Lord. In Colossians we will learn about how great Jesus is, and that he frees us from rules and regulations.

OUTLINE

- A. Prayer and thanksgiving (Chapter 1:1-14)
- B. How great Christ is (Chapter 1:15-23).
- C. Paul's ministry to Colosse (Chapters 1:24-2:7)
- D. Life in Christ is not rules and regulations (Chapters 2:8-23)
- E. The true rules for a holy life (3:1-4:6)
- F. Conclusion (4:7-18)

OVERVIEW

(Colossians 1) Paul and Timothy to the holy and faithful brothers at Colosse: we thank God for your faith and love and hope, and we thank God that the gospel is doing great things all over the world. And we are especially thankful that God has qualified you to enter the kingdom of light through Jesus Christ. In him, we have the forgiveness of sins.

How great Jesus is! When you look at him you see God. He is God's firstborn.¹ It is through him that God created everything that exists.² He is more important than anything else, and he holds the universe together. He is the head of the church. He is the first one to rise from the dead. He is supreme over everything. All of God that can live in a human being—God's fullness—was happy to live in Jesus. God's purpose is to make friends with everything through Christ's death on the cross. His death brought all the earth back into friendship with God.

You used to be foreigners, separated from God by your evil behavior. But now through your faith in Christ's death, you have made friends with God. So keep that faith.

God prepared me to give you the complete word of God. And the secret of that word is *Christ in you*. This is our hope of glory.

(Colossians 2) I'm still struggling for you. I want you to know Christ. In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. So don't be deceived by fine sounding arguments. Keep your faith in Christ firm. You have been set free in Jesus, so don't let anyone take you captive by false teaching. This is human tradition, empty philosophy and not Jesus.

If anyone tells you, you need to be circumcised, tell him you already have been. Your circumcision was not done by human hands. It was done by Christ Himself. When you were baptized, your heart was circumcised by the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

¹ *Firstborn* is a title for the Messiah from the OT. See Psalm 89:27. In the NT, Jesus is "firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29), "firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15), "firstborn from among the dead" (Colossians 1:18; compare Revelation 1:5), "firstborn son of Mary" (Matthew 1:25 and Luke 2:7).

² Compare John 1:3, Hebrews 1:3, and Hebrews 11:3.

God has forgiven all our sins. No rules or regulations stand against us. He nailed them to the cross with Jesus. *All God's requirements against you were taken away with Jesus in his death.* Jesus conquered through the cross.¹

Since all truth and reality is in Christ, don't let anybody fake you out with rules and regulations. Don't let anyone who says he has had a personal revelation bother you with his silly thoughts. He has lost connection with Jesus. But you died with Christ by your faith. You died to the rules and regulations.

(Colossians 3) If you want rules, here are the ones Christ has: focus on Christ, think about him not the world. When you were baptized, you died. You are dead now. And your life is protected in Christ and in God. And when Christ comes back, you will be just as he is—glorified. (See 1 John 3:1-3.)

So stop sinning; kill lust and evil desires and greed in yourself. Stop being angry and gossiping and talking dirty. Realize that when you were baptized, you put off your old self. Now you have a new self, which God is renewing to be like him. Christ's peace must rule in your lives.² Christ's word must live in you, so everything you do and say will be for him.

Wives, husbands, children, fathers, employees and employers must do what's right.³ (Colossians 4) Pray that the gospel will continue to spread.

I'm sending two special brothers to you, Tychicus and Onesimus. All the others with me send you greetings. Share this letter with the church at Laodicea.

God bless you. Love, -Paul

¹ We Christians *win* by *losing*, just as Jesus did. We live by dying, as he did.

² *Rule*, here, means "act like an umpire;" in other words, the peace Christ has given us in our hearts must be the referee in every problem we come up against.

³ See the teaching in Ephesians 5:21—6:9.

I THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: ca. A. D. 51) In Colossians we learned that Christ and his life are greater than rules and regulations. In I Thessalonians we will learn about a young church that needs to learn about godly living before Christ returns.

OUTLINE

- A. Prayer for the Thessalonians (Chapter 1)
- B. Paul's defense of himself (Chapters 2 and 3)
- C. What the Thessalonians need to do (Chapters 4:1-5:22)
- D. Conclusion (Chapter 5:23-28)

OVERVIEW

(Chapters 1-3) Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the Thessalonians: we always pray for you. We thank God for the work your faith causes you to do. We also thank him for hard work your love makes you do, and for your continuing hope in Jesus. We are glad you received the message of hope with joy, and that you turned from idols to serve the only living and true God.

Even though many people were against us, we spoke the truth to you. We gave you the gospel freely; we paid our own way. We treated you as a father dealing with children. We even treated you as a nursing mother dealing with infants. Jews with the same attitude that killed our Lord Jesus attacked us and drove us out of Thessalonica. God's wrath rests on them.

We long to see you again, brothers. Timothy has given us good news about your faith and love. How can we thank God enough for you? May God allow us to see you soon. May he strengthen your hearts so you will be blameless when Jesus does come.

(Chapter 4) God wants you to be sexually moral, to control your own body in a way that is holy, not with evil desire like the pagans who do not know God. The Lord will punish men for all such sins. Be calm, mind your own business, and work with your hands. Brothers, I want you to know that even if some of you die, you will rise again.

The way Christ's Second Coming will happen is this: Jesus himself will come down from heaven with a loud shout of victory. The archangel will blow his trumpet, and the Christians who have died will rise from the dead. Then the rest who are alive will be changed to be like Jesus. They will meet the Lord in the air and will always be with him. Remind each other about this. Also remember that *no one* knows when the Lord will come. There will be no warning. (See Matthew 24:36ff.)

But you are all sons of light, sons of God, and you're not out of control as the unbelievers are. Christ died for us so we could live for him and die for him. We will rise from the dead for sure.

Now, brothers, respect those working among you in the Lord. Hold your leaders in highest regard. Be kind to each other. Be joyful. Always pray. Give thanks. Listen to the prophets. Hold on to the good and avoid all kinds of evil. May the God of peace make you holy. Remember that he is faithful.

Greet each other in love, and read this letter to all the brothers. God bless you. Love, -
Paul

II THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 51 or 52 after Silas and Timothy had returned from delivering I Thessalonians) In I Thessalonians we learned about a young church that needed teaching about right living and about the Second Coming. In II Thessalonians we will learn more about the Second Coming and Paul's continuing teaching.

OUTLINE

- A. Greeting and Prayer (Chapter 1)
- B. Instruction about the day of Jesus' return (Chapter 2)
- C. Prayer and discipline (Chapter 3:1-15)
- D. Conclusion (Chapter 3:16-18)

OVERVIEW

Paul, Silas, and Timothy: we still pray for you Thessalonians. Jesus will pay back those who are persecuting you. He will come to judge the world with blazing fire. He will shut them out from the presence of God. But he will glorify you. So keep preaching and living for Jesus.

(Chapter 2) Brothers please don't get upset if you hear that the Lord has already come. Don't let anybody deceive you about this. He will not come until the lawless one is destroyed. This is the one who will set himself up in God's temple. He will teach that he is a god. Lawlessness is already at work, but God is holding back its power. The Lord Jesus will destroy it.¹

There are two ways to go: one is following the miracles of Satan and doing evil. The other is loving the truth and standing firm in it. Hold on to the gospel, brothers; the gospel is the truth. And hold on to our teaching we left with you. May the Lord encourage you in all good deeds and words. Pray for our protection from evil people.

In Jesus' name, I say, "If someone refuses to work he must not eat." Each one must earn his own food and never get tired of doing what is right. If people don't obey this letter have nothing to do with them.

God's peace and grace be with you. Love, -Paul

¹ Some people say that the Lawless One is *The Antichrist* who is supposed to come at the end of the world. But there is nothing in this text that points to that. Rather, Paul is doing what the prophets in the OT did. He is speaking of Judaism as though it were a person. [This is called "personifying."] The temple was destroyed in A. D. 70. This is when Christ used the Romans to destroy the Lawless One. The Jewish State and religion were destroyed and the temple is gone. It is probably Judaism who was the "Lawless One." [We will have much to say of *antichrist* when we get to I John.]

1 TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 62-65) This first letter to Timothy was written after the book of Acts was completed. Paul had been freed from house arrest in Rome and made a fourth missionary journey to Spain. It was toward the end of this journey that he wrote I Timothy and Titus. The letter known as I Timothy was written directly to Timothy. Timothy was a representative for Paul at the church in Ephesus. I and II Timothy are letters to Timothy and the Ephesian church. This is one of Paul's personal letters. That makes it different from his church letters, which were written to entire congregations. The four letters of Paul that are known as "personal letters" are I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Philemon was written much earlier than these other three.

In II Thessalonians we learned about Jesus' Second Coming and Paul's continuing teaching. In I Timothy we will learn how a young minister should behave in God's church.

OUTLINE

- A. Warning about false teachers (Chapter 1:1-11)
- B. Why Paul wrote to Timothy (Chapter 1:12-20)
- C. How to lead the church (Chapters 2-3)
 - 1. Public Worship (Chapter 2)
 - 2. What church leaders should be like (3)
 - a. Shepherds (pastors, elders or overseers) (3:1-7)
 - b. Deacons (3:8-16)
- D. How to deal with false teaching (Chapter 4)
- E. How to deal with different groups in the church (Chapters 5:1-6:2)
- F. Other important teaching (6:3-19)
- G. Conclusion (6:20-21)

OVERVIEW

(I Timothy 1) Paul to Timothy, my son in the faith: as you know, the main goal of our teaching is love from a pure heart. Christians need a good conscience and real faith. Some people get involved in meaningless talk. Others are involved in evil behavior. But your doctrine should conform to the gospel—what you heard originally.

Even though I used to speak against Christ and kill Christians, I'm thankful that God showed me mercy. Jesus came to save sinners—that's for sure. And I'm the worst. His patience never runs out; he keeps working with us to bring us to eternal life. Praise to him, the eternal, immortal, invisible God, our King.

My dear Timothy I'm writing this to you so you will continue in your commitment to Jesus. Others have destroyed themselves by rejecting the faith.

(I Timothy 2) Christians should pray for all those in authority. We should do that so we will be able to live peaceful Christian lives. It pleases God if we pray this way. He wants everyone to come to know him, and to know that Jesus is the only way to God. He is the one who appointed me apostle to the Gentiles.

In the church, the men should pray without anger or arguing. The women should dress modestly, and do good deeds. Women should also learn calmly and in submission to the men. Don't let a woman take away a man's leadership. She should submit because Adam was created first and then Eve.¹

(I Timothy 3) As for church leaders—anyone who really wants to be a shepherd or elder must want to work hard. He needs to be the right kind of person. Don't allow anyone who is a drunk or violent or quarrelsome or who loves money to be a leader. A leader's family must respect him. He should not be a prideful person.² Pride is what destroyed the devil.

Deacons also should be good men, not drunk or dishonest. Test them first by letting them serve. The women should be like that, too.

The purpose of this letter is to teach you how to live among God's people. The basis of the gospel is:

"Jesus appeared in the flesh but was proved to be right by the Spirit.

Angels saw him; he was preached among the Gentiles.

People believed in him. He ascended to heaven."

(I Timothy 4) Let me warn you about the future, Timothy. Many people will listen to strange teachings that come from Satan. These false teachers are liars and hypocrites. They don't let people get married: they don't let people eat certain foods. But we know that any food is okay as long we thank God for it.

God wants you to point these things out to the people, to all the believers in the church there.

Physical workouts can do you some good. But living right is much more important for this world and the world to come. After all, God wants to save all people. He will certainly save those who believe.

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Be an example for the believers in speech, in life, and in every way. Make sure you read the scripture out loud during worship service. Do your personal evangelism and your teaching, but don't forget the spiritual gift you were given. If you live this way, you will save yourself and those who listen to you.

(I Timothy 5) I have several things I want to tell you about other people. Treat older men as you would your father. Treat younger men as your brothers. Treat older women as your mother. Treat younger women as your sisters, with complete purity.³

Take good care of widows, but make sure that if they have children, that the children take care of them. There are two kinds of widows—those who pray to God for help and those that live for pleasure. (If anyone does not provide for his relatives he has rejected the faith.) The widows who serve the church should be at least sixty years old and known for good deeds. Younger widows should get married so they won't become lazy, or gossips, or troublemakers.

Elders who teach the word and help organize things in the church should be paid. This I command you, Timothy, as God is my witness, do not show favoritism.

¹ See the article "Women and the Church" on p. 53f above.

² The leader must not be too young. Also, he shouldn't have just recently become a Christian.

³ This is an excellent rule for dating or for young men and their attitude toward young women. Treat them as you would your sister. Would you hold your sister's hand? Would you give her a peck on the cheek? But you wouldn't French-kiss her, would you? Treat your girlfriend as you would your sister! Then you will be pure in your relationship with Jesus, too.

You have been sick lately, so I suggest that you drink a little wine occasionally; that should help you feel better.¹

(I Timothy 6) People who teach false doctrines and don't agree with the sound doctrine I've taught you—they are corrupt. They think being good is for making money. But we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out. So if our basic needs are met—food and clothing—we will be happy. People who want to get rich had better watch out. The love of money produces all kinds of evil and grief.

But you, Timothy, are a man of God. Keep doing what's right. Keep the teaching of this letter to the end. Remember that Jesus told the truth about himself even before Pilate. Jesus will return when God says so. God is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords. He alone is immortal. He is Light no one can approach. No one has ever seen him or can see him. Praise be to him forever.

Command the rich not to trust their riches but to trust God. Tell them to be generous and share with others. By doing that they will lay up a treasure for themselves in Heaven, and they will understand real life here.

Timothy please guard what I have given you. Reject the so-called knowledge which has destroyed some.

Grace to you all. Love, - Paul

¹ The water in Ephesus was not very good. Timothy was so careful to live right before the people that he avoided all alcoholic drinks. Paul wants him to mix his water with wine, so the water won't make him sick.

All Jews drink wine, but in the first century it was mixed with water—2 or 3 parts water with one part wine.

When I was in Israel, our guide suggested we all drink a glass of wine at bedtime. I didn't, and I got sick. So I understand what Paul means here.

II TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 65-67) II Timothy is Paul's last letter. He wrote it from a cold dungeon in Rome, where he was chained like a criminal. He knew he was about to die. He had three reasons for writing Timothy. First, he was lonely, so he wanted Timothy to come and visit him. Second, he was concerned about the churches during this time of persecution. (Nero was the Roman emperor.) Third, he wanted to write another letter to Ephesus. II Timothy is Paul's final word, and we don't even know if Timothy got there in time to see him before his death.

In I Timothy we learned about how to behave in God's church. In II Timothy we will learn about keeping the true teaching of the church pure.

OUTLINE

Sound Teaching:

- A. Keep It (Chapter 1)
- B. Teach It (Chapter 2)
- C. Live It (Chapter 3)
- D. Preach It (Chapter 4)

OVERVIEW

(II Timothy 1) Paul to Timothy my dear son: I am thankful that you have the same kind of faith that your grandmother and your mother had. So I urge you to stir up again the gift of God which was given to you. God did not want us to be afraid, but powerful, loving and disciplined in spirit.

Don't be ashamed to tell about Jesus, or of me in prison. He saved us not through what we have done, but through what he has done. He destroyed death and brought immortality to us through the gospel. I know he is trustworthy to guard our whole lives and ministry and to reward us.

Keep the sound teaching. Guard everything I have given you. The Holy Spirit will help you guard it.

(II Timothy 2) Your job, my son, in the grace that Jesus gives, is to take everything I've taught you and teach others. Make sure these others will be prepared to teach others also.¹ Never forget Jesus! He was raised from the dead; he had descended from David. This is the gospel for which I am chained like a criminal, but God's word is not chained.

Remember this for sure:

"If we died with him we will live with him.

If we hold on to the gospel, we will rule with him.

If we deny him, he will deny us.

If we are faithless, he is still faithful.² He can't deny himself."

¹ This is the Biblical doctrine of ministry again. (See Ephesians 4:11-16.) I call it "2T2:2"—if we are true to the gospel, and if we teach people who will teach others—we have fulfilled Jesus' desire for our lives.

² This is a wonderful promise. When we disobey him, he is still faithful to us. He will still save us, if we keep on believing in him.

Work hard so you won't be ashamed and so you can correctly interpret God's word. Stay away from arguments about words and empty chatter.

God's seal of ownership never changes; it has two parts:

- 1 - The Lord knows everyone who belongs to him.
- 2 - Everyone who says he follows the Lord must turn away from doing evil.

If you stop doing bad things, you will be made holy, and your Master, Jesus, will prepare you for good work.

Don't be like other young people, but be righteous. Believe God and love people. As God's servant you should not quarrel, but be kind to all, even those who oppose you. If you gently instruct them, God may grant them repentance.

(II Timothy 3) There will be very bad times in the last days. People will be abusive and evil, treacherous and godless. False teachers will try to seduce weak women. They will always be learning, but never really coming to know the truth.¹ Their minds are depraved and everyone will see their evil one day.

But you, Timothy, you know all about me. And you know that everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted. But continue in what you've learned. And remember that the Holy Scriptures can lead you to salvation through faith in Christ. All scripture is God-breathed. It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training. The end result is that God's man can be completely ready to do God's work.

(II Timothy 4) Knowing God and Christ Jesus; knowing that he is the judge of the living and the dead; knowing that he will appear and his kingdom will come, I command you: *preach the word*. Be prepared when the time is right and when the timing is off. For the time is coming when people will refuse to listen. Keep your head in all situations and do the work of an evangelist.

I am about to die. I have fought the good fight. I have finished my race. I have kept the faith. And now I know that the righteous Judge will reward me with a crown of righteousness. This is not for me only, but for all who love him.

Everyone has left me. Please get Mark and bring him with you when you come.

No one helped me at my first defense before Nero; may God forgive them. But the Lord was with me and gave me strength, so that all the Gentiles might hear the Gospel. No matter what happens, I know the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his kingdom.

Grace be with you all. Love, - Paul

P.S. Winter is coming, so please bring my heavy coat. Don't forget to pick up Mark on your way because he can help me serve. I will die soon, so please hurry.²

¹ We are always learning, too, but we already know the truth; Jesus is the truth. We already know him. But there is much to learn *about* him.

² This last book of Paul has a sad ending. We do not know whether Timothy and Mark got to Rome in time to see him. Paul was taken out on the East Way out of Rome, and his head was chopped off. I look forward to meeting him in heaven—along with all the others who have gone before us.

TITUS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 62-65) In II Timothy we learned of Paul's concern at the end of his life about keeping church teaching pure. In Titus we will learn about how a strong young man is to minister in Crete*.

OUTLINE

- A. Church Leaders (Chapter 1:1-9)
- B. False Teachers (Chapter 1:10-16)
- C. Different People in the Church (Chapter 2)
- D. Conduct of Believers (Chapter 3:1-8)
- E. Conclusion (Chapter 3:9-15)

OVERVIEW

(Titus 1) Paul to Titus, my true son in the faith we share: our faith and hope are in Jesus Christ. Your ministry in Crete includes appointing leaders. An overseer (elder) must be a good man. An elder in Crete must be able to defend the true teaching against those who oppose it. (Compare I Timothy 3:1-13).

In Crete you will meet many dishonest and rebellious people. Epimenides,* one of their poets, correctly said, "Cretans are always liars, evil animals, and lazy gluttons."* Rebuke such people in public and help them to turn to the truth.

Some of them claim to know God. But what they do shows that they do not. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are not nothing is pure.

(Titus 2) Be careful how you teach the truth. Older men must learn self-control. Older women must do what is right; they must also teach what's right to the younger women. Younger women in Crete should submit to their husbands and stay at home.¹ That way no one will speak against God's word. Young men need to be self-controlled, too. Titus, you be sure to be an example to them in all you say and do. That way no one outside the church will be able to say bad things about us.

Teach employees to try to please their bosses. Tell them not to steal time or things from them. God's grace teaches us to say, "No!" to evil desire. But to live right while we wait for Jesus to return. He will make us a pure people, all his own. Be careful to teach the truth with authority.

(Titus 3) Remind everyone to submit to authority and do what is good. Be humble among all the people. We used to be slaves of evil desires, but God's kindness appeared. He saved us. He did not save us because of our good works, but because of his mercy. His Holy Spirit has washed us. He has given us new birth, and Jesus our Savior renews us. So now we have hope of eternal life. And this is for sure.

Titus, don't get sucked into useless arguments and discussions about family trees. People who argue and discuss such things are sinful and twisted. Tell the church to commit themselves to doing good.

Grace be with you all. Love, - Paul

¹ In our culture, women often leave their children at daycare and work in the business world. This often leads to divorce. If a woman *must* work outside the home, she must be very careful not to become involved with men at her work. Men at work usually are at their best—clean-shaven and well-dressed.

PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 60) In Titus we learned about how a strong young man ministered in Crete. In Philemon* we will learn about a runaway slave. Philemon was a rich man in Colosse whose slave, Onesimus, had stolen something and run away.¹ Onesimus had met Paul and had become a Christian. The letter to Philemon is Paul's attempt to bring Philemon and Onesimus together again.

OUTLINE

- A. Greetings and Prayer (1-7)
- B. Paul's request for Onesimus (8-25)

OVERVIEW

Paul and Timothy to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker: I am so thankful for you. I thank God for your faith in Jesus and love for all believers. I hope you will keep sharing your faith, my brother. You are a great encouragement to me.

Now, I am begging you to forgive Onesimus. He used to be "useless" to you, but now he has become "useful" to you.² I am sending him to you along with my heart. He was foolish to steal and run away from you, but God brought him to me. I'm asking you to take him back, not as a slave any longer. But please take him back as a dear brother, since he has become a Christian. So if you consider me as your friend, whatever he owes you, put it on my bill. I promise to pay you back—not to mention you owe me your own life. I am confident you will welcome him back. I also hope to be your guest soon.

All the men here with me send you greetings.

Our Lord Jesus' grace be with you. Love, - Paul

¹ The early Christian writers accepted slavery as a part of their culture. They did not try to change it. Back then, many slaves were teachers and doctors and servants in their master's home. Many did not want to be free because all their needs were met where they were. Their whole families were kept together, usually. Only criminals lived in true slavery in the mines and on ships. Most masters did not mistreat their slaves. They were too useful to mistreat. The masters would usually try to keep the slaves happy.

² This is a pun on the name *Onesimus*, which means *useful*.

HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: sometime before A. D. 70) In Philemon we learned about a runaway slave and his master. In Hebrews we will learn about Greek Jews who were believers in Jesus. They were tempted to fall away from Jesus and back into Judaism, because they were experiencing some persecution, mainly from their families. No one knows who wrote the book of Hebrews. It is a totally unique book. The main point of the book is that Jesus and the New Covenant are far better than Moses and the Old Covenant.

Those who were tempted to fall back into Judaism because of persecution are warned in the book again and again. If they do fall away, they will lose their salvation.

The book is like an extended sermon about the superiority of Jesus Christ to any other way.

OUTLINE

- A. Jesus Christ is better (Chapter 1:1-7)
 - 1. He is better than angels (Chapters 1:1-2:18)
 - 2. He is better than Moses (Chapters 3:1-4:13)
 - 3. He is better than the old priesthood (Chapters 4:14-7:28)
 - 4. He has a better covenant (Chapter 8)
 - 5. He has a better holy place (Chapter 9:1-12)
 - 6. He is a better sacrifice (Chapters 9:13-10:39)
- B. Faith is better than law (Chapters 11-12)
 - 1. Old Testament heroes of the faith (Chapter 11)
 - 2. Keep the Faith (Chapter 12)
- C. Conclusion
 - 1. Rules for living (Chapter 13:1-17)
 - 2. Closing prayer and comments (Chapter 13:18-25)

OVERVIEW

(Hebrews 1) God's final word is in Jesus. Jesus is the exact character of God. Jesus is God. When he had taken away all sin he went to heaven. He sat down at God's right hand.¹ He is better than angels, because God never said to an angel "You are my Son" (Psalm 2:7). In fact, God's angels worship him as the Son of God. God's angels are just servants. But when he talks about his Son he calls him "GOD" (Psalm 45:6f). The heavens and the earth will one day wear out, but God says to his Son, "Your life will never end," (Psalm 102:25ff). God never said to any angel, "Sit at my right hand" (Psalm 110:1) as he did to Jesus.

(Hebrews 2) Jesus was the first to talk about the gospel. We know it is true by the miracles that were being done at the beginning. Therefore, we must be very careful not to drift away from him. Not only is Jesus one with God, but he is also one with mankind. Psalm 8 promises us that everything is under our feet, but we don't see that yet. However,

¹ This is an important statement in Hebrews. Jewish High Priests were *never* able to sit down during their service, because the work of forgiving sins was never done. All through all the ceremonies, the Jewish priest had to stand up (Hebrews 10:11) to offer the sacrifices and the blood. Jesus "sat down" because the work of forgiveness was *completed*. That may be why he said on the cross, *It is finished!*

we do see that everything is under Jesus' feet.¹ He is "Representative Man." He says that we are his brothers (Psalm 22:22). Even though we are flesh and blood, we are born into the same family. Jesus is our big brother. He understands all our problems, because he himself was tempted. He just overcame all his temptations.²

(Hebrews 3) Not only is he our big brother. He is also our Apostle and our High Priest. He is better than Moses, because Moses was just a slave in God's house. Jesus is the builder and owner of the house.

So be sure you don't turn away from Jesus. If you do, you are turning away from the living God. So be confident in the gospel until the end. If you are falling away, turn back; repent, and you will be able to enter God's rest in heaven. But you must turn back to him today; "Today is the day of salvation." Remember this: the generation that left Egypt was not able to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief. The promise of the future rest still stands. Some will enter it by faith. Others will not enter because of disobedience.³

(Hebrews 4) Joshua did not give the people rest. When they entered the land, they still had to conquer it. God promises that the "rest" is yet to come. Remember that God's word is alive and working; it is sharper than a sacrificial dagger; it penetrates even to the separation of the soul and spirit. It is our judge, even looking into our hearts and knowing our dreams and hopes and plans. God sees everything open and clear before his eyes.⁴

Jesus is a better high priest than Aaron. Aaron entered through the curtain into the Most Holy Place in God's Tent in the OT. But Jesus has entered heaven, God's true temple. And since he is human as well as divine, he understands all our temptations. So let's be confident that he will listen and give us grace.

(Hebrews 5) Every high priest comes from the tribe of Levi, just as Aaron did. But God chose Jesus his Son as a "priest forever, like Melchizedek." (Genesis 14) Jesus did three things: Jesus lived a perfect life. Jesus became the source of eternal salvation. Jesus became the high priest like Melchizedek.

But you people are tired of listening; you are bored. By now you should be teachers, but you need to be told the basics all over again. You need the ABC's again. You need milk, not solid food. You need to grow up!

(Hebrews 6) So now, let's leave behind basic Jewish teachings—like repentance, faith, washings, laying on of hands, resurrection, and final judgment.⁵

What if people have become followers of Jesus? What if they have the Holy Spirit and know the word of God? What if they know about heaven, and then they fall away and lose their faith in Christ? Then it is absolutely impossible to bring them back to Christ, as

¹ When Jesus ascended to heaven, God put *all things* under his feet. See I Peter 3:22 and Ephesians 1:22 and 4:10. He represents us; in the next world, all things will be under our feet.

² This is a central teaching in the New Testament. Jesus not only had no sin in him; he also lived his whole life without ever committing one sin. He was not born from Adam, as we are, but from God and woman. See Genesis 3:15, which is the first promise of the coming Messiah.

³ "Disobedience" here means *unbelief in Jesus* or *falling back into Judaism*.

⁴ The Word of God is able to strip us naked and slice through us. He opens us up and looks inside at all our thoughts and desires and motives. He knows more about us than we can know of ourselves. This used to scare me. I was afraid because he knew me so completely. But now I realize that he has to know us totally as our High Priest, so he can forgive us of *all* our sin.

⁵ He says this, not because these things are unimportant. He says it because it is all good Jewish doctrine! These Jewish believers had not grown up in the Lord Jesus. They were just as they had been before they became believers in Christ. They needed to go beyond just the Jewish teaching they'd grown up with.

long as they keep crucifying Jesus in their daily behavior.¹ As long as they keep on disobeying Jesus and disgracing him publicly, they can not come back to him. Let me illustrate this: even good land, when all it bears is thorns and thistles, will be burned.

But we are confident in you. So don't become lazy. Stick to Jesus and to your first commitment. God promises by his own self that he will bless those who are faithful as Abraham was faithful. It is impossible for God to lie. This is our anchor. We simply follow Jesus, "into the Most Holy Place," because he is the great high priest like Melchizedek. Let's keep our trust in him!

(Hebrews 7) Melchizedek was not a Levite. (Genesis 14) Jesus is not either. Melchizedek was King of Salem and Priest of the Highest God. Abraham paid him tithes. Melchizedek blessed Abraham in return. This means Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. All Israel's priests were children of Abraham [the priests were Levites]. This means the Levites paid tithes to Melchizedek, too, in their father Abraham.

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, so his priesthood is not like Aaron's. His priesthood is based on the power of his life. And his life is indestructible. His life can never be destroyed. God says "You are a priest forever just like Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4)² Jesus' priesthood is the only one that says God has given his word and will never change his mind, "You are a priest forever." So Jesus guarantees us a better covenant—an eternal covenant. So his priesthood is permanent and his covenant is permanent. This is just what we needed—a high priest who is holy and pure. Jesus had no need like the Old Testament priest to offer a sacrifice for himself to forgive his own sins. He was sinless. And when he died, he was offering himself as a *perfect sacrifice* for our sins. This is once and for all; he will never die again.

(Hebrews 8) Jesus finished his work. He sat down at God's right hand in heaven. All other high priests had to offer sacrifices at a man-made tent. But Jesus is better because he offered, once and for all, and now has entered heaven, which is God's True Tent. Therefore, this new covenant has better promises.

If the OT had been perfect, there would have been no need for Jesus. But God says that he will make a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). By promising a "new" covenant, he made the first covenant pass away.

(Hebrews 9) No high priest was able to enter the Most Holy Place more than once a year. But Jesus lives in the Most Holy Place in heaven, in the throne with God. The OT sacrifices were not able to purify the conscience of the worshipper. But when Christ came as High Priest, he did not offer the blood of bulls and goats as the priest of the OT did. Instead, he entered the Most Holy Place (heaven) once and for all, by his own perfect blood. He cleansed our sins *and* our conscience. That is why Christ brought the new covenant. And we will live in the Most Holy Place with him.

When a will is read, it is because someone has died. When Jesus died, it put into effect his will, which is the new covenant. He signed the will in his own blood. You can see that he is not like any other high priest. The other high priests had to go every year to offer sacrifice, over and over again. But Jesus was sacrificed *once and for all*, to take

¹ In other words, if you reject Jesus and go back to Judaism, you've lost everything. Your life now would be as if Jesus had never died for you.

² All the priests of Levi's family died. Jesus will never die again. This makes him far superior to the Levites' priesthood. And Psalm 110 says that Jesus is also *Lord*. This makes him far superior to any human priest!

away the sins of many. When he comes back the next time it won't be for sin. But he will bring salvation to all who are waiting for him.

(Hebrews 10) Every year under the old covenant, the priest had to offer sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice. They could never make perfect those who believed. But Christ came to fulfill God's word once and for all. When Jesus did God's will he set aside the old covenant. And by his obedience, we have been made holy once and for all. Day after day the Jewish high priests stood to perform their duties. Again and again they offered the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this High Priest, Jesus, offered for all time one sacrifice for sin and then *sat down* at God's right hand. "By one sacrifice Jesus has made perfect forever all those who are being made holy."¹ So the Holy Spirit says, "I will write my laws in their hearts and minds, and I will never again remember their sins any more." So there is no need for any more sacrifice.

Therefore, my brothers, we can enter the most holy place with Jesus. Let's get close to God. Jesus has purified our hearts and taken away our guilt. We have been baptized. Let's hang on to this hope with our whole hearts. Now let's not feel guilty any longer when we come to God.

Don't stay away from church as some do. That's a bad habit. We need to encourage each other, especially knowing that Judgment Day is coming.² If we stay away on purpose, or if we fall away from Jesus, there is no more sacrifice for that sin. Only fear of Judgment and raging fire will await those who fall away. God's enemies will be burned up. So let's approach God with our hearts purified. Don't stop meeting with the church! Encourage each other because Judgment Day is coming. Take your stand for Jesus, and don't fall back into the old ways. Don't throw away your confidence; keep your faith, and you will receive what God has promised.

(Hebrews 11) Think of all the people in the OT. They believed, but did not get all they hoped for. But it was by faith that God accepted them and spoke well of them. By faith we know the universe was put together by the Word of God. He made it out of things we can't see. The role call of the faithful people in the Old Testament is as follows:

Abel was accepted—by faith.

Enoch was taken to live with God without dying—by faith.

Noah built an ark and saved his family—by faith—when all the rest of the world was destroyed in the Flood.

Abraham became a stranger in a land not his own—by faith. Abraham was looking for the *City of God*.³ Abraham had as many children as stars in the sky—by faith. Abraham gave Isaac to God as a sacrifice—by faith. He believed God would raise Isaac from the dead—by faith.

Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and Esau—by faith.

Jacob blessed the future of Joseph's sons—by faith.

Joseph knew the Exodus from Egypt would happen in the future—by faith.

¹ This is my favorite verse in the NT. It says we have been made *perfect forever*. Christ has done it for us, once and for all. How can we know we are made perfect? If we live a more holy life than we used to. That's our proof that God sees us as perfect forever.

² This could also mean that we should encourage each other to meet with the church, because the first day of the week is coming.

³ See the special study on "The City of God" on page 86 below.

Moses' parents did not fear Pharaoh's order. They kept their son alive—by faith. Moses rejected the wealth of Egypt and the pleasures of sin—by faith. He led the people out of Egypt and kept the Passover—by faith.

The people of Israel passed through the Red Sea—by faith.

Jericho's walls fell—by faith.

Rahab the prostitute was saved—by faith.

All these and all the other heroes of the OT suffered greatly—by faith. They will be rewarded greatly—by faith.

God had planned something better for us, so that we, with them, will be made perfect—by faith.

(Hebrews 12) So fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Remember that he endured the cross, hating its shame. Now he is seated at the right hand of God. Think of him when you suffer, and you won't lose heart.¹ Even though you are undergoing mild persecution, look at it as God's discipline. This is how God treats you as his sons. A father disciplines all true sons. If you're worn out or burned out, put your faith in Jesus. He will help you.

Treat all people with love and respect. Be holy. Without holiness no one will see the Lord. Don't be immoral or godless, like Esau. He gave up his place in God's kingdom, for a bowl of red beans! (See Genesis 25:27-34.)

We haven't come to Mount Sinai with the burning fire and the storm and the trumpet blast. No, we have come to Mount Zion, the Holy City, the Heavenly Jerusalem—to Jesus, the mediator of a new and far better covenant.

Remember that God does promise that he will shake the earth once more. This means all of creation will be removed and a new creation will begin. (See Psalm 46.)

The kingdom we will receive can't be touched by evil. Our God is our protector; he will consume his enemies with fire. (See Psalm 50:1ff.)

(Hebrews 13) Keep on loving each other as brothers. Show hospitality to strangers. Remember those in prison for their faith, as if you were there with them. Keep marriage pure and honorable to escape the judgement of God. Be content with what you have. Remember his great promise: "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." (See Psalm 118:6,7 & Psalm 27:1).

Keep the true teaching of the gospel and live by grace not by rules. It is a great privilege to live by grace rather than by rules. Hang on to Jesus and never let go. He has made us holy through his own blood. Praise God and do good; share with others. Submit to your leaders. They must give an account to God for you.

God will equip you to do everything according to his will. He has given us the blood of an eternal covenant. He has raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He is the great Shepherd; he is the God of peace. And he is at work in us.

Grace be with you all.

¹ Again, if we are struggling with temptation, we should shift our focus off the temptation to Jesus. Then we should be able to overcome the temptation.

THE CITY OF GOD

The first mention of a city in the Bible is the city built by the murderer, Cain. (Genesis 4:17) God had told him to become a wanderer in the land, but Cain decided to build the city of Enoch, and settle down, rejecting God's command.

The next city mentioned in the Bible is Babel, a city built, again, out of rebellion. Nimrod (whose name means *let us rebel*) led the building of Babel (which later became Babylon, the great enemy of God's people who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B. C.). Later he built Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, the other enemy of God who conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B. C.

The next cities mentioned in the Bible are Sodom and Gomorrah. Of course, these were the immoral cities God himself judged and destroyed for their wickedness.

Are you beginning to see a pattern here? All the cities of man cause division; walls are built to keep others out. These cities are wicked and destructive. There is a need for another kind of city. Some people think Jerusalem is the city of God. But by the time you get to Isaiah 1, Jerusalem is called *Sodom and Gomorrah*. And Revelation calls earthly Jerusalem *Sodom and Egypt*, which are two images of horror and evil to the Jews. So what is the City of God?

The first mention of the City of God is in the prophecy of Psalm 46. This is a city full of rejoicing because the River of the Spirit flows through it. It is the only unchanging city in a universe of change. (Read Psalm 46; notice that verses 1-3 are symbolic; verses 6-10 interpret what the first 3 verses mean.)

Then the City of God is next mentioned in Hebrews 11:10 and 16, and 12:22 and 13:14. Following are those scriptures about the City of God in Hebrews: "Abraham was looking forward to the City with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." "God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared a City for them." "You have come to Mount Zion, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, to the City of the Living God." "Here on earth we do not have a lasting city, but we are looking for the City that is to come." Notice that the City of God is not here; it is the "Heavenly Jerusalem," not the earthly one. That one is called Sodom in the prophets and in Revelation. Earthly Jerusalem is not a place of peace and freedom. It never has been since A. D. 70. It is always a place of hatred and war. But we are looking forward, as Abraham did, to the eternal City, the one where God lives, where he has prepared a place for us.

Revelation calls that City, "...the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:1) And flowing down the main street of that City, as in Psalm 46, is the River of the Spirit of God. (Revelation 22) This is our City! Earthly cities divide mankind. The Heavenly City will unify; as Revelation says, every "tongue and tribe and nation and people" will be there. This is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, that "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (See Genesis 12:3, 17:5, and many other places.)

So there are two cities; the city of man and the City of God. We have a choice: a temporary place of hatred and division and rebellion, or a permanent place of peace and joy. Our citizenship is in one or the other!

JAMES

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 40-62) In Hebrews we learned that Jesus brought a much better covenant than the old one. In James we will learn about living what we believe. James is the epistle of consistency.* (James was beheaded for his faith about A. D. 62.) James is the half brother of Jesus. According to Mark 6:3, Jesus had several brothers and sisters. These were really half brothers and sisters, because God was Jesus' Father. Mary's husband, Joseph, was their father. Therefore, Jesus came from a blended family. He had a stepfather, half brothers, and half sisters.

James is a unique book, like a string of pearls. The closest thing to James in the OT is the book of Proverbs. James is a very early, very Jewish book, in my opinion—maybe as early as A. D. 40. James became a well-known leader in the church of Jerusalem. James was the only "unbeliever" (at that time) Jesus appeared to after his resurrection, according to I Corinthians 15.

This book is different because it is completely Jewish. It emphasizes good deeds and obedience; it refers frequently to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 5-7) It also is written in excellent Greek.

OUTLINE

- A. Tempting and testing (Chapter 1:1-18)
- B. Hearing and doing (1:19-27)
- C. Showing no favorites (2:1-13)
- D. Believing and doing (2:14-26)
- E. Controlling the tongue (3:1-12)
- F. Godly and worldly wisdom (3:13-18)
- G. In the world but not of it (4:1-17)
- H. A warning to wealthy people (5:1-6)
- I. How to live (5:7-20)

OVERVIEW

(James 1) James, to the Jews who believe in Jesus: when you undergo trials, think of it as a testing of your faith. This will give you great joy. After you keep your faith under these trials, God will give you a crown of life.

When you're tempted, it's not from God. It's either from Satan or from your own evil desires. Realize this: there is a reverse birth: evil desire comes first, then sin. When sin is full-grown then comes death.¹

Only good things come from God. Through his word he gave us new birth. Be careful to listen closely to the word. Obey it and you will have life.

Remember this: the most important religion to God is one that takes care of those in need, like orphans and widows. We must also keep ourselves from being polluted by the world.

¹ I call this "L-S-D." Lust leads to sin; sin leads to death. We can stop this process in three places: 1) before we lust; 2) after we lust and before we sin; 3) after we sin and before sin is full grown. This means we *must* overcome sinful actions in our lives.

(James 2) Don't give rich people special treatment. Be rich in faith, instead. In Christ, the rich and the poor are on level ground.¹ Love your neighbor as yourself. This fulfills all law. Show mercy and don't be judgmental.

Brothers, just believing what is right is not enough.² The demons believe that, and they are terrified. Just like Abraham, we need to believe *and* to do. If you really believe, you will do good works. Faith alone is like the body without the breath; it's dead.

(James 3) If you think you're godly, but you don't control your tongue, your religion is false. Like a rudder on a ship, a bit in horse's mouth, or a spark that starts a forest fire, the tongue is a very small thing, but it can control your whole life. It *must* be controlled. But no one can tame the tongue. Still, we must learn to control what we say.³

There are two kinds of wisdom, one comes from hell itself. It is bitter, envious, and selfish. But godly wisdom is pure, peace-loving and submissive. Godly wisdom produces right speech and right behavior. Ask God for this kind of wisdom. Don't doubt; keep asking for wisdom, and you will receive it.

(James 4) You evil people, why do you fight and quarrel with one another? It's because your motives are wrong. Don't you adulterous people know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Scripture says, "God is against proud people, but he shows grace to humble people." (Proverbs 3:34) So first submit to God, then resist Satan, and he will run away. Come near to God, use your hands only for good, and purify your thoughts. Feel sorry for your sins. If you humble yourselves, the Lord will lift you up.

Stop judging each other. Stop gossiping about each other.

When you make plans, realize that God may interrupt your plans. Don't boast about your future. God may change it. So when you make plans, say, "If the Lord is willing, we will do this or that."

(James 5) You rich people had better watch out. One day your wealth will be moth-eaten. Be careful! God will judge how you use your money. You should use it to help people, not to hurt people and not just for yourself.

As a farmer waits on a crop, you must be patient. As Job was patient and the Lord blessed him, realize that a better time is coming—the time of the Lord's return.

"Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.'" There should be no need for promising. Simply say what you mean, and do what you say. Then you will not need to make promises.

If any person is sick, he should call the elders to pray for him. Prayer from good people is very powerful.⁴

¹ This means that the rich (and we Americans are rich) must care as much for the poor as we do for *ourselves*.

² Here James is going to make sure we understand that faith must produce works. "Faith alone" is used only here in the NT. James says, "Faith alone is dead."

³ James says, "You show me a man who controls his tongue, and I'll show you a perfect man."

⁴ Although James uses Elijah as an illustration of this, it is true not just for OT prophets! My wife and I have learned this on a number of occasions. Because of our faith in Jesus, God considers us good. Therefore, he listens when we pray. In one such instance, we desperately needed a car, not just for our family, but for my weekend speaking engagements. So we prayed. After a couple of weeks, I said, "I don't think we're being specific enough. Let's figure out exactly what kind of car we want that we should be able to pay for." So I studied *Consumer Reports* magazine, which is absolutely honest about the way it tests cars. We decided on a used car of a specific model, style, and even the color and number of doors. We prayed for less than two weeks. We told no one else what we were praying for—only God. A lady at my wife's work asked her, "Do you know anyone who'd be interested in...?" *and she named the very model we had prayed for!* We got the car; it was not only exactly what we'd prayed for, it was also six years old with only 18,600 miles on it! Often, God has blessed us through our prayers. He really does listen, and he really does care.

Whoever turns a sinning brother back to Jesus may save him from death, and God will forgive him.

I PETER

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: before A. D. 65; place of writing: Rome.) In James we learned how to live what we believe. In I Peter we will learn about churches that are beginning to be persecuted, probably under Nero, the emperor of Rome (A. D. 54-68). I Peter was not directly written by the apostle Peter, though Peter is its main author. (See I Peter 5:12.)

OUTLINE

- A. Be thankful, joyful, and especially holy (Chapters 1:1-2:12)
- B. Submit to authority (Chapters 2:13-3:7)
- C. Follow the example of Christ (Chapters 3:8-4:6)
- D. Christian conduct (Chapters 4:7-5:11)
- E. Purpose and conclusion (Chapters 5:12-14)

OVERVIEW

(I Peter 1) Peter, Jesus' apostle, to God's chosen people scattered over the world: grace and peace to you.

Praise God for giving us new birth. Our inheritance is eternal, shielded by faith, and protected by God, even though we are being tested and persecuted. Keep the faith! Faith is like fine gold. But it has to be purified by fire, and the fire is hot.

You believe in Jesus even though you haven't seen him. So be filled with joy, even in persecution. Know this: you are receiving your salvation. The prophets prophesied this and now you see it. Even the angels don't understand the blessings we have gotten.

God says, "Be holy because I am holy."¹ Don't live the way you used to live. Realize we are strangers and foreigners in this world. Jesus has bought you with his own perfect blood. Keep your faith and hope in God. You are now pure because you have obeyed the truth. You are born again by the eternal seed of God.² The gospel that was preached to you is that seed. So love another deeply.

(I Peter 2) Therefore get rid of all the evil in yourselves. Be like newborn babies. Be hungry for that pure spiritual milk so you can grow up, now that you know that the Lord is good.

Jesus is a great Living Stone.³ You also are living stones, cemented in next to Jesus. He is God's Cornerstone.⁴ This Stone will crush the unbelievers. But you are a

¹ "Holy" means to be different, separated from the way the world lives. Hebrews says, "Without holiness, no one will see God." So be holy. When you fail, ask for forgiveness and go on, struggling to be holy every day. When you fail, God is faithful; he will forgive you in Christ.

² Two words in the NT are used for "seed," meaning the Word or Spirit of God. These two Greek words are *sperma* (from which we get the word "sperm") and *spora* (from which we get the word "spore"). The NT teaches us that God's seed is in us. This means we are his children, born like little brothers and sisters of Jesus. (See Romans 8:28f and John 1:12f.)

³ Jesus is called "rock" or "stone" all over the Old and New Testament. Look at what he says at the end of his Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:24f. Also, look at Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 10:1-3. There are many other places like these. [And remember that Peter's name means "Rocky."]

⁴ Today we lay down the cornerstone of buildings last. But in the first century, when this letter was written, the cornerstone was laid down first. That stone had to be exactly, perfectly square. Why? Because as they built the rest of the building, they sighted along the cornerstone, to make sure the walls were straight. So if Jesus is the cornerstone, we must align our lives with his, to "fit into his building," the church.

chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. You belong to God. You need to tell people what he has done for you.

So act like strangers and foreigners in this world. Since this is not our home, we must stay away from sinful desires. Let the unbelievers see you doing good. Maybe they will repent and come to Jesus.

For the Lord's sake, submit to authority.¹ This is God's will. Employees, obey your employers. Work hard and do good, so even if your employer is not a Christian he may believe because of you.

Look at Jesus; he suffered, but it was for doing good. So if you suffer, be sure it's for doing good. He carried our sins in his body on the cross. "By his wounds you are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) You were wandering sheep. But now you have returned to your great Shepherd and Overseer—Jesus.

(1 Peter 3) Wives submit to your husbands; don't nag them. If you behave right, they may be won over to Christ without words. Make sure you're beautiful on the inside. Even Sarah obeyed Abraham her husband. Husbands, realize that your wife is a weaker partner. Treat her right, and then God will hear your prayers.

Don't any of you repay evil with evil. Rather, bless those who curse you. (Psalm 34:12-16) If you suffer for doing what's right, remember that you are blessed. Don't be afraid. Let Christ be the Lord of your heart. And keep a clear conscience for doing good. Maybe those who speak evil of you will see the good things you do and turn to Christ.

He died for our sins, once and for all. His body was killed, but the Holy Spirit made him alive. This is the same Spirit that preached through Noah. Noah preached to those who are now in dead and awaiting judgement. (See 2 Peter 2:5.) These are the same people who disobeyed before the flood. They didn't believe Noah's preaching, so only eight people were saved in the Ark through the water. This water is a symbol of baptism, which saves you now also. It does not save you by washing dirt from your body. It saves you by the answer² of a good conscience. Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus. He is now at God's right hand. Everything else is under his feet, even the angels and spiritual powers.

(1 Peter 4) If you are suffering persecution, remember Christ suffered too. Whoever is suffering is not sinning.³ You spent enough time sinning in the past. Your old friends don't understand you because you have stopped behaving that way.⁴ This is why the gospel must be preached to the unbelievers—so they might repent.

Since the end of the world is coming, be self-controlled; pray, love others, open your homes to one another, and don't grumble. Use your gifts to help others. Remember when you speak, that it should be the Word of God that you speak. My friends, do not be

¹ Besides submitting to our leaders, Peter tells us to pray for the rulers and all in authority. Pray for them so our lives will be peaceful. We Christians should pray for our president and other leaders every day. They need God's wisdom to do their job.

² *Answer* was a court term used in the first century. It is used in the same way today. It means *to show up in court to answer charges that you broke the law*. So baptism is the point at which we admit to God that he is right; we are sinners. It's not the *water* of baptism that saves us; it's the work of the Spirit inside us that saves us. But the water is still used in all regular churches.

³ *Suffering* usually means *struggling against temptation*; it means *overcoming sin* in our lives. But sometimes it may mean *physical or mental suffering*. When someone suffers, he's not planning his next sin. He thinks only of the suffering.

⁴ Non-Christians don't understand why we don't live as they do, doing the same things we used to do with them. Because we want to please God, we try to live as Jesus did.

surprised that you are suffering persecution. Rejoice in that, because you are suffering as Christ did. You will have joy when Christ returns.

If you are insulted for being a Christian, praise God that you carry his name. If *we* are just barely saved, what do you think will happen to those who do not obey the Gospel of God? Stay committed to God even if you suffer.¹

(I Peter 5) I am a witness of Christ's sufferings. But I am also an elder along with some of you. You elders, be shepherds of God's flock. Not for money, but to help them and to be examples to them. When the Chief Shepherd comes, you will receive an unfading crown of glory.

Young people, you submit to the older ones. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Proverbs 3:34) Throw your cares upon Jesus because he cares for you.

Watch out! Your enemy the devil is like a roaring lion, roaming around, looking for someone to destroy. Resist him. Humble yourselves before God. Stand strong in the faith. Realize that all over the world your brothers are suffering like you.

The God of all grace has called you to his eternal glory. He will make you strong. Glory to him!

I have written with Silas's help. This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

The church in Babylon, chosen along with you, sends you greetings.² So does John Mark. Peace be to all of you who are in Christ.

¹ It's always a temptation to go back on our faith, to reject Jesus, when we suffer. Don't do it. Remember that Jesus suffered, too.

² *Babylon* here, means Rome, just as it does in Revelation. There is no evidence that Peter traveled clear over east to the real Babylon. It's just that Babylon has always been seen as the enemy of God's people. Rome was that enemy in the first century. We do know that Peter went to Rome. In fact, he was killed for his faith there. The *John Mark* who is mentioned at the end of this letter is the one who wrote Peter's gospel down. It is the Gospel of Mark.

II PETER

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: before A. D. 67 and after I Peter) In I Peter we learned about churches under persecution. In II Peter we will learn about Christian growth, protection from evil, and the Second Coming of Jesus.

OUTLINE

- A. Grow in Christ and his authority (Chapter 1)
- B. Watch out for false teachers (Chapter 2)
- C. Christ will return (Chapter 3:1-16)
- D. Conclusion (Chapter 3:17-18)

OVERVIEW

(II Peter 1) Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus, to all those who believe what we believe—grace and peace to you.

God has given us everything we need to live and to be godly. He has given us such precious promises! Through these promises we can actually share in God's nature. Through these promises we have also escaped the rottenness of this world. As you grow make sure you work these eight things together in your life: 1) faith, 2) courage¹, 3) knowledge, 4) self control, 5) endurance*, 6) godliness, 7) brotherly kindness, and 8) love. If all these things are growing in you, you will bear fruit for Jesus. If you don't have them, you're blind. You have forgotten that you have been forgiven.

So work hard to stay in Christ. Grow in these in yourself and you will not fall. God will welcome you into his eternal kingdom.

God has told me I'm about to die,² so I want to remind you to grow in all these things.

Remember that *people* did not invent all the prophecies of the scripture. What we are telling you is not a myth. We were eyewitnesses. We heard God speak on the holy mountain.³ We have two witnesses to our faith. We have the certain words of the prophets, which are a light in a dark place. And we have what we have seen with our eyes. God created prophecy when he carried the prophets of the Old Testament with his Spirit. He made them prophesy.⁴

(II Peter 2) But watch out for false teachers; they introduce deadly heresies.* They are greedy, evil people. Hell is hanging over their heads. God even sent angels who disobeyed into Tartarus.* He also punished Sodom and Gomorrah. He made them an example of the burning that is going to come to these filthy teachers. They follow evil

¹ *Courage* may mean *virtue*, *goodness* or even "*guts*" today. It means the strength and strong desire to do good.

² Peter uses the image of *taking down a tent* to refer to his death. How did he die? He was taken out on the Appian Way, West of Rome, and Roman soldiers crucified him upside down.

³ Peter is remembering the time he followed Jesus (with James and John) up on a mountain and saw Jesus transformed, so that his clothing became white like the light. See Matthew 17.

⁴ The word *carry* Peter uses here is the same word Luke used in Acts, when he said Paul's ship was blown by the storm-wind. In other words, the prophets didn't use their own minds to make up prophecies; rather the "wind" of God's Spirit carried them, driving them to write the prophecies.

desires of the flesh. They hate authority. They are arrogant, not even afraid to curse angels. These men are like wild animals, born only to be trapped and burned.

They throw wild parties in broad daylight. Their eyes are full of adultery. They never stop sinning. They are cursed. They have followed the way of Balaam.¹ They are springs without water, mists driven along by the storm.² Blackest darkness is reserved for them. They promise freedom, but they are slaves of violent evil. They knew Jesus, but they now reject him and are tangled up in the world. They are like Proverbs 26:11, *dogs returning to their own vomit*.

(II Peter 3) Remember the words of the Holy Prophets, the words of Jesus and the words of the Apostles. Liars will come; they will make fun of God. They will say, “Where is this Judgment Day we hear about? Nothing has changed since the world began.” On purpose, they forget two things: 1) the heavens and the earth were formed by the word of God out of water and through water, and 2) the world was destroyed by the flood from that same water. But now this world is being reserved for fire. The Day of Judgment is coming!

They say God is slow to keep his promise. But he is not. With him a day is like a thousand years. Instead, he is patient. He wants everyone to repent and no one to be destroyed. But the Lord’s Day will come as a surprise. The heavens will dissolve with a roar. The earth will be destroyed by fire. Everything will be revealed.

Since everything is going to be destroyed, what kind of people should we be? We should be holy, godly, looking for that Day. Then the whole universe will melt in the heat of the fire of God’s Judgement. But we look forward to new heavens and a new earth. Righteousness will live there.

So be patient, brothers and sisters. Do your best to live a pure life. Paul says the same thing in his letters. Some misunderstand his writing because those people are unstable and ignorant. They do that to the other scriptures, too.³ So, my friends, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. To him be glory now and forever more, Amen.
Love, -Peter

¹ *The way of Balaam* means they teach for money, and they are immoral. See Numbers 22-25.

² This means that their lives are totally out of control.

³ This is one of the places in the New Testament that makes it clear that the NT Scriptures are on the same level of authority as the OT Scriptures. Also see I Timothy 5:18. There Paul lists Luke 10:7 with Deuteronomy 25:4, making it clear that the OT and the NT are on the same level.

I JOHN

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: sometime around A. D. 90, after John's Gospel) In II Peter we learned about Christian growth, false teachers and the Second Coming. In I John we will learn about Christ's commands, which he left for believers—believe and love. The gospel of John was written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and by believing you may have eternal life.” (John 20:30f) But I John is like a follow-up letter to those who believed the gospel. It is written “to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know for a fact that you have eternal life.” (I John 5:13). Much of John's writing is an attack on a false teaching called “Gnosticism.” Gnosticism taught four major things:

1. *Gnosticism taught that matter is evil and spirit is good.* So the human body is evil but God is good. (But in Genesis 1, God says that everything he created was good. [He says it seven times.]) The NT says your body is good. It is good enough to be a holy temple for God to live in. It is a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to God. (1 Corinthians 6:19; Romans 12:1-2)
2. *Gnosticism taught that salvation means to escape our bodies.* It has nothing to do with faith, but a special “knowledge” saves us, they say. (The word *Gnosticism* comes from the Greek work gnosis, which means “knowledge.”) (Of course we know that we are saved by *faith* in Jesus in this life; we don't have to wait for heaven to be saved.)
3. *Gnosticism taught that Jesus was really not a man.* There are two views of this:
 - A. Jesus just *seemed* to be a man but was really like a ghost.
 - B. Jesus just *seemed* to be the Christ. They say the Christ was spirit, and it came upon him at his baptism and left him when he died. (But we know that Jesus Christ bled real blood, died on the cross, was buried, and was bodily raised from the dead, never to die again.)
4. Since the Gnostics thought that *the body was evil*, some taught that it was to be treated badly—some of them beat their bodies, starved themselves, or burned themselves. But others taught that the body was to be given anything it wanted. They believed you could be lawless and immoral, “as long as you did not hurt your spirit.” (We know that this is impossible, as well as wrong.)

OUTLINE [Outlining I John is very difficult. The key verse is in the middle. It is I John 3:23, where John brings together faith and love as the two absolutes for the Christian life.]¹

- A. Historical introduction (Chapter 1:1-4)
- B. Life is sharing with Jesus and the Father. (Chapters 1:5-2:28)
- C. Life is being God's children. (Chapters 2:29-4:6)
- D. Life is love. (Chapters 4:7-5:5)
- E. Life is Jesus as God and man. (Chapters 5:6-12)
- F. Life is knowing for a fact that you are born of God. (Chapters 5:13-21)

OVERVIEW

¹ There are 611 commands in the OT. But in the NT, they can all be summed up in these two: *believe* in Jesus and *love* one another.

(I John 1) The word of life is Jesus Christ. He did become flesh. We watched him. We touched him, and we tell the truth. And because of the Holy Spirit, we share with him and his father.

Jesus told us that God is light and has no darkness in him.¹ We must be like that. We must walk in the light and not in the darkness. What is walking in the light? It is admitting that we have "sin" and admitting that we have "sinned."² If we keep confessing that we sinned, Christ has completely purified us.

(I John 2) I write this with the hope that you don't sin at all. But if you do, remember Jesus is on our side. He forgave us our sins; in fact, his forgiveness is for the whole world. Keeping his commandments means: we must obey his word about love, and his word about love is both old and new.³

There are several false claims. One is that we are without sin. Another is we have not sinned. Another is, "I know him, but I don't do what's right. I am living in the light but I hate my brother." If you love your brother, you will never do anything to hurt him. If you hate your brother, you are in darkness.⁴ You will try only to help him.

My dear friends, there are several reasons I'm writing to you:

- 1 - your sins have been forgiven;
- 2 - you know the eternal God and his son Jesus Christ;
- 3 - you have overcome Satan;
- 4 - you are strong and the word of God lives inside you.

Dear children, don't love this world and its ways.⁵ If you do, you can't love the father. What is in this world? Three things:

1. the lust of our flesh (what our flesh is addicted to);
2. the lust of our eyes (what our eyes make us lust for);
3. the pride of our physical body or our job or our possessions.

But these things are all passing away. They are the darkness. But anyone who obeys God lives forever.

You have heard that Antichrist is coming, but I tell you that many antichrists⁶ have already come. The Holy Spirit has taught you the truth, but these people are liars. The antichrists are those who deny Jesus and his father. If you deny Jesus, you can't have

¹ In the scripture, God *is* four things in his very nature: 1. He is spirit (John 4:24); 2. He is light (I John 1:5 and I Timothy 6:16 [Greek text]); 3. He is fire (Hebrews 12:29); 4. He is love (I John 4:8 and 16). [The first three are terrifying, but the last one is wonderful.]

² These are two different things. *Sin* is born into us from Adam; we cannot escape our *desire to sin*, our *leaning toward sin*. *Sinned* means the different *acts* of sin that we do. We must confess that we are sinful (from Adam) and that we do the acts of sin. Don't you love I John 1:9? I do.

³ The command to love is *old*, because Moses commanded it way back in Deuteronomy 6:5. It is *new* in the sense that it is fresh. Jesus commands the same thing. See John 15:12 and 17.

⁴ *Darkness* means *the world or Satan's rule*.

⁵ This means don't be attached to *anything* in this world. Love people, love God, but *use* things.

⁶ Only in I John and II John is *antichrist* mentioned. John defines *antichrist* as *anyone who denies Jesus, anyone who says "Jesus is not the Christ," or anyone who says Jesus did not come to earth in the flesh*.

his father. Hold on to what you heard at first—the true gospel. It is the source of eternal life. These liars may try to lead you astray, but don't believe them. Remain in Jesus. If you remain in him, you have nothing to fear when he returns.

(I John 3) God has poured out such great love on us! We are his children. (That is why the world hates us; it hated Jesus first.) What we will be like when he comes back will be glorious. But we don't see that yet. When Jesus appears, we will be just like him. Since you have this hope in Jesus, purify yourself as Jesus is pure.

If you belong to Jesus you won't keep on sinning. Whoever keeps doing what is right is righteous; whoever keeps doing evil belongs to the devil. The Son of God came to destroy the work of the devil. If you've been born of God, you can't keep on sinning. If you live right, you're God's child. If you live wrong, you're the devil's child. It's as simple as that. Hating your brother is living wrong. Don't be like Cain. He was a murderer. He murdered his brother Abel because Abel did what was right. This is why the world hates us; we do what is right. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. We know that murderers don't have Jesus' life in them.

So let's love our brothers and sisters in truth and in action. When you fail and your heart condemns you, remember this: God is greater than our hearts; he knows everything. All he asks of us are these two things: to believe in his son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another. You can know for sure that you have the Holy Spirit living in you, if you love others.¹

(I John 4) How can you recognize the Spirit of God? Answer: every spirit that says Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Anything else is the spirit of antichrist. This antichrist spirit is already in the world. You have overcome these liars, because God is in you. The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. True believers listen to Christ.

God is love, and everyone who loves has been born of God. It's not that we love God, but that he loved us. His son is the forgiveness for our sins. Therefore, we ought to love one another. If we do, God will be seen in our lives. Everyone who says Jesus is God's son, belongs to God. God is love. His love is made complete in us when we have confidence before him. There is no fear of judgment in love. Perfect love drives out fear. Whoever says, "I love God," but hates his brother is a liar. You can't love God, who is unseen, if you don't love your brother, who is seen. To love God you must first love your brother.

(I John 5) Everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ is born of God. If you love the father, you also love his children. The victory that has overcome the world is our faith. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you are overcoming the world; you are winning the victory.

Jesus is the one who bled and died; out of his side came blood and water. Three witnesses testify to this truth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood.² And these three witnesses agree. God's testimony is greater than man's. If you believe in the Son of God, you have God's testimony in your heart. Those who don't believe, try to make God a liar. This is God's true testimony: he has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. If you have the Son of God, you have life. If you don't, you don't.

¹ Again, *love* means *helping people*.

² These three witnesses are still in the church today. The Spirit leads believers into truth; the water is used in baptism, and the blood is shared in the communion.

My purpose in writing this to you who believe in Jesus is *that you may know for a fact that you have eternal life*. (5:13) So we have confidence with God that whatever we ask he hears.

If you see your brother commit a sin that is not leading to death, pray for him.¹ Through your prayer God can give him life. If you're born of God, you don't keep on sinning. If you're born of God, Satan cannot touch you. This world is in the grip of Satan, but we are children of God. If you're in Jesus, you are in the true God. You have eternal life.

So, my friends, keep yourselves from idols.² Love, -John

¹ In this passage, it almost seems that we can give life to others through our prayer for them. This is the power of intercessory* prayer.

² Anything other than faith in Jesus and his Father, and obedient love, is an idol.

II JOHN

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: sometime during A. D. 90-96, probably after I John) In I John we learned that faith in Jesus and love for people makes us sure of our eternal salvation. In II John we will learn about how believers should respond to the deceivers.

OUTLINE

- A. Greeting (Verses 1-4)
- B. Encouragement and Warning (5-11)
- C. Conclusion (12-13)

OVERVIEW

John the elder to the true church: Jesus is the truth. He lives in us and will be with us forever.

I am so happy to know that you are living in love.

Watch out for the deceivers who say Jesus did not come in the flesh. These people are antichrists. Keep believing what you first believed, and you have the father and the son. Don't welcome a false teacher into your house, or you will share in his evil work.¹

I long to see you. The people of this church send their greetings.

Love, -John

¹ When members of cults like the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses come to my house, I will talk to them on the porch. If they agree to study the Bible with me, and leave all their other literature outside, I will invite them in. But until you are a mature Christian, you should not invite them in. I admire the devotion of such people, but they believe we are saved by works and not by faith.

There is no historical basis for the Mormon book or belief. The Jehovah's Witnesses use the Bible to separate from real Christians. Again, these people mean well, and there is much truth in their teachings, but they have the wrong view of Jesus.

III JOHN

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: sometime during A. D. 90-96, probably after II John) In II John we learned how the church should respond to the deceivers. In III John we will learn about a false teacher and a good teacher.

OUTLINE

- A. Gaius, the good man (Verses 1-8, 11)
- B. Diotrophes, the bad man (9-10)
- C. Demetrius, the example (12)
- D. Conclusion (13-14)

OVERVIEW

John the elder to Gaius, my friend: I'm glad that you are faithful to the truth.¹ I'm also glad you show hospitality to other believers you don't know.

I already wrote to your church, but Diotrophes² refuses to listen. He is not doing the truth. He gossips about us and drives good people out of the church.

The Lord says Demetrius is a good man. And you know the Lord's testimony is true.

I hope to see you soon. Peace to you, and greetings from your friends here.
Love, -John

¹ Gaius is a man of faith. He is holding on to the testimony of Jesus (the gospel) he had already received. And he is being obedient.

² Diotrophes is a leader who is disobeying the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 20:25ff. He glorifies himself instead of glorifying Jesus. He *rules* the people of the church instead of serving them.

JUDE

INTRODUCTION

(Date of Writing: about A. D. 65) In III John we learned about a false teacher and a good teacher. In Jude we will learn about more destructive false teachers, and how to protect the faith. (Jude is a younger half brother of Jesus and a full brother of James.)

OUTLINE

- A. Warning against false teachers (1-16)
- B. Encouragement to keep the faith (17-23)
- C. Praise (24-25)

OVERVIEW

Jude to all believers in Jesus: may God give you much mercy, peace and love. I really wanted to write to you about how wonderful our salvation is. But instead, I must warn you to hold on to the true faith. This was the faith that was given to you in the beginning.

God predicted that there would be false teachers who would think that grace is a license to do evil. They are sexually sinful, and even deny our Master. Remember that God delivered his people from Egypt, but destroyed the unbelievers of that first generation in the desert. Remember also that even angels who disobeyed God are chained in darkness and waiting for the Judgment. Also remember that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because they were evil and perverted.¹

These false teachers with false dreams reject all authority. They speak evil against heavenly beings that they do not even understand. Even the angel Michael² wouldn't do that. When he was arguing with Satan, he did not accuse him. Instead, he simply said, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan."

But these men are like evil animals.³ They even abuse heavenly powers.⁴ They will be destroyed! They have gone the way of Cain the murderer. They have hurried into Balaam's evil mistake for money.⁵ They have been destroyed right along with Korah in the rebellion.⁶

The false teachers I'm talking about pollute your love feasts. Their lusts are out of control. They are like trees that died and are uprooted. They are dead twice. They are like waves thrown up by a stormy sea. The blackest darkness has been reserved for them

¹ Jude's 3 illustrations (the desert, the darkness, and the cities) point to the certainty of God's judgement, either in this world or in the next.

² Michael, the great angel over Israel, is mentioned by name only 5 times in the Bible. (Daniel 10:13 and 21, and 12:1; here in Jude [verse 9], and Revelation 12:7) His work is like Jesus' work—to destroy the works of the devil. He fights for the people of God.

³ Compare this to II Peter 2:12.

⁴ There are many kinds of spiritual beings—like angels—that God has created. At least 4 different kinds are mentioned in the NT—thrones, dominions, powers and authorities. There may be many more. [We know very little about the spiritual realms.]

⁵ Compare II Peter 2:15, and my comment there.

⁶ Jude knows the OT well. He has used 3 different bad examples from the OT here. This last one, Korah, is told about in Numbers 16.

forever. Enoch¹ said that God would return one day with the holy angels to judge the ungodly. These ungodly men complain about God, but they brag about themselves.

So, my friends, do what the apostles said. They warned us about these mockers in the last days doing ungodly things. These ungodly men will try to divide your church because they do not have the Holy Spirit.

But you, my friends, when you come together, build yourselves up in the most holy faith that you received. Let the Holy Spirit interpret your prayers.² Guard yourselves in the love of God. Wait for our Lord Jesus Christ; he will bring you eternal life. Help the doubters; save them from the fires of hell. Show mercy to all who doubt. Stay away from all forms of corruption.

Praise to our Lord; he will keep you from falling away and present you before his father. You will be holy and filled with great joy.

Our God is the only God; to our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus our Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

Love, -Jude

¹ This is one of many places the NT quotes books that are not in the Bible. There are seven mentioned in the OT, and several others mentioned in the NT. Four books of Enoch are in a group of writings called *pseudepigrapha*. These are books with someone else's name attached to them, not the real author (probably).

It doesn't matter where truth is. If it is in a false religion or a false writing, it doesn't matter. It's still truth. Even Satan sometimes tells the truth. (See Genesis 3:5; of course, this follows one of Satan's lies!)

² *Praying in the spirit* is spoken of in Romans 8:26f. It probably means that the Holy Spirit interprets our deepest desires to God.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

THINGS TO LOOK FOR in Revelation:

Apocalyptic is a type of literature that *uncovers* or *reveals* God's word to his people in times of persecution. Apocalyptic is *symbolic* literature that teaches the following:

- God is in control of history.
- God will act at the end of history.
- God will replace suffering and evil with peace and goodness.
- God will remove the imperfect and incomplete; believers will one day be able to perform God's will perfectly.
- Christ will return soon; we have little time left; obedience is urgent!
- God will judge all people through Christ.

Apocalyptic literature like Revelation has the following unique marks:

- Shocking imagery and symbols
- Disturbing prophecy that terrifies people (but was given to *comfort* and *strengthen God's people*; Revelation 2:10)
- Unusual animal and number symbolism
- Heavenly visions
- Angels who interpret and teach
- Spiritual battles and other heavenly events that affect the earth
- Times of judgement that lead up to the Final Judgement of the world
- End-times themes
- Unusual use of language (non-grammatical use)
- Satan's earthly partners—idolatry and sin
- Seemingly overwhelming nature of evil, demons and Satan
- Much use of the "passive voice"¹
- God's victory over Satan, and ours, too

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is from Jesus and about Jesus. The revelation itself is from God to Jesus to Jesus' angel to John to the churches. It is for God's people near the end of the first century. But it applies to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

The prophecy contained in it is in symbolic form. (The Greek word, *esemanen* in 1:1, means *he showed by signs and symbols*. (This same word is used in John 12:33, 18:32, and 21:19; Acts 11:28 and 25:27. In each place it is used symbolically.)

There are two key words in Revelation:

1) The key word *seven* occurs over 50 times in the book. In fact, the book is like the seven miraculous signs in the Gospel of John. It is set up as a series of seven looks at

¹ See page 111, footnote # 10.

history. The seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath are each one of the visions. Here are the book's major divisions by chapters:

1-3, 4-7, 8-11; then 12-14, 15-16, 17-19, 20-22.

Each vision begins and ends with an appearance of Christ. The first group of three visions (chapters 1-11) expresses the physical reality more—though the world attacks the church, Jesus Christ is still its guardian. The second group of four visions (chapters 12-22) expresses the spiritual reality more—though Satan attacks Christ, Christ has already become Victor, and through his victory, the Church *wins*. Though the battles continue to be intense, we have already won!

2) The second key word is *overcome*, which is used 15 times in the book. We believers in Jesus are conquerors through him. We overcome by faith. (See I John 5:4f.) And our faith will be rewarded.

OUTLINE:

1. The Physical Reality: The World against the Church (chapters 1-11).
 - A. The seven churches: Christ walks among the lampstands. (1-3)
 - B. The seven seals: The Lamb who had been killed now opens the book. (4-7)
 - C. The seven trumpets: God's judgments continue to fall upon the world. (8-11)
2. The Spiritual Reality: Satan against Christ (chapters 12-22).
 - A. The Dragon and the Child: Satan's weapons—the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth; the great prostitute (12-14)
 - B. The seven bowls: continuing judgments upon the earth (15-16)
 - C. The beginning of Satan's end: the fall of his three helpers—the prostitute, the beast, and the false prophet (17-19)
 - D. Satan's end: the new heavens, the new earth, the new Jerusalem (20-22)

The book begins and ends with the certainty of the testimony; Jesus Christ Himself is the Revealer.

Four (4) Main Ways to Interpret the Book:

- A. Preterist - The book is written to the first century church. It is about the Roman Empire and the suffering of the believers; it is basically a history book about the events (in symbolism) of the first century. (The weakness of this view is that it would be valuable only to the church of the first century. In other words, it wouldn't have value to us and other later readers.)
- B. Historicist - The book is primarily a forecast of events (in symbolism) of all history. Every major act of humanity, especially in Western Europe, is

forecast in it. (The weakness of this view is that the book would not help its first-century readers. Teachers of Revelation could say anything they want to about the meaning of the symbols.)¹

- C. Futurist - Apart from the first three chapters, the book deals exclusively with events at the end of the world and the second appearance of Jesus. (The weakness of this view is that it would not help anyone but those at the end of time.)
- D. Idealist - The book presents broad ideas and general principles by which people can interpret how God works in history, both in the world and in the church—past, present and future. (The weakness of this view is that it limits the book's basis in history.)

¹ This is the most common interpretation I hear on TV and radio. Each teacher says the book means something different from all the other teachers.

The Numbers of the Book of Revelation

It is necessary to stop here and say something about the numbers of the Book of Revelation. Since at least the fifteenth century B. C. the Jews have used certain numbers to mean certain things. When Moses wrote Genesis 1, he used the numbers symbolically. For example: Genesis 1:1, in Hebrew, has 7 Hebrew words. It has 28 Hebrew letters. Twenty-eight is 4X7. Genesis 1:2 has 14 words, and 14 = 2X7. And the conclusion to Genesis 1 (chapter 2, verses 1-3) is 35 Hebrew words, which is 5X7. Genesis 2:1-3 also has 144 letters, which is 12X12. It is obvious that the creation has *seven* days; God says it is *good* 7 times. There are *eight* acts of creation (one act in days 1, 2, 4 and 5; but 2 each in days 3 and 6). God speaks *ten* times to create the world. Numbers are the very foundation of the Hebrew alphabet. Each letter of the alphabet stands for a certain number. The numbers are often, but not always, used symbolically, especially in books like Revelation.

So what's the point? God reveals some amazing things through the numbers of the Bible.¹ Here is a summary of some of the meanings of some of the more important numbers in the Bible:

- 1 means *unity* or *superiority*. [Example: God is *one*; Adam and Eve become *one*.]
- 2 means *fact*. [Examples: Under the Law of Moses, a person can be put to death at the word of *two* witnesses; the Ten Commandments were written on *two* tablets.]
- 3 means *God's signature*. [Example: It is always "Holy, Holy, Holy," never two or four. See the song to God in Revelation 4:8—three sets of three. Also, God is "Father, Son and Holy Spirit."]
- 3½ means the same as 1260 days, 42 months and "time and times and half a time." All these symbols mean *trouble* or *terrible times*. You can see all of these in one chapter—Revelation 11.
- 4 means the *world* or the *universal* number. [Examples: Seven times the Book of Revelation speaks of "*nations, tribes, tongues and peoples*" or some such list; it is *always four*. (See Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6 and 17:15.) And look at the *universal chorus* in Revelation 5:13; also notice that God's "living throne-chariot" is 4 living creatures (in Revelation 5 and Ezekiel 1 and 10), meaning God is everywhere.]

¹ Numbers do not *always* have symbolic meaning. However, the meaning of the numbers is often significant, especially in apocalyptic* literature, pointing to specific meanings.

- 6 means *man* and *sin*. [Man was created on the 6th day in Genesis 1. Also, see the comment on 666 in Revelation 13:18.]
- 7 =3+4 and means *complete* or *perfect*. [See the 7 days of creation, the 7 spirits of God, the seven seals, the seven lampstands, and many others. The whole book of Revelation is *filled* with the number 7.]
- 8 means *new beginning* or *deity*. [God commanded circumcision on the eighth day; 8 people passed through the Flood in the ark of Noah, etc.]
- 10 means *enough* or *sufficiency*. [Ten is a "round number;" there are "Ten Commandments," 10 fingers, 10 toes, 10 days of suffering in Revelation 2:10.]
- 12 =3X4 and means *God's people*. [There were 12 patriarchs, 12 tribes, 12 apostles. (In Revelation 4:4, there are 24 elders [2X12] seated on thrones.)]

There are many other numbers with meanings in the Bible. These are the main ones.¹ These numbers are one of the keys to understanding the Book of Revelation. As you read through the book, and through the rest of The Bible for Busy People, you will notice the use of numbers over and over.

OVERVIEW

Vision #1: The Seven Churches - Chapter 1-3:

Christ walks among the lampstands. It is in Revelation 1:1 where John says the angel revealed God's word to him *in signs and symbols*; the NIV translation says "he made it known." This Greek word (*esemanen*) indicates that the whole book is symbolic, a book of signs and images. The Book of Revelation is not meant to be taken literally.

John is on Patmos Island, off the southwest coast of today's Turkey. He is there because he is a Christian in exile. The Romans had him sent there. He praises God and then says: "behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him." And then John is shocked:

I, John, was suddenly in the Spirit on the Lord's day. I heard a shocking voice like a trumpet behind me. It told me to write a letter to seven churches. Then I saw one like a son of man. His eyes were blazing fire. His hair was white like wool. His feet looked like they had just come out of a furnace—shining bronze. He had seven stars in his right hand. A sharp double-edged sword was in his mouth. And his face was glorious, like the sun. I fell at his feet as though I were dead.

He spoke to me! He told me, "I am the one who was dead, but now I am alive forever more. And I have the keys to death." He said, "Write! The seven stars in my right

¹ For example, 50 is the number of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, (Acts 2) is 50 days after Passover. Also, hidden in the Hebrew text of the first chapters of four of the books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) the word *Torah*, the Hebrew word for Law is spelled out every 50 letters. [If you knew Hebrew, you could find it.] In Leviticus 1:1, the Hebrew name for LORD is spelled out every 8 letters.]

hand are angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands *are* the seven churches."

The following is what Christ says to the seven churches:

<i>Church</i>	<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Commendation*</i>	<i>Condemnation</i>
Ephesus	2:1-7	Hard work for Jesus; perseverance	Abandoned their first love (Jesus)
Smyrna	2:8-11	Suffering, poverty	[None]
Pergamum sexual	2:12-17	Kept the faith even in suffering	Ignoring immorality
Thyatira immorality	2:18-29	Love and faithful service	Sexual
Sardis and	3:1-6	A few true followers	Dead church incomplete works
Philadelphia	3:7-13	Obedient and faithful	[None]
Laodicea	3:14-22	[None]	Lukewarm

All these churches were in today's Turkey. Every church is commanded to repent, except the second and sixth—Smyrna and Philadelphia. All of them are suffering persecution from either Jewish unbelievers or Rome or both.

Jesus promises something unusual to the church at Philadelphia. He says they won't have to go through the trial that is coming on the whole world. The amazing thing is that this church lasted until the 15th century. All the others were destroyed by the end of the 7th century by the invasion of Islam.* [Jesus had warned these churches that he would come and take away their lampstand (that is, their church) if they didn't repent.]

The main message of Jesus to these churches (and to all churches) is to keep our faith in him, no matter what we suffer. He calls this *overcoming*. All who overcome will receive a reward from him. Repentance is also a command for most of the churches. Believers should repent of our sin and work to follow Jesus daily.¹

Vision #2: The Seven Seals - Chapter 4-7:

¹ I suggest you read Hendriksen's commentary, More Than Conquerors, or another good commentary, for more teaching and interpretation on these seven churches.

(Chapter 4) The Lamb opens God's book of his will. The same trumpet voice called me, and I was taken to Heaven, and I saw God on the throne. He looked like precious jewels. A rainbow encircled him.¹ Twenty-four other thrones surrounded God's throne, and on them were 24 elders.² Seven lamps were blazing before the throne. (These are the seven spirits of God).³ Surrounding the throne was a clear blue glass sea.⁴ The throne itself was made of four living creatures that were covered with eyes.⁵ They never stop saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is coming." And all the elders fall down and worship God.

(Chapter 5) The one seated on the throne had a great scroll in his hand. It was locked up by seven seals.⁶ No one in Heaven had the power to open that book. I kept on crying because no one could open it. But one of the elders spoke to me. "The Lion of Judah, the Root of David—He is able to open the book." But when I looked up, I saw a Lamb standing in the throne.⁷ He took the book and all of Heaven and earth praised him.

(Chapter 6) The Lamb opened the first seal; a white horse came out and its rider was a conqueror. The Lamb opened the second seal; a red horse came out whose rider had a great sword. The Lamb opened the third seal; a black horse came out. Its rider had weight-scales in his hand. A voice cried, "Food shortages are coming!" The Lamb opened the fourth seal; a pale green horse came out. Its rider was named death. Hell was following him.⁸

The Lamb opened the fifth seal. I saw dead saints under the altar of God. "How long!" they shouted, "until you pay back the world for murdering us?" But they were given a white robe and told to wait.⁹

The Lamb opened the sixth seal. There was an earthquake, the sun turned black, the stars fell out of the sky, and the sky rolled up like a scroll.¹⁰ And the unbelieving leaders of the earth tried to hide from the wrath of the Lamb.¹¹

(Chapter 7) A voice cried, "Do not harm the earth until we put on a mark on the foreheads of God's servants."¹² Then I heard a number—"144,000"—the ones who were

¹ *Rainbow* is first mentioned after the first rain in the Bible—the Flood of Noah. This is the same, eternal, immortal God that reigned in Noah's day, unchanging and unchanged. The image is that God never forgets his covenant with Noah (Genesis 9).

² Probably signifying the *people of God*, OT and NT (12+12=24).

³ The *seven spirits* are first mentioned in Isaiah 11:2. This signifies the complete Holy Spirit.

⁴ This *sea* indicates God's separation from all that is unclean. It is first seen on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:9-11 and then later in the construction of Solomon's temple.

⁵ In Ezekiel 1 and 10 in the OT, these 4 creatures are in motion—looking like a tornado of fire. They are moving so fast that Ezekiel may have thought they were *one creature* with 4 faces. Here they are at rest, since they are in heaven. They are God's living throne-chariot.

⁶ The scroll is sealed with *7 seals*. In the first century world, this indicated a *last will and testament*. The church desperately needed to know God's will for them, as they suffered persecution under Rome and under unbelieving Jews.

⁷ *Standing* means he is alive. And he is with God in the throne. *Lamb* and *lion* are the same person—Jesus.

⁸ The *four horsemen* probably means a continuing cycle of war, economic crashes, and death on earth.

Notice that the first four seals open very quickly. The next two are opened more slowly. We must wait a long time for the last seal. The last one doesn't come until we are ready for the next vision. Perhaps this signifies we must wait a long time for the end. All the visions are like this.

⁹ Later, we will discover the *white robe* is symbolic of the believers' good works. (Revelation 19:8)

¹⁰ These are all images of final judgement.

¹¹ *Wrath of the Lamb* is a strange statement. If you know anything about sheep, you know that lambs don't have wrath. But this image means that the judgement has come on all the evil rulers of the earth.

¹² This *mark on the forehead* first appears in Ezekiel 9. Please read that passage. You'll find that the mark is a mark of ownership and protection. God owns and protects those who are his. This same mark (or *seal*) is used in Ephesians

sealed from all the tribes of Israel.¹ Then I saw people from every nation, tribe, tongue and language standing before the throne. They were praising God, and the angels were praising God. An elder asked me who these white robed people were. I said, "Sir, you must know." He said, "These people are coming out of great trials. Their robes are white from the blood of the lamb."² God will take care of them. He will protect them. The lamb will be their shepherd. None of them will ever cry again.

Vision #3: The Seven Trumpets - God's Judgments Keep Falling on the World - Chapter 8-11:

(Chapter 8) The Lamb opened the seventh seal.³ I saw seven angels with seven trumpets, standing before God.⁴ Another angel offered incense.⁵ And a wonderful smell filled Heaven. But the angel threw fire from the altar on the earth.⁶ Then the angels began to sound their trumpets. The first angel blew his trumpet and a third of the earth was burned up. The second angel sounded his trumpet and a third of the sea was destroyed. The third angel blew his trumpet and a third of the waters on earth turned bitter. The fourth angel blew his trumpet and a third of the heavenly lights went dark.⁷ And I heard a flying eagle cry, "Sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow to the people on the earth because the next three trumpets will be worse."⁸

(Chapter 9) The fifth angel blew his trumpet and scorpion-locusts came up out of the open Abyss. They could sting the people of the earth but not kill them. People will want to die but will not be able to. But the people with God's seal on their foreheads were not touched by the scorpion-locusts.⁹ The king of the stinging-locusts is named Destruction. He is the angel of the Abyss.¹⁰ Two more sorrows are to come.

The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and four angels were released from the River Euphrates. A great army of frightening horses and riders attacked the unbelievers.¹¹ The horses' tails were snakes that could injure the people. A third of mankind was killed. But the two-thirds that were not killed still refused to repent. They kept practicing evil.¹²

(Chapter 10) Then I saw a great angel. His face was like the sun. He had a rainbow over his head. His legs were like pillars of fire. He was holding a tiny book in his

1:13f of baptism. When you went beneath the water, as in the ancient way of baptism, the water sealed over you. This is a symbol of the Holy Spirit *sealing* you in Christ.

¹ Here is another symbol. It is not meant to be taken literally. Look closely at the tribes. *Ephraim* and *Dan* are left out. *Joseph* has replaced Ephraim, as he sometimes does in the OT. [Ephraim was Joseph's second son.] John *heard* the number 144,000; but when he looked, he saw a crowd that no one could number. The *crowd no one could number* is the interpretation of the symbolic number, 144,000.

² If you've ever gotten blood on your clothing, you know it doesn't make it white! This is a symbol of the purity we have in Christ. His blood covers all our sin.

³ The *seventh seal* starts a new vision.

⁴ This is a reminder of the destruction of Jericho in Joshua 5:13ff. Seven priests with seven trumpets sounded when the walls of the city fell. This is a symbol of the future destruction of world systems and cities.

⁵ Incense is a symbol of the prayers of God's people. See Revelation 8:3.

⁶ Another image of judgement on the earth.

⁷ Again, notice the swiftness of the 4 first judgements—like the four horsemen.

⁸ *Eagle* is like we think of a vulture—an image of death.

⁹ Just like the plagues on Egypt in Exodus, God's people are not harmed by some of the plagues. These locusts extend the image of the plague of locusts in Exodus 10 and Joel 1 and 2.

¹⁰ The abyss may be where demons live. See Luke 8:31.

¹¹ Again, the believers are protected from this plague.

¹² The purpose for all these judgements that God sends on the earth, is to get the unbelievers to repent. But they will not do it.

hand. When this angel shouted it sounded like a lion's roar.¹ Seven thunders spoke.² God said to me, "Don't write what the seven thunders said."³ The mighty angel promised, by God himself, that his Word *will* be fulfilled. God had already told this to the prophets. God told me to take the little book from the angel and eat it. It was sweet in my mouth but bitter in my stomach.⁴

(Chapter 11) I was given a measuring rod and was told to measure the temple and everything in it, but not the outer court.⁵ God has sent his two witnesses. No one can harm them. These two witnesses can stop the rain and turn water to blood.⁶ But then the beast will kill the two witnesses. All nations will look upon them and celebrate their death. But after three and a half days God's breath brought them back to life and took these two witnesses to Heaven. All their enemies watched this happen. There was a great earthquake. The survivors of the earthquake glorified God. Now comes the seventh trumpet. And loud voices in Heaven shouted. The world's kingdoms are now God's Kingdom and Christ's Kingdom. And the twenty-four elders fell down before God and thanked him for destroying those who destroy the earth. And God opened his temple in Heaven.⁷

Vision #4: The Dragon and the Christ Child – Chapter 12-14:

(Chapter 12) Suddenly a woman appeared in Heaven. She was wearing the Sun as clothing. She was standing on the moon and had a crown of 12 stars on her head.⁸ The woman was pregnant.

A huge red dragon appeared in Heaven. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky.⁹ The dragon wanted to devour the woman's child when he was born.¹⁰ She gave birth to a male child who will rule the nations with an iron scepter.¹¹ The child was quickly taken up to God and his throne. The woman ran away into a desert, and God took care of her there.¹²

Suddenly war broke out in heaven. The archangel, Michael, and his angels fought against the great red dragon and his demons. The dragon was not strong enough. He was thrown down to earth and his demons with him. And a voice in heaven shouted, "The

¹ All this imagery—the sun, the rainbow and the Lion—points to the fact that this is the angel of Jesus. Compare Revelation 1:12-16.

² Seven *thunders* is from Psalm 29. Read that scripture, and count the number of times it says, "The voice of the LORD."

³ This reminds me of two places in Isaiah and Daniel, in which God commands them to *close up the prophecy*. There are some things God doesn't want us to know about the spiritual realm. Also, see what Paul says in II Corinthians 12:4.

⁴ John did not go up to this angel and just *take* the book, as the Lamb had done in the second vision. He humbly asked for it.

Sweet...but bitter may indicate that the word of God is wonderful to talk about and to hear, but very difficult and painful to obey. Also see Psalm 19:10 and Ezekiel 3:3.

⁵ The passive voice (*was given*) is common in Revelation. It shows that God is doing the action.

Measuring is a symbol for setting something apart as *holy*. See Ezekiel 40-48.

⁶ These two symbols refer to Elijah and Moses in the OT. Moses and Elijah symbolize all the Law and the Prophets.

John is going to say that the OT is a witness that cannot be stopped or destroyed. See also Matthew 17:1-8.

⁷ Opening the temple in Heaven shows us that we are welcome in God's house. He will live with us and we with him.

⁸ This woman is a symbol for the People of God. [The number 12]

⁹ *Stars* are angels. (See Revelation 1:20) When Satan rebelled, he took some of the angels with him. They are now demons.

¹⁰ Herod had all boy babies killed when he tried to kill Jesus. (Matthew 2:13ff)

¹¹ Of course, this child is Jesus. See Psalm 2.

¹² As God provided for Israel in the desert in the OT, he will provide for his people in this world in the NT.

accuser* has been thrown down!" The Kingdom of God has come.¹ Faith overcomes the accuser. All believers who die have overcome the accuser. But sorrow to the earth, because the devil is filled with anger; he knows his time is short.

Since he could not conquer the woman, the dragon went off to make war against all her offspring.²

(Chapter 13) Then the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.³ A beast came up out of the sea. Most of humanity worshipped the beast and the dragon. There were many evil names written on the beast.⁴ He also spoke many evil and proud words. He had great power and authority. He made war against the saints and was even given power to kill them. Everyone worshipped the beast, except the ones belonging to the Lamb. This Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.⁵ So God says, "If anyone goes to prison, he will go to prison. If anyone is killed, he will be killed." This calls for patience, endurance, and faithfulness from Christians.⁶ Suddenly another beast came up out of the earth. He looked like a lamb but talked like a dragon.⁷ He received power from the first beast. He was able to do great miracles, even causing fire to come down from Heaven.⁸ And he forced the people on earth to worship the first beast. Anyone who wouldn't worship the beast he would kill. The number of the beast is 666.⁹

(Chapter 14) Then I saw the Holy Lamb and his 144,000 people of God. And they sang a new song to the God of Heaven. I saw three angels. One was carrying the Gospel, asking people to worship God. The second angel was shouting, "Babylon the Great has fallen!"¹⁰ The third angel warned, "if you worship the beast you will be punished by the holy anger of God. There is no rest for those who worship the beast."¹¹ But the saints must patiently endure and remain faithful to Jesus.

A voice from Heaven said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."¹² Their good deeds will follow them. Then I saw another angel who looked like a

¹ Jesus completed this by his death and resurrection and the beginning of the church. Compare Mark 9:1.

² Jesus said the gates of Hell can never overcome the church. (Matthew 16) This means that death and Satan cannot win. Even in dying, we overcome!

³ Again, the sea is human history. A beast is an empire or kingdom. See Daniel 7.

⁴ These names may have been "Great God Caesar" or "Caesar is Lord." These were the claims of the Roman emperors, and all people in the empire were forced to worship the emperor, even Christians! Real Christians were tortured and killed for not worshipping "the beast."

⁵ This indicates that Jesus' death was planned by God for ages, even before the creation.

⁶ In other words, God is not going to interfere with the evil power of Rome to punish Christians. [If God were ever going to interfere with human freedom, he would have done it in the Garden of Eden. He would have gotten between Adam and the tree of knowledge.]

⁷ This is the false religion of Caesar worship. One beast is the enforcer for the other beast.

⁸ When people were forced to worship Caesar, they would take a pinch of incense and throw it in the *fire*, and say, "Caesar is Lord." False worship is a counterfeit of true worship.

⁹ John tells us it takes *wisdom and discernment* to figure out the number of the beast. If you knew Hebrew and could use the Hebrew Gematria (page 106f above), you could figure out whose name this is. It may mean *Caesar Nero*. That name adds up to 666 in the Gematria. This probably meant that any Caesar who attacked Christians was like Caesar Nero. John had been put on the Island of Patmos by Domitian, another emperor who persecuted the church. He is probably writing this book under Domitian, who ruled from A. D. 90-96.

¹⁰ This is a prediction of the fall of the Roman Empire and all world systems.

¹¹ In other words, beast-worshippers have misery on earth *and* will not enter Heaven.

¹² This is the second of the 7 blessings of Revelation. There are more blessings toward the end of the book than at the beginning. (There is only one before this—in chapter 1, for the readers and hearers of the book.)

son of Man, and he harvested the earth.¹ Another angel said, "Gather the grapes and put them in the wine press of God's anger."²

Vision #5: The Seven Bowls - God's judgments continue upon the earth - Chapter 15-16:

(Chapter 15) I saw in Heaven seven angels with seven plagues. With them God's anger is completed. And I saw God's holy people standing by the sea of glass playing harps and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.³ Then I saw the heavenly temple open and seven angels came out wearing clean, white linen. They had the seven bowls of the seven plagues.

(Chapter 16) Then the angels poured out the seven bowls on the earth one at a time, and terrible judgments came on people. But instead of repenting, they cursed the God of Heaven. Three demons that look like frogs did miracles. These demons got the kings of the whole world to get their armies and make war against the people of God.⁴ This is the battle of Armageddon.⁵ The seventh angel finally poured out his bowl, and God judged the world.

Vision #6: The Beginning of Satan's End: Satan's helpers are judged: the great prostitute, the beast and the false prophet. - Chapter 17-19:

(Chapter 17) An angel said, "Come with me and I'll show the punishment of the great prostitute."⁶ The angel took me to a desert, and I saw the great prostitute riding a purple beast that was covered with evil names.⁷ She was drinking from a cup full of filth. Her name was on her forehead: *MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE HORRIBLE THINGS OF THE EARTH*.⁸ The seven heads of the beast are seven hills on which the woman sits.⁹ Also there are seven kings.¹⁰ The beast had ten horns, which are ten kings who are yet to come. These will make war against the Lamb. But the Lamb will win!

The great prostitute sits on many waters. These waters are peoples, crowds, nations and languages.¹¹ The beast will burn the prostitute's flesh with fire.¹² The woman is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.¹³

¹ Harvest is another symbol in the Bible for the judgement. See Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43.

² These are the "grapes of wrath," which were mentioned in the Bible before this. See especially Isaiah 5:1ff. *Grapes* are an image of unbelieving, evil people.

³ The Song of Moses (and the Lamb) is a song of deliverance and freedom. See Exodus 15.

⁴ Here is another symbol of Satan attacking the church (or the world attacking Christians).

⁵ *Armageddon* in Hebrew is "Mountain of Meggido." The city of Meggido in the OT was on a hill overlooking the King's Highway, the best travel route from Egypt to Babylon. Whoever had control of this city could require those passing by to pay tax or tribute to them. Many battles were fought over the city. *Armageddon* became an image of the battle of the world against the church of Jesus Christ. Some say it is the image of the End of the World.

⁶ *The Great Prostitute* is another image of the false religion of emperor worship. Compare Proverbs 7 and 8 for a similar image.

⁷ The Church is also in this *desert*, which is a symbol for the world. See Revelation 12:14 and footnote # 6 on page 112.

⁸ In first-century Rome, prostitutes wrote their names on their foreheads. Prostitution in the ancient world was often connected with fertility religions. Here, the beast is Rome and the prostitute is the false religion of Caesar worship.

⁹ Rome is built on *seven hills*. In ancient literature it is called "the city on seven hills."

¹⁰ The more important seven kings [if we take this number literally] to the first-century church were Tiberius (under whom the church began), Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. These reigned from A. D. 14 to 96. The next *ten* probably means several (a sufficiency). See the emperor list beginning on page 118.

¹¹ Here again are the 4 groups, signifying that Rome ruled all the peoples of the world.

¹² In other words, Rome will destroy itself because it is corrupt within.

¹³ In John's day, this is obviously Rome.

(Chapter 18) But another great and glorious angel shouted as he came down from heaven: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the great! She has been judged.” Another voice from Heaven said, “Come out of her my people, so you will not share in her judgments. She will be consumed with fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

The kings will cry when they see Babylon fall. The merchants will cry for all the money they have lost. All the sea captains who traded with Babylon will cry.¹

Rejoice over her, O Heaven. Rejoice you Christians, Apostles, and Prophets. God has finally judged Babylon for how she treated you. A mighty angel picked up a great stone, threw it into the sea, and said, “So Babylon will be thrown down.” Everything in Babylon will be destroyed, because the blood of Christians and Prophets were found in her.

(Chapter 19) I heard a great roaring sound in Heaven shouting, “Hallelujah!”² Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. He has condemned the prostitute! “Hallelujah!” they shout. The twenty-four elders fall down and shout, “Hallelujah!” Like peals of thunder I heard shouting, “Hallelujah!” The wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride is wearing fine linen, white and clean. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's people.) Blessed are those who come to the wedding supper of the Lamb.³

I started to worship the Lord's angel. But he stopped me. "Worship God!" he said. And then I saw *HIM!* A rider on a white horse whose name is Faithful and True! He wages a righteous war. His eyes are blazing fire.⁴ On his head are many crowns. He wears a robe dipped in blood. His name is *The Word of God!* The armies of Heaven followed him on white horses. The armies were dressed in fine linen, white and clean. A sharp two-edged sword came out of His mouth.⁵ He will rule the nations. On his robe and on his thigh, the name “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” is written. And the judgement took place on all the people; the birds ate their flesh. The beast and the false prophet were captured. They and the people who followed them were thrown into the lake of fire.⁶

Vision #7: Satan's End: The New Heavens, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem -Chapter 20-22:

(Chapter 20) I watched another angel grab Satan with one hand. He used a long chain to chain him with the other hand. He locked Satan in the Abyss to keep him from deceiving people any more for a thousand years.⁷ I saw two things: one, high thrones on which people were seated; two, believers who had been beheaded because of their love

¹ These people cry because of the Roman economy being destroyed.

² This chapter has 4 *hallelujah's*, the only place the word occurs in the whole NT. *Hallelujah* is a combination of two words, "Praise (the) Lord."

³ *Wedding supper* is another image of the end of the world and the beginning of heavenly joy. Compare Ephesians 5:21ff.

⁴ This is some of the same imagery as in Revelation 1. This is Jesus coming in judgement.

⁵ This symbol of the *sword* for the Word of God is used in Hebrews 4:12f and Ephesians 6:17 and in the OT. Usually, it stands for the *spoken* word. This is also how Jesus conquered Satan in his temptation—he quoted scripture. If you *memorize the word* to use against Satan, you will be able to conquer him.

⁶ Here is another image of Hell—a place of burning and destruction. I recommend the books, Four Views of Hell and The Fire that Consumes.

⁷ This number is a symbol for a long time. Satan has been bound since Jesus died and rose again. Jesus said, "You cannot enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions, unless you first bind the strong man." In the context, the *strong man* is Satan. (Matthew 12:29 and context) However, there are 4 main views of what this *1000 years* means.

for Jesus. They came to life and reigned with Jesus for a thousand years.¹ This is the first resurrection. The evil dead did not come to life until after the thousand years. Blessed are those who have a part in the first resurrection, they will never die again.² They will be priests who will reign with Christ for the thousand years.³ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released.⁴ He will deceive the nations again and gather them to attack God's people. This is Gog and Magog.⁵ But fire came down from heaven and consumed them.⁶ The Devil himself was thrown into the lake of fire. There the beast and the false prophet had already been in punishment. They will be burned forever and ever.⁷

I saw God's great white throne. Earth and sky ran away from the one on the throne. And *all* the dead were judged according to what they had done. Books were opened and they were judged according to what was recorded in the books. Anyone whose name was not written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death.⁸

(Chapter 21) Then I saw the bride of Christ. There was a new Heaven and a new Earth. The sea was gone.⁹ The Holy City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, came down out of Heaven from God. Like a bride, Jerusalem was dressed in beauty. And a voice shouted from the throne. "Now God is finally with people! He will live with them. They will be his people, and he will be their God." He will remove all pain, crying, and sorrow. All the old things are gone.

The one seated on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new." He said to me, "The work is done! I am the A and the Z, the Beginning and the End. I will give water to whoever is thirsty. Whoever overcomes will inherit all this. I will be his God. He will be my son. The unbelievers, the murderers, the immoral ones, the cowards¹⁰ will be thrown into the fiery lake. This is the second death." One of the angels with the bowls of plagues said, "I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he showed me the Holy City coming down from God.¹¹ It was great and beautiful, filled with the glory of God. It had great high walls. The twelve gates were named after the twelve tribes of Israel, three on each side of the city. The city had 12 foundations named after the 12 apostles of the Lamb. The angel began measuring the city. It was a cube 15,000 miles on each side.¹² The wall was over 200 feet thick.¹³ The city was made of gold as pure as glass. The walls, gates, and foundations were precious stones.

¹ Believers ruling with Jesus happens during the same time Satan is bound. [The gospel binds Satan. He is bound in you and me, if you are a Christian. He can no longer make me do the things I used to do, before I believed the gospel.]

² The *first resurrection* is probably a reference to baptism, which was done by immersion in water. See Romans 6:4f and Ephesians 2:4-6. Also, see John 11:25f.

³ According to Revelation 1:6 and I Peter 2:5, we believers are already priests.

⁴ So he can be judged. This also could refer to his work now of stirring up the world against us.

⁵ Gog and Magog together are an image of the world attacking God's people. [Ezekiel 38 and 39]

⁶ *Fire from heaven* is God's judgement on those who attack the people of God.

⁷ This is the end of Satan and the last mention of his name in Revelation.

⁸ The words used to describe hell's punishment of people are *perish*, *destruction*, and *the second death*. These words do not sound like people will be in conscious torment forever and ever as many people teach. Satan, maybe, but people are not eternal. God gives eternal life only to believers.

⁹ *The sea was gone* means there is no longer any separation between God and his people or between peoples. It could also indicate that human history is at its end.

¹⁰ *The cowards* are probably those who are afraid to testify to Jesus. In fear for their lives, they fell away from their faith and burned incense to Caesar.

¹¹ It is clear that the Jerusalem on earth is not God's Holy City. God's city is above. See the article on page 86 above.

¹² These are all symbols for the security of the people of God.

¹³ The numbers here in the text are 12,000 and 144,000, multiples of 12, all symbols of the people of God.

The city had no temple; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. There is no Sun or moon. God and the Lamb are its light. The nations will live by the light of God and the Lamb. All the glory and honor of the nations will be there. But nothing evil will be there, nor will those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life.

(Chapter 22) Then the Lamb showed me God's holy river, the water of life, flowing from the throne through the city.¹ There stood the tree of life, on both sides of the river! It bore 12 kinds of fruit. We will serve him forever.

The angel said, "These are God's true words: 'Behold, I am coming soon!'"

You are blessed if you obey the words of this book. The angel told me, "John, don't seal up the words of this book. Let the evil people be evil, and the holy people be holy. I am coming soon! Blessed are those who wash their robes; they will live forever in the city of God.² All the evil ones are put away in the lake of fire. I am Jesus. I have sent my angel to give you this testimony. I am the Root and the Offspring of David.³ I am the Bright and Morning Star."

"So come; come if you're thirsty and drink the free water of life."

I, John, warn you not to change the words of this book, or God will judge you. Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming soon!"

Amen, come Lord Jesus!

God's grace be with you all. Love, John

¹ Here we have a symbol of the Holy Spirit, as in Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Psalm 46.

² If Jesus washes us in his blood (by faith and baptism), we can be sure we will live forever with him. Compare John 13:8b and 10f.

³ This means he is both before David and after David. He is the source of David's life, but he also came as a man among the children of David.

ROMAN EMPERORS

27 B. C. - A. D. 14	Augustus
14 - 37	Tiberius
37 - 41	Gaius Caligula
41 - 54	Claudius
54 - 68	Nero
68 - 69	Galba, Otho, Vitellius
69 - 79	Vespasian
79 - 81	Titus
81 - 96	Domitian
96 - 98	Nerva
98 - 117	Trajan
117 - 138	Hadrian
138 - 161	Antoninus Pius
161 - 180	Marcus Aurelius
180 - 192	Commodus
193	Pertinax
193 - 211	Septimius Severus
211 - 217	Caracalla
217 - 218	Macrinus
218 - 222	Elagabal
222 - 235	Alexander Severus
235 - 238	Maximin
238 - 244	Gordian
244 - 249	Philip
249 - 251	Decius
251 - 253	Gallus
253 - 260	Valerian
260 - 268	Gallien
268 - 270	Claudius II
270 - 275	Aurelian
275 - 276	Tacitus
276 - 282	Probus
282 - 284	Carus
284 - 285	Diocletian

WESTERN

285 - 305	Maximian
305 - 306	Constantius
306 - 324	Constantine
324 - 337	Constantine

EASTERN

285 - 305	Diocletian
305 - 311	Galerius
311 - 313	Maximin
324 - 337	Constantine

The Bible for Busy People: Book II: The Old Testament

Glossary:

Accuser: A title for Satan; he constantly accuses God's people in the heavenly court.

Apocalyptic: means *out of hiding*. Strange prophecies and numbers that are symbolic, as in the Book of Revelation and some other parts of the Bible, like Daniel 7.

Apocrypha: Comes from the Greek word for *hidden*. Fourteen books in the middle of some Bibles that are not really part of the Bible. They contain a lot of truth, but they sometimes have false information. [I do have my students read the first 12 chapters of I Maccabees for a class that deals with the 400 years between the OT and NT.]

Apostles: Those who were sent out with the gospel and with authority from Jesus. A very few others are also sometimes called "apostles" in the NT. See the list of the apostles' names in Matthew 10:2-4. In the gospels, they were called *disciples*.

Aqueducts: Pipes and canals that carry water.

Artemis (also called Diana): She had come to those in Ephesus from heaven, they believed. See what a problem preaching the gospel caused in Ephesus in Acts 19:23ff. [See "Ephesus" below.]

Asterisk: In this book an asterisk is a star like this *. It means you can look up the word here, in the *Glossary*.

Barabbas: Means "son of a father." This man was a thief and traitor. It is obvious that the Jewish leaders wanted to be rid of Jesus, so they would even free a traitor to do it. [I've often wondered whether the name, "son of a father" could be a symbol of us. We were set free, too, when Jesus was crucified.]

Buddhist: A person who tries to follow the *eightfold path* or the *eight ways* of Buddha, a teacher who lived and died in the fifth and sixth centuries B. C. *Buddha* means *enlightened one*. [Much truth is in nearly all the world's religions, but they are all based on salvation by works. Christ's teaching is based on *faith*.]

Caesarea: A port on the Mediterranean Sea, on the east coast of Palestine, named in honor of Augustus Caesar. A great statue of Caesar was there, worshipped by many. (Another Caesarea, called Caesarea Philippi, was way north of the Sea of Galilee.)

Catamites: Boys who have sexual relations with men.

Celibacy: The ability to live without sex and without being concerned about sex. This is a rare gift that the Apostle Paul must have had. [See I Corinthians 7:1-7.]

Chaperon: An adult who watches over children.

Christian: One who believes in and follows Jesus Christ.

Commendation: Telling a church something good about itself; expressing approval.

Consistency: Being the same all the time; doing what you say or believe; dependability.

Crete: A large island in the Mediterranean Sea, midway between Syria and Malta, now called Candia. [In some places in the OT it is called Caphtor. The Philistines of the OT, Israel's enemy, came from there. Cretan people were usually very evil.]

Cubit: A measurement from the elbow to the tips of the fingers. Usually considered about 18 inches (50 centimeters).

Damascus: The capital city of Syria, a country just north of Israel.

Diana: [See Ephesus, below.]

Endurance: keeping faith even under difficult circumstances; bearing up under hard times.

Ephesus: A great city in SW Turkey, near the Aegean Sea. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was there—the great temple of Artemis of the Ephesians. People came from all over the world to visit that famous temple. The people there believed that Artemis was goddess of the hunt and twin sister of the god, Apollo.

Epistles: Letters in the NT that have a special form. They begin with the following: 1. The name of the author(s), 2. Recipient (who received the letter), 3. Greeting, 4. Prayer, and then 5. The body of the letter. See Philippians 1 for a clear example of this form.

Epimenides: A very wise man, a poet from Crete about the sixth century before Christ.

Ethiopian: A person from Ethiopia, a country in northeast Africa.

Exile: The 70 years during which the Jews were enslaved in Babylon. The Medes and the Persians then conquered Babylon. The Persian King, Cyrus, sent the nations, including the Jews, back to their homelands. The date of the exile is 586-516 B. C.

Gluttons: People who eat so much they often make themselves sick. Usually named in the Bible with drunks.

Gospels: *Gospel* means *good news* (about Jesus). It is the story of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection to take away our sins. Because we believe the gospel, we are right with God. The four true gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in our New Testaments.

Heirs: people who inherit blessing from their father. In Christ, we inherit all the gifts God wants to give us.

Heresies: things that cause division in the church; false teachings or bad attitudes.

Hindu: A follower of the main religion of India. Hindus believe in reincarnation* and a main god who is in many forms. They worship many gods.

Illegitimate: A child conceived before the mother was married, or a child born out of wedlock.

Incense: Also called frankincense, it is burned to produce a rich-smelling perfume. Later in Revelation it is a symbol of the prayers of God's people.

Intercessory: prayer for others; Jesus does this for us. He *intercedes* at God's right hand.

Islam: Means *submission*. This is one of the world's great religions. Its followers are called Muslims. Their book is the Koran (sometimes spelled Quran). [If they would read their book, they would discover that it says: *Christians and Jews are our brothers.*]

Legion: An army of 1,000 people. Jesus drove out a legion of demons from the man from Gadara. He sent the demons into a herd of pigs.

Maccabees: The family named Maccabeus who led the rebellion against Syria to regain control of the Jewish temple and religion. (About 168-164 B. C.) I Maccabees is the name of a history book in the Apocrypha.*

Macedonia: A country north of Greece. Paul the Apostle had a vision that he must go to Macedonia, so he turned west. [Alexander the Great had come from Macedonia.]

Mary Magdalene: Means "Mary of Magdala," a town on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. [*Magdala* comes from Hebrew, and means "watchtower."] Jesus had driven seven demons out of her, so her love for Jesus was great. [She was not an immoral woman, as some think. She was one of several Mary's who followed Jesus. She may have been the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. See John 20:1.]

Menopause: When an older woman stops having her monthly period. Her body is no longer producing eggs. She can have no more children. Abraham's wife broke this rule!

Name: Means *authority* or *person*. In tribal culture, knowing someone's name, meant you knew the person. This is why prayers are often offered "in Jesus' name."

Parable: A simple, earthly story or proverb used to teach. There were three main reasons for Jesus' parables: 1) to reveal truth; 2) to hide truth [so only interested people would find out its meaning]; 3) to attack enemies. Jesus told every parable for one of these three

reasons. Some examples: 1) Matthew 13:44-52; 2) Matthew 13:1-30 and 36-43; 3) Matthew 21:33-46.

Pastors: Usually older men with good character who lead and teach a church. A shepherd or teacher.

Pederasts: Men who have sexual relations with boys.

Perga: An important capital city of Pamphylia, a province of today's Southern Turkey.

Persecutor: Someone who chases after and attacks believers. *Persecution* is the act of attacking believers. Saul led the first major persecution against the church.

Pharisee: Means *separate*. The Pharisees were a legalistic sect of the Jewish leaders who believed in the whole OT. They were in the majority on the Sanhedrin.* They were the authority to the Jewish people. They hated and feared Jesus. The good thing about them is that they believed in the spirit world—in demons and angels.

Philemon: A rich leader of the church at Colosse which met in his home. He is the slave-owner whose slave, Onesimus, ran away. Paul converted the slave who then returned to Philemon as a brother in Christ.

Reincarnation: The belief that all life is sacred, and that people can become bugs, worms, cows, etc. Reincarnation means that when a person or animal dies he becomes something else. This produces a caste system, which separates all people into classes, high to low. The high class will have nothing to do with the low class, who are considered "untouchables." But when Hindus become Christians, all this changes. They all become brothers and sisters.

Resurrection: Coming back from the dead; Jesus came back, not like those he raised from the dead. They would die again. But Jesus came back after overcoming death, never to die again.

Sadducees: May mean *righteous ones*. Conservative Jewish sect who believed in Moses' writing only [Genesis through Deuteronomy]. They did not believe in a spirit world, angels, demons or resurrection. They and the Pharisees made up the Sanhedrin.*

Samaritan: half-Jewish, half-Gentile. When the Jews were in Exile in Babylon and Assyria, some of them married non-Jews. Some of their children became the Samaritans. They settled in central Palestine, north of Judea, and worshipped God on a mountain there. Samaria's capital city is also called *Samaria* in the OT.

Sanhedrin: The Jewish supreme court. This is the highest council of the Jews.

Satan: Also called the devil, the old serpent, the dragon, the tempter, and the accuser. Satan is the leader of the rebellion against God in the spirit-world. We know little about him, except that he is powerful and prideful. He is the one who wants to destroy us.

Saul: A Jewish leader and persecutor of the church. Later, he was called Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. He wrote many of our New Testament letters.

Shorthand: A very short and quick way of writing. In the NT world it was called *tacygraphy*. Many secretaries or assistants in business today use shorthand to write down spoken messages or letters.

Silas: Also called Silvanus. He was with Paul in some of his travels in today's Turkey. He also wrote out I Peter for the Apostle Peter. See I Peter 5:12.

Tartarus: a place of terrible torment and pain; a place of punishment. Evil angels and men may be sent to this place to be punished. The men may be sent there after their death.

Testament: A statement of belief; a writing that spells out a covenant or relationship.

Transfigured: A complete and radical change in Jesus' appearance. His inner glory as God's Son shone like the sun. The three disciples who saw it were very afraid.