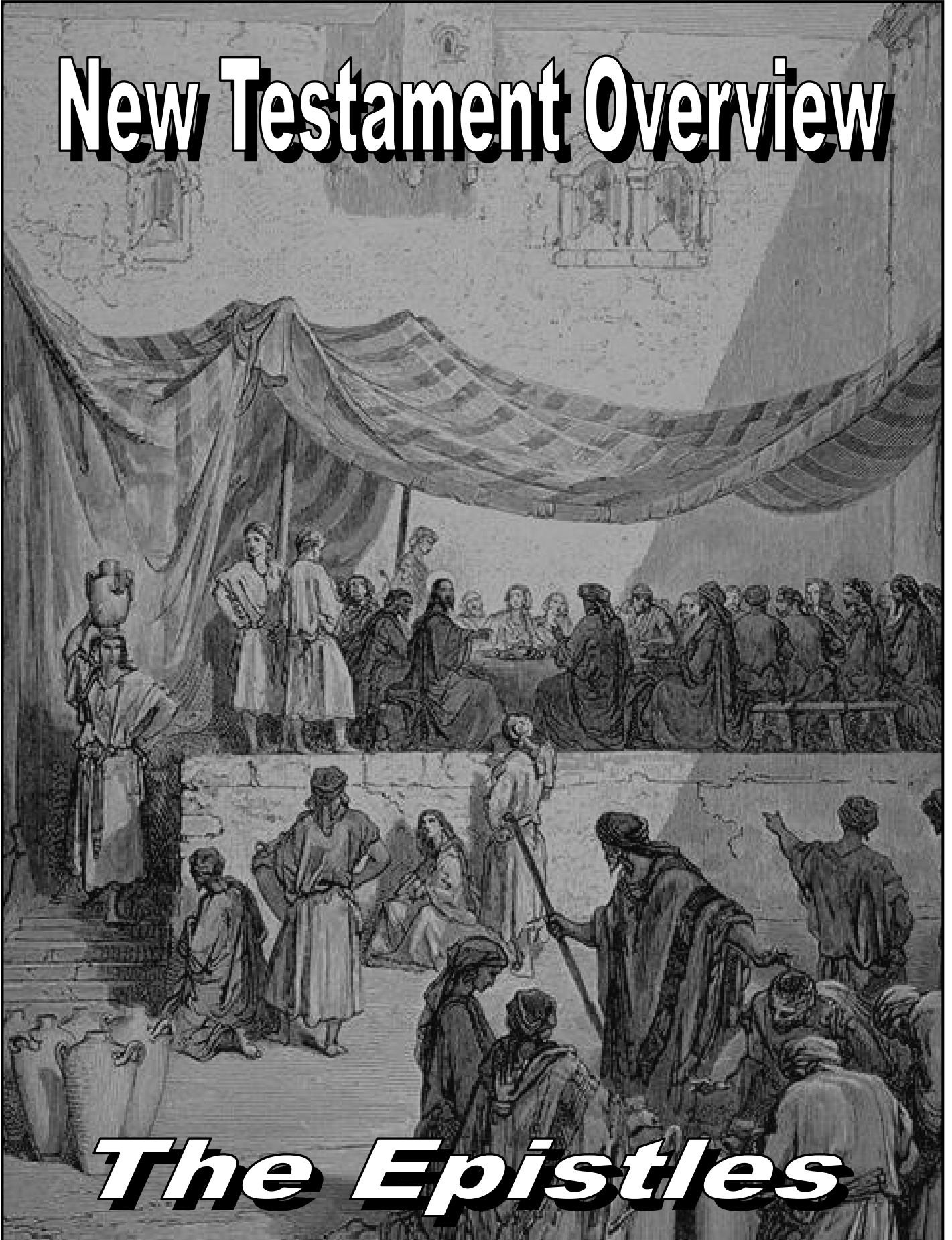


New Testament Overview



The Epistles

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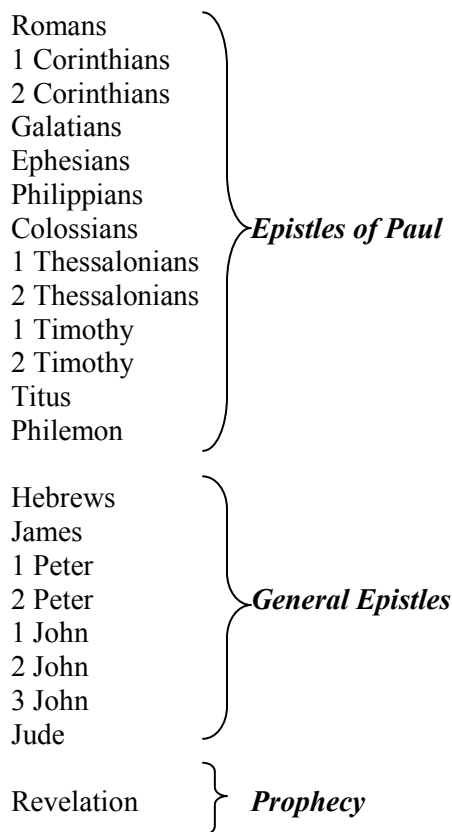
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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE FINAL SECTION of our New Testament overview. Having covered the gospels and the book of Acts we move to the New Testament letters, or as they are sometimes called the epistles.

There are twenty-two New Testament letters. Thirteen of them were written by the apostle Paul. Some scholars believe the same apostle also wrote the Hebrew letter. If this be true, that would make fourteen letters by the inspired hand of Paul. What we see then is that the bulk of these documents come from his pen. A survey of his letters will show that are primarily addressed to congregations (Romans thru 2 Thessalonians). The exceptions to this would be what are known as the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), and Philemon. The remaining New Testament letters are not addressed to specific congregations. They are more general in nature. Revelation does contain within its scope letters addressed to local congregations. However, the letter falls more into the category of prophecy than doctrinal instruction for a local church.

Division of New Testament Letters



Each student is encouraged to set aside the time necessary during the week to read through each letter prior to the class. This will provide a greater familiarity with the contents of the letters as they are individually discussed during the class period. Remember, this is an overview study, not a detailed examination of each letter. Thus, some familiarity with each letter will be helpful in getting the most out of this study.

For each of the lessons I have prepared a general introduction to each letter. These introductions include general information regarding the author, date, contents, and key verses. At times, I have relied on other resources to provide information pertinent to the specific letter. When this is the case I have tried to properly list and credit all the necessary reference information.

LESSON ONE

ROMANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 57-59

A THOROUGH STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS is necessary for every child of God. This New Testament letter could in many ways be described as Christianity 101. However, the book is much deeper than an introductory study to the faith. Essential doctrines are explored and established, such as *Justification by Faith apart from the Works of the Law (1-8)*; *The Condition of Israel with respect to God's Promises (9-11)*; *Service Toward God and in the Local Church (12)*; *Responsibility to Civil Government and Others (13)*; *Handling areas of Liberty and Responsibilities Toward Self and Others (14-15)*. It is safe to say that at some point in your life you will find yourself in need of the teaching found in this New Testament letter. It is rich in doctrine, instruction, and encouragement.

It would be helpful to point out some key words found in the book of Roman. The number of uses for each is seen in the parenthesis. Spirit (34), Law (78), Grace (21; 11 times in chapters 3-6), Sin (57), Faith (41), Works (16), Justify, justification, justified (17), and righteousness (35). These key words will help us identify some of the important themes found in the book.

Careful examination of each word and the surrounding context must be done in order to properly determine its application. For example, the word "law" is used 78 times in Romans. Sometimes translators rendered it with a capital "L" as referencing the Law of Moses. Other times it has a little "l" meaning law in general. This is purely the choice of the translators. However, they are not always correct in their choices.

Sometimes the word law has the definite article in front, i.e. *the Law*, and sometimes this is added by the translators (cf. Rom. 2:12-13 NASB has marginal note). There is a lot to examine in Paul's use and application of this word. 78 uses of the word tell us it is very important to understand in this Roman letter.

In a similar way, the word "spirit" is used 21 times in chapter eight alone, with at least three different meanings. The translators choose to put a capital "S" on some of the uses of the word "spirit" and there are times when they are wrong. Just reading the text, you do not always notice these things. Deeper study reveals them.

Jim McGuigan noted, "If ever God wrote a book, it was the book of Romans! But as by man (Jesus Christ) came redemption so through man came the books of the Bible. God wrote Romans through a man called Paul."¹ The book begins with the apostle's name (1:1), so his authorship is not really a matter of dispute among commentators.

His name being mentioned is no guarantee that Paul was in fact the author. There were counterfeit letters being circulated at this time, which bore his name, but were not from his pen (2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17). However, there are some internal clues in the book that would support his authorship. Paul mentions he was of the tribe of Benjamin (11:1). This is confirmed in his letter to the Philippians (Phil. 3:5). He sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3). Paul met these two in Corinth (Acts 18:2-3). He makes reference to

¹ Jim McGuigan, *Romans*, 3.

his journey to Jerusalem with financial support to the brethren there who were in need, mentioning the support of Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:25ff). This support is seen in the Book of Acts, where Macedonia and Achaia are again mentioned (19:21; 20:1-5; 21:15, 17-19). Further information on this matter is seen in his letters to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-5; 2 Cor. 8:1-12; 9:1-5). The consistency in these various letters point to, and strongly confirms, Paul's authorship.

This letter is unique for Paul. His other letters to churches, with the exception of Colossians (cf. Col. 2:1), were local congregations that he had established or had been personally involved in the work (Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi; Thessalonica). Paul had never been to the church in Rome (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:13-15). Though he was born with Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28), there is no indication that he had ever actually been to Rome. On the contrary, his statement, "I must see Rome" (Acts 19:21) would lead one to believe the apostle had never actually been to the great city.

Purpose:

The main purpose or theme of the book of Romans is Paul's stating and defending the teaching of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law. There were those who were perverting such a teaching by 1). Viewing the logical conclusion of such as reason to go out and sin so God would be glorified in extending grace. 2). There were also the ever-present Judaizing teachers who were attempting to bind on the people the legal requirements of the Law. This is a problem often addressed in Paul's letters, especially here in Romans. Such is also the main theme in Galatians.

Paul also deals with what might be called the "Jewish Problem." Paul was teaching the gospel and its power to save; the gospel being the death, burial, and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah. Yet, how was it that so many of Israel were not blessed through the Messiah? How did they miss the blessings of the Messiah? An understanding of Paul's treatment with this issue is critical in understanding and refuting the popular doctrine of Dispensationalism with its fascination of modern Israel.

Recipients

The recipients of the letter are obvious enough. The letter is addressed "to all who are beloved of God in Rome" (Rom. 1:7). Based on what we find in the letter, it would appear that this was a church made up of Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 2:17; 11:13, 17-32).

Being a Christian in Rome in the first century was a dangerous experience. This letter is believed to have been written around A.D. 57-59 during the reign of Nero. This evil man had made a sport of killing Christians. To be a member of the Lord's church in Nero's home city took a remarkable amount of courage. Perhaps this is why Paul remarks that he is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, adding that he is not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:15-16). It may explain why later in the letter he gives the famous words of encouragement, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Understanding the conditions of being a Christian in Rome also gives some new meaning to Paul's inspired instruction of submission to civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). How interesting that Paul tells them, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil" (Rom. 13:3)—providing of course the rulers are just.

Date

As mentioned, the letter is thought by some to have been written around A.D. 57-59. It is possible that Paul wrote the letter during his eighteen month stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11). He refers to Phoebe a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), which is the eastern harbor of Corinth. Phoebe was likely the one who delivered this letter.

Key Verses

It is hard to select only a few key verses in this great New Testament letter, but here are a few for your consideration.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Romans 1:16

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:23

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Romans 3:28

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:1

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:1-2

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

Romans 8:3

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Romans 12:9-10

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Romans 13:1-2

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

Romans 14:1

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Romans 14:19

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

Romans 15:1

Questions

1. Who wrote the book of Romans?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is the book of Romans useful for us today?

LESSON TWO

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 54-57

THE LETTER WE KNOW AS FIRST CORINTHIANS is another penned by the apostle Paul. The letter was written while Paul was at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). The date of writing is estimated to be around A.D. 54-57. This first century letter deals with important matters as: Divisiveness (1 Cor. 3), church discipline (1 Cor. 5), marriage/divorce and remarriage (1 Cor. 7), the use of our liberties as Christians and how they impact our brethren (1 Cor. 8), authority in the home and church (1 Cor. 11:1-16), maintaining order in our worship service (1 Cor. 14), doctrinal deviations and our hope in death (1 Cor. 15), and of course, perhaps the most remembered subject of the letter: love (1 Cor. 13).

First Corinthians is not so much a letter about how to live the Christian life out in the world. It is more a letter of how to be a Christian among your brethren in Christ. It deals primarily with life in the local church. As such, it contains valuable instruction on our individual and collective responsibilities. It speaks of our responsibilities towards Christ and toward one another as members of His church.

Many view First Corinthians exclusively as a rebuke to a first century church with a lot of problems. And yes, they did have their share of problems. There were various clicks (1 Cor. 3:1-4ff), disorganization in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:20ff), problems with their observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17ff), and some who were denying the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15). The sad truth is there are issues addressed in this first century letter that every church today confronts in one way or another. Remarkably, despite their problems, the church at Corinth was still comprised of saints (1 Cor. 1:2). They were still called by an inspired apostle, the church of God.

As with any portion of God's word, a study of First Corinthians will prove to be very enlightening, educational, encouraging, and challenging. One will be better as an individual, and a collective study will create a stronger local church.

Establishment of the Church in Corinth

We are familiar with Paul, much more so than the city of Corinth. We have read of his missionary journeys. We have read and studied his New Testament epistles. We are familiar with his strong determination, faith and courage. So much so, that it is hard for us to imagine Paul ever experiencing any moments of physical, emotional or even spiritual weakness. It is hard to think of Paul as ever feeling down, discouraged, or fearful. However, be assured, the great apostle had such moments. One such occasion was as Paul began preaching the gospel in the city of Corinth. Notice what Paul himself wrote to the Corinthians about his experience in their city.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

1 Cor. 2:1

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,
1 Cor. 2:3

It is hard for us to associate words like weakness, fear, and trembling with the apostle Paul, but here they are right from the pen of the apostle himself. The word “weakness” that Paul uses speaks of any kind of weakness. It could be a physical weakness of the body, or an emotional weakness of spirit. Such a word might even be used to describe a spiritual weakness in regards to one’s faith. Paul does not mention which specific area of weakness he was experiencing—perhaps there was a little of each.

The word “fear” means just that. It is the Greek word *phobos*, the word from which we get our English word phobia. As it is used here, *phobos* (fear) speaks of being afraid, full of terror, or possibly even being timid. Can you imagine Paul feeling *timid*? *Fearful*? *Frightened*?

Paul also says he was experiencing “much trembling.” The Greek word he uses is *tremo*, from which we get our English word *tremor*. We use the word in regards to earthquakes and the tremors or shaking that is experienced when the fault line decides to move. We might speak of someone having the tremors, or they shake. Paul says he was in Corinth with much shaking, as if he was nervous.

Certainly not the way we are accustomed to thinking of Paul. What brought on this fear and trembling? Perhaps, like us, Paul had moments when it was all too much. The apostle had a tremendous task in traveling and preaching the gospel. As you know, he faced much opposition. Think about the amount of rejection he experienced in preaching the gospel. The time when he was stoned and left for dead, the shipwrecks, being beaten with rods, the time when he was arrested and placed in the stocks in Philippi. In addition to all of these, there was the daily pressure and concern for the churches of which he wrote. These are other perils experienced by the apostle are well outlined in his second letter to those in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:23ff). When you consider it all, feelings of weakness, fear and trembling seem only natural. It could very well be that some of this fear and trembling was brought-on from the city of Corinth itself.

After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.
Acts 18:1

We can read those words and not really get the full impact of what it must have been like for Paul to arrive in the city of Corinth. When you arrive in a city that is new to you, you want to take in the sights—and what sights there were for Paul to see in Corinth. Corinth was a city of gross immorality. One might think of it as a first century Sodom and Gomorrah. William Barclay noted that Corinth, at the time, was a by-word for evil and immoral living; so much so, that the Greeks had a word which meant, “to live like a Corinthian.” To live like a Corinthian was to live a life of lustful wickedness. Whenever a Corinthian was portrayed in Greek plays, they would always be shown as being drunk. Not the image that would make one proud of their city.

The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love was located in Corinth. This temple included one thousand priestesses who were considered sacred prostitutes. At evening, they would descend down to the streets to market themselves in the name of religion. This led to a Greek proverb at that time that said, “It is not every man who can afford a

journey to Corinth.” One commentator noted that while Athens is remembered for its long list of poets, philosophers and orators, Corinth is remembered for venereal disease.

Possessing two major seas ports, Corinth was a city of great commerce. It was a merchant’s dream where every kind of good imaginable could be purchased or traded. All of this commerce made Corinth not only a very rich city, but also one of greed and extortion. One commentator noted:

The ideal of the Corinthians was the reckless development of the individual. The merchant who made his gain by all and every means, the man of pleasure surrendering himself to every lust, the athlete steeled to every bodily exercise and proud in his physical strength, are the true Corinthian types; in a word, the man who recognized no superior and no law but his own desires.²

All of this considered, you will perhaps recall Paul’s words to the church at Corinth where he said,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you...

1 Corinthians 6:9-11a

Imagine Paul entering the city of Corinth. He looks around and hears some swindlers trying to con some innocent traveler. He looks in another direction where some of the temple prostitutes are prowling the streets in search of “worshippers.” One of them turns and gives Paul a seductive look and a wink. On the corner, he sees a man in a drunken stagger; another is lying passed-out against a building. He hears the sounds of violence and cursing. Again, maybe this explains Paul’s fear and trembling. Most of us would have reacted the same way. From a surface level appearance, Corinth must have looked like the most unlikely place to begin preaching the gospel. From the human perspective we would wonder, “How in the world could anybody in Corinth possibly be interested in Jesus Christ?” The fact is, Jesus Christ was exactly what Corinth needed!

In a very real way, the city of Corinth was not much different from the world in which we live today. It was no different from many of our modern-day cities, right here in the United States of America. Violence, crime, prostitution, con artists, substance abuse, gross immorality, idolatry of various forms, greed, corruption, cursing, vulgarity. They are all present today just as they were then.

Perhaps, this explains some of our fear and trembling when it comes to our willingness to share the message of Jesus Christ with the world of today. We conclude, “No one is interested in hearing the truth.” Please understand that is a false conclusion. It was false for Corinth in the first century, and it is false today. The world today, like Corinth in the first century, needs Jesus Christ.

Paul, though weak, fearful and trembling, took up the task of preaching in Corinth. He did not take one look at the wickedness of the city and turn and head the other

² McGuiggan quoting Morris, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 6.

direction. Paul did not quit. The job might have been difficult; but he would not quit, and neither must we.

It was in Corinth, that Paul met two people who become very close to the apostle.

And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

Acts 18:2-3

We do not know if Aquila and Priscilla were Christians at the time Paul met them in Corinth. All Luke tells us is that they were Jews who had to leave the city of Rome. Whether Paul taught them here in Corinth or they had believed before, this husband and wife team were very devoted in their efforts to spread the gospel. We see later in this chapter that they went with Paul to Ephesus. In his Roman letter, Paul talks of how Aquila and Priscilla had risked their necks for him (Rom. 16:3-4). He also notes in his Roman letter, that Aquila and Priscilla were allowing the church in that city to meet in their home. What a wonderfully dedicated Christian couple. They were no doubt a big encouragement to Paul as he labored in the city of Corinth. With the help of Aquila and Priscilla, Paul went to work in Corinth trying to spread the gospel.

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:4

It would appear that during the week, Paul worked at making tents with Aquila and Priscilla. But on the Sabbath, he was busy with another kind of work. On the Sabbath, it was off to the synagogue. In time, that arrangement would change.

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Acts 18:5

When Silas and Timothy arrived, they brought with them, as it would appear, more financial support for Paul from Macedonia. This allowed Paul to be able to devote himself fulltime to preaching the gospel. Freed to be able to teach full time, Paul would reason continually with the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. He would show them in their own scriptures the prophecies relating to His identity. However, they were not so receptive to Paul's preaching.

But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

Acts 18:6

Turning from the Jews to the Gentiles, Paul left the synagogue and went all the way... next door.

7 Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.

8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

Acts 18:7-8

Paul leaves the synagogue intending to go to the gentiles, and what does he do? He goes right next door! And Paul sees results! Do you see the benefits of not quitting? Because Paul refused to quit and stuck with the task, even though he experienced great rejection and times of discouragement, he began finding some success. Still, in spite of the success, it seems that Paul was still wrestling with feelings of fear.

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

Acts 18:9-10

Interesting how the Lord telling this apostle, “Do not be afraid any longer.” Apparently, Paul was still struggling with feelings of fear, weakness and discouragement. Corinth was a rough place. As such, the Lord appears to Paul in a vision and tells him, “Do not be afraid. Do not quit. Keep with it. I have many people in this city.”

Amazing! The Lord had many people in a place like Corinth! What this means is that the Lord knew there were many people in that wicked city who would be receptive to the gospel. All they needed was someone to preach it to them, and Paul was going to be that someone. What does the Lord see in our cities today that we do not see?

From the human perspective, looking at Corinth, no one would have thought that any would be interested in the gospel. Paul did not know it, at least not until the Lord told him.

Looking at our cities today, again, we too might falsely conclude, that no one is interested in Jesus or church or the Bible. However, unknown to us, the Lord may have many people in your city. Many people who will be receptive to hearing the message of Jesus Christ. He may have some people in your office. There may be some who will be receptive in your neighborhood. All they need is someone who will take the time to share with them the message of the gospel.

With the words of encouragement Paul received from the Lord as to the need for reaching in Corinth. As a result of this encouragement look what he does.

And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Acts 18:11

Eighteen months Paul spent in the city of Corinth. Up to this point, it was the longest he had ever stayed in any one city. Later, he would spend three years in Ephesus. It was from Ephesus that Paul wrote the letter we know as First Corinthians. He points this out towards the close of the letter (1 Cor. 16:8-9).

Paul entered Corinth in weakness, with fear and much trembling. However, having refused to quit, having found some help, and having trusted in the Lord, souls were saved and a church was established in the most unlikely of places, sinful city of Corinth. The

straight-and-narrow truth of the gospel won out over the loose-and-permissive immorality of the Corinthians.

Key Verses

Again, it is hard to select only a few verses to identify as being “key.” Here are few for your consideration:

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.

1 Corinthians 5:1

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

1 Corinthians 9:20

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:3

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

1 Corinthians 15:12

Questions

1. Who wrote First Corinthians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in this letter?
3. How is First Corinthians useful for us today?

LESSON THREE

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 54-57

THIS IS PAUL'S FOLLOW UP LETTER to the church at Corinth. Reference is made in Second Corinthians to that first letter and its contents (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-9; 7:8). Some have assigned these referenced passages to a supposed lost letter that is called, "the severe letter." The tone of first Corinthians itself is severe (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10, 20; 3:1-3; 4:14; 5:3-13, etc.).

There are those who believe Second Corinthians is actually made up of at least two letters (chapters 1-9 comprising the first letter and chapters 10-13 being the second writing). Indeed, when one looks at the close of chapter nine and the start of chapter ten, there seems to be the possibility that such could be the case. However, James Coffman, along with many other commentators rejects the idea that Second Corinthians is anything but a whole letter. Coffman writes:

The irresponsible speculations and denials of radical scholars in the first half of this century (20th) are no longer of any significance. As Hughes pointed out, there was a time when to question the unity of 2 Corinthians "was to be very much in fashion, but now a swing back to the traditional view of the letter's integrity is noticeable." Hughes went on to name a number of outstanding scholars of today who declared that "2 Corinthians is beyond doubt a unity."³

Whether actually one or two letters, the contents of Second Corinthians are inspired writing. On this point, commentators on both sides of this issue are in agreement.

Paul begins the letter in his typical writing style. This letter is believed to have been written from Macedonia. Evidence within the letter would seem to support this belief (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-14; 9:2). Paul speaks in the letter as if he was presently with the brethren in that area.

In this letter Paul gives us a picture of how difficult his life must have been as an apostle of Jesus Christ. For example, in the opening verses of the letter, the apostle writes:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

2 Corinthians 1:8

In our study of First Corinthians we saw the apostle fearful as he first arrived in the city of Corinth. Here we see him despairing of life. Paul goes on to say "we had the sentence of death within ourselves..." (vs. 9). In other words, Paul thought his life was in very great danger. Later in this letter Paul goes into great detail about the difficulties of his life.

³ James Coffman, *First and Second Corinthians*, 296.

A Defense of Paul's Apostleship

What Paul writes in the verses previously mentioned is a means of defending his apostleship and exposing those claiming to be apostles who called into question Paul's authority. This had apparently become a problem at Corinth, one which the apostle confronts in this second letter. He does so in great detail in chapters ten through twelve.

24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.

26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;

27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.

31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

32 In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,

33 and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:24-33

How many of us would have been able to consistently and faithfully deal with such hardships? Paul's dedication to the cause of Christ and His church was great indeed.

A Follow Up to Disfellowship

In the second chapter of this letter Paul gives us the follow up account as to what happened with the man involved with his father's wife as described in First Corinthians chapter five.

5 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.

6 Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority,

7 so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

8 Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

9 For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

10 But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

11 so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Here Paul encourages the Corinthians to accept this one back into congregation. He urges them to reaffirm their love for him. They did not need to put him through any other type of punishment.

Instruction about Giving

In chapters eight and nine Paul gives the Corinthians and us some great lessons on giving.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

There are five important lessons we can learn from the example of the Macedonians, as presented in these verses.

First, despite “deep poverty” these brethren gave. From the human perspective, these brethren could not financially afford to give—but they did.

Second, they each gave “according to their ability, and even beyond!” There was no set amount placed upon each one, they gave as they were able. It might have been a little or a lot, but they gave.

Third, they gave generously (liberally). It would appear that these brethren were very cognizant of all that God had done for them in Jesus Christ. Appreciative of Christ’s great sacrifice, they *responded* generously.

Fourth, they gave freely, “of their own accord.” No one was forced to give. No one was made to feel guilty or ashamed. They heard about their brethren in need, and they responded from the heart.

Fifth, they “begged” to be able to give. They insisted on being able to participate in this matter. What a marvelous portrait of brethren willing to help other brethren in need!

Later, with the example of the Macedonians set before them, Paul tells the Corinthians:

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Notice that Paul says each is to give as they have purposed in their heart. Once again, there is no “set amount”, only as one has purposed or set in their heart to give. No one should ever be told exactly *how much* they are to give. This is what Paul means when he says no one should give “under compulsion.” The Greek word translated “compulsion” means literally “necessity or pressure of any kind.” The picture is one being pressured into giving a certain amount. The amount one gives is an individual choice. Each child of God decides what that will be based on what they have purposed in their heart.

Paul also illustrates that each should give as they are cheerfully able. To give a large amount, grudgingly, will do you no good. Unless you can give the large amount cheerfully, mindful of all God has given to you, *do not give it*. Give what you can *cheerfully purpose* in your heart to give. If we will stop to consider all the many ways God has given to us, cheerfully giving back to Him should not be a problem.

In verse six, Paul establishes a principle that we cannot afford to overlook. Paul comes right out and tells us, the one who gives generously will be rewarded (by God, I believe) generously, and the one who gives sparingly, will reap sparingly. This is a principle found in various places in the Bible (cf. Pr. 11:24; 19:17; Lk. 6:38). This is some serious motivation for rethinking our giving!

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, God outlined when the collection was to be made. Paul told them (and us):

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. **On the first day of every week** each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

As the Christians met on the first day of the week to break bread, time was also set aside to allow each one to give “as he may prosper.” This is a free-will offering geared to the believer’s particular circumstances in life.

This verse is often quoted prior to the weekly collection and is typically described as a command we are given, to lay by in store. However, though the language is imperative, the collection for the needy saints was *not a command*. And before you panic about what you just read, take a look at what the *same* apostle, told the *same* church, concerning the *same* collection.

8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

2 Corinthians 8:8-11

Here we see the collection for the saints was not a command. Paul is very clear about that. “I am not speaking this as a command.” He could not be much clearer. Remember, he had also earlier said no one was to give under compulsion, but rather, cheerfully. He gave them the example of the Macedonians and how they begged to be a part in helping meet the needs. They were not commanded to do this. They did so out of love and generosity. And if someone looks at this and concludes, “Well, if there is no command, than I don’t have to give!” You have a problem with your thinking. You are lacking love and generosity!

We have some significant examples of saints responding to meet the needs of the church, whether those involved benevolent needs or to financially support those who

were preaching the gospel. In fact, notice what Paul says about supporting those who preach the word:

7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?
8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?
9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He?
10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.
11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

1 Corinthians 9:7-11

As saints today, we should willingly and joyfully respond in supporting the work of God. We have been blessed by God and we ought to willingly and lovingly return a portion back to Him. As He Himself has promised, those who give generously, will be so rewarded. Just because we do not have a direct command to give, does not take away the need for giving! The examples say we need to, and should give. The principles we have seen in scripture indicate the need for giving. Christianity itself, being Christ-like is about giving!

The passage in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 gives specific and imperative instructions for the Corinthians on how they were to handle this *voluntary* collection. We today, can, and should follow this example in our giving.

Key Verses

Several key verses have already been given, but here a few others worth noting:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. “And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for

you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Questions

1. Who wrote Second Corinthians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in this letter?
3. How is Second Corinthians useful for us today?

LESSON FOUR

GALATIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 50

THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS is another authored by the apostle Paul. Rather than being written to one specific congregation, the letter is addressed to the *churches of Galatia*. The question confronting Bible scholars the subject of much debate and discussion, are which specific local churches are included in this address to “*the churches of Galatia*” (Gal. 1:2)? James Coffman writes:

Regarding the identity of “the Galatians”: Before moving to assign an approximate date of this epistle, the question of the persons to whom it was written has priority; because with the determination of that, the problem of the date when it was written is clearly linked. The very term “Galatia” had two meanings. The Roman province of Galatia embraced a very large section of Asia minor, including in its northern latitudes a relatively small subsection also called “Galatia.” It had originally been populated by Gauls from western Europe; and its stormy population constituted in a technical sense “the Galatians,” a designation that also quite properly belonged to all citizens of the much larger Roman province of Galatia. Paul’s missionary tour was spent in the establishment of churches in the south part of the greater Galatian province, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe being among them. Those cities were not all in the same subdivision of greater Galatia, but some were in Pisidia, others in Lycaonia; and, if Paul had addressed those Christians converted on the first tour, there would have been single term including them all except “Galatians.” It is the opinion of this writer that it was precisely those churches which are addressed in Galatians, i.e., the South Galatians. It does not lie within the scope of this work to enter into the volumes of controversy arrayed on opposite sides, some maintaining the viewpoint accepted here, and others dogmatically certain that the original “Galatians” of the north were meant.⁴

When one considers Paul’s travels as recorded in the book of Acts, these southern area congregations mentioned by Coffman make sense as being those addressed by the apostle. I have included a map in this lesson that may be helpful in better understanding Coffman’s conclusion. Another writes of this area and Paul’s work within it:

In Paul’s day the name Galatia was used for the original smaller region as well as the province. On the first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas established four churches in the southern part of the province, in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14–14:23), and those churches apparently came to form something of a regional body of believers. The Galatian epistle itself does not identify the specific local churches, but they were churches in which Paul had personally ministered (4:13–15). The fact that the book of Acts mentions the four churches established by Paul in south Galatia and mentions none in the rest of the province makes it probable that the epistle was addressed primarily to those southern churches.

While in Galatia, Paul nearly lost his life, having been stoned and left for dead by antagonistic Jewish leaders who followed him from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra

⁴ James Coffman, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 1-2.

(Acts 14:19–20). After establishing a church in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas revisited the other three cities, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith” (14:22). On his second journey Paul visited the Galatian churches with Silas, “delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily” (Acts 16:1–5).⁵

The Galatian letter was written to address the problem of false teachers who were imposing upon the Gentiles certain aspects relating to the Law of Moses. This had become a common problem among the Gentile congregations. The purpose of Galatians will be much better understood when one compares it to the problem addressed in Acts chapter fifteen. Portions of chapter two in the letter recount some of those events.

There were those among the Jewish brethren, those who thought the Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. They could not accept the idea of salvation by grace. They lived (and wanted everyone else around them to also live) with a works mentality. Right at the start of the letter Paul expresses his amazement that the brethren would so quickly turn away from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!
9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Galatians 1:6-9

Later, Paul refers to them as “foolish” for falling for a form of false teaching that was enslaving them (Gal. 3:1). Later still, he encourages them to get back to the truth.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

A good portion of the letter finds Paul once again defending his apostleship (Gal. 1:11-2:10). It would seem that the false teachers who had deceived these brethren had called into question Paul’s authority. This portion of the letter is a great addition to the events of Paul’s conversion recorded in the book of Acts. Combining both we get a much clearer picture of all that took place.

Like his Roman letter, much of Galatians deals with the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law (Gal. 2:15-5:26). For many, even today, grace is a hard concept to fully grasp and accept. Paul needed these brethren to see that they were truly freed from having to keep the works of the Law. The false teachers were imposing a system of meritorious types of works. They were teaching that salvation was something

⁵MacArthur, John. *Galatians*. Includes Indexes. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1987.

earned, not a gift of grace. Paul's treatment of this issue in Galatians is extremely valuable for us today in understanding how we are saved.

One of the more familiar contrasts in the letter is that of the works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23).

Key Verses:

But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

Galatians 2:4

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Galatians 3:1-3

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:27-29

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Galatians 4:9

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Galatians 6:9-10



Questions

1. Who wrote Galatians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in this letter?
3. How is Galatians useful for us today?

LESSON FIVE

EPHESIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 60-62

THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS is yet another written by the apostle Paul. He had spent a period of three years in that city working with the church (Acts 20:31). It is believed to be the longest he had stayed in any one city where he had established a church. In the time that Paul worked with these brethren he did not shrink from telling them anything that was profitable or from sharing with them the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:20, 27). As in every city, Paul worked hard in Ephesus (Acts 20:31-35). For more about Paul's preaching in this city read Acts 18:18-20:1, 17-28.

The words "at Ephesus" are missing from certain old manuscripts...; but the very fact of Tychicus being chosen by Paul to convey this letter to the addressees would suggest that it was surely addressed to some congregation in Asia (Tychicus was a citizen of Asia); and, as Ephesus was the principle congregation of the entire province, there was no way that the Ephesians would not have received it, either as addressed directly to them, or along with other congregations as fellow-recipients of a kind of circular letter intended for Christians throughout the area, and in fact everywhere. Certainly no harm is done by calling it the letter to the Ephesians.⁶

Ephesians is known as one of Paul's four prison epistles (Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon being the others). These prison epistles were written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (cf. Acts 28). In the letter Paul refers to himself as "the prisoner of Christ Jesus" (3:1), "my tribulations on your behalf" (3:13), "the prisoner of the Lord" (4:1), and ("an ambassador in chains" (6:20).

Paul was a prisoner at the time he wrote this letter (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Scholars differ on whether Paul wrote this letter while he was imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) in A.D. 57-59, or in Rome (28:30) in A.D. 60-62. All things considered, the Roman imprisonment seems more likely. Along with Ephesians, the Books of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are thought to have been written during the same time period and hence are called the "Prison Epistles" (cf. Phil. 1:7; Col. 4:10; Phile. 9). Since Ephesians gives no hint of his release from prison, as do Philippians (1:19-26) and Philemon (22), it is reasonable to think that he wrote it in the early part of his stay, or about A.D. 60. This would have been when Paul was kept under guard in rental quarters (Acts 28:30). Following his release he traveled, wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, was arrested again, wrote 2 Timothy, and was martyred in Rome.⁷

Though no particular problem is raised in the book, the reason for writing this epistle becomes clear when one considers the contacts the apostle had with the Ephesians. On the return from his third missionary journey Paul told the Ephesian

⁶ James Coffman, Vol. 8, 113.

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eph 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

elders at Miletus (A.D. 57) to beware of evil teachers from without and of professing believers within who would teach perverse things (Acts 20:29-30). From Revelation one can see that the Ephesian church had succeeded in keeping out the false teachers (Rev. 2:2) but had failed to maintain the vibrancy of their first love for Christ (Rev. 2:4). This is substantiated in 1 Timothy 1:5, when Paul wrote from Macedonia to Timothy at Ephesus (ca A.D. 62) that the goal of his instruction was “love which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Thus the theme of love needed to be stressed for the saints at Ephesus.

This is in harmony with the contents of Ephesians, for the verb form of “love” (agapao) is used 9 times in Ephesians, whereas Paul used it only 23 times in all his other letters. Paul used the noun (agape, “love”) 10 times in Ephesians compared with 65 times in his other epistles. Therefore, of the 107 times Paul used the verb or noun “love,” 19 are in Ephesians. Thus more than one-sixth of his references to “love” appear in this small epistle to the Ephesians. This letter begins with love (Eph. 1:4, 6) and ends with love (6:23-24).⁸

After Paul’s customary greeting, Ephesians begins “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Chapter one contains a beautiful and deep theology of God’s plan to save us (1:3-14). Chapter two presents a before and after picture of our spiritual condition. Paul says, before Christ we were dead in our trespasses and sins (2:1). We were by nature children of wrath (2:2). He then writes two beautiful words, “but God” (2:4). Despite our lost condition, God still loved us! From here Paul goes on to describe all that has been done for us in Christ. By grace we have been saved through faith. It was not of our own doing but a gift of God (2:8). Chapter three is about Paul’s ministry. This is summed very well in the first verse of chapter. Paul says, “For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). Chapter four is a discussion on unity. Paul tells the Ephesians and us that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God (4:4-6). As such, we as members of Christ’s body must be one. Chapters four, five and six contain some lengthy instruction about our conduct as Christians in the church, in the home, and in the world. The goal of our conduct is summarized in the first verse of chapter five. Paul writes, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1).

Key Verses

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Ephesians 1:3

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Ephesians 2:1-4

⁸Ibid.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Ephesians 2:8

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Ephesians 5:19

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:10-12

Questions

1. Who wrote Ephesians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Ephesians useful for us today?

LESSON SIX

PHILIPPIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 60-62

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI is a beautiful and encouraging letter. The record of Paul establishing the church in this city is found in Acts chapter sixteen. The establishment of such occurred on Paul's second missionary journey. It is there Paul meant such familiar New Testament people as Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:27-34). Both of these individuals and their households obeyed the gospel.

Philippians might well be called, "the joyful letter." Joy is a constant theme throughout the apostle's correspondence to these brethren. The words joy or rejoice are used sixteen times in just four short chapters. This is remarkable in many ways, for the letter to the Philippians is one of Paul's prison epistles. However, rather than writing from house arrest in a state of discouragement and frustration, Paul writes about joy. In fact, he tells the brethren:

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

Philippians 1:12

What a tremendous attitude demonstrated by Paul. How important for these brethren to hear this attitude in Paul. They were obviously concerned having heard about his arrest. Yet, Paul writes saying, "I'm fine and things have actually turned out for the better in terms of the gospel." Look what he says in the next two verses:

So that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Philippians 1:13-14

As Paul talked about those who were preaching the gospel from with wrong motives, some who may have even sought to discredit Paul as an apostle, he writes:

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

Philippians 1:18

It is things like this that Philippians very valuable to us. It is a letter full of powerful encouragement. The letter tells us to be joyful despite the troubles and sorrows we might experience in this life. Paul even gives us some joyful thoughts to consider when facing death:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

Philippians 1:21-23

This joyful letter also contains some great instruction about how to conduct ourselves as Christians. Paul writes:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Philippians 1:27

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

Following these descriptions of how we should conduct ourselves as Christians, Paul gives the Philippians and us the ultimate example to consider in case we are unsure of how to act. He gives us the example of Jesus Christ.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

The above referenced verses contain important information about the person of Jesus Christ and His great humility in coming to earth to die for our sins. This too is reflective of the powerful encouragement found in this New Testament letter.

We have already seen some powerful verses, but I am listing below a few other key verses found in Philippians. As with all of these letters, it is hard to single out only a few.

Key Verses:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Philippians 2:12

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having

a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-12

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Questions

1. Who wrote Philippians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Philippians useful for us today?

LESSON SEVEN

COLOSSIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 60-62

COLOSSIANS IS YET ANOTHER NEW TESTAMENT letter penned by the apostle Paul. It is another one of his prison epistles. The following excerpt from the Bible Knowledge Commentary will be helpful as a general introduction to this New Testament Letter.

The Pauline authorship of Colossians is supported by abundant evidence both in and out of the book. Colossians has three personal references to Paul in the first person (1:1; 1:23; 4:18) and numerous references to Paul's associates, such as Tychicus (4:7), Onesimus (4:9), Aristarchus (4:10), Mark (4:10), Justus (4:11), Epaphras (4:12), Luke (4:14), Demas (4:14), and Archippus (4:17). The style and content of Colossians is similar to Ephesians, written about the same time and probably alluded to as "the letter from Laodicea" (4:16).

While 34 Greek words are unique to Colossians, they are characteristic of the theme of the book and fit the thoughts of Paul. Words in this category include "visible" (1:16), "supremacy" (1:18), "fill up" (1:24), "philosophy" (2:8), and "Deity" (2:9).

The conclusion of Ephesians confirms that Tychicus was the carrier of both it and Colossians (Eph. 6:21; cf. Col. 4:7). This helps confirm Paul as the author of the Colossian epistle.

The external evidence for Paul's authorship is strong, despite the claim of some that the heresy combated in the book is second-century Gnosticism. But there is good reason to believe that the heresy addressed in Colossians (at least in its incipient form) had appeared already in Paul's lifetime. And in view of Paul's other encounters with heresies, in books which are unquestionably his, it seems clear that he authored Colossians (cf. 1 Cor. 15; Gal. 1-2; 2 Thes. 2).

Colossians includes some stylistic differences such as unusual genitival combinations: "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), "body of . . . flesh" (2:11, NASB), "growth . . . from God" (2:19, NASB), "reward of . . . inheritance" (3:24, NASB). However, as Donald Guthrie correctly observed, "stylistic differences are generally attributable to changing circumstances or subject matter" (*New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, p. 553).

One of the strongest lines of evidence that Colossians is a first-century work of the Apostle Paul is its close link to the Book of Philemon, the authenticity of which is virtually impeccable. (1) Both books include Timothy's name with Paul's in the opening greeting (Col. 1:1; Phile. 1). (2) Greetings are sent in both books from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (Col. 4:10-14; Phile. 23-24). (3) Archippus' ministry is referred to in both books (Col. 4:17; Phile. 2). (4) Onesimus the slave is mentioned in both books (Col. 4:9; Phile. 10).

Colossians was written from Rome during Paul's (first) imprisonment there, as recorded in Acts 28:30. At the same time Paul wrote Ephesians and Philemon (ca. A.D. 60-62). In Philemon 1:9 Paul referred to himself as "a prisoner of Christ Jesus." Ephesians also contains references to Paul being a "prisoner" (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). And Ephesians refers to Tychicus carrying the epistles from Paul to their destinations (Eph.

6:21; cf. Col. 4:7). Since the record of Acts ends around A.D. 60-62, Colossians was probably written during this two-year imprisonment. And since neither Colossians, Ephesians, nor Philemon mention the outcome of Paul's trial, anticipated in Philippians 1:19-21, it can be assumed that Colossians was written before Philippians.... Several references in Colossians indicate that Paul had not visited the city (Col. 1:7; 2:1; 4:12).⁹

The Colossian letter is full of some wonderful doctrinal truths concerning the person of Jesus Christ and God's plan to save us. Take for example these verses from chapter one:

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach

Colossians 1:13-22

In chapter two Paul encourages his readers to stand firm in Christ and not to fall for the false teachings of men.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

Colossians 2:16-21

There are many passages in Colossians which are similar Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which may indicate that these letters were written about the same time. Compare the following passages of scripture: Col. 1:16-18 with Eph. 1:21-23; Col. 3:8-10 with Eph. 4:25-27; Col. 2:6 with Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:16 with Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:13 with Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:18-19 with Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:20 with Eph. 6:1; Col. 4:1 with Eph. 6:6-9.

⁹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Col 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

If you have referenced the passages outlined above you have seen many key verses in the Colossian letter. However, here are a few others to consider:

Key Verses:

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Colossians 2:9

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 2:12

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

Questions

1. Who wrote Colossians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Colossians useful for us today?

LESSON EIGHT

FIRST THESSALONIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 50-54

THE LETTER WE KNOW AS FIRST THESSALONIANS just does not get studied as much as the other letters to churches. Letters such as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Corinthians, Philippians and Colossians, generally get more attention. There is by the way, one other New Testament letter (like First Thessalonians) that does not get studied as much as these others we mentioned, and that is Second Thessalonians. These Thessalonian letters were written by the apostle Paul. Take a look at how the letter begins:

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

There are three names mentioned at the start of this letter: Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy. All three of these men were with Paul when the church at Thessalonica was established. Paul went to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Silas traveled with Paul on this trip due to the contention between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. You may recall that Barnabas took John Mark with him, and Paul took Silas. Paul added Timothy to his team during that trip when he had gone back to the cities of Lystra and Derbe.

The account of the church being established in Thessalonica is found in Acts 17:1-9. From the account in Acts it would *appear* that Paul was only in Thessalonica for a short time. Luke mentions a time period of three Sabbaths. However, there are others who feel Paul stayed longer in the city.

The length of Paul's stay on this occasion is a matter of minor disagreement among students of the Thessalonian Epistles. Some believe that the reference to Paul's presence in the synagogue on three Sabbath Days (17:2) means that he was in Thessalonica for only about 21 days (e.g., James E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 7). Others feel that Paul was probably there for a longer period of time, perhaps as long as six months (e.g., Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, London: Methuen & Co., 1901, p. 296). Those who hold the latter opinion base it on the implications of other passages that may hint at Paul's experiences in Thessalonica during this visit. For example, Paul apparently worked at his craft of tentmaking while in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:8). These references may imply a prolonged stay, but they do not require it. Some interpreters contend that Philippians 4:16 suggests that the Philippians sent two gifts to Paul while he was in Thessalonica and that would be unlikely, they say, if he were there just three weeks. Other commentators insist that this verse only says that the Philippians

sent two gifts; they claim it does not explicitly say that Paul was in Thessalonica when he received both of them.¹⁰

How long Paul stayed in Thessalonica is not of critical importance. Paul did establish the church in that city. His love for these brethren is clearly seen in this letter. His expresses to them his desire to see them again. However, he indicates that Satan had hindered him from returning (1 Thess. 2:17-18). This may have reference to the pledge put up by a man named Jason and some others, that would guarantee Paul and his company would leave and not return (Acts 17:5-9).

The letter is addressed to the church of the Thessalonians. Paul's words, "the church of the Thessalonians" is not so much a title as it is a description. The word church simply means "the called out." The letter then is addressed to the called out in Christ who are in Thessalonica. It is addressed to the local gathering of Christians that met in the city of Thessalonica. It is believed Paul wrote this letter from Corinth.

References in Acts 17 and 18 as well as in 1 Thessalonians make it clear that Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth.

Evidently the letter was written shortly after Paul arrived in Corinth (Acts 17:1-10; 18:1). The references to Gallio's proconsulate in Corinth (cf. 18:12) on ancient secular inscriptions make it possible to date Paul's stay in Corinth fairly accurately—in the early 50s (Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 282). Conservative scholars date 1 Thessalonians between A.D. 50 and 54. This would make the epistle one of Paul's earliest inspired writings, probably his second (after Galatians).¹¹

First Thessalonians is a letter of encouragement to the brethren. The letter contains some beautiful words of commendation to the Thessalonians. For example:

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Th. 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Th. 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

This letter also contains some important instruction in regards to personal conduct as a Christian.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

The most familiar verses of First Thessalonians are Paul's encouraging and comforting words about our loved ones in the Lord who have passed from this life. These verses are often read at memorial services.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The words of those verses are very powerful and comforting for the believer. No wonder we are so familiar with them. Now, if we can only become more familiar with the rest of the beautiful New Testament letter.

Questions

1. Who wrote First Thessalonians?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is First Thessalonians useful for us today?

LESSON NINE

SECOND THESSALONIANS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 50-54

IN OUR PREVIOUS LESSON we discussed the establishment of the church in Thessalonica. There is no need to repeat that information here. Paul's second letter to this church begins almost word for word the same as his first letter (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1-2 with 2 Thess. 1:1-3a). It is believed the two letters were written very close together, both from Corinth. This would make Second Thessalonians Paul's third letter (Galatians, First Thessalonians being the first two).

Like his first letter to this church, second Thessalonians includes some words of encouragement for these brethren. Consider these from the first chapter with respect to the persecution they were experiencing.

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8

These words were spoken as a prophecy of the soon approaching destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus made this same prophecy in regards to those who persecute God's messengers (cf. Matt. 23:29-39).

The second chapter of this letter has been greatly misinterpreted. Paul's words in this chapter have incorrectly been applied to modern day events. It is from this text that many commentators and authors derive their false descriptions of the antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8-9).¹² This is also a text used to establish the belief that there will be another temple built in Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4). Please understand, this chapter is not talking about the antichrist (as he is described today). This chapter does not indicate a temple will be built in Jerusalem, nor is this text describing events relating to our world today. There are several key words in these verses that indicate Paul was describing events the Thessalonians might experience or witness. Consider the following:

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And **you know what restrains him now**, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of **lawlessness is already at work**; only **he who now restrains** will do so until he is taken out of the way.

2 Thessalonians 2:5-7

It is clear that these were events taking place *at that time*. The idea of another temple being built comes from Paul's reference in verse 4 of the temple of God. It is reasoned that since the temple was destroyed, another must be built in order for these events to

¹² See the Apostle John's descriptions of the antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). This is all that is said of the antichrist in scripture.

LESSON TEN

FIRST TIMOTHY

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 63-66

PAUL'S LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS are known as "the Pastoral Epistles." These letters were written to encourage and help Timothy and Titus in their work as evangelists. In these letters Paul addresses such subjects as: the work of an Evangelist, qualifications for Elders, qualifications for Deacons, care and support of widows, matters relating to worship, and the importance of "sound doctrine."

It is well known that Paul and Timothy were very close. This is illustrated in a number of different passages.

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Timothy 1:2

To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:2

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

1 Corinthians 4:17

Timothy is often mentioned in Paul's letters (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2:19-23; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1). As a traveling companion of Paul's the two grew very close. In fact, Paul was impressed with Timothy the first time they met (cf. Acts 16:1-3).

Timothy's promise for the ministry was recognized early (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:5). Thus Paul took him on as a companion and he became one of the apostle's most trustworthy fellow-laborers (cf. Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; Phil. 2:19-22; 1 Thess. 3:2). He also became Paul's faithful representative and messenger (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 1:19; Phil. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:2, 6). Six of Paul's epistles include Timothy in the salutations (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Phile. 1). Timothy had become so dear to Paul that in the apostle's last message was a touching appeal for Timothy to join him in his final days of imprisonment (2 Tim. 1:4; 4:9, 21).¹³

One of the strongly reinforced messages of First Timothy was for the evangelist to make sure the truth was taught and defended.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths

¹³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Ti 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

1 Timothy 1:3-4

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

1 Timothy 1:18-19

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

1 Timothy 4:1

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

1 Timothy 4:7

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

1 Timothy 4:13

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

1 Timothy 4:16

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”— which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Paul realized how important it was for the truth to be upheld. Already in the church at this time were various false teachers. As an evangelist, it was important for Timothy to fight against these false teaching with the truth of the word of God. The same is true for evangelists today. This is a theme found in all three of the Pastoral Epistles.

The Pastorals do reflect, of course, a profound concern on the part of the apostle for the conservation of the truth. Paul was in the best sense of the word a “conservative.” Having faithfully done all he could to develop and teach the truths of the gospel throughout his ministry, he was concerned near the end of his life that his faithful disciples not change them, but rather entrust them in turn to other faithful Christians, who would in turn entrust them to still others. He viewed this body of truth as a special stewardship from God, to be managed with great care. Since this truth led to godliness by pointing believers to Jesus Christ, it was the most valuable of treasures. It was to be taught faithfully in the congregation, and all attempts to undermine, pollute, or attack it were to be met with stern resistance.¹⁴

¹⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Ti 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

One of the most beautiful passages in First Timothy is Paul's testimony concerning his being able find salvation in spite of his past.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:12-16

How powerfully encourage it must have been for Paul to write these words. One can almost picture the apostle with a tear in his eye as he penned these words. Yet, as powerful as they were to the apostle, the same could be said for everyone. We all have a past. However, in Jesus Christ we can find forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. Hence, Paul says he was an example of what God can do for the sinner.

If there were one verse that could cited to sum up the message of First Timothy and even the other Pastoral Epistles, it might be these inspired words of the apostle:

But in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:15

Questions

1. Who wrote First Timothy?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is First Timothy useful for us today?

LESSON ELEVEN

SECOND TIMOTHY

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 67

FROM OUR PREVIOUS LESSON we know that Second Timothy is one of the “the Pastoral Epistles.” This particular letter was written by Paul from a Roman dungeon where the apostle was facing the end of his life. Once again Paul is addressing Timothy in his work of an evangelist. As in First Timothy there is strong encouragement for Timothy to hold fast in his teaching of the truth.

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:2

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,

2 Timothy 2:15-16

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:13-17

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.

2 Timothy 4:16-17

In the fourth chapter of this letter we have Paul’s final inspired words of scripture. They contain an appeal for Timothy to come him quickly (vs. 9). It is in this fourth chapter that we find these familiar and powerful words:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

The letter closes with this passionate plea from Paul to Timothy:

Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

2 Timothy 4:21-22

Questions

1. Who wrote Second Timothy?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Second Timothy useful for us today?

LESSON TWELVE

TITUS

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 63-66

WE ARE FAMILIAR WITH PAUL'S great love for Timothy. Titus was also close to Paul. Like Timothy, Titus traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys. In the fourth verse of the first chapter of the letter to Titus, Paul addresses him as "my true child."

As with the letters to Timothy, the letter to Titus addressed the work of an evangelist, qualifications for elders, and the importance of maintaining sound doctrine.

Key Verses:

In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,
Titus 1:2

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

Titus 1:5

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

Titus 2:1

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Titus 2:11-15

Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.

Titus 3:14

Questions:

1. Who wrote Titus?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Titus useful for us today?

LESSON THIRTEEN

PHILEMON

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: 60-62

The NEW TESTAMENT LETTER TO PHILEMON is more what we might call a “postcard” as opposed to a letter. This short message is another one of Paul’s prison epistles. In the first verse of the letter Paul refers to himself “a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” Some would describe Philemon as a postcard from an apostle (Paul), to a brother in Christ (Philemon), about a runaway slave (Onesimus). However, Philemon would be better described as letter from a brother, to a brother, about another brother.

This beautiful postcard tells the account of Paul, while a prisoner in Rome, coming to meet a man named Onesimus. Paul teaches this man the gospel and apparently while talking with him, learns that he has run away from his master. As it turned out, Paul knew his master, a man named Philemon. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with this little note in hand. Paul pleads with Philemon to be forgiving and do the right thing toward Onesimus.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

Philemon 8-17

As you can tell from that short excerpt this is a very beautiful New Testament note. Take some time to read through this short letter. Put yourself in Philemon’s place. What would your reaction be to seeing Onesimus at your door? Then put yourself in the place of Onesimus. How much courage would it take to knock on the door of your former master from whom you ran away?

Questions:

1. Who wrote Philemon?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Philemon useful for us today?

LESSON FOURTEEN

HEBREWS

Author: Unknown

Date of Writing: 64-68

WHO WROTE THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS? Only God knows the true author. However, there are some interesting speculations regarding the book's authorship. It is commonly believed that the apostle Paul wrote the letter. However, I do not believe this to be true. Yes, the letter contains some stylistic Pauline qualities, but it appears to me that the author could not have been an apostle. Consider for example Hebrews 2:3-4 where the author refers to those who confirmed the word to "us" through signs and wonders and miracles. This seems strange for an apostle to be writing. Also, Paul did not receive the word in this way. It was not confirmed to him by an apostle (cf. Gal. 1:11-12). Paul does not sign his name as in his other letters. Why would he not put his name to this letter?

The other name of interest in regards to the authorship of the book is that of Barnabas. One resource noted:

In fact the other name with early support is that of Paul's former missionary partner, Barnabas. This tradition appeared first in the West in Tertullian (ca. 160/170-215/220). In a polemical passage he quoted from Hebrews and assigned the quotation to an Epistle by Barnabas. Moreover, he did not talk as if this were his own opinion but simply a fact which his readers would know. The view that Barnabas wrote Hebrews was referred to at a later time by Jerome and reappeared in Gregory of Elvira and Filaster, both writers of the fourth century. There is reason to think that in the ancient catalog of canonical books found in the Western manuscript called Codex Claremontanus, the Book of Hebrews went under the name of the Epistle of Barnabas.

The evidence is not extensive, but the fact that it came from the West is perhaps significant. The only geographical reference in Hebrews is to Italy (13:24), and if the tradition about Barnabas is true it is not surprising that it comes from that part of the world. In other respects, Barnabas fits the requirements for authorship of this epistle. Since he was a Levite (Acts 4:36), an interest in the Levitical system, such as the author of Hebrews displayed, would be natural for him. Since he had close ties with Paul, resemblances in Hebrews to Paul's thought would be naturally explained. Moreover, Timothy had been converted in the area of Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3) and was therefore most probably known to Barnabas. If Paul were dead at the time of the writing of Hebrews, it would not be surprising if Timothy were to join Paul's former companion (Heb. 13:23). The rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39) had long since healed and Paul had later spoken warmly of Barnabas' cousin Mark (cf. Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

Of course authorship by Barnabas cannot be proved, any more than authorship by Paul can be disproved. But it has more to commend it than the other alternative suggestions.¹⁵

¹⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

The letter is addressed to the “Hebrews.” The contents of the letter suggest that the audience was Jewish. We would conclude Jewish believers. The word Hebrew is interesting. One resource offered this definition:

HEBREW — a name applied to the Israelites in Scripture only by one who is a foreigner (Gen. 39:14, 17; 41:12, etc.), or by the Israelites when they speak of themselves to foreigners (40:15; Ex. 1:19), or when spoken of an contrasted with other peoples (Gen. 43:32; Ex. 1:3, 7, 15; Deut. 15:12). In the New Testament there is the same contrast between Hebrews and foreigners (Acts 6:1; Phil. 3:5).

Derivation. (1.) The name is derived, according to some, from Eber (Gen. 10:24), the ancestor of Abraham. The Hebrews are “sons of Eber” (10:21).

(2.) Others trace the name of a Hebrew root-word signifying “to pass over,” and hence regard it as meaning “the man who passed over,” viz., the Euphrates; or to the Hebrew word meaning “the region” or “country beyond,” viz., the land of Chaldea. This latter view is preferred. It is the more probable origin of the designation given to Abraham coming among the Canaanites as a man from beyond the Euphrates (Gen. 14:13).

(3.) A third derivation of the word has been suggested, viz., that it is from the Hebrew word *abhar*, “to pass over,” whence *ebher*, in the sense of a “sojourner” or “passer through” as distinct from a “settler” in the land, and thus applies to the condition of Abraham (Heb. 11:13).¹⁶

Some have called Hebrews “the better letter.” Not this letter is better than any other New Testament letter. The idea of “better” comes from the contents of the letter which describe how much better it is to be in Christ, as opposed to living under the old Law. The writer talks of how Jesus is better than the prophets (1:1-2), better than the angels (1:5-14), better than any earthly high priest (3:1, 4:14-5:10; 8:1ff), there are better things concerning salvation in Christ (6:6ff), a better covenant in Christ with better promises (8:6ff). Indeed, this could be described as “the better letter.”

Overall, the letter is an encouragement to Jews who obeyed the gospel to not go back to the Law of Moses. They needed to endure the difficulties they were experiencing (10:32-39). He gives them some powerful examples of other who endured trials and remained faithful (11:1-12:2).

Key Verses:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

Hebrews 2:1

¹⁶Easton, M. 1996, c1897. *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

Hebrews 2:14

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

Hebrews 9:15-16

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:23-25

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Questions:

1. Who do you believe wrote Hebrews and why?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Hebrews useful for us today?

LESSON FIFTEEN

JAMES

Author: James, the brother of Jesus

Date of Writing: 45-48

THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTER WE KNOW as James is a powerful piece of writing. James is very bold in the things he writes. As one resource noted, “James included 54 imperatives in his 108 verses—an average of one call for action in every other verse!”¹⁷ The question many might have in approaching this letter, is which James wrote it? There were a number of men named James in the New Testament. The New Bible Dictionary had this about the various men named James in the New Testament.

1. The son of Zebedee, a Galilean fisherman who was called with his brother John to be one of the twelve apostles (Mt. 4:21). These two along with Peter formed the inner core of three among the twelve, being present at the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mk. 5:37), the transfiguration (Mk. 9:2), and the agony in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:33) to the exclusion of the others. James and John, whom Jesus nicknamed ‘Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder’ (Mk. 3:17), were rebuked by Jesus when they suggested that they should ‘bid fire come down from heaven’ to destroy a Samaritan village which had refused to receive the Jerusalem-bound Jesus (Lk. 9:54). The pair also caused envy among the disciples by requesting a place of honour in Christ’s kingdom; while not promised this advantage, they were told they would drink the cup their Master was to drink (Mk. 10:39), a prophecy which was fulfilled for James when he was ‘killed ... with the sword’ by Herod Agrippa I, c. AD 44 (Acts 12:2).

2. The son of Alphaeus, another of the twelve apostles (Mt. 10:3; Acts 1:13). He is usually identified with ‘James the younger’, the son of Mary (Mk. 15:40). The description ‘the younger’ (Gk. *ho mikros*, ‘the little’) distinguishes him from the sons of Zebedee as either younger or smaller in stature.

3. An otherwise unknown James who was the father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot) in the Lucan writings (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13; the other Gospels have Thaddaeus instead of Judas).

4. The brother of Jesus who, along with his brothers Joses, Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55), apparently did not accept the authority of Jesus before the resurrection (see Mk. 3:21 and Jn. 7:5). After the risen Jesus had appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:7), he became a leader of the Jewish-Christian church at Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 12:17). Tradition stated that he was appointed first bishop of Jerusalem by the Lord himself (Eusebius, *EH* 7. 19). He presided at the first Council of Jerusalem, which considered the terms of admission of Gentiles into the church, formulated the decree which was promulgated to the churches of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:19–23), and remained as sole leader of the Jerusalem church, working to maintain its unity with Paul and his mission when Paul visited Jerusalem for the last time (Acts 21:18ff.). A few years later James suffered martyrdom by stoning at the instigation of the high priest Ananus during the interregnum after the death of the procurator Festus in AD 61 (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9). Hegesippus’ largely legendary tradition claims that James was known as ‘the Just’ because of his (Jewish) piety (Eusebius, *EH* 2. 23). Jerome (*De viris*

¹⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

illustribus 2) records a fragment from the lost apocryphal *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (*NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA) containing a brief and probably unhistorical account of the appearance of the risen Jesus to James. James is the traditional author of the canonical Epistle of James, where he describes himself as ‘a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Jas. 1:1).¹⁸

James the brother of Jesus is believed to be the author of the New Testament letter bearing his name. However, should the letter actually be called, “James”?

James was actually Jacob (Iakōbos). It is not certain why the English translators chose “James” rather than “Jacob.” “James,” “Jake,” and “Jacob” all come from the same root. Bible translations in other languages tend to utilize the transliterated name from the actual Hebrew “Jacob” (ya‘āqōb). Could it be that King James desired to see his name in the English translation he authorized?¹⁹

The letter is addressed to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad. This has led some to conclude that the letter was addressed strictly to Jews who had become Christians. James Coffman takes another approach.

This is an unfortunate rendition because of the capitalization of "Dispersion," making it a technical term for the Jewish people. This epistle is not written to the Jews, in the sense of racial Jews. The address of those to receive this letter as "brethren" in the very next verse proves this. "The twelve tribes" is here a reference to the spiritual Israel of God, that is, the Christians of all ages. In this very first verse, James followed the same pattern that occurs repeatedly throughout the letter, in which the words of Jesus Christ dominate every line of it. It was Christ who promised the apostles that they would "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28); and James here used exactly the same terminology to describe the church of Jesus Christ. Wessel declared that "This is a symbolical designation of the Christian church." Harper agreed that "The words here include the whole of spiritual Israel, i.e., all Christians everywhere." Barnes likewise noted that "The phrase, 'the twelve tribes' became a sort of technical expression to denote the people of God, the church." This epistle, therefore, should be understood as inspired instructions to Christians, and the efforts of some to write it off as a mere appeal to racial Jews should be resolutely resisted. Paul frequently used "Israel" as a designation of the Christian community, the true children of Abraham; and James did exactly the same thing here. Morgan said that "There are more references to the Sermon on the Mount in James than in all the other New Testament letters put together." It is not surprising, therefore, that in this very first verse James employed the terminology used by our Lord.

All who have accepted Christ can learn from the teaching found in this inspired New Testament letter. Interestingly, there was a period where the inspired nature of this letter was questioned. There were those argued the letter should not be a part of the canon of scripture. The arguments against James were based on chapter 2:17-24. Those who were opposed to James believed he was contradicting what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans

¹⁸Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed. /) (Page 541). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁹Ibid.

4:1-3. In these two texts Paul says a man is not justified by works, but by faith. James says one is not justified by faith alone, but also by works. On the surface there does seem to be a contradiction. This contradiction is resolved when one understand that each writer is using the term “works” in a different manner. Paul refers to meritorious works of the Law that would earn salvation. James is talking about works simply as obedience and a demonstration of one’s faith.

(BKC [NT] p. 818)

James' References to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount	
James	Sermon on the Mount
1:2	Matthew 5:10-12
1:4	5:48
1:5; 5:15	7:7-12
1:9	5:3
1:20	5:22
2:13	5:7; 6:14-15
2:14-16	7:21-23
3:17-18	5:9
4:4	6:24
4:10	5:3-5
4:11	7:1-2
5:2	6:19
5:10	5:12
5:12	5:33-37

Key Verses:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

James 1:22-24

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

James 2:1-4

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

James 2:10

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

James 2:17

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

James 3:1-2

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:4

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:8

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

James 4:12-15

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

James 4:17

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:16

Questions:

1. Who wrote James?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is James useful for us today?

LESSON SIXTEEN

FIRST PETER

Author: Peter

Date of Writing: 64-65

THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTER OF FIRST PETER contains a powerful and encouraging message of hope. The reason for this message of hope was because of the suffering that many first century Christians were experiencing. They needed to know, there was hope in their time of suffering. Suffering is one of the main topics of this letter. Notice this brief survey of the many references to suffering in the letter.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, **you have been distressed by various trials,**

1 Peter 1:6

So that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, **even though tested by fire,** may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 1:7

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows **when suffering unjustly.**

1 Peter 2:19

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if **when you do what is right and suffer for it** you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

1 Peter 2:20

For you have been called for this purpose, **since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,**

1 Peter 2:21

But even **if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness,** you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,

1 Peter 3:14

For it is better, if God should will it so, **that you suffer for doing what is right** rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 3:17

Therefore, since Christ has **suffered in the flesh,** arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because **he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,**

1 Peter 4:1

But to the degree that **you share the sufferings of Christ,** keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

1 Peter 4:13

But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

1 Peter 4:16

Therefore, **those also who suffer according to the will of God** shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

1 Peter 4:19

But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that **the same experiences of suffering** are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

1 Peter 5:9

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

1 Peter 5:10

While addressing extensively the subject of suffering, Peter also deals with the importance of submission to: civil authorities (1 Pet. 2:13-17); employers (1 Pet. 2:18); wives to husbands (1 Peter 3:1-6); elders in the church (1 Pet. 5:5); God (1 Pet. 5:6). He deals with our conduct as Christians (1 Pet. 1:14-15, 22; 2:11-12, 21; 3:17).

Our material indicates the date of writing for First Peter as being 64-65 A.D. One resource has this as to the time of writing for this letter:

That this Epistle was written after Paul's Epistles, even those written during his imprisonment at Rome, ending in a.d. 63, appears from the acquaintance which Peter in this Epistle shows he has with them. Compare 1Pe 2:13 with 1Ti 2:2-4; 1Pe 2:18 with Eph 6:5; 1Pe 1:2 with Eph 1:4-7; 1Pe 1:3 with Eph 1:3; 1Pe 1:14 with Ro 12:2; 1Pe 2:6-10 with Ro 9:32, 33; 1Pe 2:13 with Ro 13:1-4; 1Pe 2:16 with Ga 5:13; 1Pe 2:18 with Eph 6:5; 1Pe 3:1 with Eph 5:22; 1Pe 3:9 with Ro 12:17; 1Pe 4:9 with Php 2:14; Ro 12:13 Heb 13:2; 1Pe 4:10 with Ro 12:6-8; 1Pe 5:1 with Ro 8:18; 1Pe 5:5 with Eph 5:21; Php 2:3, 5-8; 1Pe 5:8 with 1Th 5:6; 1Pe 5:14 with 1Co 16:20.²⁰

The same resource adds this:

In some passages he shows familiarity with the Epistle of James, the apostle of special weight with the Jewish legalizing party, whose inspiration he thus confirms (compare 1Pe 1:6, 7 with Jam 1:2, 3; 1Pe 1:24 with Jam 1:10; 1Pe 2:1 with Jam 1:21; 1Pe 4:8 with Jam 5:20, both quoting Pr 10:12; 5:5 with Jam 4:6, both quoting Pr 3:34). In most of these cases Old Testament quotations are the common ground of both. "Strong susceptibility to outward impressions, liveliness of feeling, dexterity in handling subjects, dispose natures like that of Peter to repeat afresh the thoughts of others" [Steiger].²¹

²⁰Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (1 Pe 1:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²¹ Ibid.

Questions:

1. Who wrote First Peter?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is First Peter useful for us today?

LESSON SEVENTEEN

SECOND PETER

Author: Peter

Date of Writing: 64-68

FIRST PETER DEALT WITH THE PROBLEM of Christian suffering. Second Peter deals with living victoriously in Christ. The letter begins with what are commonly called “the Christian Virtues.” These are in order of listing: Faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Peter tells his readers, if these belong to them they will never be useless or unfruitful (2 Pet. 1:8). Further, he adds that they will never stumble in the sense of losing their salvation. All in all, they can live victoriously as Christians.

The letter appears to have been written toward the end of Peter’s life. He tells the readers that the time of his passing is imminent (2 Pet. 1:13-14).

Two references in 2 Peter give some indication of the date of the epistle. In 2 Peter 1:13-15, Peter indicated that the time of his death was near. The traditional date for Peter’s death is late A.D. 67 or early A.D. 68. The reference to Paul’s epistles in 3:16 would seem to indicate a date some time after A.D. 60. Since 1 Peter is normally dated around A.D. 64, 2 Peter may be conservatively placed some time after the writing of 1 Peter and before Peter’s death, between A.D. 64 and 68.²²

In encouraging his readers to live victoriously as Christians, Peter draws from own his personal experience as an apostle of Jesus Christ and eyewitness to the Savior’s life.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

2 Peter 1:16-18

Clearly Peter has his experience on the mount of transfiguration in mind. What a sight that must have been for Peter, James, and John (cf. Matt. 17:1-13).

In providing further reason for living victoriously in Christ he lets the readers know that the word of God is true.

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 1:19-21

²²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2 Pe 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The second chapter of Peter deals with the problem of false teachers who would interfere with one's goal of living victoriously. Peter helps us understand the difference between teaching that which is false and being a false teacher. According to Peter a false teacher is characterized by deceptive actions (2 Pet. 2:1); destructive teachings (2 Pet. 2:1); immorality (2 Pet. 2:2); and greed (2 Peter 2:3).

As an encouragement to his readers (again in living victoriously) Peter gives some examples of how God has dealt with the wicked in the past; and how through those judgments the righteous were saved.

The second chapter of Peter, with its warning of false teachers is very similar to little letter of Jude in our New Testament.

Even a cursory reading of 2 Peter 2 and Jude 4-18 confirms their striking similarity. However, the exact nature of their dependence on each other and the effect of that dependence on their canonicity and authenticity has been the subject of much debate. Scholars of the early church thought that 2 Peter was written first, and that Jude borrowed from it. The results of German higher criticism have swayed scholars in modern times to the opposite view. Some have even posited that the authors of 2 Peter and Jude used a common third source. All three positions face significant difficulties.

If Jude were written first, it is questioned whether an apostle of Peter's standing would have borrowed so extensively from a writer of lesser reputation. However, perhaps Peter viewed Jude's warning against false teachers as important enough to be reemphasized and reinforced by his own apostolic authority. The priority of Jude does not pose a problem to Petrine authorship as long as it is not dated later than a.d. 68, the traditional date of Peter's martyrdom. The Book of Jude does not provide enough evidence for conclusive dating.

If 2 Peter is given priority, the problem arises as to why Jude would merely repeat what was already available and include so little new material. However, Jude may have abbreviated and clarified Peter's letter or some unknown common source to meet the particular needs of churches that had not yet received the earlier epistle. (Cf. Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, pp. 216-24.)

Donald Guthrie points out that the order of priority of 2 Peter and Jude need not have any particular bearing on their authenticity, authorship, or inspiration (*New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970, p. 926). The evidence is inconclusive and either position may be held consistently with a conservative view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.²³

Questions:

1. Who wrote Second Peter?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. How is Second Peter useful for us today?

²³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2 Pe 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

LESSON EIGHTEEN

JOHN'S LETTERS

ASIDE FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN and Revelation, there are three New Testament letters believed to have been written by John. Interestingly, only one of these books actually mentions John as the author, that being, Revelation. If John's name is not mentioned in any of these letters or the Gospel bearing his name, why is John thought to be the author?

The epistle has been traditionally ascribed to John the Apostle. The author's name, however, does not occur in the letter. Yet it is plain from the tone of the letter as a whole that the writer possessed spiritual authority. Moreover, he placed himself among the eyewitnesses to the incarnate life of the Lord Jesus (1:1-2). Early Christian writers including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian cited the epistle as John's. There is thus no good reason for denying the traditional belief that the letter is of apostolic authorship.²⁴

As to the Gospel of John, the same resource cited above has this:

Internal evidence. In the strict sense of the term, the Fourth Gospel is anonymous. No name of its author is given in the text. This is not surprising because a Gospel differs in literary form from an epistle or letter. The letters of Paul each begin with his name, which was the normal custom of letter writers in the ancient world. None of the human authors of the four Gospels identified himself by name. But that does not mean one cannot know who the authors were. An author may indirectly reveal himself within the writing, or his work may be well known in tradition as coming from him.

Internal evidence supplies the following chain of connections regarding the author of the Fourth Gospel. (1) In John 21:24 the word "them" refers to the whole Gospel, not to just the last chapter. (2) "The disciple" in 21:24 was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:7). (3) From 21:7 it is certain that the disciple whom Jesus loved was one of seven persons mentioned in 21:2 (Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee, and two unnamed disciples). (4) "The disciple whom Jesus loved" was seated next to the Lord at the Last Supper, and Peter motioned to him (13:23-24). (5) He must have been one of the Twelve since only they were with the Lord at the Last Supper (cf. 14:17; Luke 22:14). (6) In the Gospel, John was closely related to Peter and thus appears to be one of the inner three (cf. John 20:2-10; Mark 5:37-38; 9:2-3; 14:33). Since James, John's brother, died in the year A.D. 44, he was not the author (Acts 12:2). (7) "The other disciple" (John 18:15-16) seems to refer to the "disciple whom Jesus loved" since he is called this in 20:2. (8) The "disciple whom Jesus loved" was at the cross (19:26), and 19:35 seems to refer to him. (9) The author's claim, "We have seen His glory" (1:14), was the claim of someone who was an eyewitness (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

Putting all of these facts together makes a good case for the author of the Fourth Gospel having been John, one of the sons of a fisherman named Zebedee.

External evidence. The external evidence is the traditional ascription of authorship which has been well known in the church. Polycarp (ca. 69=ca. A.D. 155) spoke of his

²⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1 Jn 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

contact with John. Irenaeus (ca. 130=ca. 200), the bishop of Lyons, heard Polycarp and testified that “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, had himself published a Gospel during his residence in Ephesus in Asia” (*Against Heresies* 3. 1). Polycrates, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and other later fathers support this tradition. Eusebius was specific that Matthew and John of the apostles wrote the two Gospels which bear their specific names (*The Ecclesiastical History* 3. 24. 3-8).²⁵

First John

In his first letter, John writes about some important things he wanted his audience to know. The word “know” is used forty times! What is it that John wanted his readers (and us) to know? He wanted us to know that Jesus was real (1 John 1:1-4). He wanted us to know that God is light (1 John 1:5). He wanted us to know that we have fellowship with God and with one another as we walk in the light (1 John 1:7-9). He wanted us to know that if we sin we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). He wanted us to know we are forgiven (1 John 2:12). He wanted us to know we should not love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15-17). He wanted us to know the promise we have from God of eternal life (1 John 2:25). He wanted us to know that we are called the children of God and as such God greatly loves us (1 John 3:1). He wanted us to know that we need to love one another (1 John 3:11; 4:7, 11, 20-21). He wanted us to know that we can have confidence when we pray that God hears our prayers (1 John 5:14-15). All of this is just brief summary of a short letter containing some very important truths we need to know.

Second John

John’s second letter is only thirteen verses in length. It is another letter we could view more as a “postcard.” This “postcard” is addressed to “the chosen lady.” Who is this woman? James Coffman rightly notes:

As noted from the ASV margin, the Greek term for lady might also be translated as a proper name, Cyria; but this tendency to view this letter as being written to a prominent Christian woman of that era is rejected here. As Roberts pointed out, "It is also true that the word for elect could be translated as a proper name, Eclecte." However, as Roberts noted, the word for "elect" is used as an adjective by John in 2 John 1:13. There is absolutely no reason for assuming that any personal name is involved here. "The elect lady" is a metaphorical reference to the church, often spoken of in the New Testament under the figure of a bride, or a pure woman. Roberts agreed that, "The most likely possibility, however, is that the elect lady is not a person at all but a personification for a local church." This would seem to be a mandatory conclusion from the last clause of the verse.

Of course this leads one to wonder about the sister of this “chosen lady” (2 John 13). Once again, from Coffman:

"The epistle closes with greetings from the members of the church from which John wrote." Many scholars consider that the epistle was actually addressed to a distinguished woman in the church, and that this verse is a greeting from another woman, the sister of the addressee, and her children. Such a thesis is incapable of proof,

²⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jn 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

however; and it makes good sense to view it as a kind of "alert" sent by the apostle to a congregation he was about to visit. This affords an excellent explanation of the personal greetings.

The contents of the short note are very encouraging. Here are a few references to consider:

4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.

5 Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

2 John 4-9

Third John

John's third "postcard" is a short note addressed to a man named Gaius. It is hard to know if this Gaius is the same man as mentioned other places in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14).

The Gaius to whom John writes was a faithful believer in Christ. This letter bears witness to his love for the Lord and the church.

Not such a good brother was named Diotrephes (vs. 9). This man was full of pride and denying what John had to say.

The note is meant as an encouragement to Gaius, who John hoped to see very soon (vs. 14).

Questions:

1. Who wrote First, Second, and Third John?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in these short letters?
3. How are these letters useful for us today?

LESSON NINETEEN

JUDE

THE SHORT NEW TESTAMENT letter known as Jude is very similar in content to Second Peter chapter two. See notes in this material on Peter's letter. As to the identity of Jude one resource offered this:

The writer of the Epistle of Jude, the last of the "General Epistles," introduced his letter with one simple declaration about himself: "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James" (v. 1).

Who was this Jude? Three possibilities exist. The author may be either (a) Judas, a half brother of Christ, or (b) Judas, the apostle, or (c) Judas, a leader in the early church of Jerusalem. This latter Judas was sent to Antioch with Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (Acts 15:22). His surname was Barsabbas, indicating that he could have been a brother of Joseph Barsabbas, who was one of two "nominees" to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23). Thus he would have been known in the church. But little other evidence points to this individual as the author of this epistle.

As to whether he was the Apostle Jude, verse 17 in his letter seems to indicate that he did not consider himself to be an apostle, though modesty could have led him to write as he did. However, the important subject that he wrote about would probably have called for his identifying himself with the other apostles, for authority's sake, if he really was an apostle.

The most probable identification is that the author Jude was a half brother of Christ, a son of Joseph and Mary after Jesus. The term "servant" would be fitting, for though at first Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5), yet later they saw the resurrected Christ and were convinced (Acts 1:14). Among these was Judas, who did not consider himself worthy to call himself a "brother" but just a "servant" of Jesus Christ.

The James referred to by Jude as his brother was thus also a half brother of the Lord (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), as well as a leader of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13), and author of the epistle bearing his name (James 1:1).

Jude wrote with a heart of love and understanding, and with a note of concern and authority. He wanted to write on a joyful theme, "about the salvation we share" (Jude 3), but was compelled to write a much more somber epistle. His love for believers whom he saw endangered by encroaching adversaries moved him to turn from the more pleasant theme to sound a solemn warning.²⁶

²⁶Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jud 1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

LESSON TWENTY

REVELATION

INTIMIDATED BY ITS MYSTERIOUS APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY many Christians tend to stay away from the book of Revelation. They are afraid of its terrifying and threatening language: hail and fire mixed with blood being thrown to the earth (Rev. 8:7); the sea becoming blood (Rev. 8:8); the moon becoming like blood (Rev. 6:12); and stars falling from the sky (Rev. 6:13). Symbolic language of this nature interpreted literally, and out of context, has led some to conclude that Revelation is describing earth's last days and its climatic "doomsday." In this way, the popular prophecy writers of the day assure us that earth's "Armageddon" is near. Such bold (though false) predictions increase fears about Revelation's mysterious message and language.

There is the false notion among some believers that no one can understand the book of Revelation—so why study it? This is an unfortunate and unnecessary response to the last book in our New Testament. Revelation, to various degrees, can be understood. True, one may not be able to interpret accurately every apocalyptic symbol within the book. However, with some sound and consistent hermeneutics, the overall theme and message of this incredibly fascinating and often misunderstood New Testament letter can be understood and properly applied.

A sound understanding of Revelation is needed by more Christians today. Sadly, in the church of Christ, studies in eschatology involving Revelation or other "last days" related passages are often ignored or misapplied. Yet all around us, various religious groups are practically majoring in these types of studies. The End-Times is definitely a popular subject among the general public. Book sales for series such as *Left Behind* or any other end-time related material would offer strong proof to the vast interest in what the Bible has to say about "the last days."

Man has always been fascinated with how and when the world will end. Today, this fixation with the end-times is as strong as it has ever been—perhaps even stronger. This curious interest in earth's climatic "doomsday" has produced many sensationalistic speculations concerning the end-times—many of which come from misapplying the language found in the book Revelation. Throughout the course of our study, we will share some examples of this false apocalyptic sensationalism.

Our lack of study in Revelation (and eschatology in general) has found us short-skilled and ill-equipped to scripturally reply to the end-time error so widely taught today. Let us equip ourselves in being able to respond properly with the truth of the inspired scriptures.

The Author:

The author of the book of Revelation identifies himself simply as John (1:1, 4; 21:2; 22:8). While helpful, this does not go a long way in identifying with absolute certainty which John wrote the book. The most widely-accepted position regarding the specific identity of this John is that he was the apostle of the same name—the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle James. William Hendriksen notes,

...the very fact that the author of the Apocalypse merely calls himself *John* indicates that he was very well-known. Not only in one particular locality but throughout the churches of "Asia." By simply calling himself *John*, without any additional designation, everybody immediately knew just who was meant... Suppose the author of the book which you are now reading would simply call himself *William*, do you think for a minute that everybody would immediately guess who wrote it?"²⁷

Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church* had this to say about the authorship of the apostle John:

The Apocalypse professes to be the work of John, who assumes a commanding position over the churches of Asia. History knows only one such character, the Apostle and Evangelist, and to him it is ascribed by the earliest and most trustworthy witnesses, going back to the lifetime of many friends and pupils of the author. It is one of the best authenticated books of the New Testament.²⁸

As both Schaff and Hendriksen illustrate, the identification of simply "John" was enough. Readers of this first century letter would have known exactly who had penned the inspired words of Revelation: the apostle John.

Christian writers of the second the third century such as Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 153-217), Origen (A.D. 185-254), and Tertullian (A.D. 145-220), all accepted the apostle John as the divinely inspired human author. This alone does not give us irrefutable evidence that John was without question the inspired author of the book, but it does reveal the popular understanding during the period closest to Revelation's original writing.

Internally, the book reveals further evidences as to the apostle John's authorship. This is seen in some uses of various Greek words that are almost exclusive to John. For example, it is John who identifies Jesus as "the Word" using the Greek word *logos*, doing so in his gospel, his first epistle, and in Revelation (Jn. 1:1, 14; 1 Jn. 1:1; Rev. 19:13).

It is John who is the only N.T. writer to use the Greek word *arnion*, translated: "lamb" (Jn. 21:15; Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3).

Another popular word for John (though not exclusive cf. Lk. 11:22; Rom. 3:4; 12:21), is the Greek word *nikaō*, meaning "to overcome" (Jn. 16:33; 1 Jn. 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:5; 6:2; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7). From the repeated use of this word "overcome," one of Revelation's major themes is revealed.

It is also interesting to note that both the gospel of John and the book of Revelation reference the promise of "living water" resulting in one never again being "thirsty" (cf. Jn. 4:10; 17:37-38; Rev. 22:17).

Based on these external and internal evidences, it seems clear that the apostle John is the most obvious author of the book. Time will not be given here for the very few who would offer weak arguments rejecting the apostle John's authorship.

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 17.

²⁸ Schaff, Philip, and David Schley Schaff. *History of the Christian Church*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

The Language

The language of the book of Revelation is primarily that of symbolism. One would be hard-pressed to interpret the book literally, though some have attempted to take such an approach. For example, Premillennial-futurist John Hagee writes, “The Bible I revere is a literal book from cover to cover...”²⁹ Later Hagee asks in regards to his literal interpretation of the scriptures, “Why shouldn’t I literally walk on streets of gold?”³⁰ If Hagee wants to be truly *literal*, he should know that Revelation only mentions a street (singular) of gold, not “streets” (Rev. 21:21).

Details such as this seldom bother dispensational teachers like Hagee. When scripture does not conform to his futuristic eschatology, he is quick to abandon his literal approach and go symbolic. For example, in describing what he believes to be a future Russian led attack on Israel (which he bases on Ezekiel 38 and 39), Hagee writes:

Now it is unclear from Ezekiel 38:11 if Israel has retained its arsenal, but even if it has, the Russians can threaten to lob missiles loaded with nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads upon Israel...³¹

Based on his literal approach to the scriptures, I wonder where Hagee gets such advanced weaponry? The text in Ezekiel describes ancient weapons of war: swords, bows, arrows, war clubs and spears (Eze. 39:9ff). There are no nuclear, chemical or biological warheads mentioned... *literally* speaking.

The book of Revelation describes Jesus coming on a white horse with a sword in His mouth (Rev. 19:15ff). Is this a literal horse and sword? Following Hagee and other dispensationalist’s pleas for a literal Bible from cover to cover, what else could they represent? Nevertheless, does it not seem more logical to conclude that the sword is a symbolic reference to the word of God? Such an interpretation would be consistent with other scriptures where the word is *symbolically* portrayed as a sword (Isa. 49:2; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 2:12). Could the horse not be symbolic of a conquering Christ? Must this passage be interpreted literally to have any meaning?

The Bible is a book that contains a variety of different types of written language. There is poetry, figurative language, symbolical language, and yes, text that should (and must) be interpreted literally. Each verse must be closely examined in its context to determine what type of language is being used.

Jesus said, “If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off” (Matt. 5:30). A literal approach to this verse would demand a painful penalty for committing sins with the *right* hand. All those who have literally applied this scripture raise your right hand. Literally speaking, could one do whatever they want with their *left* hand? Of course not. The language here is obviously *figurative* and is not meant to be interpreted literally. Applying figurative or symbolic language *literally* will create some serious doctrinal consequences.

Revelation’s symbolic language comes straight from the Old Testament language of judgment. Hundreds of symbolic O.T. references are found within the Apocalypse.

²⁹ John Hagee, *Beginning of the End: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist*, 112.

³⁰ Ibid. 113.

³¹ Ibid. 149-150.

Specifically, it draws heavily from the prophetic language of Isaiah, Daniel, and especially Ezekiel. One commentator noted,

The Revelation is a Christian rewriting of Ezekiel. Its fundamental structure is the same. Its interpretation depends upon Ezekiel. The first half of both books lead up to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem; in the second they describe a new and holy Jerusalem. There is one significant difference. Ezekiel's lament over Tyre is transformed into a lament over Jerusalem, the reason being that St. John wishes to transfer to Jerusalem the note of *irrevocable* doom found in the lament over Tyre. Here lies the real difference in the message of the two books. Jerusalem, like Tyre, is to go forever.³²

Notice the following list of similarities between Ezekiel and Revelation. This list was put together by David Chilton and is based on the work of Philip Carrington.³³

1. The Throne-Vision (Rev. 4/Eze. 1)
2. The Book (Rev. 5/Eze. 2-3)
3. The Four Plagues (Rev. 6:1-8/Eze. 5)
4. The Slain Under the Altar (Rev. 6:9-11/Eze. 6)
5. The Wrath of God (Rev. 6:12-17/Eze. 7)
6. The Seal on the Saint's Foreheads (Rev. 7/Eze. 9)
7. The Coals from the Altar (Rev. 8/Eze. 10)
8. No More Delay (Rev. 10:1-7/Eze. 12)
9. The Eating of the Book (Rev. 10:8-11/Eze. 2)
10. The Measuring of the Temple (Rev. 11:1-2/Eze. 40-43)
11. Jerusalem and Sodom (Rev. 11:8/Eze. 16)
12. The Cup of Wrath (Rev. 14/Eze. 23)
13. The Vine of the Land (Rev. 14:18-20/Eze. 15)
14. The Great Harlot (Rev. 17-18/Eze. 16, 23)
15. The Lament over the City (Rev. 18/Eze. 27)
16. The Scavenger's Feast (Rev. 19/Eze. 39)
17. The First Resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6/Eze. 37)
18. The Battle with Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-9/Eze. 38-39)
19. The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21/Eze. 40-48)
20. The River of Life (Rev. 22/Eze. 47)

Despite all the O.T. symbolism contained within the book Revelation, interestingly, there is not one direct quotation from the O.T. scriptures! Still, it is as Ferrell Jenkins notes, "...the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book."³⁴ This means that a successful interpretation of the book will require a great familiarity with the O.T.

³² Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1931), 65. As quoted by David Chilton in *Days of Vengeance*, 21.

³³ Chilton, 21.

³⁴ Ferrell Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 22.

The Message of Revelation

The message of the book of Revelation centers on its very name. “Revelation” is the Greek word *Apokalupsis* meaning, an unveiling or uncovering. Revelation is an unveiling of certain events that are symbolically described. It is the belief of this author that those events primarily surround the first century destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. In this way, one can say that the message of Revelation was *contemporary* to its originally targeted first century audience.

Many apply the message of Revelation and the events unveiled to our *contemporary* time period. This is inconsistent with the messages of warning and comfort to the seven churches of Asia addressed in the book. David Chilton rightly comments:

The purpose of Revelation was to reveal Christ as Lord to a suffering church. Because they were being persecuted, the early Christians could be tempted to fear that the world was getting out of hand—that Jesus, who had claimed “all authority... in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), was not really in control at all....

John’s primary concern in writing the book of Revelation was just this very thing: to strengthen the Christian community in the faith of Jesus Christ’s Lordship, to make them aware that the persecutions they suffered were integrally involved in the great war of history.

Revelation’s message *reveals* that God is in control. The ungodly will be punished for their rejection of God and their violent actions upon His children. It urges the Christians to overcome, promising blessings for those who faithfully endure. It pictures a victorious Christ and a victorious church.

Understanding “The Last Days” of the New Testament

Another key in unlocking the message of Revelation is an understanding of the term “the last days” as it is used in the New Testament. It will surprise many people to learn that when the Bible uses the term “the last days,” it is not always (if ever) referring to the end of the world. Each occurrence of the phrase must be carefully examined in its context, only then can a logical and sound determination be made as to which *last days* are being described.

The last days could refer to the latter years of a person’s life, as in the case of Job (cf. Job 42:12). Moses warned Israel about the latter days. This warning had nothing to do with the end of world, it referenced a later period of time when they would depart from God and provoke His anger (Deut. 31:29). This was fulfilled shortly after the death of Joshua when they took possession of the land of Canaan and quickly fell into the abomination of idolatry (Judges 2:13-14, 20). Jeremiah warned the people of Judah of the “tempest and fierce anger of the Lord,” noting, they would understand it in “the latter days” (Jer. 30:24). This was fulfilled when Babylon invaded the land, took the people captive, and later destroyed Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 52; Dan. 1:1). In each of these examples “the last days” only represented a future period of time—not the end of the world.

Pertaining directly to our study is the New Testament usage of the phrase “the last days” or “latter days.” There are three common interpretations of these New Testament “last days.” These three interpretations could be defined as futuristic, contemporary, and historical.

The futuristic interpretation would apply the last days described in the New Testament to the period leading up to and including, the rapture of the church and the (supposed) seven years of tribulation. Those who hold this position are constantly looking for visible signs of the Lord's return. They would interpret ancient Bible prophecies with current world events. Based on what are perceived to be modern fulfillments of ancient signs, futurists would say that we are now living in the last days.

The contemporary interpretation would apply the last days to the entire Christian era. This would represent a period beginning with the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two and extend forward in time to the future day of judgment. These "days" are viewed as being *the last* in that this is the final period of God's dealings with mortal man. According to this view, we are now living in the last days and have been for the last two thousand years.

The historical interpretation views the last days of the New Testament as the period of time involved in bringing to a *complete* close the Old Covenant with Israel. Yes, the Old Covenant was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:16-26). However, there was a period existing afterwards where it continued to function. Though Jesus was the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin, for some years after there were animals still being offered on the temple's altar.

The Hebrew writer spoke of the Old Covenant (after the death of Jesus) as "growing old and ready to disappear" (Heb. 8:13). The Old Law would disappear completely with the destruction of the Jewish temple. In this way, the historical "last days" would comprise the period beginning with the baptism (or birth) of Jesus and culminate with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70.

So which of the above interpretations is correct? In being consistent with the whole of scripture, it is the historical view which best defines the last days of the New Testament. The last days are not a *future* period of time leading up to the rapture of the church and the end of the world. The last days are not describing the full *contemporary* Christian era. It hardly seems consistent to associate the term "days" with two millennia of years!

A closer look at the New Testament usage of the term will reveal that the last days represented a now *historical* period of time. It was a fitting description of the *final days* of the Old Covenant, a period lasting a little over forty years. The first century earthly ministry of Jesus ushered in these last days. In this way, the "last days" of the New Testament were actually the "first days" of the New Testament church. See chart on page 24.

The historical interpretation is validated through a number of New Testament scriptures. The Hebrew writer, addressing the Christians of his day and time penned these words:

In these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Hebrews 1:2

This verse clearly indicates that the last days were *those* (first century) days. The Christians being addressed *at that time* were living in the last days. The apostle Peter referred to the last days in the same way:

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in **these last times** for the sake of you.

1 Peter 1:20

When Peter says, Jesus has appeared in *these* last times, it is a clear reference to the times in which his first century readers were living. Jesus has not personally appeared in *these* current days as He appeared in *those* days. On the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two, Peter quoting from the prophet Joel, says:

But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: And it shall be **in the last days,** God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams.

Acts 2:16-17

The prophet Joel described some miraculous activities that would characterize the last days (Joel 2:28-31). Peter uses the prophetic words of Joel to explain the miraculous events that were occurring *at that time*. The fact that those events were ascribed as being a fulfillment of the words of Joel indicated that the last days had arrived. If the inspired prophet was referencing the entire Christian era from Pentecost until the present, would we not expect these same miraculous activities to still be *genuinely* occurring—"in the last days"?

This same first century application of the last days could be applied to Paul's words of warning to Timothy.

But the Spirit explicitly says that **in later times** some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

1 Timothy 4:1

Was Paul warning Timothy about some distant and future period known as the later times? If so, why did he tell him to warn the brethren living *at that time* about these things? (1 Tim. 4:6) Paul was not writing about the distant future. The *later times* of this verse were another reference to the last days of the Old Covenant. The brethren Timothy would address would be directly impacted by the difficult *later times* events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1ff).

With his powerful and inspired pen, James gave his readers some strong words of warning and rebuke concerning the last days. Once again, notice the first century time indication in this text.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are **coming upon you**. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. **It is in the last days** that you have stored up your treasure!

James 5:1-3

James indicates that his readers were living in the last days. The last days had come upon *them*. If the last days were not exclusively related to the first century, James would be warning his readers about something having no direct meaning to them.

In each of the above examples, “the last days” spoke of a specific (now historical) period directly applicable to the first century. The expression itself suggests the final or ending days of an era.

In his second New Testament epistle, Peter wrote, “In the last days mockers will come ... saying where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:3-4) Who were these mockers? Were these the same (now *historical*) last days we have been discussing?

Many believe Peter was describing the last days of the world. Taken literally, this would certainly appear to be the case. Peter talks of “the present heavens and earth being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7). Later, he describes the “elements being destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works being burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

However, is the end of the world the best interpretation of the passage? Is this really what Peter intended to communicate to his first century readers? Although this is the most commonly accepted understanding of Peter’s inspired words, it is not the only *possible* interpretation. What one must keep in mind in properly interpreting this text is that Peter is drawing from the Old Testament language of judgment. This language often sounded as if the end of the world was being described (cf. Isa. 34:4; Eze. 7:2; Zep. 1:2-4; Mal. 4).

In the text referenced in Malachi chapter four, we find a prophecy of a coming day of burning which would arrive after Elijah had come. Elijah in that text is a reference to John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 11:14; Mk. 9:13). This was a first century day of burning fulfilled in the burning destruction of Jerusalem.

Peter uses this same type of language when he speaks of the present heavens and earth being reserved for destruction by fire (2 Pet. 3:7). Is he speaking of the literal heavens and earth? Not necessarily. In the Old Testament, Israel as a Covenant people were symbolically referenced as “a heaven and earth” (cf. Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2; 51:6, 15-16; Jer. 4:23-24; 5:1). In this way, Peter could well be describing the burning end coming upon Old Covenant Israel. This “burning end” would be felt in the devastating events of A.D. 70.

In describing the destruction of the present heavens and earth (Old Covenant Israel), Peter spoke of the *elements* being destroyed with intense heat (2 Pet. 3:10, 12). Scholars typically define these *elements* as the atoms that make up our world. However, the Greek word (*stoicheion*) so rendered is never used this way in the New Testament. Paul uses the word four times, always with respect to the Old Law (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20). The Hebrew writer uses it once with respect to the elementary principles of the law of Christ; although, some believe he too has reference to the Old Law. It seems highly unlikely that Peter’s first century audience would have understood the application of atoms. Understanding it as a reference to the *elements* of the Old Law is much more consistent with its use in the New Testament.

With the burning destruction of the heavens and earth (Old Covenant Israel), and the burning of the elements (the Old Law), Peter described the promise of a new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:13). What promise of God did Peter have in mind? The only Old Testament promise that spoke of such! This would be the promise spoken by God through the prophet Isaiah.

“For behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth**; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”

Isaiah 65:17

This promise of a new heavens and earth was a reference to the kingdom that the Messiah would establish. In the book of Revelation, John describes the same new heavens and earth.

Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:1-2

Many believe John is describing a vision of heaven; however, notice that the new heaven and new earth is *coming down out of heaven*. The scene is not *in heaven* it is *from heaven*. It is the belief of this author that John is describing life in the kingdom. Without question, there may be some types of heaven found in this text, but a more consistent interpretation would seem to favor the idea of the kingdom.

It is also interesting that John describes a *New Jerusalem*. What happened to the old Jerusalem? It was destroyed! This fits the message of the book of Revelation, which speaks of the holy city, Jerusalem, being destroyed (cf. Rev. 11:1-2, 8).

All of these facts considered, it would appear that Peter had the same last days we have been discussing in mind: The last days of the Old Covenant system. The mockers he described would be first century Jewish mockers. In fact, notice how the mockers make mention of “the fathers” (2 Pet. 3:4). This language is Jewish in nature (Ex. 4:5; 13:11; 2 Chron. 20:6; 24:18; Ps. 22:4; Lk. 1:55; 11:47). The Jewish mockers were very familiar with the words of Jesus concerning the destruction of their temple. Jesus warned, “Behold your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:38). He told them this coming judgment would occur in their lifetime (Matt. 23:36). Some may have mocked the Lord’s coming in judgment against Jerusalem, but it soon became clear that *their* last days had indeed arrived.

The End of the Age

The historical application of the last days is again confirmed when we notice the number of New Testament passages describing a coming end of the age. The end of which age? Once again, the end of the Old Covenant age with Israel as God’s covenant people. This *end of the age* is seen in passages such as this, where Jesus says:

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either **in this age or in the age to come**.

Matthew 12:32

Jesus was not referring to a future world to come, but a future era or period of time, that being: the New Covenant “age.” In the same way, Paul wrote of Israel of old and the example they provided, stating:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom **the ends of the ages** have come.

1 Corinthians 10:11

Upon whom had the end of the ages come? Upon the church of the first century. It was happening in their lifetime. One age was ending (the Jewish age) and a new one had begun with Christ reigning as king. The Hebrew writer expresses the same idea with these inspired words:

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the **consummation of the ages** He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:26

When was Christ manifested in His putting away sin by His sacrifice? His death occurred at the consummation (or end) of the ages. This was the period described in the New Testament as being “the last days.” Again from the pen of the Hebrew writer:

When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever **is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.**

Hebrews 8:13

What was becoming obsolete, growing old, and was ready to disappear? The Old Covenant. This was the end of the age, a period fittingly described as “the last days.”

All of this in regards to “the last days” and “the end of the age” pertains to the message of Revelation. The book of Revelation describes in the prophetic and symbolic language of judgment, the burning end of the Old Covenant as felt in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Revelation deals with the last days and the end of the age.

The Olivet Discourse

Also crucial to understanding the message of the Book of Revelation is a familiarity with the Olivet Discourse of our Savior (Matt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). It is the view of this author that the signs given in the Olivet discourse dealt exclusively with events leading up to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, and that they correspond to the events described in the Book of Revelation. These signs were pointing to the (then) coming end of the Old Covenant age.

The first century application of the signs given in the Olivet discourse is seen when one accurately identifies those whom Jesus says will *see* and *experience* these events. This is not hard to determine when the context is kept under proper consideration. This all-important context is found in the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees immediately preceding.

Prior to giving these signs, Jesus had delivered a stinging and sharp rebuke to the Pharisees consisting of a series of “woes.” In the final woe of this rebuke, Jesus charged them as representatives of the Jewish nation with the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth (Matt. 23:35; cf. Rev. 17:6; 18:24). He tells them their house (the temple) was going to be left desolate (Matt. 23:38; cf. Rev. 11:1-2). When would this desolation

of their house occur? Jesus tells them: “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:36; Rev. 1:7).

Contextually, “this generation” is clearly a reference to the Jewish nation of that day and time. Their house was going to be left desolate. It was *upon them* the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth would fall. This pronouncement of coming judgment was fulfilled upon *that* generation when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

When we come to the Olivet discourse, we find Jesus using the same type of language, again referencing “this generation.” Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34). This is what some have rightly called the key “time text” of the Olivet discourse. The time indicator relates to “this generation.” Which generation? Based upon the surrounding context, it would appear that Jesus is speaking of the same first century generation He had earlier identified (Matt. 23:36). Thus, *all* the signs preceding these words would have to be first century signs. If these signs were not fulfilled prior to *that generation* passing away then Jesus was wrong. The implications of that possibility should be obvious to all.

In this way, Matthew 24:34 has become a favorite for critics and skeptics of the Bible. They would argue that Jesus expected His Second Coming to occur in the first century (before that generation passed away) and since it did not occur at that time, He was a false prophet. The critic understands the first century time indicator of “this generation,” unfortunately, many Bible teachers and students of scripture do not.

The words “this generation” are the subject of great debate. Those who would view the signs of the Olivet discourse as being still future would insist “this generation” does not mean that specific first century generation. They view it as the *future* generation that would see all the signs. In this way, Hal Lindsey wrote, “We are the generation He was talking about!”³⁵ The fallacy of such a conclusion can easily be seen by simply surveying the usage of “this generation” in Matthew’s gospel (cf. Matt. 11:16; 12:41, 42; 23:36; 24:34).

In every occurrence of “this generation” in the gospels it *always and without exception* refers to the first century generation of Jews (cf. Mk. 8:12; 13:30; Lk. 7:31; 11:29-32; 17:25; 21:32). The futurist would agree with this obvious hermeneutical conclusion, with one exception. While agreeing that “this generation” has the same application in all the passages noted, they would still insist it has a different meaning in the Olivet discourse. As noted earlier, it is there they interpret “this generation” as referencing some future generation, one that will see all the signs. The same futuristic approach is then taken with the Book of Revelation.

That the generation Jesus had in mind was of the first century is easily seen by noticing Luke’s parallel account. Luke adds the words of exhortation from Jesus to His disciples, to pray, “...that you may have the strength to escape all these things that are about to take place...” (Lk. 21:36). The words “about to take place” set these events within the lifetime of those first century disciples. Before “this (first century) generation” would pass away the signs would all be fulfilled.

The Book of Revelation prophetically speaks of the fulfillment of this sentence of doom pronounced by our Savior upon the Jews of the first century, as well as the many Olivet discourse signs: Wars and rumors of war (Rev. 6:4), famines (Rev. 6:5-6), false prophets (Rev. 16:13), persecution (Rev. 6:11), great tribulation (Rev. 7:14), and so on.

³⁵ Hal Lindsay, *The 1980’s Countdown to Armageddon*, 162.

The Date:

A key issue to solve in properly interpreting the book of Revelation is the determination of its date of writing. The date affects *completely* one's interpretation of the symbolism and the message contained within the book.

There are two major views regarding the dating of Revelation's writing—both lead to contrasting interpretations as to the message of the book. 1). The late date approach views the book as being written around A.D. 95-96. 2). The early date view suggests the book was written around A.D. 64-66. This "brief commentary" favors an early date approach.

The debate surrounding Revelation's date of writing is so important it would be good to consider evidences for both views (early and late date). We will first consider some of the evidence for the late date and then take a look at that which supports an early date writing.

Arguments Favoring a Late Date

One of the arguments made in favor of a late date writing are the conditions found in the seven churches of Asia, as mentioned in the chapters two and three of Revelation. Only two of the seven churches received no negative comments by Jesus. The others were all rebuked for such things as leaving their first love (Rev. 2:4); appearing spiritually alive but being spiritually dead (3:1); being luke warm (Rev. 3:16); needing to repent (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19); and tolerating false teaching (Rev. 2:14-15, 20).

It is argued by late date advocates that an early date writing would not provide sufficient time for these churches to fall into such spiritually poor conditions. Yet, does it really take that long for a church to experience problems? When one examines Paul's letters to Timothy (who was at the time in Ephesus), it seems evident that they were having problems as early as A.D. 63-64. Consider also the problems found in the church at Corinth as described in the apostle's first letter to those brethren. Paul went to Corinth on his second missionary journey, somewhere around A.D. 48. The First Corinthian letter may have been around A.D. 54-56, just a short time later. Yet look at problems they were *already* experiencing.

These examples considered, it is certainly possible for the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation to experience the problems recorded after only a relatively short period of existence. There is no need to suppose that a great number of years had transpired.

In regards to the late date position, the strongest evidence is external in nature. "External" meaning it is evidence that is found outside the scope of the inspired scriptures. This external evidence rests heavily (if not completely) upon the written words of a man named Irenaeus, who lived from A.D. 130-202. Irenaeus was known as the Bishop of Lyons, and claimed to know Polycarp, who in turn (according to early church history) may have known the apostle John.

The words of Irenaeus that provide such seemingly compelling evidence for a late date writing of Revelation, come from a section of his writings where he was discussing the identity of the 666, whom he calls "the antichrist." His words, which were originally written in Greek, exist today only in Latin. However, the particular statement of interest to our discussion has been preserved in Greek and is taken from the writings of Eusebius, in his work entitled, *Ecclesiastical History*. The words of Irenaeus from this work are usually translated as follows:

We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of the Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.³⁶

Advocates of a late date writing take this statement of Irenaeus to mean that the Revelation was seen by John toward the end of the reign of Domitian. Domitian reigned in Rome from A.D. 81-96. On the surface, this is indeed strong *external* evidence to establish their position, and as such, late date advocates rely very heavily on Irenaeus.

However, many scholars looking more closely at the words of Irenaeus have expressed some serious concerns. Concerns that need to be addressed if this statement is to be considered indisputable grounds for establishing a late date writing. Chief among these is the Greek word that is translated "that was seen." The question is, what should be the subject of this verb, the apocalypse or John? That is, was it the Revelation that was seen and recorded by John near to the end of Domitian's reign, or was it John himself who was seen at this late date? Should the Greek word be rendered "that was seen" or "he was seen"?

Considering the thought of Irenaeus in this particular paragraph, it seems more likely that it should be "he was seen." Irenaeus is writing about the name of the antichrist, and says if it were important for the people of his generation to know exactly who it was, the name would have been spoken by *him* who saw the apocalypse. Thus for many scholars, "him who saw" really becomes the subject, and not the apocalypse itself.

Taking the statement in this way would mean that John lived toward the end of Domitian's reign, but it would say nothing about when he saw or wrote the book of Revelation. Taking the statement of Irenaeus as we have just presented it, one person wrote:

The logic of the sentences seems to me to require this interpretation. The statement that the vision was seen at the close of Domitian's reign supplies no reason why the mysterious numbers should have been expounded "by him who saw the apocalypse," had he judged such an exposition needful. If, on the other hand, we refer [Gr. "was seen"] to St. John, the meaning is plain and simple. We may expand the sentences thus: "Had it been needful that the explanation of the name should be proclaimed to the men of our own day, that explanation would have been given by the author of the Book. For the author was seen on earth, he lived and held converse with his disciples, not so very long ago, but almost in our own generation. Thus on the one hand, he lived years after he wrote the book, and there was abundant opportunity for him to expound the riddle, had he wished to do so; and, on the other hand, since he lived on almost into our generation, the explanation, had he given it, must have been preserved to us."³⁷

The conclusion of this writer that the subject of the verb "was seen" should be John is shared by other prominent scholars. Viewing the statement in this way covers the whole

³⁶ Translation taken from Kenneth Gentry's *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 46-47. For a thorough discussion of issues relating to Irenaeus this work is highly recommended. Gentry's work is over four-hundred pages of detailed arguments for an early date writing of Revelation.

³⁷ S.H. Chase, as quoted by Kenneth Gentry in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, pp. 50-51.

context of what is being said; although, not all scholars (late date advocates) are so convinced.

Yet, another interesting argument against Irenaeus' statement being applied to a late date writing comes from some words of Eusebius where he again quotes Irenaeus. Listen closely to what Irenaeus said, again concerning the number of the beast, the 666, as recorded in Revelation.

“As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and ancient copies, and those who saw John face to face confirm it...”

What is interesting to note here is that in referring to the book of Revelation, Irenaeus speaks of “all the approved and ancient copies.” This would strongly suggest an early date writing, especially if the *approved copies* themselves were considered at this early point in history, “*ancient.*”

Irenaeus wrote this about A.D. 185. If, as late date advocates insist, the original copy of Revelation was written around A.D. 95-96, time would have been required to have it distributed to the churches. In addition, copies of the original would have been made some sufficient time after A.D. 96. These copies would have been far less than a hundred years old by the time of the writing of Irenaeus. So, why would he refer to them as being *ancient copies*? His description of *ancient copies* suggests an early date writing for the book of Revelation.

More could be discussed in regards to Irenaeus, for example, some of the historical errors contained in his writings. At one point, he writes of a fifteen-year earthly ministry for Jesus, and that Christ lived to be over forty years old! No serious Bible scholar believes such assertions. Statements like this call into question the reliability of Irenaeus. His words concerning John and the apocalypse can be interpreted either way, establishing a late or early date writing.

As noted, Irenaeus is possibly the strongest external evidence for a late writing of Revelation. However, considering what we have noted, how strong is that evidence?

Despite the objections presented here to a few late date arguments, a number of recognized scholars hold to such an interpretation. Here is short a list of late date advocates and the titles of their works on Revelation: Albert Barnes (*Notes on the New Testament: Revelation*); Homer Hailey (*Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*); William Hendriksen (*More Than Conquerors*); R.C.H. Lenski (*The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*).

Arguments Favoring an Early Date

When it comes to accurately establishing Revelation's date of writing, the strongest evidence to consider should be internal, i.e., let the scriptures interpret the scriptures. The scriptures are a much more reliable witness than Irenaeus or any other historical writer. Moreover, when it comes to internal evidence, the truth of an early date writing is made abundantly clear. What follows are four powerful internal evidences suggesting an early day writing.

1). The Events Prophesied were “Near.”

Repeatedly, John's readers were warned that the events spoken of in Revelation were to happen soon (Rev. 1:1, 3; 11:14; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 22). Written to a first century

audience, words like *shortly, quickly, soon, and near* do not leave much room for events in the far and distant future.

One can hardly imagine John's audience being warned of events two thousand years in the future; events that they would never see! These multiple time references in Revelation strongly suggest that this New Testament letter records events that the readers of this letter would see in *their* lifetime.

Combining these time references with the message of Revelation regarding the destruction of Jerusalem we see the need for an early date writing, sometime before A.D. 70. In connection with this, we have Jesus' warning to the people of His generation that the destruction of Jerusalem would occur in their lifetime (cf. Matt. 23:36; 24:34).

2). The Temple was Still Standing

In Revelation chapter eleven, John is told to measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship in it (Rev. 11:1-2). It is the position of this commentary that the temple described was that which was standing in first century Jerusalem. If this be true, it would strongly (if not undeniably) suggest a pre-A.D. 70 writing. If John is writing in A.D. 96, the temple would have been long gone.

Late date proponents suggest that the temple referenced in this passage is either a future rebuilt temple in modern Jerusalem, or that it is possibly representative of something else. Some, such as Homer Hailey, have concluded it is a picture of the church. Look at the text in question.

Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure **the temple of God and the altar**, and those who worship in it. "Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot **the holy city** for forty-two months.

Revelation 11:1-2

To identify with any degree of certainty which temple is in view, one must identify "the holy city" wherein the temple of this text is said to exist. In the Bible there is only one city known as the holy city and that is Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1; Isa. 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; 27:53). Consistency with the inspired scriptures would demand that the holy city of Revelation 11:2 be interpreted as Jerusalem.

The identification of Jerusalem for the temple's location does not establish either a late or early date for the writing of Revelation, but it does confirm for us a Jewish temple. The fact that this temple was that of the first century is seen when we compare the words of this passage with some words of Jesus found in Luke's account of the Olivet discourse. Here is the passage from Luke:

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and **Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles** until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Luke 21:24

Notice that in both passages we have Jerusalem being tread under foot by the Gentiles or the nations. When the time passages of the Olivet discourse (Matt. 23:36; 24:34) discussed earlier are considered alongside those of Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 7,

10, 12, 20), it becomes clear that both Jesus (in Luke), and John (in Revelation) are describing the same first century event. Both are describing the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is again identified a little later in chapter eleven as the place where our Lord was crucified (Rev. 11:8). Such descriptions make it hard to imagine any city other than Jerusalem!

3). The Identity of the Sixth King

Another significant piece of evidence suggesting an early date writing for the book of Revelation. It has to do with the identification of five fallen kings and the sixth who was alive at the time of the book's writing. Here is how John described it in Revelation.

“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. “The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

Revelation 17:9-11

In these verses, we have the seven heads of the beast represented by seven mountains. Rome is identified by its famous seven hills. The woman sitting upon the mountains is Israel. She is a province of the Roman Empire. The seven heads of the beast also have another symbolic value. We are told that they are seven kings. In regards to Rome, seven emperors or Caesars. Revelation calls them, “kings.” This is consistent with the familiar scripture in John's gospel where the Jews declared, “We have no *king* but Caesar” (Jn. 19:15).

John is told, five of these kings have fallen and one is. This would mean five kings were dead and one was (at the time of Revelation's writing) still living. Identifying the king that was still living gives us the time frame for the writing of the book. This would be very easy to do if there were an agreed upon list of Caesars from which we could count. The problem is scholars greatly debate who was first, second, third, and so on. Late date advocates protest including Julius Caesar being on the list. However, considering what Julius Caesar meant to Rome, how can he rightly be excluded? Some comments from Gentry's *Before Jerusalem Fell* will be helpful here. Dealing with various objections to Julius being counted as the first, Gentry writes:

It is true that the Roman empire was officially established as an empire under Augustus, and that there are some scattered lists of the emperors that seem to begin the enumeration with Augustus...

As a matter of historical fact, we must note that Julius did claim the title *Imperator*. Suetonius clearly records his claim to the “*praenomem Imperatorius*.” This puts him in line with Augustus and the following emperors who naturally claimed the same. Indeed, the following emperors even called themselves by his name, “Caesar.”

But more compelling than this are the several contemporary and nearly contemporary lists that include Julius in the line of Caesars, and as the first of the line. In his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Roman historian Suetonius (c. A.D. 70-160) begins his numbering of the Caesars with Julius. His first book in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* is entitled *The Divine Julius*. Likewise another Roman Historian, Dio Cassius (c. A.D. 150-235), numbers Julius as the first of the emperors.

For our purposes perhaps the most decisive representative of those who reckon the emperors from Julius is the Jewish writer Flavius Josephus. Not only do his dates (A.D. 37-101) overlap the very period of John and the New Testament, but he is also a Jew from Palestine, and his works were written for both the Romans and the Jews. Surely his reckoning would reflect contemporary opinion among the Jews and Romans. In his *Antiquities* he calls Augustus the “second” and Tiberius the “third” emperor. Later Gaius is called the “fourth.” In a later chapter he calls Julius the “first who transferred the power of the people to himself.”³⁸

If Julius is to be numbered first, as both Jewish and Roman historians would testify, than we have a list that looks like this:

- | | | |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Julius Caesar (49 – 44 B.C.) 2. Augustus (31 B.C. – 14 A.D.) 3. Tiberius (14 – 37 A.D.) 4. Caligula (37 – 41 A.D.) 5. Claudius (41 – 54 A.D.) | } | Five have fallen... (Dead) |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Nero (54- 68 A.D.) | | One is... (Living) |

If this numbering of emperors is correct we have solid reason for concluding that, the emperor at the time Revelation was written was Nero. This would establish that Revelation was written sometime after A.D. 54, but prior to A.D. 68.

4). John would Prophecy Again

In Revelation 10:11 John is told, “You must prophesy again concerning many people and nations and tongues and kings.” If the book were written in A.D. 96 how would John have accomplished this, at what would have been a very advanced stage of years? Wallace notes, “...it is stated by Jerome that in the year A.D. 96 the apostle was so aged and weak and infirm that ‘he was with great difficulty carried to the church, and could speak only a few words to the people.’”³⁹

While we have only presented four pieces of internal evidence for an early date in this introduction, they are strong in substance. In addition to this internal evidence, there also exists some compelling external proofs that should be considered. For further study on these, it is recommended the student consult Kenneth Gentry’s *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*. Gentry offers both internal and external evidences for an early date writing.

A Summary

It is believed that Revelation was a message of hope and encouragement for persecuted Christians of the first century. They would learn that God was in control and that they had the ultimate victory. Therefore, they should remain faithful until the end. They needed to be overcomers.

³⁸ Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 154-155.

³⁹ Foy Wallace, *The Book of Revelation*, 25.

Revelation describes in the symbolic Old Testament language of judgment the first century destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. It was written sometime prior to A.D. 68 during the reign of Nero.

Questions:

1. Who wrote Revelation?
2. What is Revelation about?
3. How is Revelation useful for us today?