

"The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon"
Psalm 92:12

Through the Beloved Book of Books

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A New Testament Survey

"So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading"
Nehemiah 8:8

By

Bill Daniels
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"O how love I Thy law!
It is my meditation
all the day"

(Psalm 119:97)

Introduction

This humble effort before you is a survey of the New Testament. The purpose here is to equip you with a basis for a better understanding of this portion of God's beloved book, the Bible. This is a collection of background details and summary studies of the 27 books that make up the New Testament. Simply because understanding this precious Book of God is so critical to blessing in this life and into eternity. Simply because I long for you to find the same joy and peace in believing that I have found.

I was a young man in university training so many years ago, doing well outwardly but not well on the inside. I was so full of unrest and self-hate. I had no peace within, and did not know what would satisfy. I was reading books on the occult because there seemed to be an intriguing power there. I lived in upstate New York at that time, on the east coast of the U.S.A. where I grew up, but had a beckoning voice echoing in my heart that if I could just leave everything, get in my car, and drive out to California I would somehow "find myself", or something to fill the empty void in my soul.

Then my friend told me how he had recently been "saved", and that he now knew the God of heaven

personally. He told me that he could actually talk to God and know with assurance that God was listening to him as His own loved child. Oh how this touched a nerve in the depth of my soul! I had so few friends at that time, certainly not God as a friend. And so began my search for the Lord. I began reading anything I could find dealing with Jesus Christ or Christianity. But this only made matters much worse initially, for I soon learned of the awfulness of my sin, standing as if an impenetrable wall between God and myself. I discovered that the Bible speaks of the reality of hell, and of God's just *wrath* against me because of my sin, that He would cast me into an eternal hell should I refuse His only answer for man, to believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him as God's sacrifice in my place on the cross. I began to understand how worthy I was of God's judgment, and how unworthy of the grace He was so freely holding out to me in Jesus Christ. My pride threw up a barrier at first. But now I see that that was merely the evil one conspiring with my own pride to keep me bound in sin and my heart from true peace and joy.

Then one day I picked up a copy of the Gospels. As I read, I was stunned with Jesus Christ, who He is and what He said and the way He said it and the things He actually did. I was amazed with the

strength and wisdom and wonder of that promised Messiah. I read through again, marvelling in His might and majesty, and yet His compassion, bidding us to *"come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest".* It was only a week or so later that I was reading a Christian magazine, somebody writing about how they had received Jesus as their Saviour, and I knew then I *must be saved!* I must know that I am right with God, that I belong to Him! And right there in the quietness of my heart I poured out my soul to the Lord in prayer and believed in Jesus Christ as my only hope for eternal life. And I was saved in that very moment. I knew it in my heart. No flashing lights or spine tingles. Only the flooding into my soul of a settled assurance that I was now God's child and that He had forgiven my sin and given me everlasting life, based on His sure promise that *"whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved".* He is a wonderful Saviour!

God used His words to correct my understanding of Him and my understanding of myself. Through His words, recorded in the Bible, He showed me my sin, and condemned condition before Him. And He showed me His amazing grace to make a way that I might find forgiveness and cleansing from sin through believing in Jesus, that only Saviour.

Through His words I have received from Him the assurance of His gift of eternal life. All through His blessed words! I found happiness, where before there was so much bitterness. I am fulfilled, where before I was hollow. Love began to form in me, where before only selfish interests. Gone was all interest in the occult or California, for I found what I had been looking for when I found Jesus Christ. Through His words the Lord began to lead me from strength to strength, out of a life of sin and into ministry. I am happily in His ministry today because I love the Lord and His words. I have found that all answers to every concern are ultimately found in Jesus Christ, God's living Word, as revealed in His written Word, for *"ye are complete in Him."* Quite plainly the Lord has miraculously transformed my life, and He has used His eternal words to do it. Therefore my passion to bring to you an understanding of His words. Through His beloved Book of books, the Bible, He has led me to life, to assurance of life, and to a truly changed life. And now my simple, unashamed longing is for Him to do the very same for you my friend. If He can use my humble efforts to help leave the imprint of His transforming Word on your life too, hey that is all my joy! May the Lord lead you from strength to strength through the transforming power of His beloved Book of books. *"Oh how I love Thy Law…"*

Between the Testaments

It is an intriguing thing to see how much that meets us when we come to the New Testament (N.T.) is new and different in comparison to the Old Testament (O.T.). Perhaps we could imagine a little old man from the O.T. era coming upon the N.T. scene. Our little old friend is familiar with things from the O.T. days. But now let's imagine him wandering around Israel in the N.T. times, bewildered and asking questions. Questions like;

"Who are these 'Pharisees', and 'Sadducees', and 'Herodians'? Where did *they* come from?"

"And what is this official Jewish council known as the 'Sanhedrin'?"

"And why is the high priest acting as the civil government leader over the Jewish people? This was never true in the O.T. days! There was always a judge or king. Or in the days of Persian rule there was a governor who served as the civil ruler (like Zerubbabel & Nehemiah). The priests fulfilled their *religious* functions and the civil leaders their *governing* function. How did it come to be that these two offices are now centred in the same man – the high priest?"

"And how could it be that our beloved Hebrew

language has given way to *Greek* as the common language of the day? I cannot even understand what my own people are saying!"

"And what ever happened to Persia?"

"And who is this Rome? When did they come into the picture?"

"This is all so strange!! How can it be that the Hebrew people, while ruled by Rome, are speaking, not Roman, not Hebrew – but *Greek* of all things? And so very Greek that a Greek version of the sacred O.T. is actually in common use among the Jewish people! *I cannot put it together!!"*

"And will you look at the temple? What happened to it? It certainly is not the same simple structure that Haggai and Zechariah moved the Jewish remnant to complete."

"And what about this thing called a "synagogue"? What is that all about? Why are folks meeting at those places? And where did that fashion come from? The last I remember, the only religious meetings of the people were those yearly solemn assemblies instructed by Moses."

Things have taken place between the two testaments – things quite important toward an understanding of what we find in the N.T. era. The

fact is, if our little friend knew his O.T. well enough he would not be entirely surprised about the changes found in the N.T. era. The prophetic outline of the intervening years between the two testaments is given in Daniel 8 & 11. We will survey those years in a bit. But let's first look back and refresh our memories on where we left off at the end of the O.T. And then we will do a brief trace of history through to the time of Jesus Christ.

Persian Rule (430-333 B.C.)

When the O.T. closed, it was about 430 years before Jesus Christ was born. Judah was still ruled by Persia at that time. A remnant of 50,000 Jewish people had returned to Judah and had rebuilt the temple through the encouragements of Haggai and Zechariah and under the leadership of governor Zerubbabel. Then later, with the help of Nehemiah, they had re-established the city of Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are the last of the O.T. chronological books, recording the last of the O.T. events. After the stern prophecy of Malachi the Lord stopped speaking to His people with any new portions of His written words. The ensuing prophetically quiet centuries are known as the 400 silent years. Judah would remain a Persian province for another 100 years after the

chronological end of the O.T. It was during this time period of Persian rule that Judah came to be known as "Judea".

There is a very interesting and important feature of the return of the Jews from captivity in Persia that must be understood. When that remnant of 50,000 Jews were allowed by King Cyrus to return to Judea, they were just that, a remnant. The majority of the Jewish people, who were scattered throughout the Persian Empire, chose to remain right where they were, not as captives anymore but as colonists, who were settled and happy to live outside the Promised Land. This concept of Jewish people actually choosing to live among the nations when given free choice was a new thing. Prior to this time all Jews lived in the Promised Land if they could. These scattered Jews who remained among the nations became known as the "Diaspora" or Jews of the Dispersion. By the time of Jesus Christ there were large numbers of Jews in every city and town in the countries around the Mediterranean, especially in Egypt. Many of these scattered Jews became wealthy and influential. They tended to be more liberal in their thinking than the Jews of the homeland. Their language was *Greek,* the language of their world, more than the old Hebrew tongue. This factor is what brought about the need for a Greek translation of the Hebrew O.T. That

translation work was done between 285 and 130 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt, where a large population of Jews lived, and became known as the "Septuagint".

The Jewish Dispersion (Diaspora) also went a long way toward preparing the world for the coming of Christ and His gospel message. Their Synagogues and Greek O.T. and hope of the coming Messiah became well known throughout the Roman world, all serving to prepare the soil of hearts for the later missionary work of the Apostles.

Rise of Greece (333-167 B.C.)

In 336 B.C., just about a hundred years after the end of the O.T. record, Alexander the Great took command of the Greek army and began conquering eastward with unbelievable effect and speed. Within three years Syria and Palestine were brought under his control. Within 5 years (by 331 B.C.) North Africa, the Middle East and much of Asia were his domain. Gone were the days of the Persian Empire!

When Alexander took Egypt, 13% of the population of Egypt was Jewish. By the time of Christ, nearly a million Jews lived in Egypt. Alexander favoured the Jewish people. When he founded the city of

Alexandria in Egypt he assigned a special section of the city to the Jews. With time half of the population of the city of Alexandria came to be Jewish, and so it became something of the capitol city of the Diaspora.

As a result of those Grecian conquests Greek culture and language were established throughout the vast kingdom of Alexander the Great.

Then in 323 B.C. Alexander was suddenly dead, and it was a kingdom without a king. The vast kingdom of Greece was eventually divided to Alexander's four generals (see in Daniel 8 God's prophecy of Greece's conquest of Persia). The two more eastern sections of the kingdom of Greece went to Seleucus, centred in Syria, and to Ptolemy, centred in Egypt. The following kings of Egypt were referred to as the "Ptolemies", and the kings following in Syria were referred to as the "Seleucids". Israel lay between these two powers to the north and south, and became the passage way for armies marching through for about 160 years. These were the *"king of the north"* and the *"king of the south"* prophesied in Daniel 11. The kingdom, either north or south, that held possession of Palestine depended on who was strong enough to take it or hold it at the time.

Then came one of the darkest hours in Jewish history, when there came to power that infamous

Seleucid king, named Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" (175-164 B.C.), in a time when Syria held sway over Judea. Antiochus IV had a characteristic little quirk that distinguished him from the rest – *he despised the Jewish people!!* He was quite determined to put them down and to wipe out their religion.

The trouble began in 168 B.C. when Antiochus ravaged Jerusalem, employing every possible means to force the Jewish people to renounce their religion. He defiled the temple, offering a pig on the altar and setting up an altar to a Roman god in the temple area. Temple worship was forbidden. Antiochus made circumcision, that sign of the Abrahamic covenant, punishable by death. He sold thousands of Jews into slavery. He destroyed every copy of the Bible they could find, making possession of a Bible a capital offence as well.

An internal struggle soon began brewing among the Jewish people. Some (the Hellenistic Jews) felt it best to just go along with the efforts to Hellenize (make Greek) the Jewish culture and religion and not fight it. But others (the *"Hasidim",* or *"the Pious"* Jews) resisted all efforts to reform the Jewish religion and culture. They considered the Hellenistic Jews to be apostates and traitors.

Ultimately the Jewish answer to the brutal methods

of Antiochus IV came in the form of the Maccabean Revolt.

Independence (167-63 B.C.)

Mattithias was a priest. He was of the Pious (Hasidim), and was enraged by the efforts of Antiochus IV against the Jews and their religion. Therefore he, with his five sons, led a heroic and highly effective revolt against the Seleucid kingdom.

Mattathias died within months after he began the revolt, but one of his sons, Judas, proved to be the real military genius, winning many an impressive skirmish against the Seleucid forces, against seemingly impossible odds. Judas was the first to win the title *"Maccabee",* or *"hammerer".* Later the title came to be applied as something like a surname to the family.

Under the leadership of the Maccabees the Jewish patriots or Pious retook Jerusalem in 165 B.C., cleansed the temple, and re-established proper worship of the Lord (compare Dan. 8:9-14, 23-25; 11:30-35). It was through the heroic leadership of this priestly family of the Maccabees that was developed a kind of combination priest–civil ruler, known as the Hasmoneans (from Hasidim), who ruled an independent Judea for the next 100 years.

The Pharisees arose out of this Pious tradition of Hasidim, defenders of the faith and loyal to the O.T. teachings. This era of independence in the history of Judea became known as the Maccabean or Hasmonean Period.

During this time period the land of Palestine was divided into separate provinces, with Judea in southern Palestine, Galilee in the northern region, to the west of the Sea of Galilee, and Samaria between these two provinces, west of the Jordan.

Rise of Rome

Then came the great Roman general Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, or "Pompey" as history more commonly knows him, who conquered the land of the Jewish people for Rome in 63 B.C.

At that time Antipater, an Idumean (Edomite or descendant of Esau), was made ruler over the province of Judea. His son, Herod the Great, succeeded him in 37 B.C. Herod ruled over Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Persia, and Idumea (see map on page 33), and was still ruling when Jesus Christ was born, during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Herod was that cruel and vicious man who ordered the little boys of Bethlehem slaughtered because the wise men from the east had come looking for the one

"born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1-3).

It was Herod who rebuilt the temple with great splendour, apparently in an effort to appease the Jews. As well, Zerubbabel's plain old temple was not flashy enough to suit Herod's tastes.

For all of the vices of the Roman Empire there is much to be said for her great contributions to the early spread of the gospel. Rome brought unity, stability, and peace, and opened up the Mediterranean World to free travel over an extensive and excellent system of highways. It was the Lord's well-timed work, using the empires of man to pave the way for His servants who would run with the gospel message, turning pagan resources to the furtherance of His work on earth. All of the action of the N.T. happens within the Roman Empire.

New Groups

Scribes

Those men known as the "Scribes" were much looked up to by the Jewish people as the interpreters and teachers of the O.T. law. They rose to a place of prominence after the return of the remnant from Babylon, largely due to the positive influence of Ezra the scribe. As a group they were bitterly opposed to Jesus, who frequently

denounced them for making the Scriptures of no effect by their manmade traditions.

Pharisees

The Pharisees arose out of the days of the Maccabees, as was mentioned earlier. They became a very influential sect among the Jewish people. Originally they rallied around the cause of separation from politics, wanting to be zealous guardians of conservative belief in the O.T. law. Therefore their beliefs were largely sound in the early days of their cause. But they became rigid legalists, and by the time of Christ's day they had spiralled downward into an empty, formal religious system.

Sadducees

The Sadducees also arose to prominence during the days of the Maccabees. They were the religious liberals of their day, who denied the existence of angels and bodily resurrection and the immortality of the soul. They were a much smaller group than the Pharisees, and much less popular with the common people.

Though the Pharisees and Sadducees were bitter rivals in their beliefs they shared a common purpose in their hatred of Jesus Christ.

Herodians

The Herodians were not a religious group, but a political party among the Jewish people. They took their name from Herod, and looked to the Roman government for their authority. They appear to have been much like the Hellenistic Jews during the days of Greek rule. They were Jews who felt that cooperation with Rome rather than resistance was the best way.

The Herodians also opposed Jesus because they saw Him as a revolutionary against the Roman government. Thus their attempted trap, in Mark 12:13, challenging Jesus on whether it was proper to pay tribute to Caesar.

Zealots

The Zealots were an extremist group. They fanatically sought to restore the Lord as the King of their country, organizing attacks against the Roman government.

One of the disciples may have been a zealot (Matt. 10:4; Luke 6:15).

The Sanhedrin

In Christ's day the seventy-member council of the Sanhedrin was the highest civil and religious body

among the Jewish people (under Rome of course). They were like a Jewish Supreme Court, with the High Priest serving as president. The development of this council is lost in obscurity, arising sometime during the 400 silent years. This body was granted the right by Rome to sentence people to death, but Rome maintained the right to execute that sentence. Jesus, Peter, John, and Stephen were all tried by the Sanhedrin.

The Synagogue

Because the Jewish people had no temple in which to worship during the many decades of their captivity in Babylon, it was there that they began to meet in smaller groups, later called "synagogues" (a Greek word meaning "a bringing together" or "assembly), for worship and instruction in the Scriptures. It was by this means that the knowledge of the O.T. was kept alive among the Jewish people, since they were unable to hear the Bible read at the temple on prescribed feast days as before.

The synagogue was a valuable institution, serving to scatter pockets of O.T. instruction and awareness throughout the Roman world. As well, synagogues became the point of entrance for the Apostle Paul (and Jesus) into communities (Acts 13:5), and became the prototype for the local church.

Ponder Points

There are in every age those determined to remain faithful to the prescribed law of God. And there are always those who feel it best to weakly go along with the flow of whatever society dictates (Hellenists and Herodians). The danger for the compromiser is dilution and ultimate disappearance of right principles altogether. The danger for the faithful is prideful legalism;

- Losing sight of the One before whom we bow, and His lowly, servant way.
- Losing love for others, whom we serve.
- Losing our love for the Word of God in our zeal to defend it.

Remember the wonderful beginning of the institution of the Scribes in godly Ezra, yet eventually declining to a prideful defence of hollow human traditions. Be warned and beware!

The Four Gospels

Henry Halley spoke of the pinnacle place of the four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ when he wrote, *"Bible books that precede are anticipatory, and those that follow are explanatory, of the Hero of the four gospels."* Indeed these four books of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John) are centre stage in this Book of God called the Bible, with the focus of their subject the pivotal *character* and *events* of all of human history!

It is a revealing thing to note that the emphasis of each of the gospels is heavily weighted toward the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we compare the percentage of coverage of the last week of Christ's life (Passion Week) with the whole of His earthly life and ministry we find the coverage of the Passion Week is about 33% (1/3) of the whole content of the gospels. To a surprisingly large degree the gospel accounts were written to record the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The events of that one week were the *crowning events* in the life of that *crowning character* of time and eternity. Those events, and the significance of them, were what the Lord wanted us to be sure to consider most carefully.

Why Four Gospels?

The question could be asked, why *four* gospels when one comprehensive one would do? Sure, in the O.T. there are some cases where portions are repeated, but here is the only *four*-fold repetition in God's Book! Why else such heightened repetition but for *supreme emphasis*, highlighting the most central person and events in all of history. The significance of this One called Jesus of Nazareth and what He did must not be underestimated. Yet is this not precisely what we find the unsaved world doing, whether pagan or religious? They fail to grasp the supreme significance of this most important Person and these most vital events.

The Synoptic Problem

Matthew, Mark, & Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. This term refers to these accounts tending to give the same basic view (*syn* – together, *opsis* – seeing) of Christ's life, relating many of the same words and events. John's gospel is the odd one out in many ways. The relationship of these first three gospel accounts with each other (i.e. whether copying took place), and the possibility of all three arising from some original source, is commonly referred to as the "Synoptic Problem".

But it is not necessary to consider the common perspective of these three gospels as a problem, or an indication of possible copying. It is not hard to imagine how the similarities might have developed. The events of Christ's life and the things He said would have been the essence of the Apostles' preaching throughout the remaining years of their lives after Pentecost. With time there would have developed a common understanding of these events and discourses among the Christians all over the world (Lk. 1:1-2). Some of these sayings and deeds of Christ may have been written down in some form or another, some not. But as the Spirit of God began to move the gospel writers to write, it would have been out of this shared knowledge, in common circulation throughout the Roman world, from which they would have drawn in the writing of their accounts. And so naturally there would be similarities in their writings. The odd thing is that John's account is so different. Yet under the direction of the Spirit of God, all four of the gospels relate differing thrusts or perspectives of Jesus, written at different times and for different readers.

Matthew – the Man

Though Matthew is not named in his gospel as the author, from very early writings (Papias, a student

of John) the first gospel is clearly attributed to him.

We know very little about Matthew. He was a Jew and a publican or collector of Roman taxes. He was also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus (Mk. 2:14). In his own gospel account we see Matthew only in his call to discipleship (Mat. 9:9; Mk. 2:14-17; Lk. 5:27-28), and his name is listed in the catalogue of the Twelve. Luke gives the added insight that it was Matthew who held a great feast at his own house for Jesus, and invited publicans and sinners, wanting to introduce his associates and friends to Jesus Christ. Luke informs us as well that at Christ's call Matthew simply stood up from his tax table and forsook all to follow Jesus (Lk. 5:28-32).

Matthew – the Book

Matthew's gospel presents Jesus as the promised Messiah and King of the Jews. This focus upon introducing Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah and King is likely why Matthew's genealogy of Christ is traced back to David and Abraham.

Compare the theme verse of Matthew 1:1;

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

The order in the second half of this verse is significant. First the offer of Jesus Christ was given

to Israel as *"the son of David",* their promised King. Upon Israel's rejection of Jesus as King, the Lord turned from them to take the offer of salvation to all nations. Israel's rejection and murder of Jesus, with the resulting opportunity for the Gentile world, was anticipated in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3, that *"in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"*, that Israel would respond as they did and that this would then open the door of opportunity to the world for blessing in God's covenant with Abraham. This is exactly what Matthew traces as well in the broad outline of his gospel account. First the clear demonstration to Israel of who Jesus Christ is in chapters 1-11. Then the demonstration of Israel's determined rejection from chapter 12, when the Jewish leaders began counselling together *"how they might destroy Him"* (vs. 14). Ultimately Jesus announced the removal of opportunity from the Jewish people at that time, to be given instead *"to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matt. 22:43).

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant, that very source of blessing to Israel and all nations, and of the Davidic Covenant, that Heir to David's throne (II Sam. 7). Perhaps this is why Matthew includes no account of Christ's ascension. As King of Israel His place is on earth, in Jerusalem, on the throne.

Matthew wrote primarily to Jewish readers. He answered the kinds of questions a Jew would ask about Jesus. Could Jesus trace His ancestry back to King David? *Yes*, Matthew traced Christ's legal right as King of the Jews, through Joseph, back to David. Did His life fulfil prophecy about the Messiah? *Yes*, Matthew continually quotes from the O.T., showing that Jesus is the fulfilment of the timeless O.T. promises of King and kingdom. For this reason Matthew's book is rightly placed as the first gospel, tying Old and New Testaments together like no other book. Matthew clearly shows that Jesus spoke as the prophets had said Messiah would speak, and did what they had said He would do. In your own reading of Matthew's gospel, note how many times the writer refers back to the O.T.

Of the four gospel writers only Matthew and John were actual followers of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

Mark – the Man

Mark, or John Mark, was the son of Mary who lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). This was the home to which Peter went when delivered from prison by the angel in Acts 12. Mark was also a cousin of Barnabus (Col. 4:10). And he was probably the young man who fled away naked into the night at

Christ's arrest (Mk. 14:51-52).

Mark started out with Paul and Barnabus on their 1st missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5), but soon quit (Acts 13:13). Paul later refused to take him on their 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36-39), and so Mark sailed with Barnabus to Cyprus. He later appears with Paul in Rome (Col. 4:10), and Paul requested his presence just before he was martyred (II Tim. 4:11). We know Mark was with Peter when Peter wrote his first book (I Pet. 5:13), and he was with Paul in his first imprisonment in Rome (Col. 4).

Peter and John were fishermen, Luke a doctor, Matthew a tax collector, but we are not told the nature of Mark's pre-ministry employment.

From the beginning fairly sound tradition informs us that Mark authored this gospel, and that his account relates the story of Jesus as told by Peter. From a human perspective Mark's book is perhaps a record of what he heard Peter tell countless times.

Mark – the Book

Mark's writing approach tends to be short, blunt, and down to earth, and consistent with the way he presents Jesus Christ. He seems to portray Jesus as the busy Servant or the Man of action, key words of the book being *"immediately"* or *"straightway"* (17

times). The key verse of the book is perhaps 10:45,

"For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many".

Most of the great sayings or discourses of Jesus do not appear in Mark's account. The focus of his book seems more to be on the Man of effective *action* rather than the Man of words. Perhaps for this reason Mark records no genealogy of Christ nor record of His birth. The servant of the Lord has no need of ancestry. It does not matter so much who He is or where he is from, but *how He serves*. And perhaps it is for this reason that the account of the ascension is included in Mark's gospel (16:19). Even as Enoch and Elijah lived for God and were taken up in their translation. So Jesus, as the Servant of the Lord, diligently did the will of the Father and therefore was One whom the Father delights to exalt. The way to highest honour is through lowliest servanthood. The way up is down. The way too exaltation is lowliness (compare Philippians 2).

Now remember how badly Mark started out, in running from the work of that first missionary effort (Acts 13:13). He joined on as a servant (Acts 13:5), yet later *"went not with them to the work"* (Acts 15:38). But remember how well he finished, for

Paul later referred to Mark as his fellow-labourer (Col. 4), and one very useful to him for ministry [II Tim. 4]. Behold the man whom the Spirit moved to write the gospel account portraying Jesus as the active, faithful Servant of the Lord. When the Lord forgives and forgets and restores, He *fully* restores!

Luke – the Man

Luke was a medical doctor, the *"beloved physician"* (Col. 4:14). He was a companion of Paul for much of his missionary journeying (Philemon 24), and was with the Apostle at the end of his earthly pilgrimage (II Tim. 4:11). Luke's gospel is an inspired account of what he had probably heard Paul preach all over the Roman Empire.

From a human perspective Luke drew from a *"perfect understanding"* (Lk. 1:3) *"of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up"* (Acts 1:1-2). He was confident of his familiarity with all the facts concerning Jesus Christ before he wrote and of his ability to speak with *"certainty of those things"* (Lk. 1:4).

It seems Luke was a Greek man who lived in the city of Philippi. He wrote both of his books (Gospel and Acts) for the benefit of an individual named Theophilus (Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1).

Luke – the Book

Luke presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, seemingly portraying His perfection as the ideal man. His record of Christ's genealogy is carried back through Mary to *Adam.* Thus Jesus is displayed as the Son of Man and the Seed of the woman, from that very first promise of a Redeemer in Gen. 3:15. Christ's ascension is included in Luke's account, perhaps because He as the Son of Man is showing the way of man upward, leading man to heaven.

Luke's gospel was written more for the Greek reader (written to Theophilus, 1:1-4). He writes with a beautifully simplified and dignified style. His gospel account has a particular focus on the prayer life of Jesus;

- While Matthew and Mark describe Christ's baptism when the Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, only Luke adds that these things took place while Jesus was praying (Lk. 3:21).
- While Matthew and Mark describe the Lord's calling of the 12 disciples, only Luke adds that Jesus first prayed all night (Lk. 6:12).
- Matthew and Mark mention Peter's great

confession, but only Luke adds that it happened as Jesus *"was alone praying"* (Lk. 9:18).

- Matthew and Mark describe the amazing revelation of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, but only Luke adds that this occurred when Jesus took Peter, James, and John *"up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed…"* (Lk. 9:28-29).

- We all know that Matthew and Mark record Jesus teaching the Lord's prayer, but only Luke explains that this well-known teaching occurred *"as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased"* (Lk. 11:1).

- We are well aware of what Matthew and Mark tell us of events on the cross, but Luke alone relates that Jesus prayed there, *"Father forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Lk. 23:34).

- The other gospel writers also inform us that at the moment of Christ's death He cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost, but it is Luke alone who explains that Jesus cried out in prayer, *"Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit"* (Lk. 23:46).

Luke seems to highlight scenes of sympathy and

forgiveness, Jesus as the Saviour of sinners, and the involvement of women and children more than any of the other gospel writers.

John – the Man

John was a fisherman, turned fisher of men. He was one of five partners in a fishing business based in Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, a business large enough to hire servants (Mk. 1:16-20). John's father was Zebedee (Mat. 4:21), and his mother seems to have been Salome (Mat. 27:56; Mk. 15:40). John may have been a personal acquaintance of the high Priest (Jn. 18:15-16). He was one of the three inner circle disciples (Peter, James, and John), and the one recognized as the closest to Jesus, 5 times referring to Himself as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7 & 20). Jesus nicknamed John *"Son of Thunder"* (Mk. 3:17), which was likely a reference to his hot-tempered nature (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:54). But how the Lord changed him, for in his later years we know him as one far more tender than tempestuous.

John and Peter were generally together and seem to have early become recognized as the leaders of the Twelve (Jn. 20:2; Acts 3:1, 11; 4:13; 8:14). Tradition informs us that during the later years of his life

John settled in Ephesus.

John – the Book

John wrote his gospel much later than the three Synoptic Gospels. The authorship of his gospel has never been seriously questioned.

John presents Jesus Christ as the Son of God;

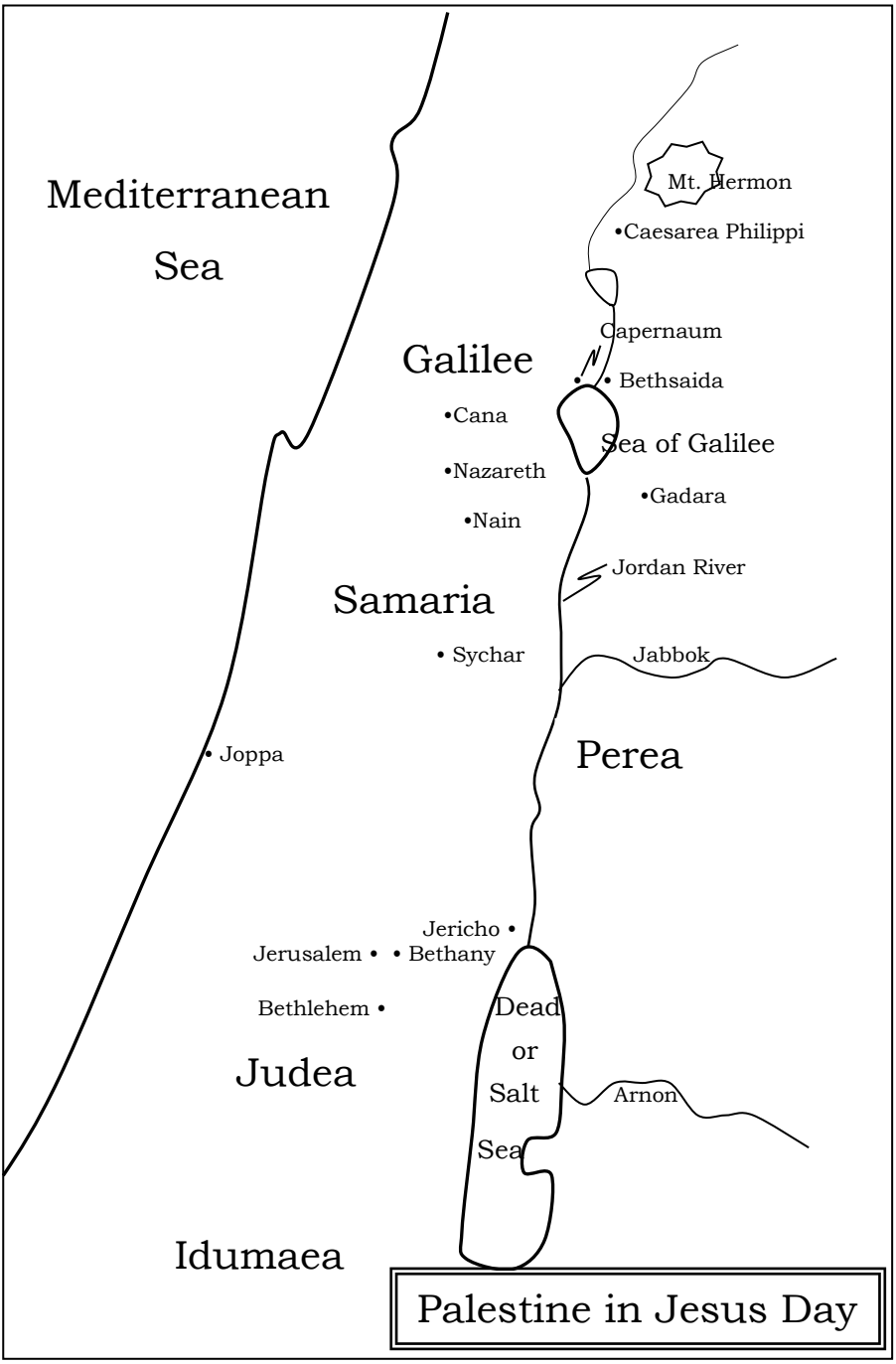
- From the first verse he wrote to emphasize the deity of Christ (*"…and the Word was God"*).
- John's is the only gospel in which we find Jesus referring to Himself as *"the Son of God"* (5 times).
- Seven miracles of Jesus are recorded in John's gospel, and these are given as "signs" that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God (20:30-31).
- John records several *"I AM"* statements of Christ (8:58; 11:25; 14:6 – compare Exodus 3:14).

While only seven miracles of all that Jesus did are recorded in John's gospel, half of John's account is made up of the words Jesus actually spoke, relating many of Christ's discourses not found in the other gospels. Thus the focus of John's gospel is opposite

to Mark's, centred more on the things Jesus *said* than the things He *did.*

Christ's ascension is not included in the gospel of John, perhaps because Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God who came down (compare John 3:13 & chapter 6). John is presenting Jesus as the way of God down to man. God came down, that man might go up. If man refuses God's way up, he will be cast down to his final judgment.

John recorded no human genealogy of Jesus Christ, perhaps because He is portrayed as the Eternal One – God from everlasting to everlasting, and *with* God from the beginning (1:1). In a sense John traced Christ's genealogy back to eternity in John 1:1.


Mediterranean
Sea
Mt. Hermon
•Caesarea Philippi
Capernaum
Galilee
• Bethsaida
•Cana
Sea of Galilee
•Nazareth
•Gadara
•Nain
Jordan River
Samaria
• Sychar
Jabbok
• Joppa
Perea
Jericho •
Jerusalem • • Bethany
Bethlehem •
Dead
or
Salt
Sea
Arnon
Judea
Idumaea
Palestine in Jesus Day

"Thy words were found,
and I did eat them;
and Thy word was unto me
the joy and rejoicing
of mine heart"

(Jeremiah 15:16)

Jesus Christ My Lord

Preparation

Birth to Baptism

Christ's Genealogies

Matthew (1:1-17) begins his book by immediately connecting Jesus with two characters and covenants important to the nation of Israel (Abraham & David).

Luke (3:23-38) connects Jesus with Adam as the Son of Man and promised Seed of the woman.

John (1:1) connects Jesus with eternity as the eternal Son of God.

Comparison of Genealogies

Matthew (1:1-17)	Luke (3:23-38)
Traces from Abraham forward to Christ	Traces from Jesus back to Adam
(*Israel's* Redeemer)	(*World's* Redeemer)
From father to son	From son to father
Follows David's reigning	Follows David's non-

line through Solomon and kings of Judah	reigning line through Solomon's brother Nathan

Observations

Note in I Chronicles 3:5 that Solomon and Nathan were both sons of David through Bathsheba. These are two separate lines forking under David.

Note that the legal right to the throne came through the father. From a human perspective sons followed fathers on the throne. Thus David's line through Solomon became the royal line or dynasty, and through Joseph to Christ.

Note how in Matthew 1:16 the genealogy stops short of Joseph (*"begat"* is conspicuously missing), and the phrase *"of whom"* is <u>feminine</u> singular in the Greek, referring to Mary, not Joseph (an obvious reference to the virgin birth).

Two Main Views Concerning Two Genealogies

1). Both lines converge on Joseph.

- But this cannot be true because of the curse upon Jeconiah (Matt. 1:11, see below).
- Joseph's line cannot be both through

Nathan to David (Luke 3:31) and through Solomon to David (Matthew 1:6).

2). Luke's genealogy is that of Mary, and Matthew's is that of Joseph.

- Touchy point – how can Joseph be of Jacob (Matt. 1:16) and of Eli (Luke 3:23)?
- Conclusion – Joseph must have been Jacob's son by birth, and Eli's son by marriage (Mary's father).

Coniah's Curse

- Jehoiakim (Eliakim) was cursed by God for cutting up and burning God's Word (Jer. 36:27-31).
- Jehoiachin (Coniah or Jeconiah) – Jer. 22:24-30.

"…for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah" (Jer. 22:30).

- This curse,
  - Forbade actual occupation of the throne by a descendant of David through

Jeconiah of David's reigning line.

- Denied prospering while on the throne.
- Extended to all generations following Jeconiah.
- Came to pass, since no descendant of David has occupied the throne of Israel since that time.

Yet David's legal or royal line and right to the throne passed on through the descendants of King Jeconiah.

Conclusions

If Jesus had been a physical descendant of Jeconiah, He would never be able to occupy or prosper upon David's throne, nor would He be able to fulfil O.T. kingdom prophecies concerning Him. But the remarkable answer of God to the problem of Jeconiah's curse was the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus received His physical right as an actual descendant of David through Mary's line, traced back through Nathan (Luke's genealogy). This was Christ's divine or prophetic right as a physical son or blood relative of David, actually conceived of Mary (Lk. 1:31; Acts 13:23) as the prophets had said he would be. Jesus apparently received his legal right to David's throne through

Joseph. He was the legal, though not the physical, firstborn son of Joseph. Thus Jesus received the legal or royal right to David's throne while effectively skirting the curse.

Birth in Bethlehem – Luke 2:11-38

- Christ's circumcision eight days after His birth – Luke 2:22-38.
- Mary's purification – 33 days.

Return to Nazareth – Luke 2:39

Return to Bethlehem?

- They were living in a house in Bethlehem when the wise men came (Matt. 2:11).
- Jesus was a toddler, not an infant at that point (compare Matthew 2:7 & 16).
- Perhaps Joseph later decided that since Jesus was born in Bethlehem (the city of David) in fulfilment of prophecy, He should live and grow up there. Perhaps an element of human manipulation, thinking a Judean up-bringing would provide better credentials? But God overruled, driving them to Egypt and then back to Nazareth of Galilee.

Bethlehem to Egypt – Matthew 2:13-18

Egypt to Nazareth – Matthew 2:19-23

- Joseph probably intended to move his family back to Bethlehem, but instead was moved to return to Galilee (vs. 22), finally settling in Nazareth.

Inauguration – Obscurity

Nazareth to Jordan – John 1:28-34; Matthew 3:13-17

- Jesus was baptized by John at Bethabara or Bethany beyond Jordan, where He received the Holy Spirit without measure (Jn. 3:34).

Jordan to Wilderness – Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13

- Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days, where He was tempted by Satan;
    - Stones to bread – It is written, *"Man shall not live…" – God's supply.*
    - Pinnacle jump – It is written, *"Thou shalt not tempt…" – God's way.*

- Kingdoms of the earth – It is written, *"Thou shalt worship…"* – *God's worship.*

Wilderness to Jordan and Galilee – John 1:35-51

- After 40 days in the wilderness Jesus returned to the Jordan where He began to gain followers (John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, & Nathaniel).
- Simon was named Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek), meaning "stone".

Wedding at Cana – John 2:1-11

- Christ's first miracle – water to wine.
  - In response to His mother's simple, quiet request in faith.
  - To demonstrate His glory (vs. 11).
  - Authentication, for His disciples believed in Him (vs. 11).

To Judea for Passover – John 2:13-3:36

- Only John tells us about this early ministry in Judea.
- Jewish preparations for Passover feast.

    - Tombs were freshly whitewashed.
    - Sacrificial animals were made ready.
    - Money-changers' booths and sales offices were set up in the temple area.

- When Jesus went up to the Passover feast in Jerusalem He cleared the temple of sellers and money-changers (Jn. 2:13-17). This was a sign to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Ps. 69:9). He would give the same sign again when He entered Jerusalem at the end of His earthly ministry (Matt. 21:12-13). Christ's words at this event later led His disciples to believe the Bible (Jn. 2:22).

- Nicodemus came by night (Jn. 3:1-21).
    - *"Marvel not…Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"* (vs. 7 & 10). Consider what Nicodemus should have understood concerning regeneration or new birth from Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27.

- Note the Christology of John the Baptist (what he understood about Christ) in John 3:23-36.

The Synoptic gospels largely skip over these first months of Christ's ministry in Judea, and pick up with His great Galilean campaign.

Judea to Samaria – John 4:1-42

- This was the first time Jesus openly stated that He is the Messiah (Jn. 4:25-26).
- While the disciples were thoughtless concerning the lost condition of the Samaritans, the Lord and the woman at the well were zealous for souls and instrumental in a small revival there in the city of Sychar.
- The Lord sought to lift the eyes of the disciples to the world, beyond just their own Jewish nation (vs. 34-38).

Thoughts on John's Gospel

- Chapter 1 – Identification (many names of Christ).
- Chapter 2 – Authentication (first miracle).
- Chapter 3 – Regeneration (so great salvation).
- Chapter 4 – Revelation (to the world) & Revival.

- Chapter 5 – Confrontation.

In the midst of the John 5 controversy with the Jewish leaders over the healing of the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, Jesus affirmed,

- His equality with God;
    - Equal in work (vs. 19-20).
    - Equal in resurrection power (vs. 21).
    - Equal in judging (vs. 22 & 27).
    - Equal in honour (vs. 23).
    - Equal in self-existence (vs. 26).
- His truthfulness (5 witnesses);
    - Witness of John (vs. 34).
    - Witness of His works (vs. 36).
    - Witness of the Father (vs. 37).
    - Witness of the O.T. (vs. 39).
    - Witness of Moses (vs. 45).
- The guilt of the leaders;
    - You have not heard His voice (vs. 37).
    - You do not have His Word abiding in

you (vs. 38).

- You have not believed in the One whom He sent (vs. 38).
- You will not come to Me that you might have life (vs. 40).
- You do not have the love of God in you (vs. 42).
- You do not receive Me, though I come in My Father's name (vs.43).
- You do not believe the writings of Moses (vs. 46- 47).
- ***WOW!!***

Popularity – Galilean Ministry

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of Him through all the region and round about" (Lk. 4:14).

Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, became Christ's home base during the days of His ministry in Galilee. Most of His work was done and ministry years spent in this northern province. It was during this time that;

- Jesus read from Isaiah at the synagogue in Nazareth and applied the prophesy to Himself (Lk. 4:16-21).
    - At first they were quite impressed with His gracious words and manner (Lk. 4:22). But then Jesus confronted their unbelief in contrast with believing Gentiles (Lk. 4:23-27). How very quickly their superficial warmth went frigid, their underlying rejection came to the surface, and they tried to kill Him (Lk. 4:28-30)!
- Jesus began to officially call His disciples.
    - John 1 – First exposure of some of the disciples to Jesus.
    - Mark 1:16-20 – First call – disciples followed for a while and then went back to fishing.
    - Luke 5:1-11 – Second call – disciples followed for good after Jesus demonstrated His power.
    - Matthew 9:9 – Matthew was called and immediately followed.
    - Luke 6:12-16 – With a growing following, and after a night devoted to

prayer, Jesus chose the twelve.

- Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).
    - Highlighting *inner* and *outer* righteousness.
    - Displaying a kingdom that is spiritual and otherworldly, yet very practical.
    - Lifting the Law of Moses to a higher plane (*"ye have heard…but I say unto you"*), while at the same time pushing aside the foolishness of appended, hollow human traditions.
    - Christ's great sermon showed the wisdom of the King as displayed in His words. This was an authenticating sign of the Messiah promised by the prophets (Isa. 11:1-3; 50:4).
- Jesus showed the power of the King displayed in His mighty works (Matt. 8-9).
    - At least a dozen miracles listed one after the other in a most impressive register.
    - When John the Baptist sent the query from prison whether Jesus was the very

Messiah for which they waited (Matt. 11:2-6), Jesus pointed to His mighty works in comparison with Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 35:5-6).

The King of kings was on display before His nation. His ancestry, His fulfilment of prophesy, the wisdom of His words and the power of His works all combined to leave no doubt who He is. And by His miracles, not only did Jesus show Himself to be the Christ (Messiah), but He also displayed the conditions that will exist in the Messiah's Millennial Kingdom;

- All satanic/demonic power cast out.
- The natural world completely under Messiah's control (power over wind, waves, natural processes).
- The utmost perfection of the body (power over disease and deformity).
- Resurrection of the dead.
- The unseen spiritual world in contact and communication with the physical world (transfiguration, the Father speaking from heaven).

Opposition

Christ's period of popularity rose to a pinnacle and then began a downward slide with a rapid string of events;

- John the Baptist was killed (Matt. 14:1-12).
- When Jesus heard the news He took His disciples across the sea to a desert place (Matt. 14:13).
- The crowds followed and Jesus was moved with compassion and healed their sick (Matt. 14:14).
- Then He fed the 5000 (Matt. 14:15-21).
- This resulted in their desire to make Him king, but for the wrong reasons (Jn. 6:22-26).
- He sifted among His followers with the hard sermon of John 6:27-65.
- The loss (which was no loss) – *"From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him"* (Jn. 6:66). Jesus was purposely removing the weeds.
- The gain (which was gold!) –
    - (To the twelve), *"Will ye also go away?"*

- (The response), *"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Jn. 6:67-69).

It was during this time of falling popularity that Jesus began to travel with His disciples to areas outside of Galilee;

- Phoenicia (Mk. 7:24-30) – where He cast the demon out of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter.
- Decapolis (Mk. 7:31-8:9) – where He fed the 4000 (8:1-9).
- Iturea (Mk. 8:27-9:29) – where He was transfigured on a high mountain (Mk. 9:1-8).
- Then Jesus left Galilee and went south to Judea (Mk. 10), where He raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:1-45).
    - Mixed response to the raising of Lazarus;
        - Some were persuaded (Jn. 11:45).
        - Some were plotting (Jn. 11:46-54).

- Compare Hebrews 4:2.

Finally Jesus turned His face toward Jerusalem, passing through Jericho along the way, where the sight of Bartimaeus and the soul of Zacchaeus were restored (Lk. 18:35-43).

Passion Week

The opposition of the Jews had been a continually growing thing throughout the years of Christ's ministry. There were constant controversies with the Jewish leaders over their traditions, beliefs, and practices. But when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey (Matt. 21:1-11), fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 and marking the end of the 69th week of Daniel, He was riding into a den of plotting, ravening wolves. Again, some sang His praise and some planned His murder. According to Daniel 9:26, after the 69th week of Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks (sevens of years) there would be two events to follow; Messiah would be cut off and Jerusalem would be destroyed. Therefore it is not surprising that these two events were most prominent in Christ's mind and message during His final week (Matt. 21:37-39; 22:7; 23:38; 24:2; Lk. 19:43-44; Lk. 23:27-31).

He cleansed the temple the second time in Matthew 21 (vs.12-13), again displaying Himself as Messiah.

Challenge after challenge was brought against Him by the Jewish leaders in Matthew 22.

He bluntly denounced the godless Jewish leaders as blind hypocrites in Matthew 23.

He gave the great Olivet Discourse on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24 & 25, speaking to His disciples of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and His own someday 2nd coming.

He ate the Passover meal with His disciples in the upper room, instituting the Lord's Supper, and then left for Gethsemane where He was captured in Matthew 26.

He was tried repeatedly, brutally beaten, mocked, crucified, and buried in Matthew 27.

But thank God for Matthew 28, for Jesus Christ gloriously rose from the dead, and has been proven alive through *"many infallible proofs"*.

Ponder Points

What a powerful impact upon the world through the life of a man after 30 years of preparation and only 3½ years of intense ministry!

Christ's greater impact was in His death rather than in His life.

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Jesus came to give and serve rather than to be served (Mk. 10:45).

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The popularity of the world's greatest man and minister was very short lived. True ministry for the true God will not maintain popularity in this world (II Tim. 3:12).

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The rise of opposition to Christ's work did not hinder or slow His work.

~~~~~~~~~~

Though Jesus Christ was so hated, mankind could not touch Him until the Father's appointed hour. Compare Revelation 11:7.

"Neither have I gone back
from the commandment of His lips;
I have esteemed
the words of His mouth
more than my necessary food"

(Job 23:12)

The Book of Acts (Part I)

In this first look at the book of Acts I would like to stand back a bit and look on the book from a broader perspective, surveying the key themes and characters and movements. In the next section we will turn our attention to some of the particulars; details such as the sermons, the methods of outreach, the reactions of the listeners, church councils, etc.

When we consider the N.T. as a whole, we find that the main N.T. focus is the church. The four gospel accounts record Israel's treacherous rejection of their King, resulting in His turn to the Gentiles. The church is *predicted* in the gospels (Matt. 16:18 – *"on this rock will I build My church"*). The book of Acts records the early development of the church, the carrying of the good news of Jesus Christ out from Jerusalem, throughout Palestine and westward throughout the Roman Empire. Acts records basically the first three decades of church history. The epistles provide detailed instruction and example for the church and church leadership. Then the book of Revelation records the breath-taking future of the church, as the Bride of Christ reigning with her Lord. Thus;

- In the gospels the *kingdom* is prominent,

while in Acts and the epistles the *church* is prominent.

- In the gospels the focus is Christ in the *world*, while in Acts and onward the focus is Christ in His *church*.
- In the gospels it was Christ *with* us, while in the rest of the N.T. it is Christ *in* us, through the indwelling Spirit of God.
- In the gospel accounts the gospel message is *introduced* into the world, while in the rest of the N.T. the gospel message is *expanded*, both in reach and in understanding.
- The gospel message,
    - Is *introduced* in the gospels.
    - Is *flung far and wide* in Acts.
    - Is *explained* in the epistles.
    - Is *completed* in Revelation.

The book of Acts is a book of action, and thus appropriately named. It is the record of *the gospel in action*. And that action is the work of outreach and evangelism.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, the same author of the third gospel named after him. Both

of Luke's books were written for the benefit of a man named Theophilus, a man known by Dr. Luke but unknown to us. Acts is obviously Dr. Luke's sequel to the gospel record of the matchless life of Jesus Christ. By describing his gospel account as a record *"of all that Jesus began both to do and teach"* in Acts 1:1, Luke implies that his second book is the sequel, the story of what Jesus Christ *continued* to do. It is the record of Christ's resurrection life lived out through the Holy Spirit working in His church. The gospels describe what *Christ* began to do and say, and Acts describes what the *"other Comforter"*, the *Holy Spirit,* continued to do and say in and through the followers of Christ.

The Spirit of God is very prominent in the book of Acts. We find reference to the Holy Spirit about 55 times in the book. Compare the two great movements in the first two chapters of Acts;

- Chapter 1 – Christ leaving (ascending into heaven).
- Chapter 2 – The Spirit coming (descending to earth).

This coming of the Holy Spirit in Christ's stead to a very new and different relationship with believers is a key point of transition in the book.

The book of Acts provides something of a key to

understanding and placing the epistles. Try to imagine what would be missing if we did not have this N.T. history book. We would not know what local churches are or how they began. We would not know about that Spirit-led transition to the inclusion of Gentiles into the concern of the apostles and into the church. We would not know that the apostles and early church actually did as they were told, going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature. We would not know much of how the gospel of Christ actually affected the hearts of men. We would know nothing of how the author of most of the N.T. epistles, the Apostle Paul, came on the scene, or where those who received his letters came from, both churches and individuals. There would be a horrible void in our understanding without this book.

Perhaps our greatest benefit in the book of Acts is the immense encouragement this book brings to us. Through the message of Acts we are;

- Encouraged by what the Spirit can do through lives given to the Lord.
- Encouraged by the great advances of the church, even into a stubbornly resistant world.
- Encouraged to *join* the work of reaching our

world for Jesus Christ.

- Encouraged by the example;
    - Of methods of reaching people that work.
    - Of how to deal with false beliefs.
    - Of how to resolve internal problems in the church.
- Encouraged by faithful examples to persist in God's great work, even in the face of appalling persecution and death.

It seems likely that Luke wrote the book of Acts while with Paul in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment. The book certainly could not have been completed before that time, since that is where the record of events ends in the last chapter. That first prison term of Paul's was likely in about 59-61 A.D., in the early days of the reign of Emperor Nero. Therefore Luke may have written about 61 A.D., toward the end of Paul's imprisonment there.

Though the close of the book of Acts leaves Paul still in a Roman prison, there is no anxious indication that his death was imminent at that point. Though not stated in the N.T. record, it is likely that Paul was released from that imprisonment soon after Luke finished writing Acts.

It appears that the Apostle travelled and laboured for a few more years of evangelistic ministry, was finally arrested again, perhaps in Troas, and found himself back in a Roman prison a second time. Paul was finally executed shortly before Nero's suicide in 68 A.D.

Throughout the book of Acts the theme is all forward thrust, extension, advancement, and multiplication. It is a record of intense pioneering endeavour. There is absolutely nothing idle about the book. It is amazing to consider the incredible progress the church made in the first thirty years of her existence! On the whole, the advance of the book is westward, from Jerusalem to Rome, and broadening from a Jewish audience to the world.

The key verse of the book would surely be **Acts 1:8**, laying out the outline of progress recorded within these 28 chapters;

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Jewish religion and culture had laid the groundwork of a belief in one God, the O.T. revelation of the true God, the expectancy of a Messiah, and the provision of salvation through

Him. Greek culture had provided a universal language, making communication possible throughout the Roman world. Roman culture had provided stable government with law, order, and relative justice, roads, bridges, and readily available sea travel. All combining to make this one of the most brilliant time periods in the development of the church of Christ on earth – *her golden age!*

Survey of Acts

Peter's name is found 58 times in the book of Acts, almost entirely within the first 12 chapters. His name drops out of the Acts account from the end of chapter 12, when Peter was delivered from prison by the angel. On the other hand the names "Paul" or "Saul" occur about 160 times in the book of Acts, with the overwhelming majority of those from Acts 13 and onwards. Peter and Paul are clearly the key human characters of the book. And there is a notable swapping of attention from Peter to Paul at the transition from chapters 12 to 13, just as there is a transition from the presence of Jesus Christ to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit between chapters 1 and 2.

With this change of key human characters there is also a change in location. In the first 12 chapters, where the presence of Peter dominates, the action is

largely located in Jerusalem and Judea. But from chapter 13 we are off to the west with Paul on his three great missionary journeys.

With that change of key characters and locations there is also a change of audience. In the first 12 chapters, where the presence of Peter dominates, the audience is largely still that of the Jewish people. But from chapter 13, where the presence of Paul dominates, it is off to the world of Gentiles – to the Jews in the synagogues first, and then to the Gentiles.

Understand what was taking place. It was to Peter that the Lord Jesus Christ had said, *"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 16:19). It would be Peter who would unlock and open for all men the door of baptism with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ or the church, that very divine promise that John the Baptist had spoken of and Jesus had so clearly affirmed. And so *"when the day of Pentecost had fully come"* (Acts 2:1), that day of Pentecost to which all of the previous feasts of Pentecost had pointed, that day when the Spirit of God came down on that small band of 120 Jewish men and women gathered in the upper room, it was *Peter* who then stood up and preached in Acts 2 to the gathered crowd of devout Jews, come from all corners of the world for the

feast. It was *Peter* who unlocked and opened the door of the church there to ***Jewish believers*** in Jesus Christ. It was *Peter* who unlocked and opened the door to the blessing of the baptism with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ to the ***Jew***, there in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost.

- Acts 2 – Peter preached to the devout Jews, and 3000 were saved, baptized, and followed the Lord.

- Acts 3 – Peter healed the lame man, and preached again to the Jews, and 5000 were saved.

Then the response of the people is shown in contrast to the response of the Jewish leaders.

- Acts 4 – Peter preached to the Jewish leadership when he and John were taken and questioned. They were threatened and released.

- Acts 5 – Peter again preached to the Jewish leadership, and they were beaten, yet came away *"rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"* (vs. 41).

- Acts 6-7 – Stephen was raised up to preach to the same Jewish leadership and was stoned to death by them.

After the death of this second great martyr for the faith (after Jesus) there was a distinct turning. The opportunities began to dry up for the Jews. The attention immediately began to turn outward in Acts 8 as persecution scattered the church from Jerusalem into the surrounding world, and Philip found fruitful ministry among the Samaritans (half-Jews) and in the heart of a man from Ethiopia.

- Acts 8 – Samaritans saved. An Ethiopian saved. And Peter unlocks and opens the door of the church to ***Samaritan believers.*** They were saved under Philip's ministry, but *Peter* carried the keys to their Spirit baptism into the body of Christ.

"…and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

As the Jewish leaders reaffirmed their determined rejection of the truth, in fulfilment of Christ's words, the movement began to range wider into Judea and Samaria – away from Jerusalem and toward the world. And in direct connection with this shift of the Spirit's focus, that man who would become the greatest missionary to the Gentile world immediately comes into view.

- Acts 7-8 – We are introduced for the first time

to Saul (7:58; 8:1-3).

- Acts 9 – The conversion of Saul, the Lord's *"chosen vessel"* to bear His name to the Gentiles (vs. 15).
- Acts 10-11 – Continuing the shift of focus to the world, Peter unlocks and opens the door of the church to ***Gentile believers.***
    - Acts 10 – Peter is convinced and makes the opening.
    - Acts 11 – The rest of the church are convinced.
- Acts 12 – Peter is delivered from prison, and James is delivered to glory.

Summary

Acts 1-7 – The gospel still to the *Jews*.

Acts 8 – The gospel to the *Samaritans*.

Acts 9-11 – The gospel to the *Gentiles*.

Picture in your mind the great barrel of the gospel cannon slowly pivoting on its turret, away from Jerusalem and to the outside world. And this is the point where Peter appropriately drops from the scene. He had opened the door for all three main

racial groups to the baptism with the Spirit into the body of Christ, into the church. And the shift of focus was now fully prepared for taking the gospel to the world.

- *"…both in Jerusalem"* (1:8) – Covered!
- *"…and in all Judea"* – Done!
- *"…and in Samaria"* – Accomplished!
- *"…and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* – Loaded, aimed, and ready to fire, Sir! Coming right up through that specially chosen vessel, Saul of Tarsus, who would become Paul the Apostle.

Do you see how the geographical movements of the book of Acts are the unfolding of 1:8? So from Acts 13 and onward the attention of the book is on the regions beyond, *"the uttermost part of the earth"*, and on that man especially fitted by God for that task.

Paul's Westward Journeys

With Acts 13 Paul replaced Peter as the key figure, the world replaced Israel as the focus of God's attention, and Antioch in Syria replaced Jerusalem as the base of operations. Antioch became the sending city of the church.

Notice in 13:2 that it was not Paul's plan nor the church's design, but the *Holy Spirit* who began the new effort of world evangelism. It is the heart of God that the world be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ! And it is the Spirit of God who does the sending.

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Ponder Points

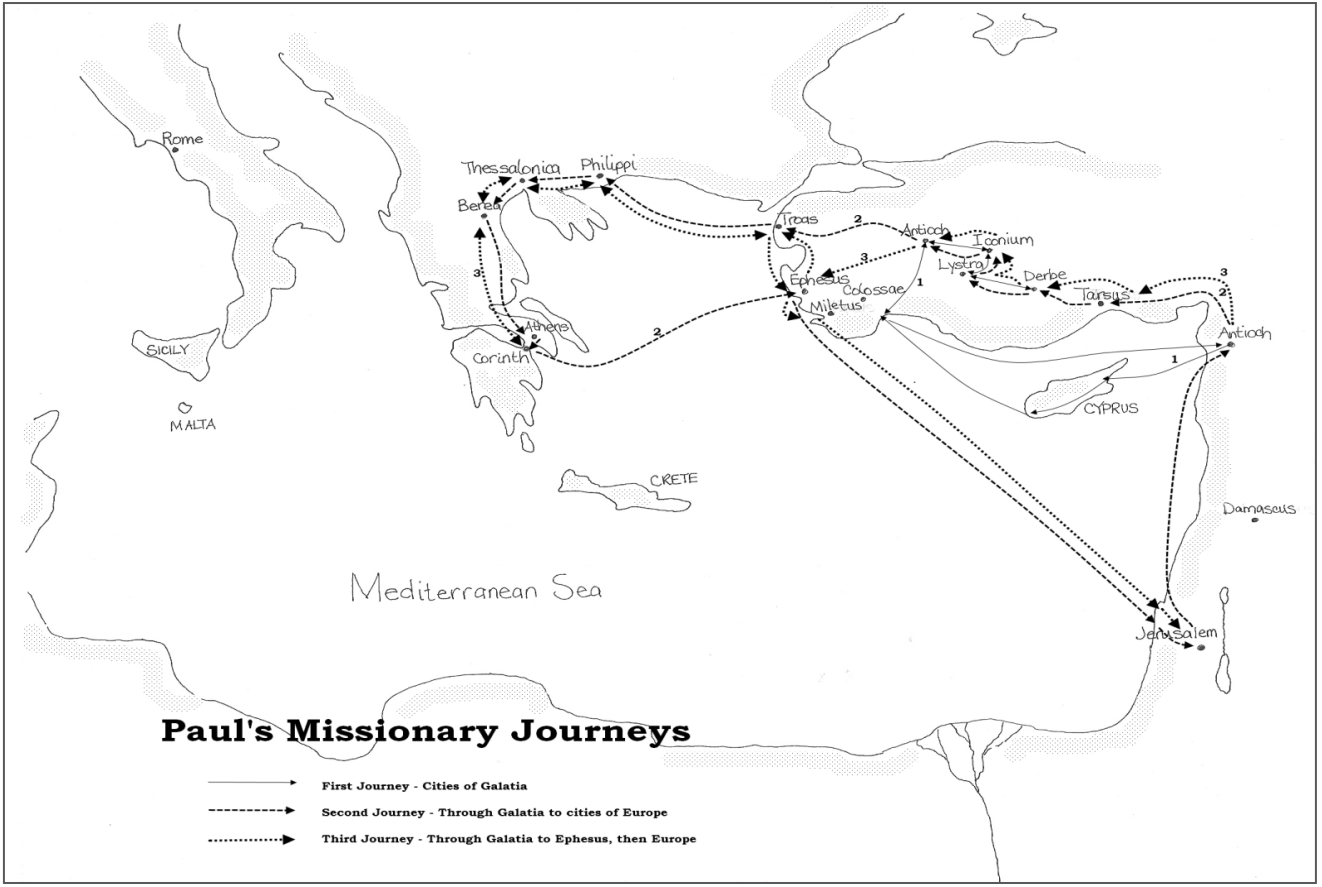
Note the last verse of the book of Acts. What might this verse suggest?

The gospel was rejected and forbidden by the Jews from the beginning. That is why Jesus was crucified and Paul was found a prisoner of Rome in Acts 28. But the Gentiles were not so consistently rejecting. This had been the consistent response to Jesus Christ since the troubling announcement of His birth in Jerusalem by the seeking gentile wise men (Matt. 2:3). So Acts 28:31 looks beyond to the confident furtherance of the Word of God beyond the pages of Acts.

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The book of Acts does not *explain* what was happening, but merely *reported* what was happening. We must go to the epistles for explanation. Be very careful building doctrine from

Acts alone.


Rome
SICILY
MALTA
Thessalonica
Philippi
Berea
Troas
Antioch
Iconium
Lystra
Derbe
Tarsus
Ephesus
Colossae
Miletus
Athens
Corinth
Antioch
CYPRUS
CRETE
Damascus
Mediterranean Sea
Jerusalem
Paul's Missionary Journeys
First Journey - Cities of Galatia
Second Journey - Through Galatia to cities of Europe
Third Journey - Through Galatia to Ephesus, then Europe

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord;
and in His law doth he meditate
day and night.
And he shall be like a tree
planted by the rivers of water,
that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
his leaf also shall not wither;
and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

(Psalm 1:2-3)

The Book of Acts (Part II)

In our first look at the book of Acts we examined the book from a broader perspective, in an overview fashion, looking to the key themes and characters and movements. We noticed how the theme of Acts is the active witness and extension of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the world, summarized in Acts 1:8. In that verse we are confronted with Christ's very last words in His final moments with His disciples before ascending to His Father's presence. His words concerned what was *His* concern, the expanding witness of His church to the ends of the earth. It was the crucial thought Jesus meant to leave remaining in the hearts of His disciples; their commission, or *God's mission* through them on this earth (and through us).

From the beginning, and throughout the Old Testament days, God's plan had been to bless the *world* through what He was working within that one small nation of Israel. In a sense the book of Acts is a commentary on the ongoing outworking of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), blessing first the descendants of Abraham and then *"all families of the earth"*. Acts is a wonderful record of how God used that nation stemming from Abraham as a channel to bring the blessing of salvation in Jesus

Christ to all the world. Do not miss the fact that He used Luke, a *Gentile*, to write the book! That significant factor is a token representation of the thrust of the book of Acts; God taking the blessing of His salvation to the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, through the work of both Jews and Gentiles.

We noticed in the previous chapter how there is a movement of the attention within the book of Acts;

- From the presence of Jesus Christ (chapter 1), to the presence and work of the Spirit of God in the church (chapter 2 onward).
- From Jerusalem, out through the surrounding provinces, and then westward through Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, and on to Rome.
- From a Jewish audience to Gentiles.
- From Peter to Paul, God's missionary to the Gentiles.

The action of the book begins in Jerusalem, with the infant church boldly preaching and growing while suffering persecution. The persecution rises to a climax in chapters 7 & 8. And then the turning begins, outward and away from Jerusalem and from a Jewish audience only.

Now we are going to look more closely at some of the detail of the book of Acts. This will only scratch the surface, but hopefully with enough to get you started in your own more detailed study.

Sermons & Preachers

The stunning events around the Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost are found in Acts 2. How very fitting that the beginning of the harvest of believers from out of the world into the church should come at that yearly feast marking the beginning of the harvest season in Israel. With the surprising, supernatural events of that very special Pentecost, a crowd was immediately gathered. Peter then stood before them and boldly preached his first sermon to that gathered crowd. With the coming of the indwelling Spirit he was suddenly a very different Peter from the back-peddling coward who had so ardently denied His Lord at Christ's trial.

In his sermon Peter was careful to make a very clear point of the fact that all that was happening was in fulfilment of prophecy;

- The Spirit's coming – 2:16-21.
- The resurrection – 2:25-28, 31.
- Christ's ascension – 2:34-35.

Peter does the same in his next sermon in chapter 3;

- Christ's crucifixion – 3:18.
- Christ's coming – 3:22-23 (do not miss the very solemn warning).
- He pointed to *"all the prophets"* – 3:18 & 24.

And notice Peter's emphasis on the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ;

- This was the pivotal point of his Pentecost sermon – 2:24, 31, 34.
- And of his next sermon – 3:15.
- And before the Jewish council – 4:2, 10; 5:30.
- And at Cornelius's house – 10:40.

Christ's resurrection was the emphasis of Paul's later preaching as well, in Antioch (note the particularly great attention there in 13:30-37), in Thessalonica (17:3), in Athens (17:18, 31), in Jerusalem (22:6-11), before Felix (24:15, 21) and before Festus and Agrippa (26:8, 23). These men went out as the Lord's witnesses, but particularly as witnesses of *Christ's resurrection*.

Notice their willingness to boldly confront and accuse of sin (2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10-11; 5:30; 7:51-

53), and to command repentance (2:38; 3:19). Christ's men were not shy to justly point out sin against God.

Then, while we are considering the nature of the preaching of the apostles, note the tremendous effect of Paul's conversion (Acts 9) upon him. Ever after that great moment of transformation how ready Paul was to tell the story of what the Lord had done in his own life (Acts 22 & 26; I Cor. 9:1; 15:1-8). Oh may you and I be ever ready to relate our story of what the Lord has done for and in us.

Stephen, a man appointed as a servant of the church in Jerusalem, was a gifted and eloquent man whose ability to defend his faith could not be refuted by his enemies (6:8-15). We see a natural progression in Stephen's rise to ministry;

- He proved himself as a man walking with the Lord and filled with the Spirit.
- He proved himself as a faithful *servant* (waiting on tables – 6:1-7).
- He proved himself as a faithful *witness* (6:8-7:53).
- He proved himself as a faithful *martyr* for the Lord (7:54-60).

Heroes begin as faithful servants in the small

matters of the Lord's work. Both the practical and the preaching aspects of Stephen's ministry bore fruit for eternity;

- We see the fruit of his faithful *works* in 6:7.
- We see the fruit of his faithful *words* in 8:1ff.

Note the thrust of Stephen's sermon to the Jewish leadership in chapter 7. This was God's final effort with this notoriously hard-hearted council. Stephen pointed out those in Israel's troubled history who were rejected by their own people, <u>yet rose to rule over their rejecting brothers</u>;

- Joseph (7:9-18 – N.B. vs. 10).
- Moses (7:19-36 – N.B. vs. 35).
- ***<u>Christ</u>!!*** (Peter's words – 4:11).

Stephen preached a 49-verse Bible survey lesson, with a 3-verse application (vs. 51-53) to Bible scholars who were *ignorant*. He was holding up the mirror of God's Word to this eminent group of Jewish leaders, pointing out that *they* were,

- *Scoundrels*, just like Joseph's scheming, jealous, hateful brothers (vs. 9) – *<u>and</u> <u>worse</u>!*
- *Self-willed proud-hearts*, just like those who challenged Moses (vs. 27-28) – *<u>and</u> <u>worse</u>!*

- *Sensual*, just like the Egypt-leaning calf worshippers (vs. 39-41) – *and worse!*

- Compare vs. 51 – *"as your fathers did, so do ye".*

Wow!! How blunt the Lord, through this preacher of righteousness. How persevering the Lord's long-suffering with them! Here was their last chance, and yet they sealed their resolute rejection of the truth with the blood of that faithful man!

Responses to Trouble

When Stephen was put to death nothing was really lost, all was gained. Stephen gained, for he was forever delivered from all enemies, gaining the presence of His Saviour. Far from hindering the forward thrust of the church, persecution merely scattered the work and the Word like seeds broadcast across the fertile field of the world (8:1-4);

- Phillip went to Samaria where great fruit resulted (8:5-25).

- Phillip continued preaching along the coast from Azotus (Ashdod) to Caesarea (8:40).

- Peter went from Lydda down to Joppa (9:32-43).

- Peter to Cornelius's house (10), where the Gentiles were brought into the church.
- Some went to Antioch, where a pivotal church was formed (11:19-24).

This is ever the Lord's way through tragedy. Compare the calamity of Paul's imprisonment, yet resulting in much fruit for eternity with many of his epistles written from that confinement.

See how the believers prayed together when persecution arose, and then just carried on preaching (4:23-31). They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Lord's name, and just carried on preaching, *undaunted* (5:41-42). Peter was sleeping soundly in prison while awaiting his execution, *unafraid* (12:7). Paul and Silas sang into the night after they had been stripped, beaten, and locked in the prison stocks, *undiscouraged* (16:22-25).

Glimpses of Church Life

The church met together constantly for prayer, communion, and teaching (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 41-41, 46-47).

The church members sacrificed their material things in order to care for brothers in need (2:44-

45; 4:32, 34-37).

The church prayed together in the face of persecution (4:23-32).

Nothing could slow the progress of the church except sin within. The first major struggles in this regard arose with the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). With the Apostle Peter presiding, the sin of this couple was exposed and judged with such force and finality that a genuine fear of offending the Lord shivered through the church (5:5, 11). Note well the manner and positive effect of church discipline. Peter's actions were quick and fair and strong against wrong. Do not miss how this right approach did not diminish the church, but rather increased it. The principle is given in Proverbs 25:5 & I Corinthians 5 – *"purge out the old leaven".* We must be careful not to linger too long before taking difficult but right actions for the sake of purity.

They appointed Spirit-filled men to resolve major problems that arose (6:1-8).

They met to discuss and resolve disputes (chapter 11 & 15) with a humble, teachable spirit, and were willing to change their perception of things as the Lord revealed His will (11:18). In chapter 11 Gentiles were accepted into the church. Ancient

prejudices could not stand before the power of this gospel message (remember Christ's disregard of such petty human limitations in John 4). In chapter 15 the church signed her name to her first great creed; salvation by grace through faith alone, and not a matter of works. Recommendations were also passed at this second council toward holy living, some guidelines relating merely to an inoffensive life before the Jews (15:19-20).

They prayed into the night together at the crisis of Peter's imprisonment and impending execution (chapter 12). I am wondering if there was any such united, earnest prayer for Paul in his similar situation in a Roman prison at the end. Maybe this is part of what Paul meant when he wrote in II Timothy 4:16, *"…no man stood with me, but all men forsook me".* Had the intensity of the early church already begun to fade by then?

The church at Antioch was quick to acknowledge the Spirit's leading in the call of Paul and Silas (13:1-3). Note that it was an independent church. No appeal to the Jerusalem church (or "Pope" Peter) was considered necessary.

Thoughts on Tactics

They *"spoke boldly"* (18:26) and disputed for the

sake of the truth (19:8-9).

Paul demonstrated unbounded zeal, even before he was saved (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:13-14). He began preaching of Jesus Christ immediately after salvation (Acts 9:19-20).

Paul demonstrated unwavering perseverance. Even stoning did not stop him (14:19-21). This steadfast endurance was one of the keys to his great success in the gospel ministry. He fully preached the gospel and finished his course (Acts 20:24-26; II Tim. 4:7; Rom. 15:19).

Paul carefully maintained a pure conscience;

- This was his testimony of himself (Acts 23:1; 24:16; II Tim. 1:3).
- He was honest with God's Word (I Cor. 2:17; 4:2).
- Note Paul's focus on a pure conscience when instructing Timothy (I Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9).

They would not allow the demon-possessed girl at Philippi to proclaim their worth or the worth of their message (Acts 16:16-18). Godless sources were rejected as vehicles for carrying the purity of God's truth. Could we not make application here to godless rock music and all of its sordid, clamorous offspring as unsuitable vehicles for the pure

message of our holy God?

Paul called the leaders of Philippi to personal apology for their rough treatment of a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35-39), perhaps to alleviate future trouble for themselves or the budding church in that city. Paul used what was legitimately available. Note that he did not bother with this approach when stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20). Perhaps because in that case it was Jews, who cared little for Roman law. And what would it accomplish? They were Jews from far-way Antioch.

Paul masterfully split the Sanhedrin over a doctrinal issue (Acts 23:6-10). He succeeded in dividing his enemies, actually getting some onto his side.

When forced, Paul appealed to Caesar (25:11). Again he was willing to use legitimate advantages available to him as a Roman citizen.

Paul's Prayer in Acts

9:4-6 – At Paul's conversion – *"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"* Like young Samuel (I Sam. 3:10), who rose to leadership through just such a humble prayer. This beginning set the tone for Paul's relationship with the Lord from the very outset of his Christian life.

9:11 – *"Behold he prayeth".* Here is the first announcement to the church of Paul's conversion.

14:21-23 – They ordained elders with prayer and fasting.

16:25 – *"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God".* After they had been beaten, stripped, and bound in the jail at Philippi.

20:36 – With the Ephesian elders, Paul knelt and prayed.

21:5 – At Tyre, on the way to Jerusalem, Paul knelt on the shore and prayed with those gathered.

27:35 – He gave thanks before all while on the ship in the storm.

28:15 – He thanked God and took courage with the arrival of brothers while on his way to Rome.

Paul's epistles as well we find to be brimming with the record of his very specific and earnest prayers for those he loved and for whom he laboured.

For Your Own Further Study

Consider the miracles in the book of Acts.

Consider the false religions in the book (idolatry, occult, etc.).

Examine the instances of the Holy Spirit's mention and involvement.

Consider the significance (if any) of Saul's name change to Paul in Acts 13.

Consider the relatively small percentage of the world Paul actually reached.

The New Testament Epistles

We now stand on the brink of that last major portion of the Bible, the N.T. epistles. That the Lord would use epistles or personal letters as a means to communicate His truth presents a sharp contrast with the O.T., and so highlights the change in the Lord's approach between old and new. Under the O.T. dispensation of law the requirements of God were spelled out in a formal legal document, the Law of Moses. It was an arrangement enforced with the terrible, authoritative presence of the Lord in the smoke and trembling of the scene at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19). God became related to His people by covenant, with the detail of conditions laid out (Ex. 20-23), and the threat and promise of cursing and blessing vividly listed (Deut. 28). It was a legal arrangement, like a marriage, and therefore the documentation given was more an official certificate in the formal Law of Moses.

Yet such a contrast we see with the N.T. age of grace, marked not by fearful trembling and smoke, but by the gracious sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our behalf. Even the way God communicated His N.T. truths is consistent with this change, largely that of personal letters. As Dr. Luke writing to Theophilus his gospel and the book of Acts, the N.T. approach

is more the loving relationship of a friend writing to a friend to offer instruction, kind encouragement, and guidance.

Of the 27 books of the N.T. 21 are epistles or personal letters. And of those 21 epistles 13 were written by the Apostle Paul (the author of Hebrews an uncertainty). There seems to have been a purposeful ordering of Paul's epistles as well. First are listed those written to churches (Romans to II Thessalonians), followed by those written to individuals (I Timothy to Philemon). Within these two main groups Paul's letters are listed from longest to shortest (Galatians the one exception, being a few verses shorter than Ephesians). Within the first group written to churches, first come those with a theme centring on salvation (Romans, I & II Cor. and Galatians). And of this group the book of Romans is foundational.

The Apostle Paul

His Hebrew name was Saul and his Greek name was Paul. The turning point of his name change is Acts 13:9 when Paul entered into ministry among the Gentiles. After this point, and in all of his epistles, he is referred to as Paul, except when he told the story of his conversion. He was born in the city of Tarsus, of the province of Cilicia, probably at about

the time of Christ's birth. Paul learned the trade of tent-making as a young man, and then excelled in his training to be a rabbi or Jewish teacher under the famous Jewish professor, Gamaliel, in Jerusalem.

After the martyrdom of faithful Stephen (Acts 7), Paul became something of a leader of the persecution of the church until his conversion to Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9). How God transformed that fervent man with his conversion, such that Paul went from zealously leading in the *destruction* of the church to zealously leading in her *construction* and *instruction.*

Many of Paul's letters were written during the years of his missionary travels throughout the Roman world, and many were written from prison. These latter are referred to as the "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon. II Timothy as well, though this is usually classed as a Pastoral Epistle).

Paul was captured in Jerusalem after his third great missionary journey, eventually ending up in a Roman prison. Apparently he was later released and ministered for a few more years until he was captured and imprisoned in Rome a second time until his execution. The Bible does not give us the details, but tradition tells us Paul was beheaded.

James Stalker, in his *The Life of St. Paul,* suggested the following scene;

"The trial ended, Paul was condemned and delivered over to the executioner. He was led out of the city with a crowd of the lowest rabble at his heels. The fatal spot was reached; he knelt beside the block; the headsman's axe gleamed in the sun and fell; and the head of the apostle of the world rolled down in the dust. So sin did its uttermost and its worst. Yet how poor and empty was its triumph!…ten thousand times ten thousand welcomed him in the same hour at the gates of the city which is really eternal. Even on earth Paul could not die…in ten thousand churches every Sabbath and on a thousand thousand hearths every day his eloquent lips still teach that gospel of which he was never ashamed."

Romans

Paul's epistle to the believers at Rome is indeed a priceless masterpiece. How immeasurably the Lord has used this great book in my own life. Coleridge called Romans *"the most profound book in existence".* Martin Luther referred to this book as *"the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel".*

The book of Romans brings to man both great promise and great disappointment. To all who have sought to establish their own righteousness the message of this book is disappointing indeed. Paul makes very clear to all such, whether Jew or Gentile, that all efforts to justify ourselves before God *most certainly fail*, for all have *"come short of the glory of God"* (3:23). Yet in the book of Romans the Lord brings to man the greatest promise of the very righteousness of God to all who are willing to receive it as a gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ.

It appears that Paul wrote the book at the tail end of his third missionary journey, around 56 A.D., at the beginning of Emperor Nero's rule. He wrote from Corinth before sailing to his capture in Jerusalem, perhaps during the *"three months"* referred to in Acts 20:3.

Paul wrote *"to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints"* (1:7). The readers in Rome would have been a mixed group of both Jews (2:17) and Gentiles (1:13). The church was perhaps begun through those Jewish *"strangers of Rome"* (Acts 2:10) who were saved on the day of Pentecost and returned to the capitol city with Jesus Christ in their hearts and the gospel on their lips. Paul had yet to get as far west as Rome personally when he wrote to the believers there. It would be about two or three years from the time of writing before he personally arrived there, through a most unexpected means, with the Roman Empire footing the bill.

N.B.

When you run from God, like Jonah, you pay the fare but get nowhere (Jonah 1).

When you walk with God, like Paul, you get an all-expenses-paid ticket to just where you were wanting to go (1:10; 15:23, 32).

Paul wrote the book of Romans to explain the meaning of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile, and then to apply God's great truths to practical Christian living. There was confusion in the Jewish

minds of that day. They had considered the Law of Moses to be God's final word in expressing His will for all. Therefore their insistence that Gentile Christians be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. And so there was need for someone to explain how the new dispensation, with its gospel message of grace, related to the old, with its legal message of covenant conditions. There was need for someone to explain what advantage there was in being a Jew in this new dispensation, with all believers united in the church. There was need for someone to explain how the righteousness of God received by faith related to the righteousness of God lived out in the law. And what of all of the promises God had made to His people? What happened to them? *Someone needed to explain!* Paul was that someone sent by God to bring the explanation to a waiting world.

The burden of the Lord's instruction in this great book is man's salvation in Jesus Christ (1:16), and more particularly that man's justification (being made right) before God does not rest on the keeping of the Law of Moses or any other code of conduct, but on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ (1:17). In fact man's justification is not a matter of law-keeping at all. Man's sinful nature will not allow him to live up to God's holiness as expressed in His law. *Man's record is one of utter failure!* (chapter 2-

3). Man's right standing before God (justified, cleansed, forgiven) is not a matter of what *man* has done or can do, but a matter of what *God* in His grace has done for man through the coming and sacrifice, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as a result of all that we have in Jesus, God deserves the *"reasonable service"* of our wholehearted loyalty and devotion (chapter 12-15).

The book of Romans is dividable into two main parts;

- Doctrinal instruction – Chapters 1-11.
- Practical instruction – Chapters 12-16.

Survey

Chapters 1-3 – The Need of Salvation – God's Condemnation.

Though the thrust of the book is the *salvation* of man, Paul begins by displaying with all clarity man's desperate *need* of salvation.

- 1:18-32 – Pagan world condemned.
    - God's wrath against unevangelized sinners (vs. 18).
    - His sufficient revelation of Himself is *"in them"* (vs. 19) and in creation, such

that they are *"without excuse"* (vs. 20).

- Unsaved world is condemned, not because of their ignorance, but because of their conscious choice to reject the light given to them (compare John 3:18-21).

- 2:1-16 – The self-righteous condemned.
  - The *"whosoever"* of vs. 1 includes us all.
  - We are all guilty of some aspects of the darkness of chapter 1.
  - Not one of us is fit to condemn others.
- 2:17-3:8 – Jews condemned.
  - The Jewish people would have been nodding their heads in agreement with all that Paul had written so far.
  - Theirs was an outward religion, without inward righteousness.
  - The advantage of being a Jew (3:1-2) – channels of God's blessing to the world, but no better people before God.

"…for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (3:9).

- 3:9-20 – All mankind roundly, justly condemned. All are fairly raked with a devastating broadside.
    - All pretence aside.
    - All mankind is left speechless, helpless, and hopeless in himself.
    - Without argument or excuse before a holy God (vs. 19).
    - Without recourse to the law, which is found able to save *nobody!* (vs. 20)
        - The law cannot be kept – man's heart cannot do good!

Chapters 3-5 – *"But now"* – God's Grace.

- 3:21-31 – Explanation of justification.
    - Sin requires judgment, and God Himself took the punishment of our sin in the person of Jesus Christ.
    - Justification is when God declares a believing sinner to be righteous (on the basis of his faith in Jesus Christ).
        - Justification is Christ's own righteousness imputed or credited or reckoned or accounted

to the believing sinner.

- Justification is provided by God through faith in Jesus Christ *"unto all and upon all them that believe"* (vs. 22).

Note also other key words – redemption (purchase), propitiation (satisfaction), and remission (pardon).

- Chapter 4 – Examples of justification.
  - Justification is not a matter of works (4:1-8).
    - Abraham was justified by faith (vs. 1-5).
    - David was justified by faith without works (vs. 6-8).
  - Justification is not a matter of circumcision (4:9-25).
    - Abraham was circumcised (Gen. 17) *after* he believed and was justified (Gen. 15:6).
- Chapter 5 – Experience of justification.
  - When we were helpless (vs. 6) and sinners (vs. 8) and enemies (vs. 10) we were reconciled (vs. 10-11).
  - What Adam, the natural head of the

human race, *did* in his fall to sin, Jesus Christ, the spiritual head, *undid* in His sacrificial death in our place (vs. 12-21).

- One man's sin brought death to our race, and one Man's death brought life to all who will receive Him.

Here is the great provision of God and the good news of the gospel. Though man is hopelessly, helplessly rotten to the core, stained and guilty before God, yet God made the way through the sacrifice of Jesus, that man might be made right with God. Man's part is to believe in Jesus. God's response to man's faith is to count that believing soul righteous and rescued from bondage and completely pardoned in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 6-8 – Victorious Christian Living – God's Sanctifying Power.

- 6:1-7:6 – Victory over sin's power.
    - *New Life* – We are dead with Christ to sin and alive with Christ to God (6:1-11).
        - Here is what water baptism pictures – death, burial, and resurrection in Christ.

        - Our death with Christ broke the bondage of our covenant relationship to sin and the law, opening the way for our new relation to our Saviour (7:1-6).

    - *New Master* – We are no longer sin's slave, but servants of righteousness (6:12-23).

- 7:7-25 – The ongoing battle.

    - Now two natures are at work and at odds in the believer.

- Chapter 8 – Our source of power and victory.

    - How full of encouragement is chapter 8 in the great truths of our new possessions!

    - How many things we learn of the Holy Spirit in this chapter.

        - Why not make a list?

    - This chapter is the answer to the struggle in chapter 7, the sunshine after the storm.

Chapters 9-11 – What About Israel? – God's Sovereignty & Man's Responsibility.

The nation of Israel had been the focus of God's special attention since Genesis 12. Some explanation was necessary to show how this righteousness freely given by faith to both Jew and Gentile relates to Israel, and to the keeping of God's law, and to the eternal promises and unbreakable covenants between God and the nation of Israel.

For the Arminian

- Chapter 9 – God's sovereignty in His handling of Israel (past).
    - Salvation has always been a matter of God's mercy rather than man's ancestry or actions (vs. 1-18).
    - God's sovereign working in order to include Gentiles, as He planned from the beginning (vs. 24-33).

Romans 9 is not a discussion of the predestination of *individuals* to salvation or condemnation. Paul's argument in this chapter rather displays God's sovereignty in the management of *nations* in His great work of bringing the opportunity of salvation within the reach of all.

For the Calvinist

- Chapter 10 – Man's responsibility in Israel's choice to reject Jesus Christ (present).
    - *"Whosoever shall…"* (vs. 11, 13).
    - The Jews have themselves to blame for their rejection.

God's sovereign control and the free will of man are both plainly taught in the Bible, sometimes side by side. The two seemingly contradictory directions simply cannot be reconciled in this life.

"For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face".

For the Amillennialist

- Chapter 11 – Israel's coming restoration to God's favour (future).
    - *"God hath not cast away His people"* (11:2).
    - Their rejection is not complete (11:1-10).
    - Their rejection is not final (11:11-32).
        - Only *"until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"* (vs. 25).
        - Then Jesus will return to Israel's

deliverance (vs. 26-27).

Chapters 12-15 – How Shall We Then Live?

Note how a practical consideration of the practice of the Christian life begins at the peak of devotion (*"living sacrifice"*), following after the highest example (Christ's sacrifice), and based upon a thorough understanding of the greatest truths and blessings *already ours!* (as presented in chapters 1-11).

- Chapter 12 – The servant of God with *others.*
- Chapter 13 – The servant of God with *government.*
- Chapter 14 – The servant of God with his *brothers.*
- Chapter 15:1-7 – The servant of God's *example.*

There is need for tolerance and sensitive care among Christian brothers of differing persuasion if there will ever be unity in the church. This was particularly true then with the great rift between Jew and Gentile (15:8-16)

I Corinthians

Paul's two letters to the Corinthian believers add a touch of interest to the N.T. They are letters dealing with *problems*, for the church at Corinth was indeed a troubled and troubling church. Paul had heard some disturbing things concerning the believers at Corinth. As well, there were questions that the church at Corinth had sent to Paul asking for clarification. In this book of I Corinthians Paul first dealt with the troubles of which he had heard, and then moved on to deal with the questions they had raised. But things were not resolved, bringing the need for Paul's second letter of II Corinthians.

It was not a happy situation, neither for Paul to have to deal with nor for the church to go through. But as with Joseph, the Lord meant it for good. It was for *our* good, and for the health of His church throughout this age. For in the process of dealing with this troubled church these precious books were produced, carrying down through the centuries such a richness of instruction on the proper functioning of a local church, and how to deal with problems and problem people.

The City of Corinth

The city of Corinth was the capital city of the

province of Achaia in Paul's day. It had become a very important hub of commerce, and that for one main reason. Corinth was a city made by her location. The city was situated on the southern end of the narrow (6 km. wide) isthmus (land strip) separating the Aegean Sea from the Ionian Sea and connecting the mainland with the Peloponnesus. A huge amount of shipping came down the Gulf of Corinth and across that isthmus. This was the main claim to fame of Corinth and her number one business. Shippers moving cargo between Italy and Asia Minor were able to avoid the dangerous trip around the southern tip of Achaia by portage across the isthmus instead. If a ship was small enough it could be lifted right out and moved across the isthmus by tramway. Larger ships were unloaded and their cargo transferred across to other ships waiting on the other side of the isthmus. There are natural harbours on both sides. For a time Corinth was the wealthiest city of the ancient world.

The city of Corinth was large and lustful, one of the most immoral of ancient cities. It was there that the temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite stood (the Romans called her "Venus"), the goddess of beauty and love (*lust* in reality). The depraved nature of the people of that city was perhaps best seen in the priestess prostitutes of Aphrodite and the supremely immoral nature of their "worship" at that

temple. In fact the term *"Corinthian"* came to equate one who was sexually indulgent and immoral. Study of the arts, sciences, and philosophy flourished in the city of Corinth, as well as sport (Isthmithian Games). Note Paul's reference to sport in I Corinthians 9:24-27.

The Church in Corinth

We find the background for the church of Corinth in Acts 18:1-18. Paul planted the church there during his 2nd missionary journey. He ministered in the city for about 18 months, living with Aquila and Priscilla and working part-time in their tent-making business to support himself while evangelizing there. A preacher named Apollos later ministered in the church established there as well (Acts 18:27-28; I Cor. 1:12; 3:6).

Paul wrote the book of I Corinthians during his three years of ministry at Ephesus, during his 3rd missionary journey (I Cor. 16:8). Paul was very much concerned with the follow-up of those he had led to Christ. Unfortunately the believers at Corinth were very much in need of follow-up. It was while ministering at Ephesus that Paul heard discouraging reports concerning the church across the Aegean (1:11 & 5:1). So he wrote in an effort to deal with the problems in the church and to offer

solutions and instruction in spiritual maturity. As well, the church leaders there had written to Paul requesting answers to several questions relating to Christian living (7:1). So from chapter 7 onward Paul moved from one question to the next seeking to give answers. As a result I Corinthians becomes a very practical and vital epistle concerning order in the church.

A strong theme in the book is the cross of Christ;

- Our *preaching* is of the cross (1:17-18, 23; 2:2; 15:3).
    - *"We preach Christ crucified"* (1:23).
- Our *purity* in view of the cross (5:7).
- Our *care* is because of the cross (8:11).
- Our *communion* is through the cross (10:16; 11:25-27).

Survey

Handling Quarrels

Chapters 1-4 – Prideful Divisions in Church.

- Their pride – 4:6, 18-19; 5:2.
- Their division – 1:11; 3:3-4; 6:6-7; 11:17-18.

- *"Only by pride cometh contention"* (Prov. 13:10).
- The answer – *"<u>Charity</u> vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up…seeketh not her own"* (13:4-5).
- Only *carnal* Christians have a divisive party spirit (3:1-4).

<u>Chapter 5</u> – Evil in Church.

- They, like many churches today, failed to discipline their members. Man's tendency in every age is to be much more tolerant of evil than God is.
- The Lord, through His apostle, demanded action against the offending brother.

<u>6:1-11</u> – Brothers in Court.

- Note the severity of Paul's scorn (6:5 – *"I speak to your shame"*).
- A brother in Christ should be prepared to take wrong and loss rather than to take action in court.

<u>6:12-20</u> – No to Sexual Impurity! Why?

- Because you are changed (vs. 11).

- Because your body is the Lord's (vs. 13).
- Because the resurrection is certain (vs. 14).
    - No self-denial is in vain.
    - Chapter 15 will underscore this point.
    - How very vital is faith in the process and practice of sanctification!
- Because your body is a member of Christ (vs. 15-16).
- Because sexual impurity is sin against your own body (vs. 18).
    - Compare Proverbs 6:32.
- Because the Holy Spirit dwells within you (vs. 19).
- Because you are not your own (vs. 19).
    - Sexual immorality, as with all sin in a Christian, is a form of stealing, using somebody else's possession for ourselves.
- Because you have been purchased with a price (vs. 20).

Handling Questions

Relating to Personal Concerns

Chapter 7 – Concerning Marriage.

- Responsibilities in marriage (7:1-24).
- Right to marry (7:25-40).

The basic thrust of the chapter is that the ideal situation is to remain unmarried without the need of marriage, to the end that one might be more wholly given to the Lord. Far from a second-rate condition, singleness is actually a first-rate condition (vs. 1). The necessity of marriage should never be a foregone conclusion. It does not have to be a have-to-be. But the reality is that many folks *need* to marry (vs. 7, 9), and there is nothing wrong with this. Avoiding marriage is not best for those who are not so gifted, for such avoidance can lead to immorality.

Do not miss the fact that this consideration of marriage relates directly to the previous discussion at the end of chapter 6. Here in chapter 7 Paul presents marriage partly as an answer to the dangers warned against there, providing a hedge against sexual impurity. It is important for us to understand that marriage is meant to be this, and to be careful not to neglect this important purpose in our marriage. See that your marriage meets this

need and serves as that vital hedge.

Compare Paul's other N.T. teachings on marriage, where he holds high and applauds the marital relationship;

- Ephesians 5:22-33 – Two become one.
- I Timothy 4:3 – Forbidding marriage is a doctrine of demons.
- II Corinthians 6:14 – No unequal yokes.

Chapters 8-10 – Concerning Christian Liberty.

- Chapter 8 – Concerning foods.
    - Question – Can we eat meats offered to idols? (8:4)
    - Answer – *"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth"* (8:13).
    - Meat is just meat and the idols are no true gods. Yet though God and I know the truth it *does* matter what other people think and how they view my actions. Wherever the practice of my freedom is going to hurt somebody else I must give up my freedom.
    - In Christ I am free, but I am not free to

offend my brother in Christ.

- Chapter 9 – Paul's example.
    - He refused their financial support due him lest some be offended.
- Chapter 10 – Paul's explanation.
    - *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence…"* (10:31-32).

Relating to Worship Services

11:1-16 – Concerning Hair (or hats?).

11:17-34 – Concerning the Lord's Table.

- Here is the fullest statement in the N.T. on the ordinance of Communion.

Chapter 12-14 – Concerning Spiritual Gifts.

- Chapter 12 – Unity in diversity.
    - Stop demanding only the showy gifts.
    - The Spirit of God is Lord of the gifts (12:3-11).
    - All gifts are important in their contribution to the whole (12:12-31).

- Chapter 13 – *"A more excellent way"* (compare 12:31).
    - God's gifts are to be exercised in love.
- Chapter 14 – All for edification.
    - Note the prominence of *"edify"* or *"edification"* in this chapter.

Chapter 15 – Concerning the Resurrection.

- A classic chapter on the resurrection and the resurrection body.

N.B.

The doctrine of the resurrection was foreign to Greek thinking. S. Lewis Johnson made this statement in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary,

"In general the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but they did not accept the resurrection of the body. To them the resurrection of the body was unthinkable in view of the fact that they held the body to be the source of man's weakness and sin. Death, therefore, was very welcome, since by it the soul would be liberated from the body; but resurrection was not welcome, because this would constitute another descent of the soul into the grave of the body."

(A shade of Amillennialism?)

Among the Greeks,

- The Epicureans denied any existence after death.
- The Stoics believed death brought the merging of the soul with deity, and thus loss of personhood.
- The Platonists flatly denied bodily resurrection.

In contrast to Greek philosophies, which see fulfilment only in this life, Paul makes the strong point in chapter 15 that all that is done or denied for Christ in this life will last. Labour and self-denial for the Lord *will not be in vain!*

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (15:57-58)

All doubts and fears concerning the future and anxious flight to immediate pleasures are put to rest through our faith in the resurrection.

Problems and Paul's Prescriptions

The answer to the problem of contentious divisions is humility in view of Christ's judgment seat (chapter 3).

The answer to the problem of pride (party spirit, seeking showy gifts), inconsiderateness (self-serving at communion), lawsuits, etc. is the law of love (chapter 13).

The answer to the problem of pursing sensual pleasure is found partly in marriage (in the present) and largely in our hope in the resurrection (into the future).

II Corinthians

Paul's first letter to Corinth apparently produced some good results. However there appears to have been a loud-mouthed minority, fuelled by false teachers, who were stirring trouble in the church against Paul. These agitators were attacking Paul's character (fickle – 1:17-18, 23, dishonest – 12:16-19), and questioning his apostolic authority. Yet Paul's response in this second epistle to the Corinthians is as warm and gracious as it is intense. He repeatedly pointed to the things he had suffered as proof of his sincerity.

Paul wrote this second letter to the church at Corinth from Macedonia while on his way to visit the church (some suggest from Philippi as the postscript of the book proposes). The book was written to give further instruction in practical matters (such as giving), but more, Paul wrote to defend himself and his apostleship because of the false accusations of some in the church (10:10; 11:13-15; 13:3). Much of II Corinthians is Paul's impassioned personal testimony, a very unique expression of Paul's heart before the people of this troubled church. We learn so much about Paul's personality, and about the fears and comforts of his life of ministry from this epistle. It would appear

that Paul sent this letter ahead to Corinth, preparing the way for his coming, a visit that he so wanted to be a success.

Survey

One of the interesting aspects of II Corinthians is the long detour in Paul's thoughts in the early chapters, perhaps expressing his urgency and sincerity. In the first two chapters he spoke of the troubles they faced in ministry along the way;

- 1:8 – Troubles in Asia.
- 2:12 – To Troas, but troubled because Titus was not there.
- 2:13 – On into Macedonia.

Then with 2:14 Paul suddenly branched off into a long side trail concerning his ministry, only to pick up the running narrative again at 7:5 (*"when we were come into Macedonia"*).

1-2:13 – Paul Defends His Motives and Movements.

2:14-7:4 – Paul Defends His Ministry.

He bursts into a commentary on the treasure carried in earthen vessels.

- 2:14-4:6 – Glorious gospel (treasure).

- It was still a glorious treasure to him after all those years and the hardships it brought to him.
- Paul never lost his love for the *Master*, His *message,* or His *ministry.*
- Paul needed no degrees or proofs. The Corinthian believers themselves were the living proof that God had sent him (3:1-3).
- In chapter 3 Paul contrasted the new and old covenants.

- 4:7-5:10 – Feeble carriers (earthen vessels).
- 5:11-7:3 – Beloved hearers.
  - 6:14-7:1 – A classic biblical passage on separation from worldliness.
  - Chapter 7 – Behold how Paul loved them still, like his Lord.

<u>Chapters 8-9</u> – Concerning Giving.

- This is the classic biblical passage on giving.
- Note some of the biblical principles of giving.
  - Giving can excel beyond ability, even out of poverty (8:2-3).

    - Giving should be out of desire, not forced (8:3-4, 8; compare 9:7).
    - Giving is a form of fellowship (8:4).
    - Personal givenness to the Lord should come first (8:5).
    - Ability to give is a gift of grace (8:1, 6-7).
    - Giving proves love's sincerity (8:8).
    - Giving imitates Jesus (8:9).
    - Giving meets the needs of others (8:14).
- Do not miss the biblical promises of giving (9:6-15).
- Note the climatic last verse of chapter 9;
    - *"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift"* (vs. 15).
- Note the great examples given;
    - Christ's gift (8:9).
    - God's gift (9:15).
- Note Paul's great plainness of speech throughout.

<u>Chapters 10-13</u> – Defence of Apostleship.

- Chapter 10 – Personal appearance means nothing.
    - *"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"* (10:17).
- Chapters 11-12 – Paul defended his apostolic office that he might defend his message (11:4).
- 13:3 gives indication why Paul felt it necessary to spend so much time (30% of the whole letter) defending his apostolic authority.

Ponder Points

Paul did not spare to speak on touchy issues, like finances, to folks with doubtful appreciation of him. Because it was for their best and the good of God's churches. *Truth matters!!* What folks think of the preacher of truth is a much lesser concern.

"Forever, O Lord,
Thy word is settled
in heaven"

(Psalm 119:89)

Galatians

Galatia was a province in central Asia Minor. As was also true of some of the other provinces of the Roman Empire, the actual boundaries of Galatia tended to be changed upon occasion. As a result it becomes a disputed point where these *"churches of Galatia"* were to which Paul wrote. Were they churches unknown to the N.T. record, perhaps in northern Asia Minor? Or were these actually those churches established by Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey in south central Asia Minor (Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, & Lystra)? It would seem that the familiar churches of southern Galatia would have been Paul's most likely target in this letter. The difference (north or south Galatia) might affect the date of the writing, but it would not affect the thrust of the message, and is certainly nothing over which to wax passionate. It has been left an uncertainty and therefore cannot be a point of vital importance to the Lord.

Assuming these to be the churches established by Paul and Barnabus, it is interesting to see Satan's very typical approach. With the initial entrance of the gospel into the region Satan brazenly attacked with physical violence (Acts 13-14), mainly through the Jews. But this approach proved unsuccessful,

perhaps largely due to the courage and perseverance of Paul and Barnabus. Therefore, ever resourceful, Satan's clever tactical shift was to send in legalistic Jewish "Christians" (Judaizers) to cast doubt upon Paul's authority, ministry, and message; adding to the message and mixing in a dose of error. Where the rage of violence failed, the subtlety of false influences proved much more successful. The evil one still finds this restrained, subtle approach much more successful. Rather than openly attacking the true, he penetrates, infiltrates, and dilutes with a clever mixture of truth and error. Why use brawn when brains go so much farther? But Satan's pure unadulterated rage cannot hold itself back to the cooler line for long. When still God continues to raise up a faithful remnant out of Satan's muddled mess of perverted religion, eventually the evil one can hold back his rage no longer, and he cuts loose again with seasons of violent persecution, only to discover anew the frustrating failure of that approach as well. The tribulation period before Christ's 2nd coming will be Satan's grand finale effort at the violence angle against God's people. But again, this effort only to be crushed in the end as well, and an innumerable multitude of the redeemed saved out of his foremost attempt to quash God's harvest (Rev. 7).

Satan did not waste any time in Galatia. *"So soon"* after Paul left the region, legalistic Judaizers began informing the believers there that they had not heard the whole gospel message (1:6-7), that in fact salvation was through faith in Jesus Christ *plus* the addition of certain Jewish practices (consider how Roman Catholicism is just another variation on the old Judaizer theme).

Note the indications of their false teachings;

- **1:6** – *"Removed from…the grace of Christ"*
- **2:16** – *"A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ"*
- **3:2** – *"Are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"*
- **4:9-10** – *"How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years"*
- **4:21** – *"Ye…desire to be under the law"*
- **5:2-4**
- **6:12** – *"They constrain you to be circumcised"*

Note the indications of the false teachers;

- **1:7** – *"There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ"*

- **3:1** – *"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?"*
- **4:17** – *"They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them"*
- **5:10** – *"But he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be"*
- **5:12** – *"I would they were even cut off which trouble you"*
- **6:11-13**

The Message

Paul wrote to expose the false teaching of the legalists there in Galatia, and to defend himself and the truth of his message. From his very first words he affirmed his apostleship (1:1). He wrote to confirm to their troubled hearts that justification before God is *through faith plus nothing* (2:16-17; 3:11, 24; 5:4), and that only a life of liberty in Christ (5:1) can generate the genuine fruits of the Spirit (5:22-23).

Paul comes across in a very strong manner in this epistle. His greeting was brusque and formal. He expressed none of his usual thanksgiving or appreciation for his readers. Not that there was

nothing in them worthy of praise, but that this was an emergency situation requiring the most urgent attention, all else aside. Paul immediately scolded their *"so soon"* defection from the truth (1:6). He was very evidently upset over the damage caused by the troublemakers. He hurled double anathemas at those troublers (1:8-9)! He wished mutilation upon them (5:12)! He exposed their hidden motives (6:11-13). There is the swirling of dark clouds over this little book, with the flash of lightning and the angry rumble of thunder. The apostle of God was fearlessly fighting for the hearts of these believers. His love for them would not allow them to just go their own foolish way unchallenged.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Such a contrast between the message of this book of Galatians and that of the book of James. In many ways they are at two ends of the biblical spectrum, like two opposite sides of a scale balancing each other out. The message of James is lined up against that loose form of Christianity insisting that since I am saved by grace through faith it does not matter what I do after salvation, that works are not important (antinomianism or easy-believism). James assures us that *"faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone"* (compare James 2:14-26).

Galatians on the other hand is lined up against the other extreme insisting that, sure, a soul is saved by grace, but that salvation is *kept* and that soul is *perfected* by the keeping of God's law. It is a legalistic salvation that is by faith plus something else in the form of some righteous works. Galatians and James must be put side by side to find the balanced N.T. teaching on the place of works in a salvation by faith. In Galatians Paul insists that we are free in Christ. James insists that in Christ we are bound by the royal law of love, and true faith will tend to move a soul to live by that law.

The message of Galatians is comparable to some parts of the book of Romans. In both books Paul emphasizes salvation and liberty from the law in Christ. And both discuss the Jew-Gentile question and their common ground in the church.

As in the book of II Corinthians so in Galatians, Paul does much defending of His authority as God's apostle.

Survey

The message of Galatians is rather obviously presented in three sections of two chapters each:

Chapters 1-2 – An Authentic Message.

Chapters 3-4 – An Explained Message.

Chapters 5-6 – An Applied Message.

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Chapters 1-2 – An Authentic Message – *Vindication*

Paul was apparently accused of being a man-pleaser, of preaching a man's message rather than God's.

- 1:11-12 – The message of the gospel was given to Paul by direct revelation from God.
- 1:13-24 – Paul reviewed the history of how the gospel came to him.
    - Paul was three years in Damascus and Arabia before his first visit to Jerusalem (1:18; Acts 9:26-29).
    - Then eleven years in Tarsus and Syria (Antioch) before his second visit to Jerusalem (2:1; Acts 11:20).
    - *His message came from heaven, not from Jerusalem!*
- 2:1-10 – Paul's ministry and message to the Gentiles were approved by the Jerusalem church.
    - *"They gave to me and Barnabus the*
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right hands of fellowship" (vs. 9).

- 2:11-21 – Paul even needed to straighten out Peter (the *"Pillar"*, 2:9) rather than the other way around.
    - Showing that;
        - Beliefs *and* life must line up or rebuke is due.
        - You cannot preach an anti-racist message and still remain a racist in practice.
        - Rebuke must be spoken to the face of the offender (vs. 11).
        - Man must not be partial.
            - Even those *"who seemed to be pillars"* (2:9) can be wrong and need to be rebuked when they are in the wrong.
    - All serving to affirm that Paul was no man's man and that his message was no man's message (1:10-12).

Chapters 3-4 – An Explained Message - *Explanation*

Here is the doctrinal core of the book. Chapter 3 is

a contrast of faith and the law (note the number of times the words *"faith"* and *"law"* are found in this chapter).

- 3:1-5 – Consider your own experience.
    - You received the Spirit *by faith* (vs. 2).
    - Is your flesh equal to the Spirit, that it can now perfect what the Spirit started? (vs. 3).
    - Your suffering for your faith was for nothing if salvation is not by faith (vs. 4).
    - I, who brought you the message of salvation *by faith*, came with proofs of authority in the Spirit and the miraculous (vs. 5).
- 3:6-18 – Consider Abraham (compare Romans 4).
    - Abraham was blessed *by faith* (vs. 6). Salvation by faith was nothing new (Gen. 15:6).
    - Those *of faith* are blessed (vs. 7-9).
    - Those of the law are cursed (vs. 10).
    - Law and faith are mutually exclusive

(vs. 11-12).

- Jesus took the curse of the law that we might receive the blessing *"through faith"* (vs. 13-14).

- Abraham's covenant of promise, based upon his faith, preceded by centuries Moses' covenant of law (vs. 15-18). The 2nd cannot void the 1st.

- 3:19-24 – The law's purpose.

  - To preserve man from moral decay *"till the Seed* (Christ) *should come"* (vs. 19).

    - Compare similar thoughts in I Timothy 1:9.

    - The law is like the harsh snapping of the whip and beating of sticks that drives the cows out of the dangerous road and into the safety of the pasture.

  - To display man's hopelessness without Jesus Christ (vs. 20-24).

    - The law is the tutor unto Christ, He who sets us free from the curse of the law.

- 3:25-4:7 – Free sons and heirs.

- 4:8-10 – Why your choice for bondage?
- 4:11-19 – Why your choice of teachers?
- 4:20-31 – An illustration from Sarah and Hagar.
    - Ishmael illustrates fleshly birth by man's power and design, which brings us under sins bondage (vs. 23).
    - Isaac illustrates spiritual birth by the miraculous power of God, according to His promise, which makes us God's child (vs. 23).
    - Abraham began with Sarah (promise), then Hagar (law) was added later. But when the promised son/Son (Isaac/Christ) miraculously came, that which was added (Hagar/Ishmael – *law*) was to be cast out.
    - Ishmael persecuted Isaac, even as our old nature joins those under the law (Jews) in persecuting those justified freely by grace through faith.

Galatians 4 (vs. 24) has been used by those of an amillennial persuasion to justify an allegorical

approach to interpreting the Bible. But note here that the true sense of an allegory does not void the original account. Though there be some representative meaning, Paul never indicated that there was no actual Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, or Isaac.

In the same vein, be wise to read 1000 years as 1000 actual years in Revelation 20. And read the Genesis account of the 6-day creation of an actual earth and heaven, sky and sea, plants and animals, and the first man and woman named Adam and Eve as 6 actual days of the creation of all things. Accommodating the lies of men by shading ambiguous the plain sense of God's words is a fool's game.

Contrasts in Chapters 3 & 4

Law and promise (chapter 3).

Works and faith.

Bound children and free sons (4:1-5).

Old covenant and new (4:24).

- Hagar and Sarah.
- Bondwoman and free.

- Ishmael and Isaac.
- Born after the flesh and born after the Spirit (4:29).
- Sinai and Jerusalem (4:24-25).

Chapters 5-6 – An Applied Message - *Application*

Essentially all of the *commands* applied to the readers of this book are found in these last two chapters.

- 5:1-6 – Stand in liberty.
    - Do not let your troublesome teachers lead you back under the yoke of legalistic bondage.
    - It is one or the other (vs. 2 & 4). Either pull the plough yourself or plough with the tractor, but if by your own power, you make the tractor good for nothing.
    - It is all or nothing (vs. 3). If the inch measure of circumcision, then go the whole mile of keeping all the law for salvation if you can.
    - They did not want to burn the old bridge.

The statement in 5:4 *"ye are fallen from grace"* does not mean that these believers had lost their salvation as some tend to read it. At least 9 times in this epistle Paul referred to the Galatians as *"brethren"*. They were still in the family. The statement merely means that they had fallen away from an understanding of receiving justification by grace through faith. They had come to see justification rather as maintained (earned) by human merit through works of righteousness.

It is surprising how commonly the deceived will twist a Bible portion into support of their foolishness that was actually meant by God to correct their deception. The book of Galatians is God's answer for those who believe the saved can lose their salvation.

- 5:7-12 – Troublers condemned.
- 5:13-6:10 – Life in the Spirit is a life of love.
    - See contrast between 5:12 & 13 (true love is tough).
    - So much of chapter 5 is about the Holy Spirit and His desire to lead us into a life of victory over the works of the flesh.

- 5:16 – *"Walk in the Spirit"* (a present, continuous command).
- 5:18 – *"If we be led of the Spirit".*
- 5:25 – *"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit".*

- The one law that now guides us is the law of love (5:13-14).
  - This is the central thrust of N.T. teaching.
    - We are neither under law nor lawless, but free to serve one another in love.
  - Walking in the Spirit is our source of love.
    - Compare how Peter connects the Spirit with unfeigned love of brothers in I Peter 1:22.
    - Compare the same association between the true Spirit of God and love in I John 4.
- Love applied – 5:26-6:10.

- Opposite of vainglorious (5:26).
- Restoring burden-bearer (6:1-5).
    - Compare Hebrews 10:24-25; 12:14-15
- Doer of good (6:6-10).

Contrasts in Chapters 5 & 6

Liberty and bondage (5:1).

Standing fast in liberty and falling from grace (5:1-4).

Liberty and license (5:13).

Flesh and Spirit (5:17).

Works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit (5:18-23).

Sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit (6:8).

Ponder Points

Note the balance between God's direct commands and our source of power in the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5.

- Sanctification by self-effort? Yes *and* no.

- The priests went forward with feet into the water by God's command, *then* the miracle of the dried river opening before them in Joshua 3.

- *"Give ye them to eat"*, Jesus commanded His disciples, and they managed to collect a little boy's lunch. *Then* the miracle of their meagre resources multiplied.

- The one who would say that we must get up and do God's work is right.

- The one who would say that God's work is all of God is right.

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Note the limitations of Christian liberty (5:13-14).

Compare I Corinthians 8-10 (esp. 8:9 & 13); I Peter 2:16; James 2:8
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"For verily I say unto you,
till heaven and earth pass,
one jot or one tittle
shall in no wise pass from the law,
till all be fulfilled"

(Matthew 5:18)

Ephesians

This book of Ephesians is the first of the four "Prison Epistles" in the N.T., the others being Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (note Paul's references to writing while in bonds in these books – Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philippians 1:7, 13 & 14; Colossians 4:3 & 18; Philemon 9, 10, 13, 22 & 23). Therefore the time of the writing of all four Prison Epistles would be essentially the same, falling within the time period described in the last 16 verses of the book of Acts, for there is where we find the record of Paul's arrival under armed escort and two-year detention at Rome. Perhaps partly as a result of these books being written at the same time it is not surprising that we find similarities among them from a human perspective. In fact, some folks refer to Ephesians and Colossians as twin epistles because of their many parallels. Jensen points out that *"78 of Ephesians' 155 verses are very similar to phrases in Colossians"* (just on half). This similarity is explained also by a common purpose in the writing of these two books.

Do you see how Paul turned his prison term to greatest positive effect! He was unjustly held for doing nothing but good and promoting the truth, yet the product of that era of his life was not as one

might expect – sorrow, bitterness, venom – but rather some of the most Christ-exalting lines of the N.T. Compare the two halves of Psalm 22. Remember the joyful jailhouse hymns at Philippi (Acts 16:25). There was no less fruit in Paul's bonds in comparison to his days of freedom (Acts 28:16-31; Phil. 1:13; 4:22). Coupled with the right heart, the worst of circumstances can become the best of times and wonderfully productive places. John Bunyon wrote his classic "Pilgrim's Progress" while in prison. Paul was ever a living example of what he preached – *"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil"* (5:14).

It must have been about 61 A.D. when Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, and he about 65 years of age (note *"Paul the aged"* in Philemon 9).

The City & Church

Ephesus was the chief city of the province of Asia at that time. The city of Ephesus, like Corinth, was noted for its philosophers, poets, artists, and orators. It was a leading centre of international trade. In its religion, the city was dominated by the worship of Diana (the Greeks called her "Artemis"). The famed temple of Diana in Ephesus was once considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World (Acts 19:27).

The development of the church in Asia and at Ephesus was a progressive thing,

- Asian converts at Pentecost – Acts 2:9.
- Paul's weekend stop at Ephesus – Acts 18:18-21.
- Ministry of Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla – Acts 18:24-26.
- Paul's extended ministry there – Acts 19.
- Paul's message to the Ephesian elders – Acts 20:17-38.
- The book of Ephesians sent from Rome.
- Timothy's ministry – I Timothy 1:3.

Eventually the church at Ephesus became something of a mother church of the region. Compare the foremost place of Ephesus among the churches of Asia listed in Revelation 1:11; 2-3.

Purpose

What was Paul's purpose in writing this book to the believers in and around Ephesus? There does not seem to be any specific problem toward which Paul is aiming, as in other books;

- As Colossians and Galatians directed at false

teachings.

- As I Corinthians directed at internal contention and questions.
- As II Corinthians directed at false accusations.

The book of Ephesians was written to lift Jesus Christ high as the exalted Head of His body, the church. There is a distinct focus on unity in the book (compare Philippians). Paul seems to be seeking to set at one the division between Jew and Gentile in the church.

- The mention of 1:10.
- The focus of 2:11-22.
- *"The mystery"* of 3:1-13.
- There is *"<u>one</u> body, and <u>one</u> Spirit…<u>one</u> hope of your calling; <u>one</u> Lord, <u>one</u> faith, <u>one</u> baptism, <u>one</u> God and Father of all"* (4:4-6).
- Note the unifying pictures of the church,
    - A building (2:20-22).
    - A body (4:4-13).
    - A bride (5:23-33).

The Lord did not want separate Jewish and Gentile

churches.

This is an epistle aimed at the spiritual growth of its readers, leading them into an understanding of the wonder of who God is and what He has done for us, and then leading on to the day-to-day experience of walking in the light of those great truths. Nobody can read this priceless book with a sincere heart without being challenged in the same way.

Survey

The book of Ephesians has Paul's characteristic touch. The first 3 chapters are of a more doctrinal nature, dealing with our *faith* or *heavenly position,* while the last three chapters are of a more practical nature, dealing with our *walk* or *earthly practice* (note the turning point at 4:1).

Consider again the practical lessons suggested by this approach;

- We must believe and think right before we can live or walk right.
- Proverbs 4:23-27 – *"Keep thy <u>heart</u> with all diligence…"* – and then note how Solomon

immediately turns to outward actions in that context as well.

- Compare II Corinthians 10:5 – *"Casting down imaginations…"*
- Compare the focus of the book of Philippians on giving command concerning our will, thoughts, and even emotions.
- Good outward discipline begins within.
- This principle applied to,
    - Our personal life;
        - Look well to what you believe and think, for this will determine what you are and do.
    - The church;
        - There must be a preaching and teaching focus that relates both what the Lord would have us believe and think *and* what He would have us to do, with the order of presentation as here.
        - When there is error and need for discipline, we must seek to correct not only the wrong actions, but also the underlying

wrong beliefs and thinking patterns.

- Our home and child discipline;
  - Our parental responsibility toward our children goes farther than just what they do. It is first of all a matter of how they think and believe.
  - Compare Proverbs 23:12-16.

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Chapters 1-3 – Our Heavenly Position.

From the outset of the book we are led to the lofty heights of the *"heavenly places in Christ"* (1:3), where we discover that we who are His are blessed *"with all spiritual blessings"* (*"heavenly places"* is a key phrase in the book – 1:3, 10, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Ephesians is a book of the most magnificent of themes, carried by the most precious of words.

- 1:1-14 – Spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ. We *"who first trusted in Christ"* (1:12);
  - Are *"blessed"* (1:3).
  - Are *"chosen"* (1:4).
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- Are *"predestinated unto the adoption of children"* (1:5).
- Are *"accepted in the beloved"* (1:6).
- Are *"sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"* (1:13).
    - Note two rings,
        - Signet ring – *sealed* (vs. 13).
        - Engagement ring – *promise* (vs. 14).
- Have *"redemption through His blood"* (1:7).
- Have *"forgiveness of sins"* (1:7).
- Have experienced *"the riches of His grace"* (1:7) and *"His good pleasure"* (1:9).
- Have come to know *"the mystery of His will"* (1:9).
- Have *"obtained an inheritance"* (1:11).
    - The *"earnest"* (deposit or down payment) of which is the Holy Spirit (1:14), already dwelling within the believer.

- And all of these blessings *"in Christ"*.
  - Note the prominence of this or similar phrase in chapter 1 (as in Philippians).
  - While in prison Paul seemed especially mindful that he was *"in Christ"*.
- All *"to the praise of His glory"* (1:12 & 14).

God's great plan of redemption, determined from eternity past, has at last been brought to reality *"according to the good pleasure of His will"*. And behold the Trinity of God united in that great work for man;

- God the Father elects (1:3-6).
- God the Son redeems (1:7-12).
- God the Holy Spirit assures (1:13-14).

Note how each of these three sections ends with the phrase, *"the praise of His glory"* (1:6, 12, 14), like an exultant hymn of grace with repeating chorus.

A note on election and predestination, upon which we find a strong focus in this chapter.

Compare Acts 2:23 where divine sovereignty and human responsibility are combined in one verse (also Acts 4:27-28). We are just not going to put it together in this life, for we do not have the capacity to do so. This is an antinomy, with two seemingly contradictory ideas which both must be received as true.

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Then as was often the case such lofty considerations launched Paul's heart into prayer.

- 1:15-23 – Prayer for spiritual vision.
    - Do you see him there within the earthly bondage of a Roman prison, yet with his heart soaring aloft into Christ's very presence *"in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion"* (1:20-21)?
    - In prayer Paul was "released" from all earthly dominion to stand before the only true Dominion.
    - Here is the balance of sound theology rising into sound, sincere worship, just as it should be.
        - Not precise, dry, heartless doctrine, but real and alive and
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full of passion.

- Not heat without light, unleashing man's whim to soar into the absurd.

- 2:1-22 – Once *without*, yet now *with*.
    - Redemption (2:1-10).
        - Before salvation we were,
            - Spiritually dead (vs. 1).
            - Servants of the devil (vs. 2).
            - Serving our desires (vs. 3).

Until we understand what we once were we can never fully comprehend the grace of the God who saved us.

- *"**But God**…"* (vs.4-10).
    - God raised us high from the lowness of spiritual death (vs. 5) up to the height of *"heavenly places"* (vs. 6).
    - Compare Romans 5:8.
    - And why such grace? That our gracious God might

continue to show us His grace *forever* (vs. 7).

- Relationship (2:11-22).

It was because of Paul's preaching of this very sort of thing, unity between Jew and Gentile in Jesus Christ, that Paul was writing from a prison in Rome.

- Consider Halley's statement, *"this passage plainly means that the Nations are heirs to the promises which God gave to the Jews"*. True or false? Did the apostle say this?
- This latter half of chapter 2 is a portion commonly twisted into support for the amillennial view.

- <u>3:1-13</u> – Minister of the mystery.
  - What is the mystery? – Gentiles are now *"fellow heirs and of the same body"* (vs. 6).

    The mystery was not that Gentiles would be included (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 2:2; 11:10; 42:6; 49:6), but that Jew and Gentile would be joint-heirs of God's blessing in a *new thing* (2:15), the church.

- Compare Galatians 3:28-29 & I Corinthians 12:13.

- 3:14-21 – Intercessory prayer.
    - The way we should pray for each other.

Chapters 4-6 – Our Earthly Walk.

The turning point here is comparable to Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, & Galatians 5. Note the similar theme as well – *to walk in the Spirit is to walk in love and service of others.* Here is the foundational N.T. principle of Christian practice.

- 4:1-16 – Walking in love.
    - A bowed heart (vs. 2) fosters unity (vs. 3-6) and the use of all gifts for the benefit of others (vs. 7-16).
    - Our great object is that of nurturing every member of the body into the perfect image of Jesus Christ.

Consider that apostles and prophets (4:11) related to the foundation of the church (2:20), while evangelists, pastors, and teachers relate to the present, ongoing construction (compare II Peter 2:1).

- 4:17-5:17 – Walking in purity.

- Note the principle of replacement here (4:20-32), with the wrong replaced by the corresponding right.
- Note from the context that to grieve the Spirit is to fall from a walk in love (4:29-32).
    - The Spirit is a Person who can be grieved, yet He cannot be grieved *away* from the true child of God (vs. 30b; 1:13-14).
- Again and again we find Paul warning against sexual promiscuity (5:3-6 – cf. I Cor. 6 & 7; I Thess. 4).
- What does 5:4 mean?
    - Talking like a fool.
    - Entertaining others with foolishness or vulgar speech.
    - Class clown.
    - Finding humour in sinful things.
    - Making light of sacred things.
    - Jesus did not tell jokes.

- 5:18-21 – Walking in the Spirit.

- The command (5:18).
    - Continual filling with the Spirit is commanded, while baptism with the Spirit is *never* commanded.
- The results or evidence (5:19-21).
    - Glad heart (vs. 19).
        - The pure, joy-filled, Spirit-led praise of a meeting of believers is set in contrast to a riotous, raucous drunken revel. A Spirit-filled heart cannot help but sing.
    - Grateful heart (vs. 20).
    - Good heart (vs. 21).

- 5:22-6:4 – Walking in the home.

Notice that the Lord in this section does not speak of our *rights* in our family, but only of our *roles* and *responsibilities.*

- Wives submit (5:22-24).
- Husbands love (5:25-33).
    - Sacrificial (vs. 25).

- Sanctifying (vs. 26-27).
- Self-fulfilling (vs. 28-33).

Thoughts on marriage partners;

- Find one who loves you enough to sacrifice for you, even unto death.
- Find one who has your best interests at heart.
- Find one whom you can please, more than one who pleases you.
- Marriage is a picture of eternal security – it is *forever.*

  - Children obey (6:1-3).
    - God set it in stone (Ten Commandments) that we should honour those who gave us life, as we honour He who gave us eternal life.
  - Fathers provoke not (6:4).
- 6:5-9 – Walking in society.
  - Sincere servants (vs. 5-8).

        - Take in every detail of this portrait of a *biblical employee.*

    - Mindful masters (vs. 9).

        - Here is the portrait of the *biblical employer.*

- 6:10-20 – Warring against Satan.

    - Note the focus on *standing* (vs. 11-14).

    - Recognition of the enemy (vs. 10-12).

        - There is more to the Christian's battle than just the natural temptations of his flesh.

    - Resources to be employed (vs. 13-20).

        - There are powers in the unseen world against which we are powerless without God's resources of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, God's Word, and prayer.

Another View of Ephesians;

- Heavenly treasures (1-3).

    - Already blessed with *"all spiritual*

blessings".

- Holy testimony (4-6:9).
    - The Spirit moves us to a life of love, unity, service, and purity.
- Hell's tempest (6:10-20).
    - The evil one will not stand idle over a Spirit-filled life.

Philippians

The epistle of *rejoicing* is this book of Philippians. "The brightest and most joyful of all Paul's writings", was Jensen's comment. We find the words *"joy"* or *"rejoicing"* 17 times within the four short chapters of this little book. Obviously this is a prominent theme. And truly happy is the one who digs deep into its treasures. Great answers to some of life's great questions are found here.

"If ye know these things, <u>happy</u> are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

Another key phrase in the book of Philippians (as in Ephesians) is *"in Christ"*. True rejoicing is only found *"in Christ"*.

This again is one of the four Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Thus the time of the writing of Philippians, as with all four, falls within the last 16 verses of the book of Acts, in about 61 A.D., when Paul was about 65 years old. Do not miss the fact that Paul wrote his brightest and most joy-filled letter while an old man in detention at Rome, and surrounded by enemies (1:15-17). Every place becomes a house of praise when your heart is as Paul's was, in earnest pursuit of Jesus Christ. Satan might succeed in changing Paul's *status* or *condition* by keeping him from

travelling, tying him down physically, but he could not change Paul's *state* or *position* as a more-than-conqueror! Paul's heart could not be bound. His joy in Christ knew no limitations.

The City

Paul wrote *"to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi"* (1:1). Philippi was a city of Macedonia on that famous ancient highway called the Egnatian Way. Luke referred to this city as *"the chief city of that part of Macedonia"* (Acts 16:12). Compare how Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were all chief cities of their respective areas as well. Paul tended to concentrate his work on the main city centres. Philippi was apparently a wealthy city. It was known for its gold mines, exceptionally fertile soil, and reputable school of medicine. It seems as well that Philippi was Dr. Luke's home town, and that he was instrumental in moving Paul to begin a work there (Acts 16:10), the first of Paul's outreach into Europe.

The Church

The record of the beginning of the church at Philippi and of the charter members is found in Acts 16;

- Dr. Luke.

- Acts 16:14-15 – Lydia was saved, with her household.
- Acts 16:16-18 – Demon-possessed girl was apparently saved.
- Acts 16:25-34 – Jailer was saved, with his household.
    - Note that there was no delay in baptism at the houses of Lydia and the jailor.

Can you imagine how this bright and happy letter, written by Paul from prison, must have encouraged that jailor? He himself was saved through Paul's indomitably joyful spirit and testimony in the jail at Philippi. He had seen first-hand that neither beating nor bonds could rob the rejoicing of a truly Spirit-filled saint.

Purpose

What was Paul's purpose in writing this letter to this church? Partly the apostle was sending thanks for their gift (4:10-19). Unlike so many others, the believers at Philippi had not been persuaded away from their first love for Paul. They had sent financial help to him on more than one occasion (4:15-16). Paul wrote to acknowledge his receipt of their gift, delivered by Epaphroditus, and to express

his sincere gratitude.

Some other purposes for the writing of Philippians;

- Ironing out disunities (4:2-3).
    - Note the focus on unity (1:27-2:3).
    - Satan ever seeks to sow discord in the church.
    - *"Only by pride cometh contention"* – yet how very opposite the nature of Christ (2:6-8).
- Informing of direction (2:19-24).
- Instructing on the delights of;
    - A life lived for Jesus Christ (1:20-21; 3:7-14).
        - *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (1:21).
    - A life lived for others (chapter 2).
        - *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"* (2:5).

Survey

Chapter 1 – Testimony of a life lived above the world.

The key verse of the book, and surely the theme of Paul's life, is 1:21 – *"for to me to live is Christ".* There is neither triumph nor true rejoicing outside of Jesus Christ. Paul was surrounded by trouble (captivity, enemies, threat of death), yet above it all his spirit arose as on wings of eagles.

- 1:3-8 – Still loving.
- 1:9-11 – Still praying.
    - Paul's prayer for them was not just an occasional thing (*"every", "always", "every", "all"* – vs. 3-4).
    - His requests were specific.
        - Abounding love (vs. 9).
        - Excellent choices (vs. 9-10).
        - Sincere and without offense (vs. 10).
            - Spotlessly pure and blameless.
        - Full of the fruits of righteousness (vs. 11).
- 1:12-18 – Still preaching.
    - Rather than being hindered, the gospel was furthered by his bonds (compare

Acts 28:30-31).

- Vs. 15-16 speak not of wrong *message* or *method*, but of wrong *motive.*

- 1:19-26 – Still encouraged, even in the prospect of death.
  - Note Paul's one consuming passion above all else in vs. 20, that Jesus be magnified in his body.

Chapter 2 – Examples of a life lived for others.

There is a strong focus on *unity* (from 1:27) and *servanthood* in this section, and these virtues arising out of *humility.*

Examples;

- 2:6-11 – Jesus in His sacrifice.
  - His *humiliation* (vs. 6-8).
    - He did not have to be seen for who He is.
    - Look for six steps down here (see chart page 162).
  - His *exaltation* (vs. 9-11).
    - God exalted Him in due time.

- This quote from Isaiah 45:23, speaking of *Jehovah* there, is applied to *Jesus* here – *Jesus is Jehovah!*

- Consider the "kenosis" or emptying in vs. 7.

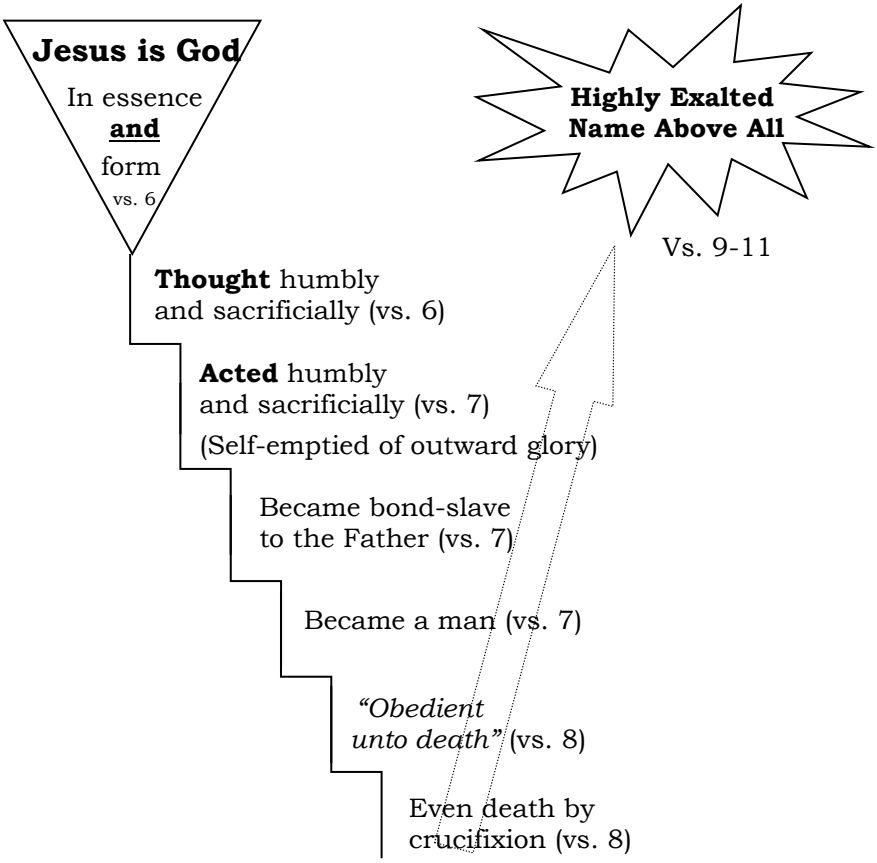
  - Literally *"He emptied Himself having taken the form of a servant".*

  - Some think Jesus emptied Himself of His deity. Others think He surrendered the use of some of His divine attributes.

    The King James Version puts it well – *"made Himself of no reputation".* The point being that He gave up His visible, evident glory as God the Son. He gave up what became momentarily visible on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).

Humiliation & Exaltation of Jesus Christ

Phil. 2:6-11



        - In His meekness and humility Jesus did not have to be seen for who He is.

- 2:19-22 – Timothy in his service.
    - Timothy did not have to run his own programme. His one purpose was rather to serve.
    - Paul praised his faithful companion.
- 2:25-30 – Epaphroditus in his sickness.
    - He did not have to live for his own interests or comforts.
    - Praised by Paul.

Chapters 3-4 – Exhortations.

- Chapter 3 – Paul's purposes (again example).
    - *"That I might win Christ"* – 3:8.
        - True reward.
        - Paul cast off all that men might consider important in pursuit of the *all*-important.
    - *"That I may know Him"* – 3:10.
        - True sanctification.

- *"That I might apprehend"* – 3:12.
    - A true follower.
    - Paul was the first to admit that he had not "arrived", but he was most earnestly pursuing.
- Here are the secrets of the heart of a genuine spiritual giant. Compare Moses in Exodus 33, and David, that man after God's own heart. Contrast the heart of the natural man, who does not *"like to retain God in their knowledge"* (Rom. 1:28).

- <u>Chapter 4</u> – the power of the right use of our minds (the great battlefront).
    - The true test of what a man is and will become is not so much a matter of what he says or does, but what he chooses to think.
    - If we are obedient to these commands of the Lord (4:6, 8), keeping our minds fixed on right things, we ensure that;
        - The peace of God shall keep our minds (4:7).
        - And the God of peace shall keep

us close (4:9).

- And virtue and praise will fill our hearts and flow from our lives, rather than bitterness and anxiety.
- Here is exactly how Paul comes out the end of this happy epistle;
  - Rejoicing (4:10).
  - Thanksgiving (4:14-18).
  - Contentment (4:11).
  - And praise (4:20).
- In Christ, Paul was;
  - *Sufficient* in all things (vs. 11).
  - *Able* in all things (vs. 13).
- Note that we do not have a blanket promise to all in 4:19. The promise was spoken to those who were *given* to the Lord and *giving* to the Lord and others (compare II Corinthians 9:6ff). The promise assumes givenness and giving.

Another View of Philippians

- Christ is our *everything* (chapter 1).
    - In life and death.
- Christ is our *example* (chapter 2).
- Christ is our *endeavour* (chapter 3).
    - To win / to know Him.
- Christ is our *enjoyment* (chapter 4).
    - Rejoicing, peace, contentment.

Paul's Positive Attitude

Chapter 1 – Soaring above all obstacles.

Chapter 2 – Selfless toward others.

Chapter 3 – Seeking only Jesus.

Chapter 4 – Satisfied always.

Paul was such a happy man!! No circumstance removed his joy. (Compare II Corinthians 11:23-29).

Three *Surpassing* Things

- A surpassing *interest* – *others* (2:3).
- Surpassing *knowledge* – *Christ* (3:8).
- Surpassing *peace* (4:7).

"Let the word of Christ
dwell in you richly
in all wisdom"

(Colossians 3:16)

Colossians

Paul sent this book of Colossians to an area known as Phrygia in western Asia Minor. For there in the sheep-herding region of the Lycus Valley, about 160 kilometres inland from Ephesus, was a church in the small city of Colossae. When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Colossae he meant that it not only be read there in that church, but that it also be read in the church a few kilometres down the valley in the city of Laodicea (4:16). There was actually a third church in Hierapolis as well, at the head of the Lycus Valley (4:13). Apparently these were not churches that Paul had himself established. In fact it appears as though Paul had never even visited the area (1:3-4; 2:1).

The churches established in many of these outlying areas were likely the result of Paul's years of evangelistic and teaching ministry at Ephesus on the coast. We are told in Acts 19:10 that as a result of those years of ministry there, *"all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."* Though we are not let in on the details, it may very well be that many were called of the Lord into ministry out of Paul's work in Ephesus, taking the Lord's word out to the regions beyond. Or perhaps, as from Pentecost, it was

simply a case of folks returning home from Ephesus, having been saved and challenged to live for the Lord, and then being used of the Lord back home to lead others to salvation in Christ. Either way, the Lord was building His church and pressing the borders outward. As mentioned previously, Paul tended to go to the main city centres (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi), establishing churches where the water was deepest, at the crossroads. But neither he nor the Lord who moved him intended that the work should stop there. From those centres the Lord meant that His word and church be pressed into the interiors, out into the valleys and mountains, out to the smaller cities, exactly what we can see happening there in Phrygia. Maybe it was Epaphras who was saved and moved of the Lord to go off to establish churches in that distant valley (1:7; 4:12-13). Somebody was moved, and moved out! The fact that we do not know the names of those who established these churches tells us that we do not need to know the Lord's champions. He knows. That is all that matters.

It appears that Paul's friends Philemon and Onesimus also lived in Colossae and were active members of the church there. This we understand through a comparison of Paul's little letter to Philemon and Colossians 4:9. How many others attended the church at Colossae? Who knoweth?

Why do we not know? Because who careth? Such a concern was not an issue with the Lord's people back in those days, nor is it an issue with the Lord today, though it is often the first question folks ask about a ministry. Only secular silliness measures success in congregation size and growth rate in our modern worldly churches.

The book of Colossians was another of Paul's Prison Epistles, written from Rome in 61 A.D. We can see that the letter to Philemon was sent at the same time. And of course the run-away slave, Onesimus, must have returned to Colossae with the letters Tychicus carried from Paul (see 4:7-9). Tychicus probably dropped off the letter to the Ephesians and perhaps Paul's letter to the Philippians along the way.

It is a surprising discovery that Paul also sent along a third letter to the Lycus Valley, to the church at Laodicea (4:16), a letter which has been lost. The Spirit of God is the great Superintendent as to which writings made their way into His sacred text. But one wonders how that other letter went astray? Was it a tragic thing? Surely it must have been in some way. Did Tychicus lose it in the sea on the way across? Did somebody's house burn down with that letter reduced to ash as well? Judging by the description of the church at Laodicea in Revelation

3, perhaps they failed to appreciate Paul's message and burnt it on purpose. Was there great anguish at the loss of one of the Apostle Paul's writings? By whatever means the epistle was lost and remained lost, we can safely conclude that it was the hand of the Lord removing that piece from circulation by His divine determination for reasons known only to Him.

We tend to bemoan our great losses. But it is always the Lord allowing circumstance to work His will for our best. It is always the hand of the great Sculptor chipping away so deftly and with perfect timing from His work of the ages. It was such a heartache many years ago when our Borough turned down our application to buy a property for use as a church. But we can see now that He had a better plan for us, one that works much better than that one ever could have. It surely must have been a great heartache those many years that Ruth was unable bear children with her first husband. But the Lord had something much better for her with Boaz, after her years of barrenness and loss. We often cannot see God's purposes for suffering on the surface, but we can rest assured that it has much more to do with gain than loss in God's eternal plan; much more to do with triumph than tragedy, if we are patient to wait. Our rest is in our trust in that One who is *"faithful and true".*

Purpose

Paul wrote the book of Colossians partly to combat the threat of false teachings and teachers there (compare the *"any man"* of 2:4, 8 and the *"no man"* of 2:16, 18);

- Paul seemed to hint at the influence of Jewish legalism.
    - He pointed out a right view of circumcision (2:11; 3:11), ordinances, foods, and holidays (2:14, 16).
- He indicated asceticism (2:20-23).
- He mentioned the worship of angels (2:18).
- He spoke of empty, specious human philosophies, which followed the ways of the world rather than Christ (2:4, 8).

Some of these errant views dealt with by Paul in this epistle later jelled into what came to be known as Gnosticism. Gnostic views were a collection of ideas arising out of the teachings of Plato, Persian religion, and Buddhist philosophy. Some of the beliefs of the Gnostics;

- They claimed to possess a special knowledge of great, secret "mysteries" available only to the initiated (compare 1:25-2:3).

- They emphasized their enlightened knowledge as superior over faith.

- They viewed Paul's gospel as simple-minded childishness in comparison to their elaborate system of belief.

- They saw a separation between material things and spirit, and considered material things evil.

- They reckoned that since God is good He could not have been directly responsible for the creation of matter.

- In their thinking they devised a series of spirits or angels ("emanations") between God and material things, each lower emanation in turn created by a higher one.

- They believed an emanation called "Demiurge" created matter, one that was far enough removed from God to not contaminate God.

- When presented with Jesus Christ, Gnostics viewed Him through their pagan philosophy and slotted Him in somewhere among their emanations, making Jesus less than God in their view. Yet they tended to deny Christ's humanity as well, since they considered

matter to be evil.

- Their view that material things are evil, caused some Gnostics to fall to the side of asceticism in an effort to subdue evil flesh (the Essenes and Stoics).

- Others of their persuasion believed material flesh was best overcome through indulging every fleshly craving until fully satisfied (the Epicureans).

Through the message of Colossians Paul graciously wrote off this load of nonsense for the manure pile it is. He held high the answer to all such devious follies in a right understanding and relation to Jesus Christ.

"For <u>in Him</u> dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

"<u>In whom</u> are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

"And ye are complete <u>in Him</u>, which is the head of all principality and power."

"Christ is all, and in all… (and) *in you, the hope of glory"* (1:27; 2:3, 9-10; 3:11).

Here is the great theme of this epistle – *Christ, Christ, <u>Christ</u> <u>is</u> <u>all</u>!!* The answer for mankind is

never ordinances or philosophies or rigorous asceticism or fleshly abandon. It is never the arm of flesh at all. The answer is in the Person of Jesus Christ, in a relationship with He who is all and in all.

The message of Colossians is a strong, positive, gracious but forthright presentation of Jesus Christ as Supreme God, suffering Saviour, Sovereign Lord, and centre of all human attention, the one and only Mediator between the true God and man.

Survey

Colossians is like the book of Galatians in that it was also written largely to correct error. But unlike Galatians, Colossians begins and remains on a bright, positive, thankful note. Paul seems to be concerned, but not overly concerned. Perhaps indicating that the doctrinal problems there were lurking close but still on the edges, rather than into the heart of the church as yet, in contrast to the more urgent situation among the Galatian believers.

Chapter 1 – True Doctrine of Jesus Christ.

- 1:3-8 – Thanksgiving.
    - Compare how often Paul expresses his thankfulness for people – Romans 1:8-

9; I Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-5; I Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2:13; II Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; II Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4-5.

- 1:9-11 – Intercession.
    - Note the focus on knowledge (vs. 9 & 10).
- 1:12-14 – Who *we* are.
    - Justified – *"made us meet"* (vs. 12).
    - Heirs of glory (vs. 12).
    - Rescued from darkness (vs. 13).
    - Members of God's kingdom of light (vs. 13).
    - Purchased through Christ's blood (vs. 14).
- 1:15-23 – Who *He* is.

  Note the statements describing,

    - The person of Christ (you list them).
        - *"The image of the invisible God"* (compare John 14:9; II Corinthians. 4:4; Hebrews 1:3).

        - *"Firstborn"*, meaning superior over all.

    - The work of Jesus Christ.
        - *"By Him all things consist"* (cohere, hold together). Jesus is the One holding all things together at the most basic level.

"No comparable listing of so many characteristics of Christ and His deity are found in any other Scripture passage" (Walvoord & Zuck)

In 1:26-27 Paul shows that all true believers are initiated into the *true* mystery of the *true* God, *"which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"*.

Chapter 2 – False Doctrine.

- 2:1-7 – All answers are in Jesus Christ.
    - In whom are all the hidden, collected treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
    - Why pursue empty human speculations when all is found in Christ?
- 2:8-10 – Against human reasonings.
    - As J.B. Phillips put vs. 8, *"Be careful*

that nobody spoils your faith through intellectualism or high-sounding nonsense".

- 2:11-23 – Against human rituals.
    - In Jesus the condemnations of the law have been removed, nailed to the cross with Him (vs. 14).
    - The rituals of the law were only *"a shadow"* of the coming Christ (vs. 17).
    - Note the reference to mysticism in vs. 18.
        - Apparently the false teachers were claiming higher, fuller mystical experiences of God or contact with angels to support their claims.
        - They were using spiritual intimidation to point up the lowly, unspiritual state of the uninitiated, calculated to give the impression that the words of the mystic cannot be questioned.
        - Paul pulls their curtain back, calling their supposed visions lies *("which he hath not seen").*

- Rather than admitting any high and heavenly source for their fanciful dreams, Paul points to their *"fleshly mind"* as the true source.
- Behold modern mysticism in charismaticism.

Chapter 3-4:6 – True Living that Radiates Christ.

So typical of Paul, the focus now turns to the practical application of truth lived out in the life.

- 3:1-17 – Personal Life.
  - Paul speaks of *mind* masters (vs. 1-2) and *member* masters (vs. 5ff) to be put off.
  - Be seeking and minding *"things above"* (vs. 1-2).
    - Compare Paul's focus on right thinking in his letter to the Philippians.
    - Every *outward* sin marks the end of a long, twisted trail of the *inward* sin of evil thinking.
  - Put off – put on (vs. 8-14).

        - Compare in Ephesians 4 the same principle of replacement.

- 3:18-4:6 – Social Life.
    - Wives (3:18).
    - Husband (3:19).
    - Children (3:20).
        - Do not hit your parents (Ex. 21:15).
        - Do not curse your parents (Ex. 21:17).
        - Do not dishonour your parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 27:16).
        - Rather reverence your parents (Lev. 19:3), or the results will be tragic (Prov. 30:17).
        - If you would *"study to show thyself approved unto God"*, here is where your study begins.
    - Fathers (3:21).
    - Servants (3:22-25).
    - Masters (4:1).
    - The world (4:2-6).

- The proper use of time (vs. 5) and tongue (vs. 6).

4:7-18 – Annotated list of the Lord's Servants.

I Thessalonians

None of Paul's letters put such a focus on the second coming of Jesus Christ like this pair of gems written to *"the church of the Thessalonians"*. Not only do we find great detail as to coming events within these few chapters, but we also find here much instruction in Christian living in light of the Lord's return. Both books were written with a very positive, encouraged spirit (as Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians). How greatly Paul cherished this church at Thessalonica.

The City

Again, the city of Thessalonica was a city of major importance in Paul's day, continuing the Apostle's pattern of concentrating his efforts on the major city centres. Do you see the successful outworking of this method expressed in I Thessalonians 1:6-9? The city of Thessalonica was;

- The capitol city of Macedonia.
- An important seaport at the head of the Thermaic Gulf.
- On the Egnatian Way, the main east to west trade and military road between Rome and Asia Minor (the eastern continuation of the

Appian Way on the Italy side). Berea and Philippi were also on this important route.

- A prosperous, bustling, crossroads city of caravans and traders, ships and sailors, Roman officials, Jews and Gentiles, comings and goings.

All contributing to the explosive spread of the gospel described in 1:8.

The Church

Thessalonica was the next stop after Paul and company left the work newly begun at Philippi. The first few verses of Acts 17 record the beginnings of the church at Thessalonica. There we discover;

Paul's *method* (Acts 17:1-2);

- As was his normal practice if possible, Paul began in the Jewish Synagogue.

- His approach was to reason with them out of the Scriptures, which he did over three weekends.

Paul's *message* (Acts 17:3);

- His theme was Jesus Christ.

- His text was the O.T.

- He preached a two-part outline.
    - The Messiah prophesied in the O.T. was to (in fact, *had* to) suffer and rise from death. What O.T. passages would Paul have used?
    - Jesus of Nazareth was indeed that promised Messiah.

A *multitude* believed – a small revival (Acts 17:4);

- *"Some of them* (Jews) *believed".*
- *"A great multitude"* of Gentile proselytes to Judaism.
- Many *"of the chief women".*
- As well, many pagan Gentiles were converted from idolatry (I Thess. 1:9).

Then there followed the typical jealous Jewish response, stirring a riot (Acts 17:5-9). For the Jewish people rejection was an *event*, not just a *heart* thing but a *street* thing. Paul and company were soon forced out of the city, putting an abrupt end to their incredibly fruitful ministry there. The missionary team moved on to Berea, but as at Derbe (Acts 14) the Jews of Thessalonica pursued and trouble soon moved them on from there as well. Paul then went down to Athens and then on to

Corinth where he laboured for a year and a half. It was during his time in Athens or Corinth that he wrote both of these letters to the believers at Thessalonica. Though the church at Thessalonica was actually very young (only months old) when Paul wrote to them, already their reputation was spread far and wide because of the transformation their new lives in Christ displayed (1:8-10).

Notice how Paul wrote to them as a viable church (1:1) though the work had just begun before the missionaries were pushed out. There had barely been time to appoint leaders (I Thess. 5:12). Paul's (God's) church planting-approach was very different than ours today. We want to build a church up to a certain size. We want to train Christian workers to a certain standard or qualification set by the world. But Paul's approach was to simply get the work going, train the new believers in the Word of God, appoint mature men to lead the new work, and leave. And then he laboured to further guide the work through correspondence, occasional visits, and continual prayer for the Lord's blessing on the church (I Thess. 3:10). And it worked! A church was growing and the word of the Lord was sounding out from them, though the church was only newly begun.

Together with this thought, consider young

Timothy, only recently collected when Paul and Silas were passing through Galatia (Acts 16:1-3). Yet Paul refers to Timothy in I Thessalonians 3:2 as *"our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ".* He trusted Timothy enough to send him to Thessalonica to assess and help with the new work there. Things moved much faster than in our modern way of thinking. It would appear that with Paul it was more a matter of finding those with the Lord's *call* on their life and Spirit gifting for the work than our modern view of proper human *qualification.*

Purpose

Timothy's return and report of the progress among the Thessalonian believers brought the occasion for Paul's first epistle to them. He wrote to express his joy-filled affection for them and to commend the believers for their faith. And what a joyful encouragement they were to Paul (2:17-20). He writes like a new mother enthusing over a cherished newborn child. He wrote as well, to encourage them onward in godly living (4:1-12). And he wrote to instruct and comfort them with the truths of the Lord's return (4:13-5:11).

Survey

Details concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ are surprisingly prominent in both epistles to this church. Every chapter concludes with some comment concerning things to come (I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23. Note as well II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-12).

Chapters 1-3 – Words of Comfort.

- Chapter 1 – The testimony of the Thessalonian believers.
    - 1:4-6 – Justification.
    - 1:6-9 – Sanctification.
    - 1:10 – Glorification.
- Chapter 2 – Paul's testimony – he seems to be answering his critics.
    - 2:1-11 – Their example.
        - They showed boldness and courage (vs. 1-2).
        - Their message was pure and without deceit (vs. 3).
        - They sought to please God, not men (vs. 4-6).
        - They were without covetousness

(vs. 5).

- They were tenderly, sacrificially affectionate (vs. 7-8, 11).
- They worked hard (vs. 9).
- *"How holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you"* (vs. 10).

- 2:12-14 – Their following.
  - Notice how he commends them for simply receiving the word preached as God's words (vs. 13). Here is the one and only commendable response to the Word of God. Man is condemned or blessed, based simply upon how he responds to the Word of God.
- 2:15-16 – Their enemies.
- 2:17-20 – Their affection.
  - Though Paul longed to be with them but could not, yet he rejoiced in the sure hope that they would be his crown of rejoicing at the Lord's coming.

- Chapter 3 – Paul's ministry in absence.
    - He wrote to them.
    - 3:1-9 – He sent Timothy.
        - They had tried repeatedly to return (2:18), yet when they *"could no longer forbear"* Timothy was sent (3:1, 5).
    - 3:10-13 – He prayed for them constantly.

Chapters 4-5 – Words of Encouragement.

Did Paul ever write a letter that did not in some way appeal for appropriate Christian conduct?

- 4:1-12 – Living before the world.
    - Walking in purity (vs. 1-8) – *"abstain from fornication",*
        - Because the Lord is the avenger (vs. 6).
        - Because you have been called to holiness, not uncleanness (vs. 7).
        - Because to despise another is to despise the Lord (vs. 8). We despise others when we use them

for our own pleasure.

- Because He has given us His Holy Spirit (vs. 8).
- Compare the end of I Corinthians 6.

- Walking in love (vs. 9-10).
- Walking attractively (good form) before the world (vs. 11-12).
- ***"So ye would abound more and more"*** (4:1, 10; 3:12). A walk with the Lord is never to be stagnant.

- 4:13-18 – Living in expectation of the rapture.
  - This is the classic N.T. passage on the rapture of the church. It is not the only text pointing out the truth of the rapture. The word "rapture" is not found in the Bible. "Rapture" is the Latin translation of the Greek word translated *"caught up"* here in 4:17.

Ponder Points

There are differing views among Christians concerning the matter of Christ's second coming;

- Some think there will be one general return of Christ. These are referred to as the *post-tribulationists*, for they expect the rapture or catching up of the saints (the church) at the end of the coming Tribulation period, with the rapture of the church and then Christ's return to earth all in one great movement or event.

- Some think Christ's coming will be in two phases;

    - *Mid-tribulationists* expect the rapture of believers in the middle of the coming 7-year Tribulation, which will precede the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

    - *Pre-tribulationists* expect the rapture before the 7-year Tribulation period begins.

- A careful comparison of Daniel and other prophetic passages will lead to the pre-tribulational view.

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Paul wrote of the rapture and the Lord's return mainly to bring comfort to the hearts of believers in their sorrow with those lost to death (4:13, 18; 5:11).
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Note the string of 15 closing commands in 5:11-22.
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"O the depth of the riches
both of the wisdom
and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable
are His judgments,
and His ways past finding out!"

(Romans 11:33)

II Thessalonians

We cannot observe how greatly Paul emphasized the doctrine of Christ's second coming without recognizing the supreme importance of these truths for believers. Yet how neglected a subject in many churches today. The confusion brought by Amillennialism has perhaps contributed more to the death of interest in prophecy in the modern church than anything else. Paul did not just make the doctrine of future things the focus of the two letters he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. These great truths were also the focus of his teaching while briefly with them at the first (II Thess. 2:5). Abstract theological discussions of little practical use? It does not seem the Lord's Apostle thought so!

This second letter must have followed the first by only a matter of months. Not only had a very favourable report come to Paul concerning this new church to the north, but there was also word that the believers at Thessalonica were troubled by a false report that *"the day of Christ is at hand"* (2:2), that the day of Christ's second coming was immediately upon them, bringing the end of all things. Some of them had actually given up their work in anticipation of the Lord's coming, ignoring Paul's previous instructions (I Thess. 4:11-12).

So Paul sent this second letter to give correction and further details of events around Christ's return.

Survey

Chapter 1 – Praise for their patience.

- 1:3-5 – Paul encouraged them in their persecutions.
- 1:6-10 – Paul assured them of God's future, final justice.
    - Compare Revelation 20:11-15.
    - Compare I Thessalonians 2:15-16; Revelation 13:10 & 14:12.

Chapter 2 – Correct understanding of things future.

Paul had spoken in I Thessalonians 5 of the coming *"day of the Lord"*, which would bring *"sudden destruction"* with it. Perhaps since they were led by Paul to associate the time of Christ's return with trouble or tribulation, and since they were then suffering severe tribulation of persecution, and this combined with a spurious report that *"the day of Christ is at hand"* (2:2-3), therefore they were tending to believe that the end had come or was near. But this then stirred confusion, for if the day of the Lord had already arrived then what had

become of the promised rapture of all believers, of which Paul had previously written (I Thess. 4:13-17)? So Paul wrote to explain that they were not to confuse their present tribulations with the future Great Tribulation. And he wrote to lay out the timeline of coming events.

Paul pointed to two future developments, which must take place before Christ's return;

- First there will be a great falling away from the Lord (2:3). The Greek word behind the English *"falling away"* is *apostasia*, from which we get the English word apostasy.
- Then a man referred to as *"that man of sin"* and *"the son of perdition"* (antichrist in I John 2:18) will rise to his brief day in the sun (2:3-4).
    - Paul explains that antichrist's rise is presently held back by the church of God indwelt by the Spirit of God on this earth.
    - The removal of the Spirit-indwelt church of God (2:6-8), heralding antichrist's rise, can only refer to the rapture.
    - The previous dispensation ended with

Israel's rejection of the true Christ. This present dispensation will end with Israel's acceptance of antichrist (Dan. 9:27).

- In light of II Thessalonians 2:4, what do you suppose they thought when the temple was later flattened and the Jews dispersed?
- Note the four references to lies and deception in vs. 9-11.

Consider the many names of the coming Antichrist and his prominence in God's Book;

- The little horn (Dan. 7).
- The prince that shall come (Dan. 9:26).
- The wilful king (Dan. 11:36ff).
- The man of sin (II Thess. 2:3).
- The son of perdition (II Thess. 2:3).
- The Wicked (II Thess. 2:8).
- Antichrist (I John 2:18).
- The beast (Rev. 13, 19:19-20).

Chapter 3 – Correct living in the light of future things.

- 3:1-5 – The Lord is the source of victorious Christian living.
- 3:6-15 – Christian discipline.
    - The prospect of the Lord's coming is not to hinder the conduct of our lives in integrity.
    - Waiting must be joined with working.
    - Note well the instruction on the proper handling of erring brothers.

Paul was dealing with both false *teaching* and false *interpretation* in this book.

"Thy word
is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path"

(Psalm 119:105)

I Timothy

We first meet Timothy in Acts 16:1-3, after which his name features prominently, appearing over 20 times in the N.T. Timothy's home was the Lystra/Derbe area of southern Galatia. Paul was passing through the region again on his second missionary journey with Silas, and this young man named Timothy was so *"well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium"* that Paul wanted him to join their missionary team.

Timothy was of that rare breed who was faithful from the beginning, from the day he was saved. He got busy right where he was, working out of his home church. Timothy's faithfulness would prove to be a characteristic that would stay with him throughout the rest of his life. It was that very trait which so endeared him to Paul and kept him by Paul's side when all others later forsook him.

Timothy had been trained in the things of the Lord by a mother's love as a child (II Tim. 1:5; 3:15), but it seems he was led to salvation in Christ through Paul's ministry (I Tim. 1:2; I Cor. 4:14-17) on his first missionary journey to the same region with Barnabus (Acts 14). This one sows, that one waters, another reaps. All aspects vital toward the harvest of a soul.

So as a young man, Timothy became one of the Apostle Paul's closest and most faithful companions, working beside him for the rest of Paul's years of ministry. Timothy became a trusted servant of God (Phil. 2:19-23) whom Paul could send to prepare the way for his own coming, as he did in Macedonia (Acts 19:21-22), or to carry on a work Paul had left, as he did at Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:1-2). To this faithful servant of the Lord Paul wrote two of his thirteen inspired letters.

The books of I & II Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles. There is good reason for this title. These three books were written mainly to advise these two men (Timothy & Titus) who were serving in some type of pastoral or overseeing role – Timothy overseeing the Lord's work in the Ephesus area and Titus on the Island of Crete. So these books become something of an instruction manual in appropriate conduct in the Lord's churches and leaders.

"These things write I unto thee…that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God" (I Tim. 3:14-15).

If we stand back for a moment and view Paul's contribution to the N.T. as a whole we can perhaps see a progression in the thrust of his writings. Paul wrote six of his epistles while travelling about on his

early journeys recorded in the book of Acts. The theme of the first four of these (Romans, I & II Corinthians, and Galatians) leans toward an explanation of the salvation made available in Jesus Christ. Certainly this is true of Romans and Galatians. There is a strong theme of the cross in I Corinthians as well, but the two books to the church at Corinth largely deal with church problems and questions. Then, coming out the end of the book of Acts, while a prisoner in Rome, Paul wrote his four Prison Epistles. The thrust of the first three (the next three books in N.T. order, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians) is the exaltation of Jesus Christ and the joy of our refuge in Him. Then come the two books to the Thessalonian believers in the N.T. order, gazing off to the future with their focus on prophecy. Then these Pastoral Epistles, written toward the end of Paul's days on earth, where the focus turns to instruction in spiritual leadership. It would appear that Paul was turning over the reins to the next generation (compare Christ's similar purpose in His final words to His disciples in John 13-17).

When Paul spoke to the elders of the Ephesus area for what he thought would be the last time, in Acts 20, he solemnly warned them of trouble to come, both from without and from within (Acts 20:28-30).

After Paul was released from his first imprisonment he apparently returned to Ephesus and found what he had prophesied becoming reality, what Edmond Hiebert referred to as a *"storm centre of false teaching".* Perhaps it was something like Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem after long absence in chapter 13 of his book. Paul may have stayed and laboured there for some time, but then left Timothy at Ephesus to continue dealing with the troubles and moved on to Macedonia.

Note the word *"besought"* (pled) in 1:3. It appears to have taken some persuasion. Perhaps Timothy would have preferred to stay by Paul's side (as the disciples with Jesus). The time was soon coming when Paul would not be around anymore, and Timothy would be on his own humanly speaking. Do we perhaps see Paul beginning to pull away?

Timothy had been with Paul throughout those three years of his first ministry efforts in Ephesus (Acts 19:22), and therefore Timothy would have been familiar with the nature of the work and people there. But still he was left with a full plate. It was a tribute to Paul's confidence in Timothy that he would leave to him such a vital and daunting task. It was while across the sea in Macedonia that Paul wrote this first epistle to his faithful companion (I Tim. 1:3). He hoped to rejoin Timothy soon, yet

recognized that he might not be able to make it back quickly (3:14-15), and so Paul wrote to help Timothy in the difficult work there at Ephesus.

Paul wrote to give to his young comrade both *encouragement* and *authorization* in the work.

Paul gave *encouragement* to Timothy;

- To expose and refute false teaching and teachers (chapter 1, 4 & 6).
    - Those who were wasting time on worthless *"fables and endless genealogies",* which contribute nothing to the spiritual growth of others (1:4; 4:7). Compare Titus 3:9.
    - Those who loved to get into useless disputes of words (6:4). Compare II Timothy 2:14, 16-18, 23.
    - Those who were emphasizing unnecessary issues over *"the glorious gospel of the blessed God".*
    - Consider the danger of majoring on minor things, such as;
        - Charismatic style showtime religion and fanaticism over signs and wonders.

- Christian health food nuts and special diet pushers.
- Advocates of Jewish style worship services.
- Warriors against the dreaded "foreign invader" plants, and crusaders for the indigenous (and other ecological concerns).
- Warriors against animal injustice. God's not as worried as some people are about the extinction of animals. He has allowed for mass extinctions before man could be considered a cause, and before people ever thought about trying to stop it.
- Warriors against human injustices and other social concerns.

o Nice causes, but *not our mission!* Ours is the *great commission.* Do not allow Satan to subtly steer you away from *the great cause* to lesser "good" causes. Do not waste your life on the *good* choices when you can make the *excellent* choices, the very best ones.

- To teach the truth.
    - Note the focus on sound *"doctrine"* throughout the book. All three of the Pastoral Epistles highlight the word.

Paul gave *authorization* to Timothy;

- First highlighting his own apostolic authority (vs. 1).
- Then signing his authority over to Timothy at the outset of the epistle (1:3-4).
    - These words would be read among the churches.
    - This epistle would have served a similar purpose to Moses' public appointment of Joshua, transferring the mantle of leadership (Deut. 31:7-8, 23).

Highlights

2:1-8 – Thoughts on prayer.

- Our communication with God should involve *"supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks"* (vs. 1). Paul piles terms for emphasis.
- We should plead *"for all men"* (vs. 1) and *"for*

<u>all</u> *that are in authority"* (vs. 2).

- We are to so plead because this is *"good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour"* (vs. 3).
- The first four verses of chapter 2 are perhaps the closest God comes in the Bible to instructing us that we should pray for the salvation of the lost.
- We are to pray (vs. 8);
    - *"Everywhere".*
    - With *"holy hands".*
    - *"Without wrath"*, or bitterness of heart.
    - *"Without…doubting".*

<u>2:9-15</u> – Thoughts on a woman's role.

- Walk in godliness (vs. 9-10). Compare I Peter 3:1-6.
- Learn in silence (vs. 11-12). Compare I Corinthians 14:34-35.
- Reasons why (vs. 13-14).
- Where she shines (vs. 15) – in her godly children.

<u>3:1-13</u> – Leadership standards.

This chapter is nourishing soil for an excellent word-by-word study.

- Bishops (vs. 1-7).
    - Greek – *episkopos* – "overseer".
    - The words "elder" and "bishop" and "pastor" (Eph. 4:11) seem to describe the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7).
    - These are the superintendents of the local churches (I Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17), whose work it is to;
        - Labour in the word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:17).
        - Pray continually (Acts 6:2-4).
        - Care for and feed the flock of God (Acts 20:28, 35; I Tim. 3:5; I Pet. 5:2).
        - Lead God's people through godly example (I Pet. 5:3; I Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7-8).
        - Guard God's flock against all that is false (Acts 20:29-31).
- Deacons (vs. 8-10, 12-13).

- In the Greek the word is *diakonos,* meaning "servant".

- These are the servants of the local churches, in spiritual as well as physical matters (Acts 6:1-6).

- Their wives (vs. 11).

    - It would appear that spiritual leadership does not need to be a celibate position. Neither were the O.T. priests without wives. Why the folly of Catholicism's demand for priestly celibacy, except through *"doctrines of demons"* (I Tim. 4:1-3)?

3:15-16 – See how we are motivated in ministry by the highest of visions.

- The Lord, through the Apostle, lifts what we are busy with in His church to the highest level. Woe be it to the one who belittles or corrupts or destroys *"the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth".*

Chapters 4 & 6 concern false views and how to prevent and deal with them.

Chapter 5 gives instruction concerning caring for widows and handling elders.

- Note the different types of widows. Only one type is to be financially supported by the church.

"All Scripture is given
by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine,
for reproof, for correction,
for instruction in righteousness:
that the man of God may be perfect,
throughly furnished unto all good works"

(II Timothy 3:16-17)

II Timothy

When Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy, perhaps about five years after his first, he was writing his last. Paul was in a Roman prison again (II Tim. 2:9; 4:16), but it was a very different situation than the first time. Now the threat of execution loomed close, for Emperor Nero had proclaimed illegal that religion for which Paul was the foremost spokesman. Much of Rome had burned in July A.D. 64, and noxious Nero had blamed the tragedy on what was considered the disruptive presence of the Christians in the Empire (probably to cover his own dirty tracks). It is a lasting tribute to the faithful friendship and service of Timothy that these last recorded words from Paul were addressed to him.

Paul was an old man when he wrote his farewell. And the prison conditions were not so inviting as last time. He was cold and wishing for his coat (II Tim. 4:13). He was likely in a dungeon rather than in a house as before (Acts 28:30). For you see, Paul was not a protected Roman citizen accused by the troublesome Jews this time, but a criminal of the Roman Empire. He had been taken so suddenly, perhaps at Troas, that he was without his books, and was wishful for them as well (II Tim. 4:13). He

had no string of friends and inquirers as before (Acts 28:30-31), but was forsaken by all (II Tim. 1:15; 4:10-11, 16). The great apostle was quite open about his wounded heart through this mass desertion. And Paul was not anticipating release this time, but only certain execution, and that in short order.

Thus the tone of II Timothy is urgent and tender and very personal, yet ever triumphant. Paul wrote to stir Timothy's heart (1:6) to carry on in the Lord's work in spite of the loss, in spite of rejection, in spite of the fearful threat of danger. We can well imagine what it must have been like for Timothy. He would have known that Paul had been taken, and probably would have feared the worst, and perhaps feared the same fate for himself if he should continue his unreserved stand for the truth of God. He knew of the negative attitude toward Paul, not only at the Jewish and Gentile capitals, but among the *believers* in Asia as well (1:15). Timothy would have felt the dark shadows of despair drawing closer, in losing his greatest friend and mentor, feeling quite alone and deserted, with all human support seeming to melt away, with so many drifting from a firm stand for the Lord under Nero's threats. Timothy was likely wondering what it was all coming to, and what it was all for. Everything seemed to be coming apart in that dark hour.

Then this urgent, stirring, bright, and victorious letter arrived from Paul's own hand and heart – from the dungeon – from the very verge of death – from where the shadows could not be darker.

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind" (1:7).

Can you picture those words ringing such a note of courage in Timothy's troubled soul, as in so many other souls throughout the ensuing centuries? Can you imagine a swell of confidence surging through him?

"Thou therefore be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1).

All of the dark, smothering clouds of despair and uncertainty and weakness of knees all beginning to dissipate.

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2:3).

The sunshine of God's surpassing grace suddenly shining through, stirring Timothy to renewed courage and resolve to remain faithful to the Lord, through Paul's strengthening words and courageous example.

"I am ready to be poured out" (4:6).

And Timothy was strong again, ready to face Satan's worst to the very end.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (4:7-8).

Timothy's troubled heart perhaps infused with renewed confidence that the church of God was not in peril, on the brink of annihilation, but rather that the gates of hell would never prevail against the forward march of the church, no matter how it may look at any given moment on the ground.

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (4:18).

"Do not shrink from trouble Timothy! You have stood with me in the Lord's business these many years; now endure hardship with me too – *to the end.*"

Survey

In chapter 1 Paul relates examples, both negative and positive, in an effort to stir Timothy to

"withstand in the evil day".

- Negative example (vs. 15) – Paul's disappointment with the deserters.
- Positive example (vs. 16-18) – Paul's encouragement from faithful Onesiphorus.

In chapter 2, Paul uses illustrations (vs. 3-6) and examples (vs. 8-10) to express the idea of Christian *hardships* with their resulting *honours*.

Illustrations;

- Soldier (vs. 3-4) – Endures hardships to please the one who appointed him.
- Athlete (vs. 5) – Strives according to the rules and receives a crown.
- Farmer (vs. 6) – Labours and partakes of the fruits.

Examples;

- Christ (vs. 8) – Died but was raised again.
- Paul (vs. 9-10) – Suffered trouble, enduring so that others might be saved.

From 2:14 through to the end of chapter 3 Paul turned his attention to what Timothy was up against and how to handle it.

- The mess – 2:14-3:13.
- The message – 3:14-17.
- The method – 4:1-2.
    - Forget the puppets, plays and dance routines. Remember that all of God's great men were *preachers.*
- The motive – 4:6-8.

II Timothy 3:16-17 is the classic passage on the inspiration of the Word of God.

The Greek word used in 3:16 is *theopneustia* – literally "God breathed". Compare II Peter 1:21.

Titus

Who was Titus? And why is he so obscure in the N.T. in comparison to a man like Timothy? Who knows! But then who were Tychicus or Artemas (3:12) but mere foot soldiers of the cross as well. Interesting the difference. Timothy features so prominently in the book of Acts, but Titus is never once mentioned in that inspired church history book. We know Titus was around in those early days. Paul mentions in Galatians 2:1-4 that he took Titus with when he went up to the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. And we learn in II Corinthians (8:6, 16) that Titus was active in the ministry at Corinth.

Apparently Titus, like Timothy, believed in Jesus Christ through Paul's ministry (Titus 1:4), but nobody knows when. We first meet Titus at Corinth. Piecing things together from II Corinthians, it appears that Paul sent Titus to initiate the project of collecting an offering for the believers of Judea (II Cor. 8:6). Later Paul sent him to assess the effects of his first letter to Corinth and to help further straighten out the situation there (II Cor. 2:12-13). Titus then met Paul in Macedonia with the happy news of a break-through among those troubled brothers (II Cor. 7:5-7, 13-14), later returning to

Corinth carrying Paul's second letter to that church (II Cor. 8:16-24). After his work at Corinth Titus steps off the stage of history until he appears again in the Pastoral Epistles.

As mentioned earlier, the three books of I & II Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles. The reason for this title being that these letters were written mainly to help Timothy & Titus in their pastoral or overseeing roles; Timothy overseeing the Lord's work in Ephesus and Titus on the Island of Crete.

Crete is a mountainous island just south of the Aegean Sea, about the size of Swaziland (maybe 1/6 the size of Kwazulu Natal). We have no biblical record of Paul visiting the island during his missionary journeys, but apparently at some point after Paul's release from his first prison term he went with Titus to the Island of Crete (implied in 1:5). Paul then left Crete, leaving Titus behind, *"that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee"* (1:5). Do you see Paul issuing the same authority to Titus as we saw him do with Timothy (I Tim. 1:3)?

It would appear that there was or would be church-planting work done on the island since there would be the need to appoint elders in every city. There

were likely already pockets of believers on the Island of Crete, since there had been devout Cretans in Jerusalem on that day when *"Pentecost was fully come"* (Acts 2:11). Perhaps some were saved there, taking the gospel back to their island home.

The last we see of Titus is the brief mention of him in II Timothy 4:10, Paul having later sent him off to distant Dalmatia (Yugoslavia).

Ministry on Crete was likely not a pleasant assignment. It was a land of many people in Paul's day, men famous as sailors and archers, but people with a reputation for evil. Paul had to agree with one of their own prophets that *"the Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies"* (1:12-13). Their infamy was affirmed by many of the early church fathers. The people of Crete were such liars that their deceit was proverbial. *"To Cretanize"* or *"play the Cretan"* came to mean to lie or be deceptive, and *"to play a Cretan with a Cretan"* was to out-trick a trickster. They were famous for their wine, and thus drunkenness and low morals prevailed among them. One writer described them as *"neither peaceable among themselves, nor very patient of foreign dominion."* Here is the reason for the emphasis in the book of Titus on good Christian conduct. It was a message the Cretans needed to hear.

Paul's reasons for writing to Titus were much the same as with Timothy;

- There was need for Paul to issue his apostolic authority to Titus as his own representative on the island (1:5).
- Paul wrote to instruct Titus in dealing with false teachings and teachers (1:10-16; 3:9-11).
    - Note the prominence of the phrase *"sound doctrine".* When the Lord writes to spiritual leaders about how to run His church, *sound doctrine* is what is on His heart (a major theme throughout these Pastoral Epistles).
- He wrote to give instruction;
    - In establishing the churches and good leadership (1:5-9).
    - In proper Christian conduct (2:1-3:8).
        - Note the prominence of the phrase *"good works".*
- As well, Paul's letter would have brought encouragement to Titus in a difficult spot.

Survey

Chapter 1 – Good and Bad Spiritual Leaders.

- 1:5-9 – Good spiritual leaders.
    - Again, as in I Tim. 3, we find a list of leadership qualifications to which Titus was to refer in seeking out elders.
        - Note the focus on blamelessness (vs. 6-7). Another excellent list for a word-by-word study of godly leadership character.
    - Does vs. 9 sound like a painfully tolerant fellow who is willing to join with any spiritual Tom, Dick, or Harry?
        - The shepherd must be able to guard the deposit (I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 1:12-14) *and* handle the thieves who would steal it.
        - He must tend the sheep *and* drive away the wolves who would devour the sheep.
        - According to this list, to be qualified for the Lord's ministry His men must be those able to hold fast to the truth *and*

convincingly refute those contradicting (*"gainsaying"*) the truth.

- By this standard truly qualified shepherds are a greater scarcity with increasing tolerance of evil in the church.

- 1:10-16 – Bad leaders.
    - An elder must be vs. 9 because of what is described here in vs. 10-16.
    - There was a strong Jewish element among these troublers (vs. 10 & 14; 3:9).
    - Note in vs. 13 that the proper answer to wrong in others is sharp rebuke, leading to sound faith, rather than backing off with never a harsh word and hoping for the best.
    - Titus 1:16 is comparable to II Timothy 3:5.

Chapters 2-3 – Lives that Adorn God's Doctrine.

The focus in these chapters turns from those in *ministry* to those in *membership* in the local churches. Note the focus on sober mindedness,

pressed upon every age group.

- 2:2-10 – Instruction for various people.
    - 2:2 – Older men.
    - 2:3 – Older women.
    - 2:4-5 – Younger women.
    - 2:6 – Younger men.
    - 2:7-8 – Titus – *blameless!*
    - 2:9-10 – Servants.
        - Here is another picture of a faithful employee who adorns God's doctrine.
        - Submissive.
        - Desiring to be well pleasing to those over them in everything.
        - Refusing to speak against those over them.
        - Embezzling nothing.
        - Showing all good faithfulness.
    - Again priceless word studies here.

2:11-15 – Christ's 1st and 2nd comings both encourage us toward godly living.

    - Note the three aspects of salvation;
        - Saved – 2:11.
        - Being saved – 2:12.
        - Will be saved – 2:13.
    - The Lord's return is again brought to our attention as a very practical motivation to right living (2:13).

- 3:1-8 – The proper imprint that true salvation is to have upon a life.
    - Compare Ephesians 2:8-10.
    - Paul is careful to make clear that we are not saved *by* good works (vs. 5), but we are saved *unto* good works.
- 3:10-11 – Handling heretics.
    - Compare II John 10-11.
        - Do not welcome them.
        - Do not bid them "God speed", for God is not with them.

Even in his parting comment Paul insists again that we *"maintain good works"* that we might bear fruit (3:14).

Philemon

Paul's letter to Philemon is the shortest of his thirteen epistles, little more than a memo. The smallness of the book is likely the reason it was placed at the end of Paul's contribution to the N.T.

There are three main characters involved in this little book called "Philemon"; the Apostle Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus.

Paul wrote this letter from prison, this being one of his four Prison Epistles, written during his first imprisonment at Rome.

Philemon's name is found nowhere else in the N.T. other than vs. 1 of this book. He was a saved man who apparently lived in the city of Colossae (Col. 4:9 refers to Onesimus dwelling at Colossae), and fellowshipped at the church to which Paul wrote the book of Colossians (again, this letter would have been delivered by Tychicus at the same time he delivered the letters to the churches at Ephesus, Laodicea, Colossae, and perhaps Philippi).

Philemon was a good friend of Paul's, vs. 19 indicating that Paul may have led him to Christ (perhaps at Ephesus?). Apphia may have been Philemon's wife (vs. 2), and Archippus his son. Colossians 4:17 indicates that Archippus was

responsible for some aspect of the ministry there.

It would appear that Philemon was a man of some means. He had a house large enough to use as a church meeting place (vs. 2) and he owned slaves.

Onesimus was (one of?) Philemon's slave. He had run away from his master, causing him some loss (vs. 18), and then turned up all the way over in Rome, 1,700 kilometres away. Somehow Onesimus came in contact with Paul in Rome, who led him to Christ (vs. 10). It may have been that wherever Paul had come to befriend Philemon he had also befriended his slave at the same time. Thus perhaps Onesimus actually sought Paul out in Rome. In whatever way the Lord worked out the contact, a strong friendship developed between Paul and Onesimus after his conversion. But the law required that Onesimus be returned to his master, as any stolen property.

N.B. – Receiving Christ does not free one from the need to make restitution. Rather, a heart put right and at rest seeks all the more to put all else right.

Therefore not only did Tychicus carry three of Paul's letters to the Lycus Valley, he also brought Paul's

friend, the slave Onesimus, back to Philemon his master (Col. 4:7-9).

The whole thrust or theme of this brief letter is Paul's plea for pardon in behalf of Onesimus. As a runaway slave in that day, Onesimus could expect the harshest of treatments upon return. One writer suggested *"scourging, mutilation, and either crucifixion or the arena, under Roman law".* A slave had no rights, but rather was a possession, as a cow or a horse. A slave-owner was free to do as he pleased with his possession. Paul pled for grace, that Philemon might disregard the just claims of the law and rather treat his returned slave as *"a brother beloved"* (vs. 16).

By the design of the divine Author, as with the book of Ruth, this little letter to Philemon is much more than just a nice story, for in this book we see;

- A picture of Christian brotherhood that is blind to status. The famous (infamous) missionary befriending a nobody runaway slave, and thus a picture of God who cares for the lowliest.

- An example of Christian courtesy and tact in Paul's dealing with his friend, Philemon. So graciously Paul presents this request.

- A picture of our absolute bankruptcy before

Jesus Christ paid our account and set us free.

  - A slave owned nothing, not even himself. Therefore he had no means to repay when he brought loss to his master.
  - Yet ours was a loss of the worst kind before God, deserving eternal judgment, and we utterly without means to repay.
  - *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23).
  - So helpless and hopeless we were! Our only hope was that somebody able and willing might step in to our aid from the outside to pay our debt, which is what Paul (Jesus) did.
  - As Paul acted as an advocate for Onesimus, so Jesus for us.

- A picture of substitution and imputation.
  - *"Receive him as myself"* (vs. 17).
  - *"Put that on mine account"* (vs. 18).
- A picture of the Mediator, whose friendship touches both the divine and human side.
- A picture of redemption.

- *"I will repay it"* (vs. 19).
- As the O.T. kinsman redeemer, paying the price that the fallen kin cannot pay.

- A picture of Christ's advocacy and intercession for His own, pleading for leniency.
  - Here is the masterfully gracious plea of our Advocate for our pardon, pleading in our behalf.
  - Not only was Jesus willing to help and able to pay the price, but He is One (the *only* one) able to influence the offended Master.
  - *"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (I John 2:1).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Survey

Verses 1-7 – Focus on Philemon.

- Vs. 1 – Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of Rome, but *"of Jesus Christ"* (also vs. 9).

- Vs. 1 – While pleading the cause of a slave, note how Paul repeatedly puts himself in a similar setting of bondage (also vs. 9, 10, 13, 23).

- Vs. 5 & 7 – Paul commends Philemon for his love and care *"toward all saints"*, that company of the blessed, which of course Onesimus had now joined!

- "Tact" – *"the delicate perception of the right thing to say"* (dictionary).

Verses 8-21 – Focus on Onesimus.

Paul, the effective advocate, pled for Onesimus on the basis of;

- Vs. 8 – His own apostolic authority.

- Vs. 9 – *"For love's sake".*

- Vs. 9 – Sympathy in view of Paul's age and bondage.

- Vs. 10 – His special relation to Onesimus (spiritual father and son).

- Vs. 11 – Onesimus' new profitability.

- Vs. 12 – Paul's tender care for Onesimus. To strike the one would be to strike the other.

- Vs. 13 – Onesimus' service to Paul in

Philemon's stead at Rome.

- Vs. 15 – The new trustworthiness of Onesimus.
- Vs. 18 – Paul's promise to stand good for all the loss Philemon incurred through the desertion of Onesimus (signing his own name to it).
    - Think about how such a pledge would have meant nothing if Paul had not already been known for his trustworthiness. You may not think you need a good reputation before people now, but the day will surely come when you will wish you had one!

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Ponder Points

Though this book is dealing with the touchy issue of slavery, of people owning people, there is no indication here of the wrongness of the institution. Master Philemon was no less *"dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer"* (vs. 1) of the Apostle Paul by being a slave-owner.

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All the difference for Onesimus rested in his

connection with a man who was *able* and *willing* to help. In the same way *all* the difference for us between life and death rests in our association with the Man, Christ Jesus, our only hope.

Hebrews

I mentioned some percentages early on in this study of God's beloved Book of books. The history portion of the N.T. (Gospels and Acts) makes up 59% and Paul's epistles make up 25% of the N.T. Putting the history portion and Paul's contribution together we come up with 84% of the N.T. This is the ground we have covered so far. We have only 16% remaining. The general or non-Pauline epistles make up about 10% and Revelation about 6%.

We leave Paul's letters behind now as we move into the non-Pauline letters, where the book of Hebrews heads the list. This letter to the Hebrews fulfils a very unique function in the canon of Scripture. The book is an eye-opening commentary on the O.T., explaining why God's people were doing what the books of Moses required in the O.T. era. Explained as well is the meaning of the ritual requirements of law and Levitical system, demonstrating how it all pointed to the fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

- *He* is the once-for-all sacrifice for sin, answering to all of the O.T. sacrifices.
- *He* is the true Mediator.
- *He* is the eternal High Priest.

- *He* is the fulfilment of all of the O.T. types (red heifer, Passover, firstfruits, etc.).

It is for this reason that we find such an abundance of O.T. quotations in the book of Hebrews.

John Phillips made the excellent observation and comparison that whereas the message of Romans moves from law to grace, the message of Hebrews moves from shadow to substance. Jesus Christ is the substance and the O.T. Levitical system merely the shadow of His approaching presence. The book of Romans shows that the righteousness of the law is all fulfilled in the Christian. Hebrews shows that the ritual of the law is all fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

From beginning to end the book of Hebrews is all about Jesus Christ. The book is an urgent, clarion call to carefully consider that One, and what He has said.

"Consider…Christ Jesus…therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things…which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord…" (2:1-3; 3:1).

Audience and Author

From the earliest days of church history the book of Hebrews was titled simply *"pros hebraious"* (Greek) – *"To Hebrews".* It was perhaps written to a

particular group of Jewish people somewhere in the Roman world, but beyond them the book carried a message to all the Jews.

Though there be much difference of opinion on the matter, nobody knows for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews. There is no claim to authorship within its message. This is an intriguing point in itself and begs the question why not, why the anonymity? The message of the book in many ways indicates that the Apostle Paul may have had a hand in it;

- We have seen how Jesus Christ was such a central theme in Paul's writings (Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians), as in this book.
- The matter of how the religion of the Jews aligns with salvation offered by faith in Christ was a concept Paul was at pains to explain in his own writings (Romans & Galatians).
- From a human perspective Paul was highly trained in the O.T.
- The ideas and expressions in Hebrews are much like Paul's.
- As Paul, so the writer of Hebrews was associated with Timothy (13:23).
- The writer mentioned his *"bonds"* (10:34).

Perhaps the author was one of Paul's co-workers such as Luke or Apollos (Titus 3:13). Or perhaps it was a joint authorship of Paul and Luke during Paul's first imprisonment. That would make a lot of sense. Paul certainly had much involvement with the Jews while under house arrest there in Rome (Acts 28:17-31). And the epistle does seem to have been written from Italy (13:24).

So why did Paul not identify himself if he was involved? Perhaps because his name was not particularly cherished among the unbelieving Hebrew people of his day.

Purpose

To understand the purpose of the book of Hebrews we must understand what a Jew faced when he left the Jewish religion and joined himself to Christianity. It was no small step! There was the pull of long-standing Jewish tradition based upon the venerable books of Moses and backed by the greatest names in Jewish history. There was the temple of God still standing on the temple mount in Jerusalem, symbol of the worship of the true God. There was the bitter scorn and exclusion of family and friends levelled against all who went "apostate" from the Jewish religion. There was relentless persecution from Jewish quarters directed at such

deserters. The book of Acts reveals how ferocious was the Jewish response against the gospel message, and how much more when one of their own was "lost" to Christ. All of these influences combined to form a powerful force in the heart of a Jewish convert to Jesus Christ, drawing him back into the ancient religion of his people.

Christianity was such an extreme offense to the Jewish religionists, for the Christian religion dared to claim the same book as their authority, yet denied the need to keep the very law of God through Moses or the need of the proper Levitical priesthood, temple sacrifices, rites, and rituals decreed by God in His Book.

Can you see how it was a step of highest courage for a Jew to leave the religion of his fathers for Christ? And so the letter to the Hebrews was written to explain, encourage, and warn – to help resolve the conflicts, anxious uncertainties, and misunderstandings in the heart of that Jewish convert to Jesus, and those of the practicing Jew who might be leaning toward Jesus as well.

There was need to teach the Hebrew world, and the whole world, about who Jesus is and about what He brought to the world and accomplished and how He fit into and fulfilled the O.T. There was need to show how the details of the Jews' religion were just

the shadow of the coming Christ, fulfilled and finished in Him, and of Christ's continuing ministry in our behalf as our great High Priest (7:25).

What Jesus brought to mankind was indeed *"better"* than what Moses brought.

- He is better than the angels (1:4).
- Bringing a better hope (7:19).
- Mediator of a better covenant (7:22; 8:6).
- Established upon better promises (8:6).
- Offering better sacrifices (9:23).
- Providing in heaven,
    - A better substance (10:34).
    - A better country (11:16).
    - A better resurrection (11:35).

Obviously *"better"* is a key word in this book of Hebrews. A converted Jew must understand that what he had received in Christ was a far greater gain than what he had left behind in the religion of his fathers.

As well, there was need to *warn* and *encourage* some who were growing weary and discouraged under the continued pressure of persecution, and some who

were professing to have entered into salvation in Christ, but who were only *professors* and no true *possessors* of eternal life. Several warning sections are found in Hebrews, because;

- There was danger of some missing *"so great salvation"* offered in Jesus (2:1-4).
- There was danger of some hardening their hearts in unbelief and going back to the Jewish religion (3:7-16).
- There was danger of some not progressing in their Christian life (5:11-6:8).
- There was danger of some despising and impatiently casting away their confidence in Christ's salvation (10:26-39). Note in 10:32-34 the trials they were facing (compare Galatians 6:12-13).
- There was danger of some refusing the voice of God (12:25-29).

Obviously the author was convinced that the need of the hour was for his readers to know who Jesus Christ truly is (Son of God and Son of Man), and to understand the true significance of what He did and continues to do (His sacrifice, priesthood, and lordship). Throughout the book Jesus Christ is held forth as *superior*;

- To the prophets (1:1-3).
- To the angels (1:4-2:3).
- To Moses (3:1-6).
- To Aaron the high priest (4:14-5:10).

Above every O.T. institution or individual Jesus Christ is set forth above and beyond all.

So the aim of the book is clearly to lead its readers on to a genuine, growing Christian life through growth in an understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done and continues to do for us.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is past into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (4:14).

Survey

Chapter 1 – Christ the Son of God.

From the beginning the author's Christ-exalting purpose is evident. Jesus Christ is revealed as;

- 1:2 – Creator.
- 1:3 – The exact expression of God.
- 1:3 – Sustainer.
- 1:4 – Better than the angels.

- 1:5 – God's Son.
- 1:6 – Worshipped by the angels.
- 1:8 – *God!*
- 1:8-13 – Eternal King (vs. 3).
- 1:10 – Lord.

In 2:1-3 man's proper response is spelled out in light of who Jesus is. If that is who He is, and that One has spoken, then *how much more certainly shall all that He has said come to pass!!*

Chapter 2 – Christ the Son of Man.

- 2:9-18 – Christ our Kinsman Redeemer.
    - Jesus became a man that through death He might become man's Deliverer from death (vs. 14-15).
    - Jesus became a man that He might be able to comfort us, having experienced all that we experience (vs. 17-18).

Chapters 3 – Warning Against Hardening in Unbelief.

The writer quotes repeatedly from Psalm 95:7-11, holding up the illustration of the hardened Israelites in the wilderness who were destroyed for their

faithless, stony hearts. This an example of what God will do to those who refuse to believe.

Chapter 4 – The Rest (9 times).

God's rest from His labours on the seventh day of creation (vs. 4) and Israel's rest in Canaan (vs. 8) are used as types of our rest in Jesus Christ by faith. Concerning that rest;

- It is entered into by faith (vs. 2-3).
- The time to enter is ***"today"*** (vs. 7).
- It is given to the Lord's people (vs. 9).
- It is received when one ceases attempting to enter by his own labour (*"as God did from His"*, vs. 4) and trusts in Christ's sufficient labour in our behalf (vs. 10).
- It is missed by the disobedience of unbelief (vs. 11).

"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28-29).

This rest from God is settled rest in salvation, growing rest in sanctification, and final rest in glory.

4:14-10:18 – Christ the Superior Priest & His Superior Priesthood.

- 4:14-8:5 – Jesus Christ is a better priest.
    - A priest after the order of Melchizedek, not after Aaron (5:5-8:5). Compare Genesis 14:17-24.
    - The O.T. priests were merely types of Jessus Christ, the coming Mediator.

"…this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (8:1).

- 8:6-13 – Jesus is Mediator of a better covenant.
- 9:1-12 – Jesus is priest of a better tabernacle (see vs. 11-12).
- 9:13-10:18 – Jesus offers a better sacrifice, because His sacrifice was once for all (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10-14).

10:19-13:25 – Our life response in view of Jesus Christ.

- 10:19-39 – A call to perseverance by faith.
- Chapter 11 – Heroes of faith – examples of perseverance.
- Chapter 12 – Enduring by faith.
    - Vs. 3-4 – Consider Jesus – how He

persevered.

- How certainly 12:27 was fulfilled in the destruction of the Temple and system of worship, so soon to fall upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

- Chapter 13 – Practical outworking of faith.
  - Vs. 11-14 – A call to separation, bearing His reproach.
  - Join Jesus outside the city, as if a despised leper with Him.

Thoughts on Problem Passages

There are some difficult passages in this book, which seem at first blush to indicate salvation, once gained, can then be lost. Some principles to guide our approach to such passages;

- Be sure to read each portion in its context.
- Read the difficult portions in the context of the whole of the larger Bible teaching on the subject.
- Be careful not to read any preconceptions into the passage.

- Get the full meaning of all details of the passage.

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3:6 & 14

- Note carefully the verb tenses.
    - Does this say *"whose house we <u>are</u>"* or *"whose house we will continue to be"?*
- We tend to *demonstrate* the reality of what we are, our present saved condition or not, by our actions/ways.
- We do not *become* or *remain* saved by our outward lifestyle.

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6:4-6

- Keep in mind the audience to whom the message of the book is addressed.
    - The Jewish people on whom the light of God's Word had shone over the centuries, and who had witnessed the working of the Spirit in the miraculous (consider the example of Judas Iscariot).
    - Perhaps as well Jews who had

professed faith in Jesus, having joined the Christian community, but who were not yet truly saved. Folks who were like the second soil of Christ's parable of sower and soils (Matt. 13), for whom the price of being a "Christian" was perhaps brimming close to the breaking-out point. Compare the similar illustration here of Hebrews 6:7-8, with two very different kinds of soils (souls). Compare 4:1-2.

- Note the 3rd person of vs. 4-6 in contrast to the 1st and 2nd person of vs. 1-3, 9ff.

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10:26-31

- Does *"sanctified"* mean *saved* in vs. 29? Compare I Corinthians 7:14.

  The point is simply that there is nothing else, no other sacrifice available, if we are going to despise the one and only way to which all the purpose and plan and words of God have been leading all along.

- Apart from Jesus Christ there is no salvation by any other means.

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Ponder Points

Consider how strongly the message of this book speaks concerning;

- Backsliding Christians.
- Professing unsaved, who are mere professors and not true possessors of eternal life in Jesus Christ.
- Steadfast endurance in the Christian life (chapter 10-12).
- Separation from the world even though it may mean severest suffering.

"This book of the law
shall not depart out of thy mouth;
but thou shalt meditate therein
day and night,
that thou mayest observe to do
according to all that is written therein:
for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous,
and then thou shalt have good success"

(Joshua 1:8)

James

A swirl of controversy revolves around this epistle of James. For one thing, who wrote the book? The writer calls himself *"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1:1), but reference is made to more than one James in the N.T. who may have done the honours.

The greater controversy is whether the message of the book contradicts Paul on the issue of salvation. Martin Luther rejected this book of James altogether, calling it *"a veritable epistle of straw, and destitute of evangelic character".* He insisted that James *"contradicts Paul and all Scriptures".* We will pursue these thoughts further in just a bit.

James was rather stern, blunt, and simple in his manner of writing, much like Enoch in his message to his generation (Jude 14-15). There was no hedging when he spoke of a dead faith being empty of good works in chapter 2. His comments are blisteringly unsparing when dealing with the tongue in chapter 3. He penetrates straight to the heart when speaking of our motives at the beginning of chapter 4. Yet this is not to say that James was unduly harsh or unfriendly. He displays in his book a vibrant, brotherly compassion as well. Phrases such as *"my brothers"* or *"my beloved"* occur more

frequently than any other N.T. epistle except I Thessalonians.

There is a clear authoritative character to James' approach. The book averages a command (imperative) for every two verses (54 commands within 108 verses). Therefore it becomes obvious that the message of James is very much given to the practical side of a holy walk. Recognizing this basic thrust sheds a good deal of light on the apparent contradiction with Paul on the matter of salvation.

Paul spoke of *inward* justification before *God – "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"* (Rom. 4:5). God's promise through him is, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:31). James, it would appear, spoke of *outward* justification before *men*. In the context of a discussion of Christian conduct he said *"Show me..."* (James 2:18; 2:24).

True Christian faith will tend to express itself in practical goodness (Matt. 7:16-18; 12:35) just as a living body will surely tend to demonstrate its life through pulse and breathing (James 2:26). But those works are the *product*, not the *means* of salvation or the means of keeping it. Even Paul in Galatians, where his message is all about freedom from the law, makes it quite clear that in Jesus we

are free to *"by love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13).

The book of James is another challenging book to try to analyse. It does not seem to contain an orderly message. There are frequent shifts in subject or side trails. Maybe this a reminder of the fact that there does not always need to be an orderly arrangement of things? Maybe its O.K. for the message to be simple and clear, though seemingly scattered at times. Sometimes men seem to glory more in their orderly arguments (neat alliterations and orderly progression of thoughts), well-ordered advanced plans and projections, neat facilities, and impressively thorough policy documents. But Paul says that his ministry did not bear the marks of man's wisdom – not *"with excellency of speech or of wisdom"*, nor *"with enticing words of man's wisdom"* (I Cor. 2:1, 4).

James, the Man

The English name "James" is the translation of the Hebrew "Iakob" (Jacob), in Greek, *Iakobos*. It is a bit ironic to find "Jacob" writing to Israel, *"to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad"* (1:1).

As mentioned earlier, there were several men named James in the N.T. Actually there were three (some say four);

- James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt. 4:21; Luke 5:10). This was the James who was killed by Herod in the early years of the church (Acts 12:2).

- James, the *"son of Alphaeus"* (Matt. 10:3; Acts 1:13) and brother of Judas (not Iscariot). His mother's name is given as Mary, and he is referred to as *"James the Less"* in Mark 15:40.

- James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ (Matt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19). He appears to have been Joseph's firstborn after Jesus.

The first two mentioned above were disciples of Jesus, but the view most strongly supported by tradition is that the book was written by the third mentioned, James the brother of Jesus.

If this is the case then it further confirms the great turn-around in this half-brother of Christ. During the days of Christ's earthly ministry neither James nor his other brothers believed in Jesus (John 7:2-8). This seems a strange thing with their parents so devout and Jesus Himself growing up right in their home. Yet Acts 1:14 indicates that James and his brothers were saved sometime before Pentecost. Perhaps it was at the time of Christ's crucifixion, or when He appeared to James after His resurrection

(I Cor. 15:1-7). And James became a devoted follower, later known as "James the Just".

James eventually rose to leadership at the Jerusalem church;

- Acts 12:17 – When Peter was released from prison he said *"Go show these things to James, and to the brethren".*
- Acts 15:13-31 – Heading the Jerusalem council.
- Acts 21:18 – *"Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present"* (plurality of elders?).
- Galatians 2:9 – Listed first among those *"who seemed to be pillars"* at the Jerusalem church.
- Galatians 2:12 – *"For before that certain came from James…"*

It would have been sometime during these years of leadership in Jerusalem that James wrote to the scattered Jewish believers of the Roman world. Eusebius relates a brief and somewhat reliable glimpse of James, taken from the writings of a 2nd century man named Hegesippus,

"James, the brother of our Lord, who, as there were

many of this name, was surnamed the Just by all from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the church with the apostles…He was in the habit of entering into the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became hard like a camel's knees in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God. And, indeed, on account of his exceeding righteousness he was called the Just…".

It is interesting to note that the same adjective ("just") was used of Joseph, the father of James, in Matthew 1:19.

I find it highly instructive that a man so given to prayer would write such an entirely practical book. A heart of true prayer and devotion to the Lord does not make one impractical.

And then the historian, Josephus, writes concerning the death of James,

"Caesar, upon hearing of the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judaea as procurator…Ananus (the high priest at Jerusalem) thought he had now a proper opportunity…so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation

against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned…"

Audience

James wrote *"to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad"* (1:1). The Greek word here is *diaspora* – "to the twelve tribes of the *diaspora"* or dispersion. Yet the message of his book was clearly directed at believers, so it would appear James' message was to believing Jews of the diaspora, perhaps some scattered through the early persecutions at Jerusalem.

Purpose

Partly James wrote to encourage and comfort Christians in the trials of their faith (1:2-3; 5:8). But mostly he wrote to correct wrong Christian conduct, to strongly encourage the kind of behaviour genuine faith will result in, the kinds of thoughts, words, and actions that should be part of a godly Christian life.

"But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (1:22).

Survey

Chapter 1 – Trials and Truth.

James immediately begins with the issue of handling hardships, pointing up the urgent need among his readers for divine help in this area.

- 1:1-16 – Evil things from below.
    - In the midst of the pressure of trials, there is need;
        - To just *"count it all joy"* (1:2).
        - To understand that trials have a *"perfect work"* of forming patience and maturity in us (1:3-4).
        - To turn to the Lord for help, with confidence and singleness of heart (1:5-8).
        - To recognize the eternal rewards for steadfast endurance (1:12).
        - To understand that though the Lord may be the author of trials He is never the author of temptation to sin (1:13).
        - To admit that not all hardships can be blamed on outward troublemakers, for much of our trouble stems from the sinful

nature of our own hearts (1:14-15).

- 1:17-27 – Good things from above.
    - New birth (1:18).
    - Good walk (1:19-21).
    - Good Word (1:21-25).
    - Good witness (1:26-27).

Chapter 2 – Faith that Works.

- 2:1-13 – The foolishness of partiality.
    - He begins with a statement of his point (vs. 1).
    - Then he highlights, argues, and illustrates his point (vs. 2-13).
        - It is against God's nature to honour or condemn men on the basis of their gold or lack of it.
        - Such a response would reflect a spirit opposite to God's while "worshipping" God in church.
        - Has God not found most of His faithful ones among the poor (vs. 5)?

- Are the rich not most inclined to oppress (vs. 6)?
- Does partiality not deny God's two great commands (vs. 8-12)?

Consider these thoughts in light of those terrified of being outside the "in" crowd. Is it not true that those with a passion for acceptance among society's popular set reflect a fear of those who are partial? God, in His grace, does not categorize people as "in's" and "out's", and neither should we who are His.

- 2:14-26 – *"I willl show you my faith".*
    - Compassionless faith is worthless and dead (vs. 14-17).
    - Good works are faith's display (vs. 18). Compare again 3:13 – *"Let him show…".*
    - Faith is not just head belief (vs. 19-20).

      Faith is heart commitment leading to obedience (vs. 21-26). Remember that Abraham had already been justified by faith before God in Genesis 15:6.
    - James is not saying that good works produce or preserve salvation, but only

that genuine faith unto salvation tends to show itself by good works.

- Consider the context. Paul was not teaching about Christian conduct when he taught that justification is by faith apart from works (Rom. 4), yet the whole theme of James' book is Christian conduct.

- As D.A. Hayes said, "Paul is looking at the root; James is looking at the fruit…With Paul, the works he renounces precede faith and are dead works. With James, the faith he denounces is apart from works and is a dead faith."

Chapter 3 – Fountains of Wickedness and Wisdom.

- 3:1-12 – Evil sourced in the tongue.

  - The evidence of true maturity is a bridled tongue (vs. 2).

  - Note the three illustrations (vs. 3-6).

    - Power to *control* great things (vs. 3-4).

    - Power to *consume* great things (vs. 5-6).

- The tongue is uncontrollable (vs. 7-8).
- The tongue is inconsistent (vs. 9-12).

- 3:13-18 – Wisdom sourced from above.
  - Earthly and heavenly wisdom contrasted.

Chapter 4 – Pride Problems.

- 4:1-12 – Prideful separation from God.
  - Reasons for answerless prayer (vs. 1-6).
    - Evil hearts (vs. 1-2).
    - Did not ask (vs. 2).
    - Ask with wrong motives (vs. 3).
    - Associating with the wrong side (vs. 4-5).
    - Pride (vs. 6).
  - Overcoming temptation (vs. 7-10).
- 4:13-17 – Picture of prideful independence.

Chapter 5 – Oppression, Patience, & Prayer.

- 5:1-6 – The oppressive rich.
- 5:7-11 – Patient endurance.

- 5:13-20 – Prayer in affliction.
    - The Prayer of Faith (vs. 14-15).
        - The words used indicate that James is not speaking of folks who are down with disease or illness, but of those weak or weary with discouragement.
        - The anointing with oil was not some ceremonial means to divine healing, but the common Jewish practice of anointing with perfumed ointment as an honouring refreshment, bringing joy, satisfaction, and a sense of well-being.
            - Compare Psalm 23:5; 133:2; II Samuel 12:20; Matthew 6:17.

"If ye continue in My word,
then are ye My disciples indeed;
and ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free"

(John 8:31-32)

I Peter

Peter is one of the most well-known and remarkable men in the N.T. The Gospels and Acts are full of information about him. So many contrasts we see in this man;

- Unstable, yet with an unshakeable faith – *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God".*
- Sometimes weak, sometimes strong.
- Sometimes brave, sometimes cowardly – from the sword slashed ear in the garden to the triple denial before a young girl in the courtyard.
- Impulsive, yet later quite even-keeled.
- Bold, yet humble.

Peter was very evidently a different man after Pentecost, through the influence of the indwelling Spirit.

Peter had a wife (Mk. 1:30; I Cor. 9:5), but no word of children. We know of one brother, Andrew. In fact it was his brother who first led Peter to Jesus. Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist, until John pointed his disciples to Jesus in John 1. Andrew immediately went to his brother with the

good news, *"we have found the Messiah"*, bringing Peter to meet Jesus (John 1:35-42). His name was originally Simon (or Simeon, Acts 15:14), until Jesus gave him the name Peter (Greek) or Cephas (Aramaic) at that first encounter with the Lord. Peter and Andrew were partners in a fishing business with Zebedee and his sons, James and John, working out of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

I have pointed out to you in the past how that Peter's call into the Lord's ministry seems to have been in stages;

- First contact – John 1:41-42.
- First call – Mark 1:16-18.
- Second call – Luke 5:1-11.

Peter arose as a natural leader among the twelve disciples and featured prominently throughout the Gospels and early chapters of Acts. In his great confession concerning who Jesus Christ is in Matthew 16:13-17 Peter spoke for all of the disciples when he acknowledged that, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* For his firm faith the Lord blessed Peter with *"the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 16:18-19). Thus it was Peter who preached to the devout Jews in Acts 2, unlocking the door for *Jews* to baptism with the Spirit into the

church, the body of Christ. And thus it was Peter who arrived in Samaria in Acts 8, after Philip's successes there, to unlock the door for the mixed-race *Samaritans* to baptism with the Spirit into the church. And therefore it was Peter who was called to preach at Cornelius' house, in Acts 10, to unlock the door for *Gentiles* to baptism with the Spirit into the church.

Then, with the doors of opportunity all standing open for every racial group, Peter fades out of focus in Acts 12 (vs. 17), as the spotlight turns to Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. We then catch only glimpses of Peter;

- He spoke at the Jerusalem council against the legalistic influence of the Judaizers (Acts 15).
- Paul mentions that Peter was involved in ministry to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-8).
- Peter later visited the church at Antioch, where Paul confronted his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-21).

Some think that Peter may have later been involved in evangelistic work in the northern parts of Asia Minor – this perhaps the reason he wrote his two books to the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (I Pet. 1:1, cf. II Pet.

3:1). Perhaps Peter had laboured in those northern provinces, areas not evangelized by Paul and company, and then wrote to encourage those among whom he had laboured.

Tradition tells us that Peter was martyred, as Paul, during the days of Nero's persecution, in 67 or 68 A.D. It was Origen who wrote that Peter died by crucifixion, but considering himself unworthy to die in the same manner Jesus did, he requested that he might be crucified upside down. There may perhaps be indication in II Peter 1:13-15 that Peter's second epistle was written with his death imminent, even as Paul's second epistle to Timothy.

Do you remember how the Lord after His resurrection commissioned Peter to *"feed My lambs…feed My sheep"* (John 21:15-17), even as He had earlier charged Peter to *"strengthen thy brethren"* (Lk. 22:32)? These two books demonstrate Peter doing just as he was told, not only feeding and strengthening the believers of his own day, but those of every age.

We find the same word in I Peter 1:1 found in James 1:1, *diaspora.* Both James and Peter were apparently writing largely to scattered believing Jews. And II Peter 3:1 indicates that Peter's second epistle went to the same group to which he had sent the first.

One interesting feature is found in I Peter 5:13, where Peter sent greetings from the church of Babylon, suggesting that he wrote from that city. This little concluding comment raises big questions. Did Peter write from the actual city of Babylon in Mesopotamia, or was it from the city called Babylon on the Nile River in Egypt? Or could it be that the name was to be understood symbolically? Some believe this to be a reference to Rome, associating the capitol of the Roman Empire with all of the evil of ancient Babylon. Was Peter writing from Rome? Was he hiding the actual origin of his letter for some reason? I am afraid no clear answers are available this side of the pearly gates.

Purpose

How to live in purity and hope in the midst of persecution is the main theme of Peter's first letter. We can likely conclude that his immediate readers were facing persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. Peter's encouragement to them is,

"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (4:13 – cf. James 1:2).

Note the emphasis on the subject of suffering in Peter's first epistle;

- *Christ's* suffering – 1:11; 2:21, 232; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1.

- *Our* suffering – 2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 13, 15-16, 19; 5:9-10.

Notice how our encouragement in sufferings is based upon our faith in;

- The promise of glory that shall follow – 5:1, 10.

- The reality of Christ's return – 1:8, 13; 2:12; 4:7, 13; 5:4.

Survey

1:1-2:10 – Salvation & Sanctification.

- 1:4-12 – Salvation.

    - The assurance of our inheritance (vs. 4-5). An undying, undefiled, and undiminished inheritance awaits us (vs. 4).

    - Rejoicing in our salvation (vs. 6-9).

    - Prophets' search into a suffering Saviour (vs. 10-12). Note that it was the Spirit of Christ who was speaking through the prophets. Compare 3:19-

20.

- 1:13-2:3 – Sanctification.
    - Command to holiness (vs. 13-16).
    - Fearing God – the way to holiness (vs. 17).
        - We are *driven* to holiness by His command and fear.
    - Jesus Christ – our example of holiness (vs. 18-21).
        - We are *drawn* to holiness by His example and sacrifice.
        - Christ the Passover Lamb of God.
    - Love for others – the outworking of holiness (vs. 22).
    - God's written Word – the *hunger* of saints (1:23-2:3).
    - God's living Word – the *honour* of saints (2:4-10).
        - The living stone (vs. 4).
        - The rejected stone (vs. 4).
        - The corner stone (vs. 6-7).

        - The stumbling stone (vs. 8).

2:11-4:19 – Right Response to Trials and Suffering.

- 2:13-3:6 – Submission under difficult authority.
    - Government (2:13-17).
    - Masters (2:18-20).
        - Jesus has given us an example of submission even to severe suffering (2:21-25).
    - Unbelieving husbands (3:1-6).
- 3:13-4:19 - Note how many times in this section we find words and phrases such as suffer or suffering, evil speaking, falsely accuse, trial, reproach, etc. (count them).
- 3:19-20 – Could we conclude that Peter believed in an allegorical understanding of the Genesis account of Noah's flood, as so many "Christians" do today?
- 3:21 – Baptism brings, not cleansing from sin, but *"a good conscience toward God".*

Chapter 5 – Instructions for Feeder and Flock.

- 5:1-4 – Pastors with their flock.

- Tend the flock (vs. 2) – The instruction means more than just *feed.*
- Watch over the flock (vs. 2).
- Willingly (vs. 2) – A right heart.
- Not to fleece the flock (vs. 2) – Right motives.
- Not lording (vs. 3) – Right humility.
- Be examples (vs.3).
- Look to the *"chief Shepherd"* (vs. 4).
- Long for His honours (vs. 4).

"Heaven and earth
shall pass away,
but My words
shall not pass away."

(Matthew 24:35)

II Peter

The book of II Peter has its critics. In fact a great deal of controversy has swirled around this second of Peter's letters through the centuries. The debate largely concerns whether Peter was the one who actually wrote the book. You can easily pick up an introduction to the book of II Peter to get the pros and cons if that sort of thing is your interest. The church of Christ has accepted the book as Peter's, and as part of Scripture, and I believe on good grounds.

Peter continues in this second epistle with a strong focus on practical Christian living (chapter 1), involving an earnest warning concerning false teachers (chapter 2), and motivated by a clear expectation of all things made new at Christ's return (chapter 3). While the thrust of Peter's first epistle was encouragement in living a life of purity and hope in spite of trouble coming on us from the *outside*, the focus of this second is an earnest warning of the treachery of falsehood getting *inside* the church or arising *from within*, and how to handle that eventuality (2:1). Peter wrote that his readers might *know* and *remember* these things.

- Note how often we find forms of the word *"know"* in chapter 1 (I count 9 times), and

"remembrance" (3 times).

- Note how the epistle begins and ends on the theme of knowledge (1:2 & 3:18).

Peter's purpose statement is found in 3:1-3;

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance…that ye may be mindful…knowing this first…"

As then, so in our own day, God wants us to stir ourselves up to *know* of coming evils, and how to recognize and avoid them. Do you see again (as in Colossians) how God's help in handling what is false is to know the truth, and to know the One who is true and faithful? Compare also the message of Hebrews.

The book of II Peter is comparable to II Timothy in that both books;

- Reflect a simple, straightforward, blunt tone. Perhaps both authors were aware that they would soon be dead.
- Warn of coming apostasy.
- Reflect a positive, triumphant attitude, even in the face of serious trouble to come. Note Peter's victorious focus on the Lord's return –

1:11, 16, 19; 3:10-13.

Survey

Chapter 1 – Growing by Knowing.

- 1:5-7 – See how the Christian life is never meant to be a stagnant affair, but should be ever progressing from strength to strength, adding each new phase to the last.
- 1:16-21 – N.B. how Peter refused to base his confidence on the most trustworthy of experiences, but rather his faith rested solely upon the *"more sure word of prophecy"* of the Word of God.
- If a believer is going to be growing in faith (1:3-15) then his eyes must be fixed on true revelation (1:19-21) rather than subjective experiences (1:16-18).

Chapter 2 – Recognizing False Teachers.

They masquerade as God's true servants, but have a different agenda than God.

- 2:1-2 – A little image of the original treachery and fall from heaven.
- 2:4-9 – Illustrations of judgment and

deliverance.

  - Every age has had those who lead people astray, all coming to their just rewards.

  - Note how the righteous (Noah, Lot) are delivered *before* or *as* God's judgment falls on the wicked. Does this perhaps illustrate the same pattern in the rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation? Compare also Enoch, translated before God's judgment of the Flood.

- 2:10-22 – Character of false teachers on display. Pick out and list the many dark characteristics.

Chapter 3 – Looking for that Blessed Hope.

- 3:5-6 – More illustrations from history.

  - The world was lifted out of water in creation and swallowed by water again in Noah's Flood. As if dunked again and washed clean of man's defilement for a new start.

  - Could we conclude by this comparison that Noah's Flood was not actually a

worldwide flood, but only a local one?

- Again, does this indicate that Peter believed in a normal or an allegorical reading of the Genesis creation and Flood accounts? Compare Hebrews 11:3. "Wooden literalist" or man of faith?

- As these *historical* events came to pass *"by the word of God"* (vs. 5), so will the future dissolving of the universe come *"by the same word"* (vs. 7).

- A cataclysm greater than Noah's will come, just as certainly as did the first.

- 3:7-12 – Next time by fire.

  - Look at the thunderous emphasis on the consuming fire to come;

    - Vs. 7 – *"Reserved unto fire".*

    - Vs. 10 – *"The elements shall melt with fervent heat".*

    - Vs. 10 – *"The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up".*

    - Vs. 11 – *"All these things shall be dissolved".*

- Vs. 12 – *"The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved".*
- Vs. 12 – *"The elements shall melt with fervent heat".*

- Dost thou get the impression that Peter (the Lord) did not want us to miss the point?!

By the way, this is not a picture of nuclear holocaust. Man is not, nor will he ever be big enough to do this with his most impressive of bombs. This will be the work of God ushering in the new heavens and earth of Revelation 21-22.

- Equally strong is the emphasis on the Lord's desired response in man, in view of these looming events;
  - Vs. 7 – *"The day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men".*
  - Vs. 9 – *"But that all should come to repentance".*
  - Vs. 11 – *"Seeing…these things… what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness".*
  - Vs. 14 – *"Wherefore, beloved,*

seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless".

- Vs. 17 – *"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness."*

Compare Titus 2:11-13 where the Lord's return is again used as motivation for practical Christian living. It is a desperately unfortunate thing that amillennialism's butchery of eschatology (Bible doctrine of future things) removes the power of this sanctifying influence.

"...for Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name"

(Psalm 138:2)

I John

In the first verses of his second and third epistles the Apostle John refers to himself as *"the elder"* – the old man, perhaps. He must have been over 80 years old when he wrote I, II, & III John. John's three short epistles are letters of love from a pious old man of God. Let's begin by reminding ourselves of the background of this old saint.

John was a fisherman during the early years of his working life, and a fisherman turned fisher of men throughout the remaining decades of his earthly walk. He was one of at least five partners in a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee, working out of Capernaum, when he first met Jesus. John's father was Zebedee (Mat. 4:21), and his mother seems to have been the woman named Salome (Mat. 27:56; Mk. 15:40). When John became a follower of Jesus he came to be the disciple recognized as the closest to his Master, several times in his gospel referring to Himself as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7 & 20).

We get a feel for the character of John and his brother James when Jesus surnamed them *"Boanerges"* or *"the sons of thunder"* (Mk. 3:17). As is true of many people, the nature of these brothers was not so attractive in the early days of their

walk with Jesus;

- They were self-seeking, requesting with their mother a special place of honour for themselves in Christ's kingdom (Matt. 20:20-23; Mark 10:35-39).

- John displayed a jealously factious spirit, excluding all who did not follow with them (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49-50).

- They were spitefully intolerant of rejection, ready to call immediate destruction down upon those who resisted the Lord in Samaria (Luke 9:51-56).

In each case Jesus firmly reproved their wrong spirit. And with time, the Lord (and later the indwelling Spirit) softened John's hot-tempered nature, transforming him into the Apostle of love. Then, some 50 years later, when John was an old man writing his contributions to the N.T., we find him to be one exceedingly more tender than tempestuous;

- He writes to his *"beloved"* or *"well beloved"* (9 times in his epistles).

- He tenderly displays his deep concern for fellow believers, addressing his readers as *"my little children"* (9 times in I John), and

expressing *"no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth"* (III John 4).

- I John 4 is one of the great chapters on love.
- The word *"love"* is found 45 times in the epistle of I John alone.

Cleary John *"the elder"* was a very different man than John the younger, exceedingly more useful for the Lord and like his Master, displaying the transforming power of God. How the Lord changes people, taming wild natures and tongues and transforming willing souls *"into the same image* (of the Lord) *from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (II Cor. 3:18). Yet the grace of Jesus Christ is so evident when we remember that it was while John was still a rough and raw recruit that he was that *"disciple whom Jesus loved".* As with Jacob of old, the Lord loved him for his faith, though his character was yet distorted with the *"earthly, sensual, devilish"* wisdom from below, rather than that peaceable *"wisdom that is from above"* (James 3:13-18).

John and Peter were generally together and seem to have early become recognized as the leaders of the Twelve;

- Acts 3 – It was Peter and John together when Peter healed the lame man and preached at

the temple.

- Acts 4 – It was Peter and John giving answer before the Sanhedrin.
- Acts 8:14-15 – It was Peter and John who were sent down to help with the new work among the Samaritan believers.

Then the history book of Acts suddenly goes quiet concerning John. We know that he was still active in the leadership of the church at Jerusalem for a time, for Paul mentions his involvement as one of the *"pillars"* there (Gal. 2:9). But we hear nothing else of John until much later in his life when his books were written (perhaps 85-90 A.D.). Tradition tells us that during the later years of his life John settled in the Ephesus area. Perhaps it was for this reason that he was exiled on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9), off the coast of Asia in the Aegean Sea, and made reference to seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3.

It is not clear to whom John was writing his first epistle of I John. It is obvious that he was writing to believers, but to what particular church or group of churches is an unknown. In fact John's first letter is a bit odd as epistles go. It contains neither an opening greeting nor any reference to those to whom it was addressed. We find none of the normal

closing comments. John makes no mention of himself or his circumstances in the epistle. In fact, we do not find any references to places or earthly individuals in the epistle at all. Yet this book of I John is clearly an epistle because of the obvious fact that John was writing to certain readers *("My little children, these things write unto you…"* – 2:1, compare 2:12-14). The book reveals a saintly old man, as a father, lovingly writing to encourage his fellow believers in the things of the Lord.

Purpose

John repeatedly relates the reasons why he wrote;

- 1:4 – *"That your joy may be full".*
- 2:1 – *"That ye sin not".*
- 2:12-14 – Various reasons. A somewhat strange portion, written to children, young men, and fathers.
- 2:26 – To know *"concerning them that seduce you".*
- 5:13 – *"That ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God".*

It was a day when many were questioning whether

Jesus had really come in the flesh, and so John wrote to testify of the One *"which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled"* (1:1; compare 4:2-3). It sounds like John was dealing with the heresy of Gnosticism (compare discussion of Gnosticism in the chapter on Colossians). One of the ugly offshoots of Gnosticism was the error of Doceticism, which taught that Jesus did not actually have a physical body, for this would stain Christ's divine perfection through connection with evil flesh or matter. These false teachers insisted that Jesus only *seemed* (Greek *dokeo*) to have an actual, physical, human body.

It was a day when many were doubting their own sinfulness, and so John wrote to point up the folly of doubting such a thing as that (1:8-10).

It was a day when the fires of love were dying down in the church, and so John wrote to rekindle that flame of love for one another, and to warn those hating their brothers (2:11).

It was a day when God's children excelled in appreciation for things worldly, and so John wrote to put things into proper perspective. Quite frankly if you love the things of the world then you are an enemy of God (2:15-17).

It was day when "believers" were apostatizing from the church, and so John wrote to comfort true believers by explaining that heart-breaking phenomenon (2:18-19).

It was a day when false teachers subtly sought to seduce believers from the truth, and so John wrote to expose their craft (2:20-29).

It was a day when many kinds of spirits were teaching in the world, and so John wrote to identify God's true Spirit from among the false (chapter 4).

It was a day when many were doubting their salvation, and so John wrote to explain how we can know that we have eternal life (chapter 5).

It was a day…*like today!!*

As in our own day, it was day when blacks and whites were being shaded to greys, and so John wrote to rub out the middle hues;

- Either you are with the Lord in the light, or you are walking in darkness (1:5-7).
- Either you are honest to confess your sin and darkness, or you are a liar (1:6-10).
- If you say you know the Lord, either you keep His commandments, or you are a liar (2:3-6).
- Either you love the world, or you love the

Father (2:15). It is either one or the other. It simply cannot be both.

- Either you abide in Him, or you will be ashamed before Him in His coming (2:28).
- Either you belong to God and live in righteousness, or you practice sin and are *"of the devil"* (2:29; 3:4-10; 5:4, 18).
- Either you love your brother, or you are an unsaved murderer (3:14-15).
- Either you love your brother, or you hate God (4:20-21). The one who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar.
- Either you show compassion, or God's love is not in you (3:17-19).
- Either you are *"of God"*, or you are lying in wickedness (5:19).

Highlights

Consider how often John speaks of *liars*;

- 1:6 – If we say we have fellowship with God and walk in darkness we are liars.
- 1:8 – If we say we have no sin we are liars.
- 1:10 – If we say we have no sin we make *God*

out to be a liar.

- 2:4 – If we say we know God but neglect His commands we are liars.
- 2:22 – If we deny that Jesus is the Messiah we are liars.
- 4:20 – If we say we love God but hate our brother we are liars.
- 5:10 – If we do not believe God concerning His Son we make Him out to be a liar.

There was still a bit of thunder in the old son! This Apostle of Love's line-drawing pencil was rather sharp. He did not *debate* the truth, nor did he allow for any shading into error. He simply stated the truth, and left his readers to hear it with joy or to choke on it.

And notice how often the word *"know"* is found in this epistle (nearly 40 times). Again, we see that the *answer* in a day when all is relative and foggy is to *know* the light of the truth in sharp contrast to, and separated out of the darkness of error – leaving no greys. *Victory is in the truth of God!*

Consider John's tests of true salvation. We know we know God;

- 2:3-6; 3:24 – If we keep His commandments.

- 3:6-10 & 5:18 – If we walk in righteousness and do not practice sin.
- 2:9-11; 3:14-15; 4:7-8, 12-13, 16 – If we love our brothers. *A major focus!!*
- 3:16-19 – If we show compassion toward others.
- 4:2-3 – If we confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. True humanity.
- 4:15 – If we confess that Jesus is the Son of God. True deity.

Note how John's eyes begin (1:1-4) and remain *on Christ,* in whose presence is fullness of joy;

- He is our fellowship (1:1-7).
- He is our cleansing (1:7).
- He is our advocate (2:1).
- He is our propitiation (2:2; 4:10).
- He is our Lord (2:3-6).
- He is our dwelling place (2:28).
- He is our hope (2:28-3:3).
- He is our life (4:9).
- He is our Saviour (4:14).

Not *creed* but *Christ!*

Note the key phrases;

- *"God is light"* (1:5). The brilliant light of God's purity (1:5-6) is contrasted with the darkness of our corruption (1:7-10).
    - Compare I John 1 with the early verses of Isaiah 6.
- *"God is love"* (4:8, 16). The particular focus of 3:10-4:21.

Compare I John 2 with II Thessalonians 2 – describing the spirit of the coming *"man of sin".*

- Only John used the term *"antichrist"* (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7).
- That prefix "anti" can mean either "against" or "instead of". This coming one will both oppose Jesus Christ and exalt himself to His place of worship.

"So shall My word be
that goeth forth out of My mouth:
it shall not return unto me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please,
and it shall prosper in the thing
whereto I sent it"

(Isaiah 55:11)

II John

As with John's first and third epistles, internal evidence and tradition point strongly to the Apostle John's authorship. John identifies himself only as *"the elder"* (vs. 1), but the style of writing and nature of the message are clearly John's.

John wrote this second epistle *"unto the elect lady and her children"* (vs. 1). The Greek word translated *"lady"* (also in vs. 5) presents a problem. What does it mean? How is it to be translated? The Greek word used here is *kuria*, which is actually the feminine form of *kurios*, the Greek word meaning "lord". It was a word used as an affectionate form of address, something like "dear". It also could very well have been the proper name "Cyria". John seems to have been writing to an individual woman friend and her children. Some think that John was writing to some particular church congregation, addressing them in a figurative way, and therefore his concluding greeting sent from *"the children of thy elect sister"* (vs. 13), perhaps referring to some sister congregation. Hard to say for sure.

Take a moment to quickly read through this little epistle, looking for and recording key words or evident themes.

Suggested Observations

True love is first love of the truth. Note the focus on truth and love in the first few verses (vs. 1-4).

- Straightforward dealing with error is not inconsistent with God's love (vs. 7-11).
- To love the Lord is to love the truth ***and*** *to hate error* – which hate is not inconsistent with true love.
- *False love* opens the door to falsehood.
- Note that John was writing to a woman to warn her of false teachers. Perhaps a remote indication here that women are more susceptible to such deception? Compare I Timothy 2:14; II Timothy 3:1-7. Their quicker tendency toward kindness and love perhaps leading more easily to a false love that foolishly embraces deception.
- Vs. 5-6 – His commandment is love, and love is to *"walk after His commandments".*

III John

Again, as in his second epistle, John identifies himself as *"the elder"*, and writes this time to a man friend, *"unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth"* (vs. 1). We are given no help in identifying this man Gaius. There are at least three men by this name found elsewhere in the N.T. (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; I Cor. 1:14).

It appears as though the occasion for the writing of this book was something like the following: both Gaius and Diotrephes were members of some church, but Diotrephes maliciously refused to receive evangelists or teachers sent by John to that church. And so John, in sending the travelling minister, Demetrius (vs. 12), sent him with this letter to Gaius instead of to Diotrephes.

Vs. 5-8 – Faithfulness to others in Christian hospitality is faithfulness to the Lord in helping to promote the truth.

Vs. 9-11 – Quite the opposite spirit.

"Blessed are they
that keep His testimonies,
and that seek Him
with the whole heart"

(Psalm 119:2)

Jude

Jude's epistle is much like flipping over an old plank on the ground and seeing all the hideous little creatures dash for a hiding place, or like turning on the kitchen light at night to see the cockroaches scurry. The book is a vivid exposure of apostate false teachers and their ways. We also find in its brief message warning to true believers and encouragement in their continuance in what is right.

As Jude indicates in vs. 3-4, he actually sat down to write to his readers concerning the happy subject of that glorious salvation in which all believers share a part. But then the Spirit of God, that great Author of the written Word of God, *"moved"* Jude in a very different direction (II Pet. 1:21), a much more *unhappy* one. Suddenly Jude's letter became a most earnest and revealing unmasking of false teachers and their godless ways and direction. It is for this reason that one writer refers (tongue-in-cheek) to Jude's little book as "The Acts of the Apostates". It does not take a Ph.D. to grasp how very unpopular this message would have been, certainly among those most stung and exposed by it. I suspect Jude's little book did not hit the best-sellers list of his day.

I am reminded of how people prefer to major on happier, more optimistic subjects. Such messages do tend to be much more pleasant to carry, and tend to grow churches numerically and keep people pumped up with a short-term happiness. I am not implying that it was Jude's intention to avoid difficult subjects. But it is a curious thing to see a man heading in a rather positive direction and then God moving him to the pursuit of a decidedly more negative subject. It *is* the way of men, and of God with men. We like to be carriers of good news and encouragements. We do not like to be carriers of hard words, words of rebuke. But the delivery of those hard words is exactly what God often needs toward accomplishing His purposes. And those are precisely the moments when heaven and earth discover if we are *His* servants or *self*-servants.

Jude could have resisted the Spirit's prompting and written on his chosen, more delightful subject of salvation anyway. Perhaps all *under* the sun would have been quite happy, and nobody would have felt threatened. But it would not have been a message as needful for the hour, for God knew better what was really crucial. And it would not have struck quite as useful a blow against God's enemies. It might have hit the target sheet, but would have scored no bull's-eye. And it would not have lifted

the Lord's true saints quite like this message did and continues to do throughout the ages. There is something else of which I am quite sure. If Jude had pressed on and written on what *he* intended, it would not be here in the Book of books. And Jude's name would not have become known among the Lord's people for his contribution to the Bible. Though he wrote a hard message through the Spirit's leading, which must surely have pierced and angered all who were either outside of the truth or on the drift away from the truth in his day, yet Jude's name is remembered in every age as one of those used of the Lord to bring His truth to man. Had Jude written a more popular message, he would have saved himself a bit of trouble in his own day, stirred a touch of popular following, and then he would have been promptly forgotten throughout the following generations.

Do you see the choice? It is always the same. Take a stand and make the right choices for what is right, and you will be hated by the godless *for the moment*, but loved and respected and remembered by the wise and godly *forever*. Refuse to stand for the truth of God, or refuse to make the right choices for what is right, and you join with the selfish godless and save yourself a packet of trouble in the short term. But you will soon be forgotten by *both* the godless *and* the godly. Forgotten by the godless because

they never really cared about you in the first place. They only care about you as far as you serve their purposes. For the wicked at heart are consistent. They only ever *use* others. They only ever "love" another for a passing moment. They only ever really appreciate one for flattering them or not stepping on their toes. But then they quickly forget such a pawn, because they never really cared about anyone but themselves anyway. Forgotten by the godly as well, because you failed to impress them as one who stood with them and with the Lord. Either you are popular with your evil day and forgotten tomorrow, or you are hated by your evil day and loved and remembered by the wise and godly both now and forever. Your choice.

Here was Jude calling a spade a spade in no uncertain terms. He minced no words in his just revelations and condemnations, and I for one love him for his courage and resolve to do right. He is an example to me. I am encouraged, not only by *what* he said, but by his *boldness* to so publicly broadcast it.

Author

The writer of the book identifies himself in vs. 1 as *"Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James".* Though there is uncertainty, it is

commonly believed that the Jude and James mentioned here were the half-brothers of Jesus Christ (Matt. 13:55). So this Jude was likely the full brother of the author of the book of James, sons of Joseph and Mary. If this be true, then Jude would have undergone the same transformation we considered in James, from faithless half-brother (John 7:5) to believing servant of the Lord Jesus, at some point perhaps after Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:14).

Purpose

The reason for Jude's writing is quite clear. There was a subtle entrance of evil into the church in the form of *"certain men"* (vs. 4). The Greek word used here communicates the idea of sneaking in through stealth. Jude goes on to describe these men as immoral beasts, lawless Christ-rejecters, insolent mockers, and worse. Jude made abundant use of illustrations from the O.T. and from the natural world in an effort to vividly portray the essential nature and ultimate destiny of such *"filthy dreamers".*

Where are such men in our own day? All around us! A quote from Hunt and McMahon's book "The Seduction of Christianity" may help to shed some light;

"The New Age movement…involves things that are firmly entrenched within the church, such as psychotherapy, visualization, meditation, biofeedback, Positive Confession, Positive or Possibility Thinking, hypnosis, Holistic medicine, and a whole spectrum of self-improvement and success/motivation techniques."

Look to the men and women, laymen and preachers promoting such tripe and you will have a measure of the answer.

Survey

Vs. 3-4 – Purpose statement.

- Do not miss the fact that it was when Jude got busy doing something for the Lord and others that the Lord stepped in to steer him into the direction He wanted.

Vs. 5-7 – God's judgments of the past.

- Note the O.T. illustrations;
    - Vs. 5 – Unbelievers destroyed in the wilderness (Num. 13-14). Compare I Corinthians 10:5-10 & Hebrews 3-4.
    - Vs. 6 – Fallen angels reserved in chains (II Pet. 2:4).

- Some connect this and II Peter 2:4 with Genesis 6:1-4, and see a particular group of demons held in some deeper, darker dungeon because of their supposed attempt to corrupt the human race through sexual relations with women in the days before Noah's Flood. Probably vs. 6 is rather just a reference to the bondage of all fallen angels reserved for judgment. Compare Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:4.

- It is important to note how God's pronouncements of judgment in Genesis 6:1-7 are aimed only at *"man".*

o Vs. 7 – Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19).

- The fire then falling upon them was only the beginning, for we read here of their *"suffering the vengeance of eternal fire".*

- The certainty of God's past judgments confirms the certainty of those yet to come (vs. 13-15).

Vs. 8-13, 16 – The nature of the beast.

After speaking of the certainty of God's judgment, Jude begins in earnest to describe the character of the apostates. List the characteristics of these apostate teachers (I count 28).

- Vs. 4 – Crept in unawares. Craftily they worm their way into God's flock. They do not fly their flag while sailing into harbour.
- Vs. 4 – Foreordained to condemnation. Or perhaps the indication simply is that their condemnation was already written in the Book of books (compare vs. 14-15).
- Vs. 4 – Ungodly. "Destitute of reverential awe toward God" (Thayer's).
- Vs. 4 – Pervert God's grace into lasciviousness. They use God's grace as an opportunity to practice their unbridled lust.
- Vs. 4 – Deny God as Master. Self-willed – acknowledging no restraint and no God. Compare the nature of the coming antichrist in Daniel 11:36-37.
- Vs. 8 – Filthy dreamers.
- Vs. 8 – Defile the flesh.
- Vs. 8 – Despise dominion.

- Vs. 8 – Speak evil of dignities.

  The idea of vs. 8 seems to be that while such as these cherish their own empty, corrupt views, they despise and slander those who have a valid right to their views (God and God-appointed leadership). While they make themselves low through their own filthy ways, they think nothing of bringing down others who are much more worthy than they. They are impudent. Not even the archangel Michael, highest of the highest created beings, would dare to personally speak against Satan, who has fallen from a place of high authority.

Note concerning Michael (vs. 9).

- Though Michael is referred to in the book of Daniel (10:13; 21:1) as *"one of the chief princes"* and *"the great prince"*, here in Jude 9 is the only time he is described as an *"archangel".* Compare Revelation 12:7 where he is seen leading the angelic host.

- Daniel 12 and Revelation 12 indicate that Michael's role relates particularly to the oversight and protection of the nation of Israel.

- This contention with Satan over the body of Moses (Deut. 34:5-7) is not recorded in the O.T.

- Origen, one of the early church fathers, claimed that the account came from the apocryphal book of "The Assumption of Moses", but this cannot be proven.

- Satan likely wanted to use the body of Moses for purposes of idolatry.

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Further, in description of these apostates;

- Vs. 10 – They speak evil of those things, which they know not.

- Vs. 10 – They corrupt themselves in what they know naturally as brute beasts.

  The idea of vs. 10 seems to be that while they speak against what they do not know, in what they *do* comprehend, as irrational beasts, they corrupt themselves. In other words, what they do not understand they slander, and what they do understand they use to corrupt themselves.

- Vs. 11 – Gone in the way of Cain (Gen. 4).
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- Comparable to Islam, Cain founded his own religion, based on works and promoted by violence upon true believers. Those of the Muslim religion, and other religions like it, are spiritual descendants of godless Cain.

- Vs. 11 – They ran greedily after Balaam's error (Num. 22-24). Balaam's error was to prostitute his supernatural gift for money & honour.

- Vs. 11 – They perish with the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16). Korah's fatal rebellion was to deny and speak against God's leadership appointments.

- Vs. 12 – They are flaws in your love feasts – feeding without fear.

- Vs. 12 – They are like clouds without water – swept along by the winds.

    - Compare II Peter 2:17 – *"Wells without water".* Empty promises.

    - They are anchored to no fixed principles of right and wrong. Compare Ephesians 4:14.

- Vs. 12 – They are like fruitless trees – rooted

up and withered (lit. “autumn trees”). Having no connection with a true source of nourishment. Compare Colossians 2:19; John 15:6.

- Vs.13 – They are like wild waves of the sea – foaming out their own shame. Or vomiting forth their own disgraces (Prov. 15:2).
- Vs. 13 – They are like wandering (or misleading) stars – eternal thick darkness of the darkness reserved for them. As the 9th plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23).
- Vs. 16 – They are murmurers.
- Vs. 16 – They are complainers. Finding fault with, or blaming their lot.
- Vs. 16 – The are walking after their own lusts (again in vs. 18).
- Vs. 16 – Their mouth speaks great swelling (boastful) words. Compare antichrist (Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 11:36; Rev. 13:5-6).
- Vs. 16 – They have men’s persons in admiration for advantage.
- Vs. 17 – They are mockers/scoffers. Compare II Peter 3:3-7.

- Vs. 19 – They separate themselves (compare I John 2:19). Or perhaps the idea is of those who cause divisions (Rom. 16:17; Prov. 6:12-19).

- Vs. 19 – They are sensual. Compare Philippians 3:19 & Romans 16:18.

- Vs. 19 – They do not have the Spirit. Soulish or fleshly, but not spiritual.

Vs. 13-15 – Judgments to come.

These verses are the commentary on Jude's statement in vs. 4 that such brute beasts were long ago foreordained to God's judgment.

- Eternal *"blackness of darkness"* is reserved for them (vs. 13).

- From as far back as Enoch's day (only the 7th from Adam) came God's prophecy of their eventual destruction (vs. 14-15). Jude points out how long ago their judgment was fixed. Note how all deceivers from the creation of heaven and earth to the creation of the new heavens and earth are all lumped together as one. They were condemned by Enoch in his day, had already *"crept in unawares"* in Jude's day, and will be much in evidence *"in the last time"* (vs. 18).

Jude's quote of Enoch in vs. 14-15 did not come from the O.T. either, for there are no words attributed to Enoch in the brief account of his life in Genesis 5:18-24 or elsewhere. Some think that Jude may have been quoting from the apocryphal book(s) of Enoch, which is supposed to contain revelations given to Enoch and Noah. It may or may not be a quote from this book. Jude could have been referring to an unrecorded prophecy of Enoch. But even if Jude did lift a quote from a spurious book, this would not endorse the whole of the source.

Vs. 17-23 – Exhortations to saints.

Note Jude's positive counsel and commands to believers in the midst of his earnest attack upon evil and evildoers;

- Vs. 3 – *"Earnestly contend for the faith".* Earnestly fight for that body of truth, which was once-for-all entrusted to the saints. It is to be held close, pure, and high.

- Vs. 17 – *"Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles…there should be mockers in the last time".* Compare II Peter 3:3-7.

- Vs. 20 – *"Building up yourselves in your most*

holy faith".

- Vs. 20 – *"Praying in the Holy Ghost".*
    - Do you see tongues anywhere in this verse? Compare Romans 8:26-27.
- Vs. 21 – *"Keep yourselves in the love of God".*
- Vs. 22 – *"Of some have compassion".*
- Vs. 23 – *"Others save with fear".*

Vs. 24-25 – Doxology. An assurance to the true believer that he will be presented faultless before Christ. Compare Ephesians 5:25-27.

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Ponder Points

Consider the extreme similarity between Jude & II Peter 2. Much the same as Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3.

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Things *kept;*

- Vs. 1 – We are being *kept* in Jesus Christ.
- Vs. 6 – Angels who *kept* not their first estate are being *kept* unto judgment.

- Vs. 13 – For apostates the thick darkness of the darkness is being *kept* into the ages.
- Vs. 21 – We are commanded to *keep* ourselves in God's love.
- Vs. 24 – The Lord is able to *keep* us free from offense and sin.

Revelation

Here is the great N.T. book of prophecy. As the picture of Moses standing up on Mt. Pisgah's height, the wind gently blowing his grey beard, squinting his aged eyes as he looked out over the hazy view of the Promised Land from across the river, even so the book of Revelation is the last breath-taking gaze off into the misty, distant future from the summit of God's faithful revelation.

In the book of Genesis, God's first book of revelation, we find the record of the beginning of heaven and earth and all that are in them, the fall of mankind into the tragedy of sin, and the beginning of God's supreme expression of His love in redeeming fallen man. Throughout the 66 books of the Bible, never do we find man's recovery of himself highlighted (quite the opposite). Always the consistent picture presented to us is of God's relentless grace and enduring patience in man's behalf. All leading progressively upward to the height of the closing chapters of this book of Revelation, with mankind fully and finally restored to God there, and dwelling with Him in the new heavens and earth.

In John's final book we have that magnificent crescendo of the heavenly cantata of the ages, the

capstone of all of God's earth works, the last glorious chapter in God's story of man. Throughout the centuries, since the day the Apostle John completed the book of Revelation, adding it to the canon of Scripture, human hearts have been stirred to encouragement and optimism…and *terror* through a study of this book. Believers have been believing it and infidels have been ignoring it or laughing at it or attempting to explain away the message of the book of Revelation. And as a result all manner of highly imaginative views have sprung up over the years concerning the meaning of this book. But understood properly, this book of prophecy becomes one of the most uplifting and motivational books in the Bible, filling the perceptive reader with hope and courage. Consider how the Lord of the book challenges the reader to perceive in 13:18 & 17:9. Consider how this is the only book of the Bible carrying a conspicuous promise of blessing (1:3) to those who read it and to those who hear what is written with understanding and to those who *"keep those things which are written therein"*. Does it not then become one of the strangest quirks of church history that the one book containing such a striking promise would become the one most avoided (or twisted) by the church? I want that blessing, and I want it for you. Therefore I refuse to drift over to the other side of the road and

pass it by on our way to the Celestial City like the heartless Jewish religious leaders on the Jericho road.

Background

We are told by John, in Revelation 1:9, that he *"was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."* History confirms that John was banished to this little island of 35 square kilometres by the Roman emperor, Domitian, toward the end of the first century (mid 90's A.D. perhaps – John in his 90's as well), for reasons made obvious there in 1:9,

"…for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

It was a day when the intolerance of the Christian religion was on the rise. And it was while there in that place of punishment and dishonour that John received the visions recorded in this crowning book of the Bible.

Do you see again how God can turn the tragedy of persecution, a barren isle of shame, into a veritable Mont-Aux Sources? God did the same with the tragic unfairness of Joseph's dungeon, transforming it into a springboard to blessing. Out of bitterest persecution in the present came clearest

perspective into the future, both for John and for millions of blessed readers ever after.

John was instructed by the Lord in 1:11 to write down what he was to see and to send the book to seven churches, scribing a crescent throughout the province of Asia, the heart of the Christian world at that time.

Theme

What the Apostle was to see becomes evident from the very first words of the book, *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ".* John's book receives its name from the first word of the book in the Greek, *apokalupsis* (apocalypse), meaning to remove from hiding, to unveil or uncover. This book is the revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is the disclosure of His glory and of the spectacular event of His coming in all of His splendour, and the circumstances leading up to and following that coming. Matchless disclosure!! This theme is confirmed from the first through the record of John's stunning encounter with Jesus Christ, the Lord of the churches, in the second half of chapter 1. The Bible holds Jesus Christ as its central theme throughout, and the book of Revelation is the Christ-centred theme of the Bible rising to its very summit. There are constant allusions to the O.T. throughout John's

Apocalypse, particularly to the book of Daniel, showing the coming together of all events prophesied, and conclusively entwining the Old and New Testaments together.

But that phrase *"the Revelation of Jesus Christ"* could also be understood a bit differently, could it not? It could be the revelation of Jesus Christ in that He is the One revealed, or it could be His revelation as the One revealing (perhaps both?) – *Jesus* revealed to us or *what* Jesus reveals to us. This latter sense of revelation, not only *about* Jesus but also *from* Jesus, finds support in the rest of 1:1-2. God the Father gave the message to Jesus, who sent it through an angel to John, who wrote and sent it to the seven churches, and through them to all churches of every age. And do not miss how John does not hesitate to refer to this record coming down to us from God the Father, through this chain of many links (some heavenly and some human), as *"the word of God"*. So we have in these words recorded by John an awesome but accurate, terrible but true accounting of the future, final events leading up to the very pinnacle of world history – the resplendent return of Jesus Christ to His earthly kingdom.

Purpose

The setting of the book finds John, the highest human representative of the worship of Christ in that day, the last of the Apostles, persecuted under the ban of human government and banished to a remote island. Thus the stage was set for the book's purpose;

- To encourage saints to perseverance under persecution for Jesus Christ, with an eye to the greatest trouble the world will ever experience yet to come (chapter 12-13 – compare Matthew 24:21).
- To see momentary persecution from an eternal perspective.
- To instil hope;
    - Of the ultimate victory of Christ and all who are His.
    - Of final deliverance from evil.
    - Of justice upon evil in all of its many forms.

Running throughout John's book is such a note of victory! Revelation is a book just brimming with singing saints and gloriously promising announcements to God's own people!!

Major Views

Over the centuries there have arisen many views of interpretation of John's Apocalypse. This development perhaps for many reasons;

- Because of the seemingly disconnected visions and scenes in the book.
- Because of the abundance of figurative language.
- Because of the graphic, and even bazaar details of predicted judgments.
- Because of the differing kinds of human hearts seeking to find interpretation, and moved by various purposes.
- Because of the Lord's desire to hide His great truths through symbolism from those who have no eyes to see (Matt. 13:10-16).
- Because of Satan's effort to mar the message through hatred and fear of the handwriting on the wall written into the pages of this book. He shall be cast down out of heaven (12:7-13), down into the abyss (20:1-3), and then finally down into the Lake of Fire to *"be tormented day and night for ever and ever"* (20:10).

Jensen lists four basic schools of interpretation of Revelation;

1. The symbolic view – Does not view Revelation as prophecy (foretelling) of any specific future events at all, but only as teaching general spiritual truths through a symbolic style.

2. The preterist view – Acknowledges some reference to future things in the last two chapters, but apart from this sees the message of Revelation as fulfilled in the first century.

3. The continuous-historical view – Recognizes that chapters 19-22 speak of Christ's coming and events following, but sees chapters 1-18 as prophetically describing the entire time period from Christ's first coming to His return. For example, they commonly equate the mighty angel of chapter 10 with the Reformation. Predictably they tend to differ widely among themselves over the details of interpretation.

4. The futurist view – Sees chapters 1-3 as written for the churches of Asia, but with application throughout church history, and chapters 4-22 as speaking of end time events yet future. Some folks of this persuasion

suppose the seven churches of the first three chapters represent stages of church history.

Then there are differing views as to the interpretation of the first half of chapter 20, more specifically the 1000-year reign repeatedly mentioned there. How are we to understand this reference to 1000 years and the order of events given? There are three common views;

1. Premillennial view – Future events will be in the order described in chapters 19-20. Jesus Christ will return to the earth before (pre) He rules on the earth for an actual 1000-year period.

2. Postmillennial view – Jesus will return after (post) a "millennium" (not necessarily a literal 1000 years) period of blessedness and prosperity upon the earth, even as Israel's kingdom rose to her golden era under David and Solomon. This golden age will be brought by means of the Holy Spirit's work through the church.

3. Amillennial view – There will be no (a) actual 1000-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth. Christ's reign is a spiritual one, in heaven and in the hearts of His saints on earth, extending throughout this age from the time of His

death and resurrection to the end. Such folks suppose that God only ever meant that Christ's promised kingdom should be understood in this way. Yet note that Jesus never discouraged the expectation in His disciples of an actual earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6-8).

A normal reading of the book will lead to a futuristic and premillennial persuasion. We find key verses in 1:7 & 19, clearly pointing out the forward, future look of John's vision (*"and the things which shall be hereafter"*), and centring around the 2nd coming of Christ (*"Behold, he cometh"*). Do not miss the very physical references in the summary statement of 1:7 (clouds, eyes), highlighting the literal, physical, actual nature of His return, *"in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11).

Basic Outline

Chapter 1-3 – Letters to the Churches.

Chapter 4-5 – Heavenly Throne Scene.

Chapter 6-7 – Seal Judgments.

Chapter 8-11 – Trumpet Judgments.

Chapter 12-14 – Characters in Conflict.

Chapter 15-16 – Bowl Judgments.

Chapter 17-18 – Babylon's Destruction.

Chapter 19-20 – Christ's Coming & Reign.

Chapter21-22 – New Heaven & Earth.

Highlights

Chapter 1-3 – Letters to the Churches.

- 2:1-7 – Ephesus church was commended for their righteous intolerance of evil, but had lost their first love. They had pitched evil and evil ones, for they rightly *refused to tolerate the presence of evil.*
- 2:8-11 – Smyrna church was encouraged against fear of persecution.
- 2:12-17 – Pergamos church was commended for faith and martyrdoms, but was too tolerant of evil.
    - *Tolerating the presence of evil.*
    - Tobiah in the temple (Neh. 13:4-9).
    - A bit of evil among the good.
- 2:18-29 – Thyatira church was commended for love, service, faith, patience, and works,

but was tolerating the presence and even the propagation of evil.

  - *Tolerating the promotion of evil* (vs. 20).
  - Too late now to talk about removal of evil (compare vs. 2:16). Just hold on to what is left (vs. 24-25).

- 3:1-6 – Sardis church only had a few yet undefiled – mostly dead – living only a name.
  - *A bit of good among the evil!*
  - *Evil tolerating the presence of some good!*
  - Compare the same heart-sickening tumble to ruin in Judges 1.
- 3:7-13 – Philadelphia church had a little strength, kept the word, and had not denied God's name.
- 3:14-22 – Laodicean church would be spewed out of Christ's mouth as good for nothing. Things both hot and cold were good for something, but things lukewarm were good for nothing.

Chapter 4-5 – Heavenly Throne Scene.

- 4:1 – From the moment the Lord commands

John to *"Come up hither"* reference to the church ends (apart from closing comments in 22:16). This in sharp contrast to the 20 times the word *"church"* is found in the first three chapters. A picture of the rapture before God's judgments fall on the earth perhaps?

- Chapter 5 – The Lamb alone is worthy to open the seals of the book.

Chapter 6-7 – Seal Judgments.

- 6:1-8 – The four horsemen are a picture of antichrist.
    - White horse – Antichrist arising in peace.
    - Red horse – His about-face at the midpoint of the 7-year Tribulation period – peace is gone.
    - Black horse – Resulting worldwide devastation by famine.
    - Pale horse – Death to a quarter of the earth's population.
- 6:9-11 – Martyrdom of saints will characterize antichrist's rule.
- Chapter 7 – Two multitudes.

- 144,000 Jewish sealed servants (evangelists?).
- Great multitude redeemed out of Tribulation.

Chapter 8-11 – Trumpet Judgments.

- Chapter 8 – Destruction by thirds (*"third"* found 11 times).
- 9:1-12 – Fifth trumpet (first woe) – demonic creatures from the pit.
    - Ironic justice (vs. 6) – The wicked have often refused the righteous their preference to live, demanding that they die. Therefore God will refuse the wicked their preference to die, demanding that they live, in agony.
    - Note that the last three trumpet judgments are called the three *"woes"*.
- 11:1-14 – Two Witnesses.

    This will mark the midpoint of the 7-year Tribulation. The time remaining is greatly emphasized (vs. 2-3, 9, 11). Compare Daniel 7:25; 9:27 (*"in the middle of the seven"*); 12:7.

Chapter 12-14 – Characters in Conflict.

- Chapter 12 – Conflict on earth and in heaven – showing the heavenly causes for the earthly conflicts happening at that time.
    - Woman = Israel.
    - The dragon = Satan.
    - The man-child = Christ.
    - Again the time remaining is underscored (vs. 6, 14). Still the midpoint of the Tribulation.
- Chapter 13 – Rise of antichrist and false prophet.
    - He will be characterized by blasphemy, persecution of saints, demand for universal worship, and *"great"* miraculous powers granted to him. Compare Daniel 7; II Thessalonians 2.
    - Again a reference to his numbered days in vs. 5.
- 14:14-20 – A glimpse of the approaching horror of human harvest at Armageddon.

Chapter 15-16 – Bowl Judgments.

- Chapter 16 – A chapter of great things (*mega* found 11 times in the Greek).

Chapter 17-18 – Babylon's Destruction.

- Chapter 17 - Religious Babylon falls (apostate church?)
- Chapter 18 – Commercial Babylon falls.
    - Actual restored city?
    - Suddenness (*"in one hour"* or *"day"*, 4 times) and completeness are emphasized.

Chapter 19-20 – Christ's Coming & Reign.

- Two suppers;
    - The marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).
    - The great supper of God (19:17-18). Compare Ezekiel 39:17-20; Zephaniah 1:7?; Matthew 24:28; Luke 17:37.
- 20:1-7 – The 1000-year earthly reign of Jesus Christ.
    - The duration of Christ's coming earthly kingdom is 6 times repeated so even amillennialists cannot miss it.

Chapter 21-22 – New Heaven & Earth.

Breath-taking prospect!!!

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Ponder Points

Consider God's sovereign control of world history.

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Consider how very many things come in sevens in this book; churches, spirits, golden candlesticks, stars, angels, lamps, seals, horns, eyes, trumpets, thunders, thousands slain, heads, last plagues, golden vials, mountains, and kings. The word *"seven"* is found *40 times* in the book.

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Consider what will flee from the hearts of all, as a dream when one wakes, in the moment Jesus Christ splits the sky at His return;

- Every thought that Jesus is less than magnificent.
- Every hope of in any way deceiving Him.
- Every doubt of His reality.
- Every hope of escape.
- Every sneering scorn and all laughter on the
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lips of pseudo-intellectual scoffers and heretics.

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Consider Christ's comment to Peter concerning John in John 20:21-23. John's Patmos experience is perhaps that to which Jesus was referring. At the end of his long life, before he left this world for the next, John "saw" the return of Jesus Christ. Compare Christ's comment in Matthew 16:28, speaking of His coming transfiguration (Matt. 17:1ff), in which some would see Him *"coming in His kingdom".*
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