

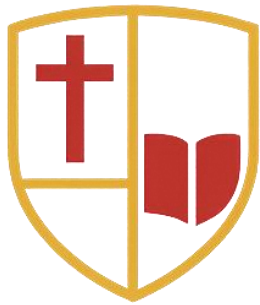
NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

DR. THOMAS T. HALE

Gain a clear, historically grounded, and
theologically informed understanding
of the New Testament



LEGACY SCHOOL OF MINISTRY



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NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Instructor: Thomas T. Hale

Program Length: 25 Sessions

“A comprehensive study of the New Testament’s history,
literature, and theology.”

Legacy School of Ministry

New Testament Survey

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NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

PREFACE

The New Testament stands as the foundation of Christian faith and practice. Its pages reveal the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the birth and expansion of the early church, the theological framework of the apostles, and the hope of Christ's return. This book was written to provide a clear, structured, academically grounded, and pastorally rich survey of all 27 New Testament books.

My goal is simple: to equip believers, students, and ministers with a resource that is both scholarly and accessible, thorough yet practical, and deeply rooted in the life-changing message of Scripture. Each lesson blends historical background, theological insight, literary structure, and ministry application — all designed to help readers understand the New Testament as a unified story of God's redeeming work.

Whether you are teaching a class, preparing sermons, discipling new believers, or studying for personal growth, I pray this survey strengthens your understanding and deepens your devotion to Christ.

To God be the glory.

— Thomas T. Hale, D.D.

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The New Testament Survey is a structured, scholarly introduction to the world, literature, and theology of the New Testament. Designed for students, ministry leaders, and serious learners, this program provides a clear and academically grounded understanding of the message of Jesus Christ and the formation of the early Christian movement.

This course explores the New Testament within its historical, cultural, and literary context. Students will examine the world of Second Temple Judaism, the influence of Greek and Roman culture, the distinct theological contributions of each New Testament book, and the development of the early church. Special attention is given to authorship, date, structure, major themes, and the canonical significance of each text.

The program is intentionally crafted to balance academic rigor with accessible clarity, making it suitable for Bible college settings, ministry training programs, and personal study. Each lesson includes historical background, literary analysis, theological synthesis, and practical implications for Christian life and ministry.

PROGRAM GOALS

The **New Testament Survey** is designed to equip students with a clear, historically grounded, and theologically informed understanding of the New Testament. By the end of this program, students will be able to:

1. UNDERSTAND THE HISTORICAL WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Identify the major political, cultural, and religious forces shaping first-century Judaism.
- Explain the significance of the Intertestamental Period, Hellenism, and Roman rule.
- Recognize how Second Temple Judaism influences the Gospels and early church.

2. GRASP THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Summarize the purpose, structure, and themes of each New Testament book.
- Distinguish between Gospel genre, epistolary literature, and apocalyptic writing.
- Understand how the books of the New Testament function together as a unified canon.

3. ANALYZE KEY THEOLOGICAL THEMES

- Trace major doctrines such as Christology, salvation, the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, and the mission of the church.
- Understand how each New Testament author contributes uniquely to Christian theology.
- Recognize intertextual connections between the Old and New Testaments.

4. ENGAGE WITH ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP

- Interact with historical-critical background, authorship discussions, and major scholarly viewpoints.
- Evaluate differing interpretations with clarity and discernment.
- Develop the ability to read Scripture with both academic rigor and spiritual sensitivity.

5. APPLY NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING TO CHRISTIAN LIFE AND MINISTRY

- Understand how the message of Jesus and the apostles shapes discipleship, leadership, and mission.
- Apply New Testament principles to contemporary ministry contexts.
- Cultivate a deeper devotion to Christ through informed study of Scripture

LESSON TEMPLATE

Each lesson will follow a consistent academic structure:

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Author, dates, audience
- Cultural and political setting
- Literary genre and purpose

B. STRUCTURE & OUTLINE

- Major sections
- Key movements in the text

C. KEY THEMES & THEOLOGY

- Christology
- Kingdom of God
- Salvation
- Ethics
- Ecclesiology

D. SCHOLARLY CONSIDERATIONS •

- Major debates (presented neutrally)
- Canonical issues
- Intertextual connections

E. APPLICATION (BRIEF)

- How the book shapes Christian life and ministry

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

The New Testament does not emerge in a vacuum. Its world is shaped by four centuries of political upheaval, cultural transformation, and religious development between Malachi and Matthew. This period—often called the **Intertestamental Period** or the **Second Temple Period**—provides the essential backdrop for understanding Jesus, the early church, and the writings of the apostles.

This lesson establishes the academic foundation for the entire course.

II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PERIOD (430 BC – AD 70)

1. PERSIAN RULE (539–331 BC)

- Jews return from exile and rebuild the Temple (516 BC).
- Hebrew Scriptures begin to take their final shape.
- Priestly leadership becomes central to Jewish identity.

2. HELLENISTIC RULE (331–167 BC)

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

- Conquers the Near East and spreads **Hellenism**—Greek language, culture, and philosophy.
- Koine Greek becomes the common language, setting the stage for the NT.

THE PTOLEMIES & SELEUCIDS

- Jewish life becomes a tug-of-war between two Greek empires.
- The **Septuagint (LXX)** is produced in Alexandria—hugely influential for NT writers.

3. THE MACCABEAN REVOLT (167–160 BC)

- Triggered by Antiochus IV's attempt to eradicate Jewish worship.
- Judas Maccabeus leads a successful revolt.
- Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple.

4. HASMONEAN DYNASTY (160–63 BC)

- Jewish independence restored.
- Rise of political priest-kings.
- Seeds of later Jewish sects begin to form.

5. ROMAN RULE (63 BC – AD 70)

- Pompey annexes Judea into the Roman Empire.
- Herod the Great becomes king (37–4 BC).
- Roman taxation, military presence, and political tension shape the world of Jesus.

III. JEWISH SECTS OF THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

Understanding these groups is essential for interpreting the Gospels and Acts.

1. PHARISEES

- Emphasized Torah, oral tradition, and purity.
- Popular among common people.
- Believed in resurrection and angels.

2. SADDUCEES

- Priestly aristocracy.
- Controlled the Temple.
- Rejected resurrection and oral tradition.

3. ESSENES

- Separatist, ascetic community (likely connected to Qumran).
- Produced the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- Awaited a coming Messiah and final judgment.

4. ZEALOTS

- Revolutionary nationalists.
- Advocated violent resistance against Rome.

5. “PEOPLE OF THE LAND”

- Majority of Jews not aligned with any sect.
- Jesus’ primary audience.

IV. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. SYNAGOGUES

- Emerged during exile; became centers for teaching and community life.
- Crucial for Paul's missionary strategy.

2. THE SANHEDRIN

- Jewish ruling council.
- Played a major role in the trial of Jesus.

3. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

- Flourished during this period (e.g., 1 Enoch).
- Emphasized divine intervention, judgment, and the coming kingdom.
- Influences NT books like Revelation and parts of the Gospels.

4. MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS

- Varied and complex:
 - Davidic king
 - Priestly Messiah
 - Prophetic figure
 - Apocalyptic deliverer
- Jesus' ministry interacts with and redefines these expectations.

V. KEY THEMES FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

1. HELLENISM AND LANGUAGE

- Koine Greek becomes the language of the NT.
- Greek philosophical terms shape theological vocabulary.

2. EMPIRE AND OPPRESSION

- Roman occupation forms the political backdrop of the Gospels.
- Crucifixion is a Roman execution method for rebels.

3. IDENTITY AND PURITY

- Jewish debates about holiness, law, and identity shape Jesus' interactions with Pharisees and others.

4. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

- The Septuagint becomes the Bible of the early church.
- Oral traditions influence Jewish interpretation.

VI. THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

This period prepares the way for:

- The universal reach of the gospel (thanks to Greek language and Roman roads).
- The tension between kingdom expectations and Jesus' mission.
- The diversity of Jewish thought encountered in the Gospels.
- The rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman world.

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Without understanding this background, the New Testament loses much of its depth and context.

VII. SUMMARY

The Intertestamental Period is the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. It explains:

- Why the world of Jesus looks the way it does
- Why Jewish groups respond to Him differently
- Why the gospel spreads so quickly
- Why the New Testament is written in Greek
- Why Rome is central to the story

This lesson lays the academic foundation for everything that follows.

LESSON 1 – THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

When we open the New Testament and begin reading the Gospels, we step into a world that looks very different from the one we left at the end of the Old Testament. The Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi, around 430 BC, under Persian rule. The people have returned from exile, the Temple has been rebuilt, and Israel is waiting—waiting for God to fulfill His promises, waiting for the Messiah, waiting for restoration. But when we turn the page and arrive in Matthew, we suddenly find Roman soldiers in the streets, synagogues in every town, Pharisees and Sadducees debating the Law, and a Jewish world shaped by forces the Old Testament never mentioned. What happened? How did we get from Malachi to Matthew? That is the purpose of this first lesson.

The period between the Testaments—roughly four hundred years—is often called the Intertestamental Period or the Second Temple Period. Although no biblical books were written during this time, it was one of the most significant eras in Jewish history. It shaped the language, culture, politics, and religious expectations of the world Jesus entered. If we don't understand this period, we miss the context that makes the New Testament come alive.

Let's begin with the broad historical movements. When the Old Testament ends, Persia is the dominant world power. Under Persian rule, the Jews enjoyed relative stability. They rebuilt the Temple, reestablished worship, and organized their community around the Law. But in 331 BC, everything changed. Alexander the Great swept across the ancient world with astonishing speed, conquering Persia and establishing a vast empire. With him came something far more influential than military power: Hellenism. Hellenism was the spread of Greek language, Greek culture, Greek philosophy, and Greek ways of thinking. It touched everything—education, politics, religion, art, and daily life.

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This is why the New Testament is written in Greek. Not classical Greek, but Koine Greek—the common, everyday language of the empire. It was the language of trade, government, and communication. When Paul traveled across the Mediterranean world preaching the gospel, he didn't need a translator. Everyone spoke the same language. In God's providence, the spread of Greek culture prepared the world for the rapid spread of Christianity.

After Alexander's death, his empire was divided among his generals. Judea found itself caught between two Greek kingdoms: the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria. For a time, the Ptolemies ruled with relative tolerance. But when the Seleucids gained control, things changed dramatically. Antiochus IV Epiphanes attempted to force Greek culture on the Jewish people. He outlawed circumcision, banned Sabbath observance, and desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. This sparked the Maccabean Revolt, one of the most heroic chapters in Jewish history.

Led by Judas Maccabeus, the Jewish people fought for their faith and their freedom. Against overwhelming odds, they reclaimed the Temple, purified it, and restored worship. The celebration of this event is known as Hanukkah. For about a century afterward, the Hasmonean dynasty ruled an independent Jewish state. But internal corruption and political infighting weakened the nation, and in 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey marched into Jerusalem and brought Judea under Roman control.

By the time Jesus was born, Rome dominated the world. Herod the Great ruled Judea as a client king. Roman soldiers patrolled the streets. Taxes were heavy. Tension simmered between the Jewish people and their Roman overlords. This political environment forms the backdrop of the Gospels. When the New Testament speaks of tax collectors, centurions, crucifixion, and Roman governors, it is speaking into this world.

But political history is only part of the story. During these four centuries, Jewish religious life also changed dramatically. Several groups emerged, each with its own interpretation of the Law and its own vision for Israel's future.

The **Pharisees** were the most influential among the common people. They emphasized strict obedience to the Law and developed an extensive oral tradition to help interpret it. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels, and the coming judgment. Many of their teachings were sincere, but their emphasis on tradition sometimes overshadowed the heart of the Law, which is why Jesus often challenged them.

The **Sadducees** were the wealthy priestly class. They controlled the Temple and held significant political power. Unlike the Pharisees, they rejected the oral tradition and accepted only the written Torah. They denied the resurrection and the existence of angels. Their cooperation with Rome made them unpopular with the people.

The **Essenes** were a separatist group who withdrew from society to pursue purity and holiness. Many scholars believe they lived in the Qumran community near the Dead Sea and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. They viewed the Temple leadership as corrupt and awaited a coming Messiah who would purify Israel.

The **Zealots** were revolutionaries who believed that violent resistance was the only faithful response to Roman oppression. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot, likely came from this movement.

And then there were the ordinary people—the “people of the land”—who were not aligned with any sect. These were the farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, and families who made up the majority of Jewish society. They are the ones who flocked to Jesus, listened to His teaching, and followed Him.

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Alongside these groups, several important institutions developed. The **synagogue** became the center of Jewish community life. It was not a place of sacrifice—that was reserved for the Temple—but a place of teaching, prayer, and fellowship. Every town had one. This is why Jesus and Paul often began their ministry in the synagogue. It was the natural gathering place for the people.

The **Sanhedrin**, the Jewish ruling council, also emerged during this period. It consisted of Pharisees, Sadducees, and other leaders. They held significant authority in religious and civil matters, though under Rome their power was limited. The Sanhedrin played a major role in the trial of Jesus.

Another major development was the rise of **apocalyptic literature**. Books like 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and others expressed a longing for God to intervene in history, judge the wicked, and establish His kingdom. These writings shaped Jewish expectations about the Messiah and the end times. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, judgment, angels, and the coming age, He was speaking into a world already steeped in apocalyptic hope.

All of this created a complex and dynamic environment. The Jewish people longed for deliverance. Some expected a warrior king like David. Others expected a priestly reformer. Still others expected a prophetic figure or an apocalyptic judge. Into this world of competing expectations, Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God. He fulfilled the Scriptures, but not in the way many expected. He confronted the Pharisees, challenged the Sadducees, ignored the Essenes, and refused the Zealots' call to violence. He brought a kingdom not of political power but of spiritual transformation.

Understanding the Intertestamental Period helps us see why Jesus' message was both compelling and controversial. It explains the conflicts in the Gospels, the questions of the disciples, and the rapid spread of the early church. It shows us

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that God was at work even in the silence, preparing the world for the coming of His Son.

As we move forward in this New Testament Survey, this background will help us read the Gospels with clarity, understand the early church with depth, and appreciate the New Testament as a unified story rooted in history. The world Jesus entered was not random. It was prepared. And now, with this foundation in place, we are ready to explore the New Testament itself.

LESSON 2 – THE WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we open the New Testament, we step into a world shaped by three powerful forces: **the Roman Empire, Greek culture, and Jewish identity**. These three worlds overlap, collide, and interact in ways that profoundly influence the ministry of Jesus, the mission of the early church, and the writings of the New Testament. To understand the message of the New Testament, we must first understand the world in which it was written.

The first century was a time of remarkable cultural blending. Rome ruled politically. Greece ruled culturally. Judaism ruled religiously for the people of Israel. Each of these worlds contributed something essential to the environment in which the gospel took root. And each one helps us read the New Testament with clarity and depth.

Let's begin with the world of **Rome**, the dominant political force of the first century. By the time Jesus was born, Rome had established itself as the unrivaled superpower of the Mediterranean world. Its influence stretched from Britain to Egypt, from Spain to Syria. Judea was just one small province in a vast empire, but it was a province of strategic importance. Positioned between Africa and Asia, Judea sat at the crossroads of trade, culture, and military movement.

Rome brought with it a system of governance that shaped daily life. Roman governors, like Pontius Pilate, exercised authority over legal matters, taxation, and public order. Local rulers, such as Herod the Great and his sons, served as client kings—loyal to Rome, yet attempting to maintain some semblance of Jewish identity. This political arrangement created constant tension. The Jewish people longed for freedom, yet Rome demanded loyalty, taxes, and obedience.

One of Rome's greatest contributions to the New Testament world was the **Pax Romana**, the "Roman Peace." This was a period of relative stability that lasted for about two centuries. Roads were built. Trade flourished. Travel became safer. Communication improved. For the first time in history, a person could travel thousands of miles across multiple regions using a single language and a unified system of law. This is one of the reasons the gospel spread so rapidly. Paul could travel from Jerusalem to Rome, preaching and planting churches, because Rome had created the infrastructure that made such journeys possible.

But Rome also ruled with a heavy hand. Crucifixion, the method used to execute Jesus, was a Roman punishment reserved for rebels and slaves. It was designed to be public, humiliating, and terrifying. When the New Testament speaks of crosses, soldiers, governors, and centurions, it is speaking into a world where Rome's presence was felt in every aspect of life.

If Rome shaped the political world of the New Testament, **Greece shaped the cultural world**. Even though Rome ruled the empire, Greek culture—Hellenism—ruled the imagination. Greek philosophy, Greek education, Greek art, and Greek language permeated society. The influence of thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics shaped the intellectual climate of the first century.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Hellenism was the **Greek language**. Koine Greek became the common language of the empire. It was the language of trade, government, and everyday communication. This is why the New Testament was written in Greek. It was the language that could reach the widest audience. When Paul wrote to the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, or Philippi, he wrote in Greek because that was the language they all shared.

Greek culture also influenced the way people thought about religion, ethics, and the nature of the soul. Concepts like logos, virtue, and immortality were part of

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the intellectual vocabulary of the time. The New Testament writers often engaged with these ideas, sometimes using them, sometimes challenging them, but always communicating the gospel in a world shaped by Greek thought.

Now, while Rome provided the political structure and Greece provided the cultural framework, **Judaism provided the religious foundation** for the New Testament. Jesus was born into a Jewish family, raised in a Jewish community, and ministered among Jewish people. The early church began as a Jewish movement. The apostles were Jewish. The Scriptures they read were the Hebrew Scriptures. The festivals they observed—Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles—were Jewish festivals. The New Testament cannot be understood apart from the world of Judaism.

First-century Judaism was diverse and dynamic. The Temple in Jerusalem was the center of worship, sacrifice, and national identity. Pilgrims traveled from all over the world to worship there. The priesthood oversaw the sacrificial system. The Sanhedrin served as the ruling council. And the synagogue became the heart of local community life. It was in the synagogue that Scripture was read, prayers were offered, and teaching took place. This is why Jesus often taught in synagogues and why Paul began his missionary work in the synagogue of each new city he visited.

Jewish life was shaped by the Law—the Torah—and by centuries of tradition. The Pharisees emphasized strict obedience to the Law and developed an oral tradition to interpret it. The Sadducees controlled the Temple and rejected many of the beliefs held by the Pharisees. The Essenes withdrew from society to pursue purity. The Zealots advocated violent resistance against Rome. These groups did not always agree with one another, but together they formed the religious landscape of the New Testament.

One of the most important aspects of Jewish life in the first century was the expectation of a **Messiah**. The Jewish people longed for deliverance. They remembered the promises of the prophets. They looked for a king like David, a prophet like Moses, or a priest who would purify the nation. Some expected a political liberator. Others expected a spiritual reformer. Still others expected an apocalyptic figure who would overthrow evil and establish God's kingdom. Into this world of longing and expectation, Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God.

Understanding the world of Judaism helps us understand why Jesus' message was both welcomed and resisted. He fulfilled the Scriptures, but not always in the way people expected. He challenged the religious leaders. He redefined purity. He expanded the boundaries of God's people. And He proclaimed a kingdom that was not of this world.

When we bring these three worlds together—Rome, Greece, and Judaism—we begin to see the richness of the New Testament context. Rome provided the roads, the law, and the political framework. Greece provided the language, the culture, and the intellectual environment. Judaism provided the Scriptures, the promises, and the expectation of a Messiah. The gospel was born at the intersection of these worlds.

This is why Paul could travel freely across the empire. This is why the New Testament could be written in a language understood by millions. This is why Jesus' message resonated so deeply with the hopes of the Jewish people. And this is why the early church grew so rapidly. God, in His providence, prepared the world for the coming of Christ.

LESSON 3 – CANON, TEXT, AND TRANSMISSION

When we hold a New Testament in our hands, it is easy to forget the remarkable journey that brought these twenty-seven books together. We see a single bound volume, printed in modern type, translated into our language, and widely available. But behind this familiar book lies a long and careful process of writing, copying, preserving, and recognizing Scripture. Understanding how the New Testament came to us is essential for appreciating its authority, its reliability, and its place in the life of the church.

In this lesson, we will explore three major areas: first, **the formation of the New Testament canon**; second, **the manuscripts and textual transmission**; and third, **the reliability and preservation of the New Testament text**. Each of these areas helps us understand how God worked through history to give us the Scriptures we read today.

Let's begin with the idea of **canon**. The word "canon" simply means "rule" or "standard." When we speak of the canon of Scripture, we are referring to the collection of writings recognized by the church as inspired and authoritative. The New Testament did not become Scripture because a council voted on it. It was recognized as Scripture because the early church understood that these writings carried the authority of Christ and the apostles.

The formation of the New Testament canon began in the first century itself. As the apostles wrote letters to churches, those letters were read publicly, copied, and circulated. Paul instructed the Colossians to share his letter with the church in Laodicea. Peter referred to Paul's letters as Scripture. The Gospels were written to preserve the authoritative witness of the apostles. From the very beginning, the church treated these writings as sacred.

By the end of the first century, most Christian communities possessed collections of apostolic writings. The four Gospels were widely accepted. Acts circulated with Luke's Gospel. Paul's letters were gathered into collections. Other writings, such as Hebrews, James, and Revelation, were known and used, though sometimes with regional differences. The process was organic, not political. The church recognized the voice of the Shepherd in these writings.

As the church grew, so did the need for clarity. False writings began to appear—Gospels claiming to be written by Thomas or Peter, letters claiming apostolic authority but teaching ideas contrary to the faith. In response, the church articulated the criteria it had already been using. These criteria included **apostolic origin**, meaning the book was written by an apostle or a close associate; **orthodoxy**, meaning it aligned with the teaching of Jesus and the apostles; and **widespread use**, meaning it was accepted across the churches.

By the early fourth century, the canon we know today was widely recognized. Athanasius, in his Easter letter of AD 367, listed the exact twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Councils in Hippo and Carthage later affirmed what the church had already embraced. The canon was not created by the church; it was acknowledged by the church. The sheep recognized the Shepherd's voice.

Now that we understand how the New Testament books were recognized, we turn to the question of **textual transmission**. How did these writings survive? How were they copied? And how do we know that the text we have today is faithful to the original?

The New Testament was originally written on papyrus—an ancient writing material made from reeds. Papyrus was fragile, especially in humid climates, so early manuscripts often wore out from use. As a result, the church copied the writings frequently. These copies were made by hand, sometimes by trained

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scribes, sometimes by ordinary believers. Because copying was manual, variations inevitably occurred. But the sheer number of manuscripts allows us to compare them and reconstruct the original text with remarkable accuracy.

Today, we possess over **5,800 Greek manuscripts** of the New Testament, ranging from small fragments to complete books. Some of these manuscripts date to within a century of the originals. In addition to Greek manuscripts, we have thousands of early translations—Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian—and quotations from early Christian writers that are so extensive that the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from their writings alone.

One of the most significant discoveries in New Testament studies is the **John Rylands Papyrus**, known as P52. This small fragment of the Gospel of John dates to the early second century, possibly within decades of the original writing. Other important manuscripts include Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both from the fourth century, containing nearly the entire New Testament. These manuscripts demonstrate the care with which the text was preserved.

When scholars compare manuscripts, they find variations—differences in spelling, word order, or small phrases. But the vast majority of these differences are minor and do not affect the meaning of the text. Less than one percent of variations are significant, and none of them alter any major doctrine of the Christian faith. The message of the New Testament has been preserved with extraordinary fidelity.

This brings us to the question of **reliability**. Can we trust that the New Testament we read today reflects what the apostles wrote? The answer, based on historical evidence, is a resounding yes. The New Testament is the best-attested document of the ancient world. No other ancient writing has as many manuscripts, as early manuscripts, or as geographically diverse manuscripts.

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For comparison, the works of Homer, Plato, or Caesar survive in far fewer copies, often separated from the originals by many centuries. Yet historians accept those texts as reliable. How much more should we trust the New Testament?

The reliability of the New Testament is not only textual but historical. The writings reflect accurate knowledge of first-century geography, culture, politics, and customs. Archaeological discoveries consistently confirm the details found in the Gospels and Acts. The names of officials, the structure of cities, the practices of synagogues, and the titles of Roman authorities all align with what we know from external sources.

But beyond historical reliability, the New Testament carries a deeper reliability—the reliability of divine inspiration. The early church recognized that these writings were not merely human documents but the Word of God. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles as they wrote. He guided the church as it recognized the canon. And He continues to speak through these Scriptures today.

As we reflect on the canon, the manuscripts, and the preservation of the text, we see the providence of God at work. He used ordinary people—scribes, pastors, missionaries, and believers—to preserve His Word. He guided the church to recognize the books that carried His authority. And He ensured that the message of Christ would be faithfully transmitted from generation to generation.

Understanding this process strengthens our confidence in Scripture. When we read the New Testament, we are not reading a corrupted text or a human invention. We are reading the inspired Word of God, preserved through centuries with extraordinary care. This foundation prepares us to study the New Testament with trust, reverence, and expectation.

LESSON 4 – THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

When we open the New Testament and begin reading the Gospels, one of the first things we notice is that three of them—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—sound remarkably similar. They tell many of the same stories, often in the same order, sometimes even using the same wording. Yet each Gospel also has its own unique emphasis, its own structure, and its own theological voice. Understanding how these three Gospels relate to one another is essential for interpreting them well. This relationship is known as the **Synoptic Problem**, and it forms the foundation of our study in this lesson.

Before we explore the Synoptic Problem itself, we need to step back and consider the **genre** of the Gospels. What kind of literature are we reading when we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? The Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense. They are not novels. They are not collections of sayings. They are not historical chronicles in the way ancient historians wrote. The Gospels are a unique form of ancient literature—**theological narratives** that present the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to reveal His identity and call readers to faith.

The Gospels are rooted in history. They describe real events, real places, and real people. But they are also deeply theological. Each Gospel writer selects, arranges, and presents material in a way that communicates a particular portrait of Jesus. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture. Mark presents Him as the suffering Son of God. Luke highlights His compassion and universal mission. John reveals His divine identity as the Word made flesh. Understanding the genre of the Gospels helps us appreciate both their historical reliability and their theological purpose.

Now, with that foundation in place, we turn to the **Synoptic Problem**. The word “synoptic” comes from a Greek term meaning “to see together.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they can be viewed side by side and compared easily. They share many of the same stories, teachings, and events. In fact, about 90 percent of Mark appears in Matthew, and about half of Mark appears in Luke. This raises an important question: **How do we explain the similarities and differences among these three Gospels?**

The early church recognized these similarities but did not see them as a problem. They understood that the apostles and their associates wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, drawing from eyewitness testimony and the teachings of Jesus. But as scholars studied the Gospels more closely, they began to ask how these texts were composed. Did the Gospel writers use common sources? Did they borrow from one another? Did they rely on oral tradition? These questions form the heart of the Synoptic Problem.

One of the most widely accepted explanations is known as **Markan Priority**—the idea that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source. Several factors support this view. Mark is the shortest Gospel. It has a straightforward, fast-paced style. It includes vivid details that suggest eyewitness testimony. And when Matthew and Luke include material from Mark, they often expand or clarify it. This suggests that Mark may have been the earliest written account of Jesus’ ministry.

In addition to Mark, many scholars propose that Matthew and Luke used another source—often called **Q**, from the German word *Quelle*, meaning “source.” Q is a hypothetical collection of Jesus’ sayings that Matthew and Luke share but Mark does not. Whether Q existed as a written document or represents shared oral tradition is debated, but the idea helps explain the material common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark.

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Matthew and Luke also contain material unique to each of them—stories, parables, and teachings found nowhere else. These unique sections are often referred to as **M** (for Matthew) and **L** (for Luke). Together, Mark, Q, M, and L form what is known as the **Four-Source Hypothesis**, one of the most common explanations for the composition of the Synoptic Gospels.

But it is important to remember that these theories are attempts to describe what the early church understood intuitively: the Gospel writers were not isolated authors inventing stories. They were part of a living community shaped by the teachings of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. They wrote with purpose, guided by God, using the sources available to them.

While the Synoptic Problem helps us understand the literary relationships among the Gospels, it also highlights the **distinctive voice** of each Gospel writer. Matthew writes with a deep concern for Jewish readers. He quotes the Old Testament frequently and presents Jesus as the promised Messiah. Mark writes with urgency, emphasizing action and the cost of discipleship. Luke writes with historical precision and compassion, highlighting Jesus' ministry to the marginalized. Each Gospel is a window into the life of Jesus, shaped by the needs of its audience and the inspiration of the Spirit.

Understanding the Synoptic Problem also helps us appreciate the **unity and diversity** of the Gospels. The unity is seen in their shared message: Jesus is the Son of God who brings the kingdom of God and offers salvation through His death and resurrection. The diversity is seen in their different emphases, structures, and theological insights. This diversity enriches our understanding of Jesus. We do not have one flat portrait of Christ; we have four complementary portraits that together reveal the fullness of His identity.

Another important aspect of Gospel study is recognizing the **oral culture** of the first century. Before the Gospels were written, the teachings and stories of Jesus were passed down orally. The apostles preached, taught, and repeated the words of Jesus in communities across the Roman world. Oral tradition was not casual or careless. It was structured, memorized, and preserved with great care. The early church valued accuracy, and the apostles ensured that the message of Jesus was faithfully transmitted. When the Gospel writers eventually recorded these traditions, they did so with the authority of eyewitnesses and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As we study the Gospels, we must also remember that they are not arranged chronologically in every detail. The Gospel writers often group teachings or events thematically to emphasize particular truths. For example, Matthew collects many of Jesus' teachings into five major discourses, echoing the five books of Moses. Mark arranges his material to highlight the identity of Jesus and the cost of following Him. Luke structures his Gospel around Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. These literary choices are not contradictions; they are theological strategies that help us understand the message of Jesus more clearly.

The Synoptic Problem, then, is not a problem in the sense of something that threatens our faith. It is a window into the way God used human authors, historical events, and living tradition to communicate His Word. It shows us that the Gospels are both divine and human—divinely inspired, yet written through the personalities, experiences, and perspectives of real people.

As we move forward in this course, this understanding will help us read the Gospels with greater insight. We will see why Matthew emphasizes fulfillment, why Mark emphasizes action, why Luke emphasizes compassion, and why John stands apart with his profound theological depth. The Gospels are not

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competing accounts; they are complementary witnesses. Together, they give us a rich, multifaceted portrait of Jesus Christ.

In the next lessons, we will begin exploring each Gospel individually, starting with Matthew. But before we do, it is essential to appreciate the literary relationships that bind the Synoptic Gospels together and the unique genre that shapes their message. The Gospels are the heart of the New Testament, and understanding how they were written prepares us to hear their message with clarity, reverence, and faith.

LESSON 5 - MATTHEW

JESUS THE MESSIANIC KING

When we open the New Testament and begin reading the Gospel of Matthew, we are stepping into a book that stands at the crossroads of two worlds. On one hand, Matthew looks back to the Old Testament, drawing deeply from its promises, prophecies, and patterns. On the other hand, Matthew looks forward, introducing Jesus as the fulfillment of everything God had promised and the One who inaugurates the kingdom of heaven. Matthew is the bridge between the Testaments, and his Gospel is intentionally crafted to show that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the true King of Israel, and the authoritative Teacher who brings God's kingdom to earth.

Matthew's Gospel is the first book in the New Testament not because it was written first—Mark likely came earlier—but because Matthew provides the most natural transition from the Hebrew Scriptures to the story of Jesus. His opening words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,” immediately anchor Jesus in the story of Israel. Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus is not a new idea. He is the fulfillment of a very old promise.

To understand Matthew's message, we need to begin with his **audience and purpose**. Matthew writes primarily for a Jewish audience. His Gospel is filled with Old Testament quotations, references to prophecy, and themes that would resonate deeply with Jewish readers. He presents Jesus as the new Moses, the new David, and the true Israel. He shows how Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets. And he emphasizes the kingdom of heaven—a phrase unique to Matthew—which reflects Jewish reverence for the name of God.

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Matthew's purpose is clear: to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, the King who brings God's kingdom, and the Teacher who reveals God's will. Everything in the Gospel points toward this central truth.

Matthew begins with a **genealogy**, something modern readers often skip, but something ancient readers valued deeply. Genealogies established identity, legitimacy, and purpose. Matthew organizes Jesus' genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations, highlighting key moments in Israel's history: Abraham, David, and the exile. By doing this, Matthew shows that Jesus stands at the climax of God's redemptive plan. He is the promised son of Abraham through whom all nations will be blessed. He is the son of David who will reign forever. And He is the One who brings restoration after exile.

From the genealogy, Matthew moves to the **birth narrative**, which is rich with theological meaning. The virgin birth, the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth all echo Old Testament themes. Matthew repeatedly uses the phrase "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet," emphasizing that Jesus' life is the fulfillment of Scripture. Even the hostility of Herod and the suffering of the innocent reflect the pattern of opposition that God's chosen servants often faced.

After the birth narrative, Matthew introduces **John the Baptist**, the forerunner who prepares the way for Jesus. John's message is simple: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This becomes the central theme of Jesus' ministry as well. The kingdom is not merely a future hope; it is breaking into the present through the person and work of Jesus.

Jesus' **baptism** marks the beginning of His public ministry. As He comes up from the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." This moment reveals Jesus'

identity as the Son of God and sets the stage for His mission. Immediately afterward, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Unlike Israel, who failed in the wilderness, Jesus remains faithful. He resists temptation by quoting Scripture, demonstrating His obedience to the Father and His authority over evil.

One of the most significant sections of Matthew's Gospel is the **Sermon on the Mount**, found in chapters 5 through 7. This sermon is the heart of Jesus' teaching and reveals the ethics of the kingdom. Jesus begins with the Beatitudes, a series of blessings that describe the character of kingdom people. He then teaches about righteousness, anger, lust, marriage, honesty, retaliation, love for enemies, prayer, fasting, and trust in God. The Sermon on the Mount is not a list of rules; it is a portrait of the transformed life. Jesus calls His followers to a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees—not by adding more rules, but by transforming the heart.

Throughout the Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as a **Teacher with authority**. When Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds are astonished because He teaches “as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” This theme continues as Jesus performs miracles, heals the sick, casts out demons, and forgives sins. His authority extends over nature, disease, evil spirits, and even death. Matthew wants his readers to see that Jesus is not merely a teacher; He is the King whose authority is absolute.

Another major theme in Matthew is the **kingdom of heaven**. Jesus speaks of the kingdom more in Matthew than in any other Gospel. The kingdom is God's reign breaking into the world through Jesus. It is present wherever Jesus is acknowledged as King. It is revealed in His teaching, demonstrated in His miracles, and embodied in His people. The parables of Matthew 13—such as the sower, the wheat and tares, the mustard seed, and the hidden treasure—

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illustrate the nature of the kingdom: it grows quietly, spreads widely, and transforms everything it touches.

Matthew also emphasizes the **conflict** between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Pharisees and Sadducees challenge Jesus repeatedly, questioning His authority and accusing Him of breaking the Law. Jesus confronts their hypocrisy, exposes their legalism, and calls them to genuine repentance. This conflict intensifies as the Gospel progresses, leading ultimately to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

The **Passion narrative** in Matthew highlights Jesus as the suffering King. He enters Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. He cleanses the Temple, teaches in parables, and warns of coming judgment. At the Last Supper, He establishes the new covenant in His blood. In Gethsemane, He submits to the Father's will. At His trial, He is falsely accused, mocked, and condemned. On the cross, He bears the sins of the world. And in His resurrection, He triumphs over death.

Matthew concludes with the **Great Commission**, one of the most important passages in the New Testament. Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." On the basis of that authority, He commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He has commanded. And He promises, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." This commission extends the mission of Jesus to the entire world and forms the foundation of the church's mission.

As we reflect on the Gospel of Matthew, we see a portrait of Jesus that is rich, compelling, and deeply rooted in Scripture. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the true King, the authoritative Teacher, and the Savior of the world. Matthew

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invites us to follow Him, to live under His authority, and to participate in His kingdom.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the Gospel of Mark, the shortest and most fast-paced of the Gospels, and explore its unique contribution to our understanding of Jesus. But for now, Matthew stands before us as the Gospel that bridges the Testaments and reveals the King who fulfills God's promises and brings His kingdom to earth.

LESSON 6 - MARK

THE SUFFERING SON OF GOD

When we turn from the Gospel of Matthew to the Gospel of Mark, we immediately feel a shift in tone, pace, and style. Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four, yet it is also the most urgent, the most action-oriented, and in many ways the most dramatic. Mark wastes no time. There is no genealogy, no birth narrative, no extended introduction. He begins with a bold declaration: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And from that moment forward, Mark moves quickly, almost breathlessly, through the ministry of Jesus.

Mark's Gospel is often described as the **Gospel of action**. His favorite word is "immediately," a term he uses more than forty times. Jesus is constantly moving—teaching, healing, casting out demons, confronting opposition, and revealing His identity through His works. Mark wants his readers to feel the urgency of Jesus' mission and the power of His presence. There is no wasted motion, no unnecessary detail. Everything drives toward the central question of the Gospel: **Who is Jesus?**

To understand Mark's message, we begin with his **audience and purpose**. Mark writes primarily for a Gentile audience, likely believers in Rome who were facing persecution. His Gospel is filled with explanations of Jewish customs, translations of Aramaic phrases, and references to suffering and endurance. Mark presents Jesus as the **Suffering Son of God**, the One who conquers through sacrifice and calls His followers to take up their cross.

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Mark's Gospel is traditionally associated with the apostle Peter. Early Christian writers tell us that Mark served as Peter's interpreter and recorded Peter's eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry. This connection helps explain the vivid details in Mark—details that sound like the memories of someone who was actually there. The Gospel has the feel of an eyewitness narrative, full of immediacy and authenticity.

Mark begins with the ministry of **John the Baptist**, the forerunner who prepares the way for Jesus. John's message is one of repentance and expectation. He announces that someone greater is coming—someone who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus arrives, He is baptized by John, and as He comes up from the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and the Father declares His pleasure. This moment reveals Jesus' identity and launches His public ministry.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark's account is brief, but it highlights the spiritual conflict that will characterize Jesus' ministry. From the beginning, Jesus confronts the forces of evil, and throughout the Gospel, He demonstrates His authority over demons, sickness, nature, and even death.

One of the striking features of Mark's Gospel is the emphasis on **Jesus' authority**. In the opening chapters, Jesus teaches with authority, heals with authority, and casts out demons with authority. The people are amazed because He speaks and acts in ways they have never seen before. Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus is not merely a teacher or a miracle worker. He is the Son of God whose authority extends over every realm of life.

Yet alongside this authority, Mark also emphasizes **Jesus' humanity**. Jesus becomes tired. He seeks solitude. He expresses emotion. He experiences compassion, anger, sorrow, and even astonishment. Mark presents a Jesus who

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is both powerful and deeply human—a Savior who enters into the struggles of humanity and shares in our suffering.

A major theme in Mark is the **Messianic Secret**. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus performs miracles and then instructs people not to tell anyone. He silences demons who recognize Him. He tells healed individuals to keep quiet. He even instructs His disciples not to reveal His identity. This secrecy is not accidental. Jesus is redefining what it means to be the Messiah. The people expect a political liberator, a warrior king who will overthrow Rome. But Jesus comes as a suffering servant. He does not want His identity misunderstood or His mission distorted.

This theme reaches its climax in the central section of the Gospel, beginning in chapter 8. Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds, “You are the Christ.” It is a moment of revelation. But immediately afterward, Jesus begins to teach that the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again. Peter rebukes Him, unable to reconcile suffering with Messiahship. Jesus responds with a rebuke of His own: “Get behind me, Satan.” The path of the Messiah is the path of suffering, and anyone who follows Him must take up their cross.

From this point forward, Mark’s Gospel moves steadily toward Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus continues to teach, heal, and confront opposition, but the shadow of the cross grows larger. The disciples struggle to understand. They argue about greatness. They fail to grasp the meaning of Jesus’ mission. Mark portrays the disciples honestly—not as heroes, but as ordinary people who misunderstand, stumble, and fear. This portrayal is both realistic and encouraging. It reminds us that discipleship is a journey of growth, not perfection.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the tension intensifies. He cleanses the Temple, confronts the religious leaders, and teaches about the coming judgment. The religious authorities plot to kill Him. Judas agrees to betray Him. At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes the new covenant in His blood, revealing that His death will bring salvation.

The **Passion narrative** in Mark is stark and powerful. Jesus is arrested, abandoned, and falsely accused. He is mocked, beaten, and condemned. The crowds who once followed Him now call for His crucifixion. The soldiers place a crown of thorns on His head and mock Him as King. On the cross, Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mark emphasizes the depth of Jesus’ suffering and the reality of His abandonment. Yet even in this moment, the truth of His identity shines through. A Roman centurion, witnessing His death, declares, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

Mark’s Gospel ends with the **resurrection**, but in a way that is intentionally open-ended. The women find the tomb empty. An angel announces that Jesus has risen. But the women flee in fear and say nothing to anyone. This abrupt ending is not a mistake. It is an invitation. Mark leaves the story open so that the reader must respond. Will we remain silent in fear, or will we proclaim the risen Christ?

The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the **Suffering Son of God**, the One who conquers through sacrifice and calls His followers to a life of costly discipleship. Mark challenges us to see Jesus clearly—not as a political figure, not as a miracle worker, but as the One who gives His life as a ransom for many. He invites us to follow Jesus on the path of the cross, trusting that the way of suffering leads to resurrection.

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As we move to the Gospel of Luke in the next lesson, we will see yet another portrait of Jesus—one that emphasizes His compassion, His concern for the marginalized, and His mission to bring salvation to all people. But for now, Mark stands before us as the Gospel that reveals the power of Jesus' suffering and the urgency of His call to follow Him.

LESSON 7 - LUKE

JESUS THE SAVIOR OF ALL PEOPLE

When we come to the Gospel of Luke, we encounter a portrait of Jesus that is both deeply historical and profoundly compassionate. Luke is the longest book in the New Testament, and when combined with Acts—also written by Luke—it forms a two-volume work that tells the story of Jesus and the early church from the birth of Christ to the gospel's arrival in Rome. Luke is a careful historian, a skilled storyteller, and a theologian with a heart for the marginalized. His Gospel presents Jesus as the Savior of all people—Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders.

Luke begins his Gospel with a formal prologue, something unique among the Gospels. He writes to a man named Theophilus, explaining that he has investigated everything carefully from the beginning so that Theophilus may have certainty about the things he has been taught. This introduction tells us several important things. First, Luke is not an eyewitness; he is a researcher. Second, he uses sources—eyewitness accounts, written materials, and oral traditions. Third, his goal is clarity, accuracy, and confidence. Luke wants his readers to know that the story of Jesus is grounded in real history.

Luke's Gospel is often described as the **Gospel of compassion**, the **Gospel of joy**, and the **Gospel of the outcast**. Throughout the narrative, Luke highlights Jesus' concern for the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the forgotten. He includes stories found nowhere else—stories of widows, sinners, Samaritans, tax collectors, and women who play significant roles in the ministry of Jesus. Luke shows us a Savior who reaches across boundaries and brings salvation to those who least expect it.

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Luke begins with a detailed account of the **births of John the Baptist and Jesus**. He weaves their stories together, showing how God is at work in both. The angel Gabriel announces the birth of John to Zechariah and the birth of Jesus to Mary. Mary responds with the Magnificat, a song of praise that celebrates God's mercy and justice. Luke emphasizes the humility of Jesus' birth—born in a manger, visited by shepherds, welcomed by the lowly. This theme of reversal—where the humble are lifted up and the proud are brought low—runs throughout the Gospel.

One of Luke's distinctive features is his emphasis on **the Holy Spirit**. From the opening chapters, the Spirit fills John, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and Jesus Himself. Luke presents the ministry of Jesus as Spirit-empowered from beginning to end. This emphasis continues in Acts, where the Spirit empowers the church for mission. For Luke, the coming of Jesus marks the beginning of a new era in salvation history—an era characterized by the presence and power of the Spirit.

Luke also highlights **prayer** more than any other Gospel writer. Jesus prays at His baptism, before choosing the twelve disciples, before Peter's confession, at the Transfiguration, in Gethsemane, and on the cross. Luke shows us a Savior who lives in constant communion with the Father. This emphasis on prayer shapes the spiritual tone of the Gospel and invites readers to follow Jesus' example.

As Jesus begins His public ministry, Luke presents Him as a preacher of good news. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus reads from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to the captives... to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Jesus then declares, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your

hearing.” This moment sets the agenda for His ministry. Jesus comes to bring salvation, healing, freedom, and restoration.

Luke’s Gospel is filled with **parables**, many of which are unique to his account. These include some of the most beloved stories in Scripture: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Fool, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. Each of these parables reveals something about the character of God, the nature of the kingdom, and the call to repentance. Luke’s parables often highlight God’s mercy and challenge human pride. They show that God seeks the lost, welcomes the repentant, and judges the self-righteous.

One of Luke’s major themes is **the universality of salvation**. Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the Savior not only of Israel but of all nations. Simeon declares that Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” Jesus heals Gentiles, praises the faith of outsiders, and tells parables that elevate Samaritans. Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy all the way back to Adam, not just to Abraham, showing that Jesus is connected to all humanity. This universal vision prepares the way for the book of Acts, where the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Luke also gives special attention to **women**. He includes stories of Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, the widow of Nain, the sinful woman who anoints Jesus’ feet, Mary and Martha, and the women who support Jesus’ ministry financially. Women are present at the cross, at the tomb, and among the first witnesses of the resurrection. Luke’s Gospel affirms the dignity and value of women in a way that was countercultural in the ancient world.

Another distinctive feature of Luke is his emphasis on **wealth and poverty**. Luke records Jesus’ warnings about the dangers of riches and His call to generosity.

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The parable of the Rich Fool, the story of Zacchaeus, and the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus all highlight the spiritual challenges of wealth. Luke presents a kingdom where the poor are blessed, the hungry are filled, and the humble are exalted. This theme reflects Luke's concern for justice and compassion.

As Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem—a major structural feature of Luke's Gospel—the tension increases. Luke devotes a large portion of his narrative to this journey, emphasizing Jesus' determination to fulfill His mission. Along the way, Jesus teaches about discipleship, the cost of following Him, and the nature of the kingdom. He confronts the Pharisees, warns of judgment, and calls people to repentance.

The **Passion narrative** in Luke highlights Jesus' innocence, compassion, and forgiveness. Pilate declares Him innocent three times. Jesus heals the ear of the servant who comes to arrest Him. On the cross, He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He promises paradise to the repentant thief. Luke presents Jesus as the righteous sufferer who entrusts Himself to the Father and offers salvation even in His final moments.

Luke's account of the **resurrection** emphasizes joy, wonder, and understanding. The women find the empty tomb. The disciples on the road to Emmaus encounter the risen Jesus, who opens the Scriptures to them and reveals how the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms point to Him. Jesus appears to His disciples, commissions them as witnesses, and promises the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel ends with the ascension, a moment of worship and anticipation that leads directly into the story of Acts.

As we reflect on the Gospel of Luke, we see a portrait of Jesus that is rich, compassionate, and deeply human. Luke shows us a Savior who enters into the struggles of humanity, who lifts up the lowly, who seeks the lost, and who brings

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salvation to all people. He invites us to see Jesus not only as the fulfillment of prophecy but as the One who brings joy, healing, and hope to the world.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the Gospel of John, the most theological and distinctive of the four Gospels, and explore its profound portrait of Jesus as the eternal Word made flesh. But for now, Luke stands before us as the Gospel that reveals the heart of Jesus—the Savior who came to seek and to save the lost.

LESSON 8 - JOHN

THE DIVINE WORD MADE FLESH

When we come to the Gospel of John, we step into a world that feels different from the other three Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke—what we call the Synoptic Gospels—share a similar structure, similar stories, and a similar approach to the life of Jesus. But John stands apart. His Gospel is more theological, more reflective, more symbolic, and more focused on the identity of Jesus than on the chronology of His ministry. John invites us not only to see what Jesus did, but to understand who Jesus is.

John's Gospel is written with a clear purpose. Near the end of the book, John tells us exactly why he wrote it: "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." John's goal is not simply to inform; it is to transform. He wants his readers to encounter Jesus in such a way that they come to faith and experience eternal life.

John begins his Gospel not with a genealogy, not with a birth narrative, but with a theological declaration that reaches back before creation itself: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." These opening verses echo the first words of Genesis, reminding us that Jesus is not merely a historical figure but the eternal Word through whom all things were made. John wants us to understand from the very beginning that Jesus is divine, eternal, and central to God's creative and redemptive work.

This introduction sets the tone for the entire Gospel. John presents Jesus as the **Word made flesh**, the One who reveals God perfectly because He is God. He is the

light shining in the darkness, the life that gives life to all people, and the glory of God dwelling among us. John's Gospel is a theological masterpiece that invites us to behold the mystery of the incarnation.

One of the distinctive features of John's Gospel is the series of **"I Am" statements** that Jesus makes. These statements reveal His identity and connect Him to the divine name revealed to Moses in the burning bush. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "I am the true vine." Each of these statements reveals something profound about who Jesus is and what He offers to those who believe.

Another distinctive feature of John is the emphasis on **signs**. John does not call Jesus' miracles "miracles"; he calls them "signs." A sign points beyond itself to a deeper reality. John includes seven major signs in his Gospel: turning water into wine, healing the nobleman's son, healing the paralytic, feeding the five thousand, walking on water, healing the man born blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Each sign reveals something about Jesus' identity and mission. The raising of Lazarus, for example, points to Jesus as the One who has power over death and foreshadows His own resurrection.

John also emphasizes **belief** more than any other Gospel. The word "believe" appears nearly one hundred times. But belief in John is not merely intellectual agreement; it is trust, commitment, and relationship. John invites his readers to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and to experience eternal life—a life that begins now and continues forever.

One of the most beautiful and intimate sections of John's Gospel is the **Upper Room Discourse**, found in chapters 13 through 17. In this extended teaching, Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure. He washes their feet,

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demonstrating servant leadership. He gives them a new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.” He promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper who will guide them into all truth. He speaks of abiding in Him as branches abide in the vine. And He prays for His disciples—and for all who will believe through their message—that they may be one.

This section reveals the heart of Jesus for His followers. It shows His love, His humility, His desire for unity, and His promise of the Spirit’s presence. It is one of the richest theological sections in the entire New Testament.

John’s Gospel also gives us some of the most profound conversations in Scripture. Jesus speaks with Nicodemus about being born again. He speaks with the Samaritan woman at the well about living water. He speaks with the crowds about the bread of life. He speaks with Martha about resurrection and life. These conversations reveal Jesus’ ability to meet people where they are and lead them into deeper truth.

As the Gospel progresses, the tension between Jesus and the religious leaders intensifies. John highlights the spiritual blindness of those who reject Jesus and the growing hostility that leads to His arrest and crucifixion. Yet even in these moments, John emphasizes Jesus’ sovereignty. Jesus is not a victim; He lays down His life willingly. He is in control even as He is betrayed, arrested, and condemned.

The **Passion narrative** in John is filled with theological depth. Jesus is presented as the Passover Lamb whose death brings salvation. On the cross, Jesus declares, “It is finished,” signaling the completion of His redemptive work. John emphasizes that Jesus’ death is not a tragedy but a triumph—a moment of glory in which the love of God is fully revealed.

John's account of the **resurrection** is both personal and powerful. Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus in the garden. Thomas, who doubts, is invited to touch Jesus' wounds and believe. The disciples meet Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, where He restores Peter and commissions him to shepherd His people. These encounters show that the resurrection is not merely an event; it is a relationship. Jesus meets His followers personally, calls them by name, and sends them out with purpose.

John concludes his Gospel with a reminder that Jesus did many other things not recorded in the book. His Gospel is selective, not exhaustive. But what he has written is enough—enough to reveal Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and enough to bring life to all who believe.

As we reflect on the Gospel of John, we see a portrait of Jesus that is majestic, intimate, and deeply theological. John invites us to behold the glory of the Word made flesh, to believe in Him, and to experience the life He offers. John's Gospel is not merely a record of events; it is an invitation to encounter the living Christ.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the book of Acts and explore the birth of the early church, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But for now, John stands before us as the Gospel that reveals the divine identity of Jesus and calls us to believe in Him and find life in His name.

LESSON 9 – THE HISTORICAL JESUS

THE HISTORICAL JESUS & THEOLOGICAL PORTRAITS

When we study the New Testament, one of the most important questions we face is this: **Who is Jesus?** Not simply who He is in our faith, or in our worship, or in our theology, but who He was in history — the real Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Galilee, who taught in synagogues, who confronted religious leaders, who healed the sick, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and who rose again. This lesson brings together everything we’ve learned so far about the world of the New Testament and the four Gospels, and it helps us understand the relationship between the **historical Jesus** and the **theological portraits** presented by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The phrase “historical Jesus” can sometimes sound academic or even skeptical, but it shouldn’t. The historical Jesus simply refers to the real person who lived in first-century Palestine — the Jesus who is also the Christ of faith. The Gospels are not myth, legend, or symbolic stories. They are rooted in real events, real places, and real people. But each Gospel writer presents Jesus with a particular emphasis, a particular angle, a particular theological purpose. Understanding both the history and the theology helps us see Jesus more clearly.

Let’s begin with the **historical foundations**. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and ministered primarily in Galilee and Judea. He lived under Roman occupation, within the world of Second Temple Judaism. He spoke Aramaic, likely knew Hebrew, and interacted with Greek-speaking communities. He was a Jewish teacher — a rabbi — who gathered disciples, taught with authority, performed miracles, and proclaimed the kingdom of God. These basic facts are affirmed not only by the Gospels but also by non-Christian

sources such as Josephus and Tacitus. The historical existence of Jesus is one of the most secure facts of ancient history.

But the Gospels do more than give us historical data. They interpret the meaning of Jesus' life. They show us not only what He did, but who He is. Each Gospel writer shapes his narrative to reveal a particular theological truth about Jesus. These are not contradictions; they are complementary portraits, like four artists painting the same person from different angles.

Matthew presents Jesus as the **Messianic King**, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Mark presents Him as the **Suffering Son of God**, whose identity is revealed through His actions and ultimately through His death. Luke presents Him as the **Savior of all people**, full of compassion and empowered by the Spirit. John presents Him as the **eternal Word made flesh**, the divine Son who reveals the Father. Together, these portraits give us a rich and multifaceted understanding of Jesus.

To appreciate the theological portraits of the Gospels, we must understand how ancient biography worked. Ancient writers were not concerned with strict chronological order the way modern historians are. They arranged material thematically to highlight the character and significance of their subject. The Gospel writers do the same. They select events, arrange them purposefully, and interpret them theologically. This does not diminish their historical reliability; it enhances their theological clarity.

One of the key questions in historical Jesus studies is this: **What did Jesus proclaim?** The consistent answer across all four Gospels is that Jesus proclaimed the **kingdom of God**. He announced that God's reign was breaking into the world in a new and decisive way. He called people to repentance, faith, and discipleship. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and performed signs that

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demonstrated the presence of God's kingdom. His message was not simply about personal spirituality; it was about God's rule over all creation.

Another central question is: **What did Jesus believe about Himself?** The Gospels present Jesus as more than a prophet, more than a teacher, more than a miracle worker. He speaks with divine authority. He forgives sins. He claims a unique relationship with the Father. He accepts worship. He identifies Himself with the Son of Man from Daniel's vision — a heavenly figure who receives authority and glory. He predicts His death and resurrection. These claims are not later inventions; they are woven throughout the earliest traditions of the church.

The historical Jesus and the theological Jesus are not two different figures. They are one and the same. The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. The Gospels do not give us a distorted picture of Jesus; they give us the true picture — a picture shaped by eyewitness testimony, guided by the Holy Spirit, and written for the purpose of faith.

One of the most important aspects of Jesus' identity is His role as the **Son of Man**. This title appears frequently in the Gospels, especially in Mark. It comes from Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is a heavenly figure who receives authority, glory, and an everlasting kingdom. Jesus uses this title to describe His authority, His suffering, and His future return. The Son of Man is both humble and exalted — a perfect description of Jesus' mission.

Another key aspect is Jesus' identity as the **Son of God**. In the Gospels, this title does not simply mean that Jesus is a righteous man or a chosen servant. It means He shares the nature of God. At His baptism, the Father declares Him to be the beloved Son. In His miracles, He demonstrates divine power. In His teaching, He speaks with divine authority. In His resurrection, He is vindicated as the true Son of God.

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The Gospels also present Jesus as the **Messiah**, the anointed King promised in the Old Testament. But Jesus redefines what it means to be the Messiah. He does not come as a political liberator or a military conqueror. He comes as a suffering servant. He comes to give His life as a ransom for many. He comes to establish a kingdom not through force, but through sacrifice.

This brings us to one of the most profound truths about Jesus: **His death was not an accident; it was His mission.** The Gospels consistently show that Jesus understood His death as the fulfillment of God's plan. He predicted it. He embraced it. He interpreted it as a sacrifice for sin. The cross is not a tragic end; it is the moment of victory. It is where the love of God is revealed most clearly.

The resurrection is the climax of the Gospels and the foundation of Christian faith. The historical evidence for the resurrection is strong: the empty tomb, the eyewitness appearances, the transformation of the disciples, and the rapid growth of the early church. But the theological meaning is even greater. The resurrection declares that Jesus is who He claimed to be — the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior. It inaugurates the new creation and guarantees the future resurrection of believers.

As we reflect on the historical Jesus and the theological portraits of the Gospels, we see a unified picture emerge. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the suffering servant, the divine Son, the incarnate Word, the Savior of the world. He is rooted in history, revealed in Scripture, and exalted in resurrection. The Gospels invite us not only to study Jesus, but to believe in Him, follow Him, and find life in His name.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the book of Acts and explore the birth of the early church, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But for now, Lesson 9 brings us to the heart

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of the New Testament: the identity of Jesus Himself — the One who stands at the center of history and the center of our faith.

LESSON 10 - ACTS

THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED CHURCH

When we turn from the four Gospels to the book of Acts, we move from the story of Jesus' earthly ministry to the story of Jesus' ongoing ministry through the Holy Spirit and the church. Acts is not simply a history book; it is a theological narrative that shows how the risen Christ continues His work through His people. It is the bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles, the hinge on which the entire New Testament turns, and the story of how the gospel moved from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem to a global movement reaching the heart of the Roman Empire.

Acts is the second volume of a two-part work written by Luke. In his Gospel, Luke tells the story of what Jesus "began to do and teach." In Acts, he tells the story of what Jesus continues to do and teach through the Holy Spirit. The book opens with the risen Jesus instructing His disciples, promising the coming of the Spirit, and commissioning them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This verse — Acts 1:8 — is the outline of the entire book. Everything that follows is the unfolding of that mission.

The first major theme of Acts is the **power of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are "clothed with power from on high." They are not to begin the mission in their own strength. They are to wait for the Spirit who will empower them, guide them, and speak through them. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit comes with wind and fire, filling the disciples and enabling them to speak in other languages. This moment marks the birth of the church. It is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the beginning of a new era in salvation history.

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Peter stands up and preaches the first Christian sermon. He proclaims Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord, calls the people to repentance, and announces the gift of the Spirit. Three thousand people respond in faith and are baptized. The church is born not through human strategy but through the power of the Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel.

Acts shows us a church that is **Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered**. The Spirit guides decisions, directs mission, calls leaders, and confirms the gospel with signs and wonders. The Spirit breaks down barriers, opens doors, and transforms lives. The Spirit is the main character of Acts, the driving force behind the expansion of the gospel.

The second major theme of Acts is **the unity and fellowship of the early church**. After Pentecost, the believers devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. They share their possessions, care for the needy, and worship with joy. Their community life is marked by generosity, unity, and devotion. This picture of the early church is not idealized; it is a model of what the Spirit can produce in a people who are surrendered to Christ.

But Acts also shows us that the early church faced challenges. Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Spirit and face judgment. Complaints arise about the distribution of food, leading to the appointment of deacons. Persecution breaks out after the martyrdom of Stephen. The church is not perfect, but it is faithful. And through every challenge, the gospel continues to advance.

One of the most significant turning points in Acts is the **conversion of Saul**, who becomes the apostle Paul. Saul begins as a persecutor of the church, convinced that he is defending the purity of Judaism. But on the road to Damascus, he encounters the risen Christ. This encounter transforms him from an enemy of

the gospel into its most passionate messenger. Paul becomes the central figure of the second half of Acts, carrying the gospel across the Roman world.

Another major turning point is the **inclusion of the Gentiles**. Up to this point, the church is almost entirely Jewish. But God reveals to Peter through a vision that the gospel is for all people. When Peter preaches to Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles just as He did on the Jews at Pentecost. This event confirms that the gospel is not limited to one nation or one culture. It is for the whole world.

This inclusion of the Gentiles leads to the **Jerusalem Council** in Acts 15, where the apostles and elders gather to decide whether Gentile believers must follow the Law of Moses. After discussion and prayer, they conclude that salvation is by grace through faith, not by the works of the Law. This decision preserves the unity of the church and affirms the universality of the gospel.

The second half of Acts focuses on **Paul's missionary journeys**. Paul travels through Asia Minor, Greece, and eventually to Rome. He preaches in synagogues, marketplaces, homes, and public squares. He plants churches, appoints leaders, and strengthens believers. He faces opposition, persecution, imprisonment, and hardship, yet he remains faithful to his calling. Paul's ministry demonstrates the unstoppable power of the gospel and the faithfulness of God to His mission.

Acts also highlights the **diversity of the early church**. The gospel reaches Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Romans, merchants, soldiers, jailers, philosophers, and rulers. The church is not defined by ethnicity, social status, or background. It is defined by faith in Christ and the presence of the Spirit. Acts shows us a church that is global, multicultural, and united in mission.

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One of the most striking features of Acts is its **open ending**. The book concludes with Paul in Rome, preaching the gospel “with all boldness and without hindrance.” There is no mention of Paul’s trial or death. The story feels unfinished — and that is intentional. Acts is not just the story of the early church; it is the story of the ongoing mission of God. The book ends where our mission begins. The gospel continues to spread, and the Spirit continues to empower believers to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

As we reflect on the book of Acts, we see a church that is bold, prayerful, generous, unified, and Spirit-empowered. We see a gospel that crosses boundaries, breaks down walls, and transforms lives. We see a Savior who continues His work through His people. Acts invites us to participate in that mission — to be witnesses, to be filled with the Spirit, and to carry the message of Jesus to our world.

In the next lesson, we will explore Paul’s missionary journeys in more detail and see how the gospel spread across the Roman Empire through the ministry of the apostle Paul. But for now, Acts stands before us as the story of the Spirit-empowered church — a story that continues to this day.

LESSON 11 – PAUL’S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

THE EXPANSION OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

When we open the book of Acts and move into the ministry of the apostle Paul, we witness one of the most remarkable movements in human history — the rapid expansion of Christianity from a small Jewish sect in Jerusalem to a global, multicultural community stretching across the Roman Empire. Paul’s missionary journeys are not simply travel logs; they are the story of how the gospel crossed boundaries, confronted cultures, transformed lives, and established churches in some of the most influential cities of the ancient world.

Paul is one of the most significant figures in the New Testament. His letters make up nearly half of the New Testament books, and his influence on Christian theology, mission, and discipleship is profound. But before he became the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was Saul of Tarsus — a Pharisee, a scholar, and a fierce opponent of the early church. His dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the clearest demonstrations of God’s grace and power. The man who once persecuted the church became its greatest missionary.

To understand Paul’s missionary journeys, we need to begin with his **calling and preparation**. After his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul spends time in Arabia and Damascus, reflecting, praying, and preparing for the mission God has given him. Eventually, he is brought to Antioch, a vibrant, multicultural church that becomes the launching point for global mission. It is in Antioch that the Holy Spirit speaks, saying, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” With prayer, fasting, and the laying on of hands, the church sends them out — and the missionary movement begins.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul's first journey, recorded in Acts 13 and 14, takes him and Barnabas to Cyprus and into the region of Galatia. They preach in synagogues, share the gospel with Gentiles, and establish churches in cities like Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. This journey reveals several key patterns that will shape Paul's ministry.

First, Paul consistently begins in the synagogue. He honors the Jewish roots of the gospel and seeks to reach his own people first. But when the message is rejected, he turns to the Gentiles, fulfilling his calling as the apostle to the nations.

Second, Paul faces opposition. In nearly every city, he encounters resistance — from religious leaders, from political authorities, and from hostile crowds. In Lystra, he is even stoned and left for dead. Yet he gets up and continues preaching. Paul's perseverance demonstrates that the mission of God advances not through comfort but through courage.

Third, Paul establishes churches and appoints leaders. He does not simply make converts; he forms communities. He strengthens believers, encourages them to remain faithful, and entrusts leadership to elders. This pattern becomes the foundation of his missionary strategy.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

After the first journey, a major controversy arises: must Gentile believers follow the Law of Moses? This question threatens the unity of the church. Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders gather to discuss the issue. After prayer and debate, they conclude that salvation is by grace

through faith, not by the works of the Law. Gentiles are welcomed into the church without becoming Jews. This decision preserves the unity of the church and affirms the universal scope of the gospel.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul's second journey expands the mission even further. This time, he travels with Silas, and later Timothy and Luke join the team. They revisit the churches in Galatia, strengthening the believers. Then something remarkable happens: Paul receives a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." This vision marks a turning point. The gospel crosses into Europe for the first time.

In Philippi, Paul meets Lydia, a businesswoman who becomes the first convert in Europe. He and Silas are imprisoned, but God sends an earthquake that opens the prison doors. The jailer and his household come to faith. In Thessalonica and Berea, Paul preaches boldly, and many believe. In Athens, he engages philosophers on Mars Hill, proclaiming the "unknown God" as the Creator and Judge of all. In Corinth, he spends eighteen months planting a church in one of the most challenging cities of the ancient world.

This journey reveals Paul's ability to adapt the gospel to different audiences. To Jews, he reasons from the Scriptures. To Gentiles, he appeals to creation and conscience. To philosophers, he speaks in the language of ideas. Paul does not change the message, but he changes the method. He becomes "all things to all people" so that he might win some.

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul's third journey focuses on strengthening the churches he has planted. He spends three years in Ephesus, one of the most important cities in the empire. His ministry there is powerful. People turn from idols, burn their magic books, and embrace the gospel. The entire region hears the word of the Lord. But opposition arises from those whose businesses are threatened by the decline of idol worship. A riot breaks out, and Paul is forced to leave.

Throughout this journey, Paul teaches, encourages, and warns the churches. He writes letters — including 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans — that shape Christian theology for generations. He trains leaders, such as Timothy and Titus, who will carry on the mission after him. Paul's heart for the churches is evident. He weeps with them, prays for them, and warns them of false teachers.

PAUL'S ARREST AND JOURNEY TO ROME

After returning to Jerusalem, Paul is arrested. False accusations lead to a series of trials before Jewish and Roman authorities. But even in chains, Paul continues to preach. He shares the gospel with governors, kings, and soldiers. When he appeals to Caesar, he is sent to Rome. The journey is perilous — storms, shipwreck, and danger — yet Paul remains confident in God's purpose.

Acts ends with Paul in Rome, under house arrest, preaching the gospel “with all boldness and without hindrance.” The book closes abruptly, not because the story is over, but because the mission continues. The gospel has reached the heart of the empire, and from there it will spread to the ends of the earth.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAUL'S MISSION

Paul's missionary journeys reveal several key truths about the early church and the mission of God.

First, the gospel is **for all people**. Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated — all are invited into the kingdom of God.

Second, the mission advances through **the power of the Holy Spirit**. Paul's success is not due to his brilliance, though he was brilliant. It is due to the Spirit who empowers, guides, and opens doors.

Third, the mission requires **courage and perseverance**. Paul faces persecution, hardship, and suffering, yet he remains faithful. His life is a model of endurance.

Fourth, the mission is **church-centered**. Paul plants churches, trains leaders, and strengthens communities. The church is God's chosen instrument for spreading the gospel.

Fifth, the mission is **ongoing**. Acts ends with an open door. The story continues through the centuries — and through us.

As we reflect on Paul's missionary journeys, we are reminded that the same Spirit who empowered Paul empowers us today. The same gospel that transformed cities in the first century transforms lives today. And the same mission that began in Jerusalem continues in our world. We are part of the story that began in Acts — a story of a Spirit-empowered church carrying the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the book of Romans, Paul's most comprehensive theological work, and explore the heart of his message about

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salvation, righteousness, and the grace of God. But for now, Lesson 11 stands as a reminder that the gospel is a global message, carried by ordinary people empowered by an extraordinary God.

LESSON 12 - ROMANS

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

When we open the book of Romans, we are stepping into one of the most influential writings in the history of the world. Romans is not simply a letter; it is Paul's most comprehensive and carefully structured presentation of the gospel. It is the theological foundation of Christian doctrine, the backbone of the Reformation, and the clearest explanation of salvation by grace through faith found anywhere in Scripture. If the Gospels show us the life of Jesus, Romans shows us the meaning of His life, death, and resurrection.

Paul writes Romans to a church he has never visited. The believers in Rome are a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, living in the heart of the empire. Paul longs to visit them, to strengthen them, and to use Rome as a launching point for mission to Spain. But before he arrives, he sends this letter — a masterpiece of theology, logic, and pastoral wisdom.

Romans begins with a bold declaration: Paul is “set apart for the gospel of God.” This gospel is not a human invention; it is God's plan, promised beforehand in the Scriptures, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and offered to all who believe. Paul's thesis statement comes in Romans 1:16–17: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.” These verses set the tone for the entire letter. Romans is about the righteousness of God — His faithfulness, His justice, His saving power — and how that righteousness is given to sinners through faith.

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Paul begins by addressing the universal problem of **sin**. He shows that all humanity — Gentiles and Jews alike — stands guilty before God. The Gentiles have rejected God’s revelation in creation, exchanging the truth for a lie. The Jews, though possessing the Law, have failed to keep it. Paul concludes with a sweeping statement: “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Sin is not merely a list of wrong actions; it is a condition of the heart. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Having established the problem, Paul turns to the solution: **justification by faith**. Justification is a legal term meaning to be declared righteous. It is not something we earn; it is something God gives. Paul explains that we are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus’ death is a sacrifice of atonement, satisfying God’s justice and demonstrating His love. Faith is the means by which we receive this gift. Paul uses Abraham as the prime example. Abraham was justified by faith before the Law was given, showing that salvation has always been by grace through faith.

Paul then explores the results of justification. In Romans 5, he declares that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We stand in grace. We rejoice in hope. And even in suffering, we find purpose, because suffering produces endurance, character, and hope. Paul contrasts Adam and Christ, showing that just as Adam’s sin brought death to all, Christ’s obedience brings life to all who believe. Grace is greater than sin.

In Romans 6–8, Paul addresses the believer’s new life in Christ. He explains that justification leads to **sanctification** — a transformed life empowered by the Spirit. In Romans 6, he teaches that believers are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. We are no longer slaves to sin; we are slaves to righteousness. In Romans 7, Paul describes the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, the tension between the desire to do good and the reality of human weakness. But

Romans 8 brings a triumphant conclusion: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The Spirit empowers us, assures us, and intercedes for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 9–11 address a crucial question: **What about Israel?** If the gospel is for all people, and many Jews have rejected it, has God abandoned His promises? Paul answers with a resounding no. God’s plan has not failed. Throughout history, God has always preserved a remnant. Israel’s rejection has opened the door for Gentiles, but God is not finished with Israel. Paul envisions a future in which Israel will turn to Christ, and God’s mercy will be displayed in all its fullness. These chapters remind us that God’s plan is bigger than we can imagine and that His faithfulness endures.

In Romans 12–15, Paul turns from doctrine to application. He begins with a call to worship: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” This is the proper response to God’s mercy. Paul describes the transformed life — humility, love, service, generosity, patience, and forgiveness. He teaches that believers must submit to governing authorities, love their neighbors, and live in harmony. He addresses issues of conscience, urging believers to welcome one another and avoid causing others to stumble. The gospel not only saves us; it shapes how we live in community.

Paul concludes the letter with personal greetings, travel plans, and a final doxology. Even in these closing sections, we see Paul’s heart — his love for the churches, his desire for unity, and his commitment to the mission of God.

As we reflect on the book of Romans, we see a sweeping vision of the gospel — a gospel that reveals God’s righteousness, exposes human sin, offers salvation through faith, transforms lives through the Spirit, and unites believers in love.

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Romans is not merely a theological treatise; it is a call to worship, a call to holiness, and a call to mission.

Romans reminds us that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. It is not a message we outgrow. It is the foundation of our faith, the source of our hope, and the anchor of our identity. As we continue through the New Testament, the truths of Romans will shape how we read every other book. For now, Romans stands before us as the clearest, richest, and most powerful explanation of the gospel ever written.

In the next lesson, we will turn to 1 and 2 Corinthians and explore Paul's pastoral heart as he addresses a church struggling with division, immorality, spiritual gifts, and the meaning of true Christian leadership.

LESSON 13 – 1ST & 2ND CORINTHIANS

A CHURCH IN CRISIS AND THE HEART OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

When we turn to the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians, we encounter a church unlike any other in the New Testament. Corinth was vibrant, gifted, passionate, and full of potential — but it was also divided, confused, morally compromised, and spiritually immature. These letters give us a window into the challenges of early Christian communities and reveal the pastoral heart of the apostle Paul as he guides, corrects, and encourages a struggling church.

Corinth was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. Located on a narrow isthmus connecting northern and southern Greece, it was a center of trade, wealth, culture, and diversity. It was also known for immorality, idolatry, and social stratification. The church Paul planted there reflected the city's complexity. It was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. It was gifted with spiritual power but plagued by division and confusion.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians to address a series of problems reported to him — problems that threatened the unity, witness, and spiritual health of the church. His letter is pastoral, corrective, and deeply theological. It shows us how the gospel speaks into real-world issues and how the church must live out its identity in Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS: A CHURCH CALLED TO HOLINESS AND UNITY

Paul begins 1 Corinthians by reminding the believers who they are: sanctified in Christ, called to be saints, enriched in every way, and sustained by God's

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faithfulness. Before he corrects them, he affirms them. He grounds his entire letter in the grace of God.

But immediately after this introduction, Paul addresses the first major issue: **division**. The church is splitting into factions — some claiming allegiance to Paul, others to Apollos, others to Peter, and others claiming to follow Christ alone. Paul confronts this mindset directly. Christ is not divided. The church is not built on personalities but on the gospel. Paul emphasizes that the message of the cross is the power of God, not human wisdom. The Corinthians were impressed with eloquence and rhetoric, but Paul reminds them that true power comes from the Spirit, not from human skill.

Next, Paul addresses issues of **spiritual immaturity**. The Corinthians are acting like infants in Christ, driven by jealousy and strife. Paul explains that he and Apollos are merely servants. God is the One who gives growth. The church is God's field, God's building, God's temple. Their divisions reveal a misunderstanding of the gospel and a failure to live in the Spirit.

Paul then confronts a shocking case of **sexual immorality** — a man living with his father's wife. Instead of mourning, the church is proud. Paul commands them to discipline the offender, not out of cruelty but out of love, so that he may be restored. Holiness matters. The church must not tolerate sin that destroys lives and dishonors Christ.

In chapters 6 and 7, Paul addresses issues related to **sexual ethics, marriage, and singleness**. Corinth was a city saturated with immorality, and the church struggled to understand how to live differently. Paul teaches that the body belongs to the Lord, that believers are temples of the Holy Spirit, and that sexual purity is essential to Christian discipleship. He affirms both marriage and singleness as gifts from God, each with its own calling and purpose.

Chapters 8 through 10 deal with the issue of **food sacrificed to idols** — a topic that may seem distant to us but was central in Corinth. Paul teaches that knowledge must be guided by love. Even if something is permissible, it may not be beneficial. Believers must consider how their actions affect others. Christian freedom is not about asserting rights but about serving others.

In chapters 11 through 14, Paul addresses issues related to **worship, spiritual gifts, and the Lord's Supper**. The Corinthians were gifted, but their worship gatherings were chaotic. Some were abusing the Lord's Supper, turning it into a display of social status. Others were using spiritual gifts in ways that caused confusion rather than edification.

Paul responds with one of the most beautiful and important chapters in the Bible: **1 Corinthians 13**, the chapter on love. He teaches that spiritual gifts are meaningless without love. Love is patient, kind, humble, and enduring. Love never fails. This chapter is not a sentimental poem; it is a rebuke to a church lacking love and a call to embody the character of Christ.

Paul then explains the proper use of spiritual gifts, emphasizing order, clarity, and edification. The goal of worship is not personal expression but the building up of the church.

Finally, Paul concludes 1 Corinthians with a powerful defense of the **resurrection**. Some in Corinth denied the resurrection of the dead. Paul responds by declaring that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the gospel. If Christ is not raised, our faith is in vain. But Christ has been raised, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. The resurrection guarantees our future hope and shapes how we live today.

2 CORINTHIANS: THE HEART OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

While 1 Corinthians is corrective, 2 Corinthians is deeply personal. It reveals Paul's heart, his struggles, his suffering, and his unwavering commitment to the gospel. It is one of the most emotional and vulnerable letters in the New Testament.

Paul writes 2 Corinthians after a painful visit and a difficult season in his relationship with the church. False teachers have entered the community, questioning Paul's authority, criticizing his weakness, and promoting a distorted gospel. Paul responds not with anger but with transparency, humility, and pastoral love.

He begins by praising God as the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort." Paul has suffered greatly — persecution, hardship, pressure beyond his strength — yet he has experienced God's comfort in every trial. He reminds the Corinthians that suffering is not a sign of failure but a mark of authentic ministry.

Paul then explains the nature of **new covenant ministry**. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone; the new covenant is written on human hearts. The old brought condemnation; the new brings life. The old was fading; the new is glorious. Paul describes himself as a jar of clay — fragile, ordinary, unimpressive — yet carrying the treasure of the gospel. His weakness reveals God's power.

In chapters 8 and 9, Paul addresses the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He encourages generosity, not as a burden but as an act of grace. He points to the example of Christ, who became poor so that we might become rich. Giving is an expression of love, unity, and worship.

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The final chapters of 2 Corinthians contain Paul's defense of his apostleship. He confronts the false apostles who boast in their strength, eloquence, and credentials. Paul responds by boasting in his weaknesses — his sufferings, hardships, and trials. He recounts beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, hunger, and danger. He speaks of a “thorn in the flesh,” a weakness God allowed to remain so that Paul would rely on grace. God's answer to Paul is one of the most powerful statements in Scripture: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Paul ends the letter with a call to repentance, unity, and restoration. His final words — “Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace” — capture the heart of his ministry.

THE MESSAGE OF 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS FOR TODAY

These letters speak powerfully to the modern church. They remind us that:

- The church is called to **unity**, not division.
- Holiness matters.
- Love is the foundation of Christian community.
- Spiritual gifts must be used with humility and order.
- The resurrection is the anchor of our hope.
- Ministry is marked by **weakness**, not worldly strength.
- God's grace is sufficient in every trial.

Corinth shows us that the church has always been messy, imperfect, and in need of correction — yet always loved, empowered, and sustained by God's grace.

In the next lesson, we will turn to the book of **Galatians**, where Paul defends the gospel of grace against legalism and calls believers to live in the freedom of the Spirit.

LESSON 14 - GALATIANS

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

When we come to the book of Galatians, we encounter one of Paul's most urgent, passionate, and confrontational letters. Galatians is not calm, reflective theology like Romans. It is not pastoral counsel like Corinthians. It is a spiritual emergency. Paul writes with fire in his voice because the very heart of the gospel is at stake. The churches in Galatia are being pulled away from the freedom of Christ and into a system of legalism that threatens to enslave them once again.

Galatians is Paul's declaration of **the gospel of grace** — a gospel that cannot be mixed with works, cannot be supplemented by human effort, and cannot be compromised without losing its power. It is a letter about freedom, identity, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. And it remains one of the most important books in the New Testament for understanding what it means to live in the freedom of Christ.

THE CRISIS IN GALATIA

Paul writes to a group of churches he planted during his missionary journeys. After he left, a group of teachers — often called “Judaizers” — arrived and began teaching that Gentile believers must follow the Law of Moses, including circumcision, in order to be fully accepted by God. They did not deny Christ, but they added to Christ. They taught Jesus **plus** the Law. Jesus **plus** circumcision. Jesus **plus** human effort.

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Paul responds with urgency because he knows that Jesus plus anything equals nothing. If salvation depends on human effort, then Christ died for nothing. The gospel is not Jesus plus the Law; it is Jesus alone.

PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Paul begins the letter by defending his apostleship. The false teachers claimed that Paul was not a true apostle, that he watered down the gospel to please Gentiles, and that his message lacked authority. Paul responds by declaring that his apostleship came not from men but from Jesus Christ Himself. He recounts his dramatic conversion, his calling, and his independence from the Jerusalem apostles. His message came directly from God.

Paul is not defending his ego; he is defending the gospel. If his authority is undermined, his message will be dismissed. And if his message is dismissed, the Galatians will lose the truth that sets them free.

THE HEART OF THE LETTER: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The central theme of Galatians is **justification by faith**. Paul argues that no one is justified — declared righteous — by works of the Law. The Law reveals sin; it cannot remove it. The Law condemns; it cannot save. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law on our behalf.

Paul uses Abraham as the key example. Abraham was justified by faith long before the Law was given. He believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Therefore, those who have faith are the true children of Abraham. The Judaizers claimed that circumcision made someone a child of Abraham; Paul says faith does.

Paul also explains the purpose of the Law. The Law was a guardian, a tutor, a temporary guide until Christ came. It revealed sin, restrained evil, and pointed to the need for a Savior. But now that Christ has come, believers are no longer under the guardian. They are sons and daughters of God through faith.

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

One of the most powerful themes in Galatians is **freedom**. Paul declares, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” Freedom from what? Freedom from the Law as a system of righteousness. Freedom from the curse of sin. Freedom from the burden of trying to earn God’s approval. Freedom from the fear of condemnation.

But this freedom is not a license to sin. It is freedom to live in the power of the Spirit. Freedom to love. Freedom to serve. Freedom to walk in the newness of life. Paul warns the Galatians not to use their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but to serve one another in love.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

In one of the most famous sections of the letter, Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh — such as immorality, idolatry, jealousy, anger, and selfish ambition — are the natural results of a life lived apart from the Spirit. They are not merely actions; they are the overflow of a heart not surrendered to God.

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — is the natural result of a life surrendered to the Spirit. Notice that Paul says “fruit,” not “fruits.” The

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fruit of the Spirit is a unified character produced by the Spirit, not a list of traits we choose from.

Paul's point is clear: the Christian life is not lived by human effort but by the power of the Spirit. The Law cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. Only the Spirit can.

ADOPTION AND IDENTITY

Another major theme in Galatians is **adoption**. Paul declares that believers are not slaves but sons and daughters of God. Through Christ, we receive the Spirit of adoption, who cries out, "Abba, Father." This intimate cry reflects our new identity. We are no longer defined by our past, our failures, or our attempts to earn righteousness. We are defined by our relationship with God.

Paul uses a powerful analogy: before Christ, we were like children under guardians. But now, through faith, we have come of age. We are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. This identity is the foundation of Christian freedom.

PAUL'S PASTORAL PLEA

Galatians is not just theological; it is deeply personal. Paul expresses anguish over the Galatians' spiritual condition. He calls them "my little children" and says he is in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in them. He pleads with them not to return to slavery. He reminds them of their past joy, their love for him, and their experience of the Spirit.

Paul's heart breaks because he sees the Galatians trading the freedom of Christ for the bondage of legalism. He knows that legalism destroys joy, kills intimacy

with God, and produces pride or despair. He longs for them to return to the simplicity of the gospel.

THE CROSS AT THE CENTER

Paul concludes the letter by bringing everything back to the cross. He declares, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The cross is the center of the gospel. It is where sin was defeated, where the curse was broken, and where freedom was purchased. The cross is the end of legalism and the beginning of new creation.

Paul ends with a blessing of peace and mercy for all who walk according to this rule — the rule of the new creation, the rule of grace, the rule of the Spirit.

THE MESSAGE OF GALATIANS FOR TODAY

Galatians speaks powerfully to the modern church. It reminds us that:

- Salvation is by **grace alone**, through **faith alone**, in **Christ alone**.
- Legalism is a threat to the gospel.
- Freedom in Christ is real, but it is lived out through the Spirit.
- Our identity as sons and daughters of God shapes everything.
- The Christian life is not self-effort but Spirit-empowered transformation.

Galatians calls us to stand firm in the freedom Christ has given us and to refuse anything that adds to the gospel.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **Ephesians**, where Paul lifts our eyes to the cosmic scope of Christ's work and the unity of the church in God's eternal plan.

LESSON 15 - EPHESIANS

THE CHURCH IN GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

When we open the book of Ephesians, we step into one of the most majestic, sweeping, and spiritually rich letters in the New Testament. Ephesians lifts our eyes from the struggles of daily life and invites us to see the church — and our place in it — from God's eternal perspective. If Romans explains the gospel to the individual, Ephesians explains the gospel to the church. It shows us who we are in Christ, what God has done for us, and how we are called to live as His new creation.

Paul writes Ephesians from prison, likely in Rome, around AD 60–62. Unlike many of his letters, Ephesians does not address a specific crisis or controversy. Instead, it reads like a circular letter — a message intended for multiple churches in the region. Its tone is worshipful, its theology is profound, and its vision of the church is breathtaking.

Ephesians can be divided into two major sections: **Chapters 1–3: What God has done for us in Christ** **Chapters 4–6: How we live in response to God's work**

The first half is theological; the second half is practical. The first half reveals our identity; the second half calls us to live out that identity. Paul moves from doctrine to duty, from calling to conduct, from grace to gratitude.

BLESSED IN CHRIST (EPHESIANS 1)

Paul begins Ephesians with one long, continuous sentence of praise — a 202-word doxology in Greek. It is as if he cannot contain his joy. He blesses God for blessing us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

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These blessings are not material; they are spiritual, eternal, and rooted in God's sovereign grace.

Paul lists these blessings:

- We are **chosen** before the foundation of the world.
- We are **predestined** for adoption as sons and daughters.
- We are **redeemed** through the blood of Christ.
- We are **forgiven** of our sins.
- We are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit.
- We are **given an inheritance** in Christ.

Paul wants believers to understand that salvation is not an accident or an afterthought. It is part of God's eternal plan — a plan centered on Christ and accomplished through His grace.

Paul then prays that the believers would have spiritual wisdom to understand three things:

1. The **hope** of God's calling.
2. The **riches** of His glorious inheritance in the saints.
3. The **immeasurable greatness** of His power toward us who believe.

This power is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand. Paul wants the church to know that the resurrection power of God is at work in them.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE (EPHESIANS 2)

In chapter 2, Paul moves from God's eternal plan to our personal story. He describes our condition before Christ: "You were dead in your trespasses and

sins.” Not sick. Not weak. Dead. Unable to save ourselves. Controlled by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Deserving of wrath.

But then come two of the most beautiful words in Scripture: **“But God.”** “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, made us alive together with Christ.” Salvation is entirely the work of God. We are saved by grace through faith — not by works, not by effort, not by merit — so that no one may boast.

Paul then explains the purpose of salvation: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works — works that God prepared in advance for us to do.

Paul also addresses the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The Law created a dividing wall between them, but Christ has torn down that wall. Through His death, He has made one new humanity, reconciling both groups to God and to each other. The church is not a Jewish church or a Gentile church; it is a new creation, a unified body built on the foundation of Christ.

THE MYSTERY REVEALED (EPHESIANS 3)

In chapter 3, Paul explains the “mystery” that was hidden for ages but is now revealed: that Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ. This mystery is not a puzzle; it is a divine revelation. God’s plan has always been to unite all things in Christ — people from every nation, tribe, and background.

Paul describes his own calling as a steward of this mystery. Though he is the least of the saints, God has given him the grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul then prays again — this time that believers would be

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strengthened with power through the Spirit, rooted and grounded in love, and able to grasp the height, depth, width, and breadth of Christ's love. He concludes with a doxology: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think..."

WALKING WORTHY OF THE CALLING (EPHESIANS 4)

The second half of Ephesians turns from theology to practice. Paul urges believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling." This walk is marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Unity is not optional; it is essential. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

Paul then explains the gifts Christ has given to the church — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — to equip the saints for ministry. The goal is maturity, unity, and growth. The church grows as every member does their part.

Paul contrasts the old life with the new life. The old life is marked by futility, darkness, impurity, and deceit. The new life is marked by truth, righteousness, and holiness. Believers must put off the old self and put on the new self. This transformation affects every area of life — speech, anger, work, relationships, and attitudes.

WALKING IN LOVE, LIGHT, AND WISDOM (EPHESIANS 5)

Paul continues with three commands:

- Walk in **love**.
- Walk in **light**.
- Walk in **wisdom**.

Walking in love means imitating Christ, who gave Himself up for us. Walking in light means exposing darkness and living in purity. Walking in wisdom means making the most of every opportunity and being filled with the Spirit.

Paul then applies Spirit-filled living to relationships — husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. These household codes are not about hierarchy but about mutual submission, love, respect, and Christlike character. Marriage becomes a picture of Christ and the church — a relationship marked by sacrificial love and joyful submission.

THE ARMOR OF GOD (EPHESIANS 6)

Paul concludes Ephesians with a call to spiritual warfare. The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battlefield. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. Therefore, believers must put on the full armor of God — truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer.

This armor is not something we create; it is something God provides. We stand firm not by our strength but by His. Prayer becomes the lifeline of spiritual warfare — praying at all times, in the Spirit, with perseverance.

Paul ends the letter with personal greetings and a blessing of peace, love, and grace.

THE MESSAGE OF EPHESIANS FOR TODAY

Ephesians speaks powerfully to the modern church. It reminds us that:

- The church is central to God's eternal plan.
- Our identity is rooted in Christ, not in culture.
- Salvation is by grace, not works.
- Unity is essential to the witness of the church.
- Spiritual maturity requires community.
- The Christian life is Spirit-empowered.
- Spiritual warfare is real, but victory is in Christ.

Ephesians lifts our eyes to see the church not as a human institution but as the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, and the family of God. It calls us to live out our identity with humility, love, and strength.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **Philippians and Colossians**, exploring the themes of joy, humility, and the supremacy of Christ.

LESSON 16 – PHILIPPIANS AND COLOSSIANS

JOY IN CHRIST AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

As we continue our journey through the New Testament, we come to two letters written from the same season of Paul’s life — his imprisonment — yet they radiate two of the most uplifting themes in all of Scripture: **joy** and **the supremacy of Christ**. Philippians and Colossians are companion letters, written to two different churches, facing two different challenges, but both anchored in the same unshakable truth: Christ is enough.

Philippians shows us the **mind of Christ** and the joy that flows from knowing Him. Colossians shows us the **supremacy of Christ** and the fullness that is found in Him alone. Together, these letters give us a vision of Christian maturity that is both deeply personal and profoundly theological.

Let’s begin with Philippians.

PHILIPPIANS — THE EPISTLE OF JOY

Philippi was the first European city where Paul planted a church. The believers there were dear to him — partners in the gospel, supporters of his ministry, and friends who stood with him in suffering. When Paul writes Philippians, he is in prison, yet the letter overflows with joy. In fact, the words “joy” and “rejoice” appear more in Philippians than in any other letter.

Philippians teaches us that joy is not based on circumstances; it is rooted in Christ.

CHAPTER 1 — JOY IN THE MIDST OF HARDSHIP

Paul begins by thanking God for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel. He is confident that God, who began a good work in them, will bring it to completion. Even in prison, Paul rejoices because the gospel is advancing. Some preach Christ sincerely; others preach out of rivalry. But Paul says, "What matters is that Christ is preached."

Paul's perspective is shaped by a single passion: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Life means fruitful labor for Christ; death means being with Christ. Either way, Christ is his treasure.

CHAPTER 2 — THE MIND OF CHRIST

Philippians 2 contains one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament — the Christ hymn. Paul urges the believers to live in unity, humility, and love. Then he gives them the ultimate example: Jesus.

Though He was in the form of God, He did not cling to His divine privileges, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, humbling Himself to the point of death — even death on a cross.

Because of His humility, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name.

This passage reveals the heart of Christian discipleship: **humility, service, and obedience**. Paul calls believers to "work out their salvation" — not earn it, but live it out — because God is at work within them.

CHAPTER 3 — JOY IN KNOWING CHRIST

In chapter 3, Paul warns against false teachers who promote confidence in the flesh. He lists his own impressive credentials — Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee, blameless under the Law — and then declares them all “rubbish” compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Paul’s goal is simple: “To know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.”

He presses on toward the goal, forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead. Christian maturity is not perfection; it is pursuit — the relentless pursuit of Christ.

CHAPTER 4 — JOY IN CONTENTMENT

Philippians ends with practical encouragement. Paul urges believers to rejoice always, pray with thanksgiving, and think on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy. He teaches the secret of contentment: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Paul thanks the Philippians for their generosity, reminding them that God will supply all their needs according to His riches in glory.

Philippians is a letter of joy — joy in Christ, joy in suffering, joy in service, joy in unity, joy in contentment. It shows us that joy is not the absence of hardship but the presence of Christ.

COLOSSIANS — THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

While Philippians focuses on the mind of Christ, Colossians focuses on the **supremacy and sufficiency of Christ**. The church in Colossae was facing false teaching — a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, mystical spirituality, and ascetic practices. These teachings suggested that Christ was not enough — that believers needed additional rituals, visions, or secret knowledge.

Paul writes to declare that Christ is more than enough. In fact, Christ is everything.

CHAPTER 1 — THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Colossians 1 contains one of the highest Christological passages in the New Testament. Paul describes Jesus as:

- The image of the invisible God
- The firstborn over all creation
- The Creator of all things
- The sustainer of all things
- The head of the church
- The firstborn from the dead
- The fullness of God in bodily form
- The reconciler of all things through His blood

This is not a small Christ. This is the cosmic Christ — supreme over creation, supreme over the church, supreme over salvation. Paul wants the Colossians to see that Christ is not one option among many; He is the center of everything.

Paul also reminds them of their salvation: once alienated, now reconciled; once hostile, now holy; once lost, now secure in Christ.

CHAPTER 2 — COMPLETE IN CHRIST

In chapter 2, Paul confronts the false teachings directly. He warns against:

- Empty philosophy
- Human tradition
- Legalism
- Mysticism
- Asceticism

These teachings promise spiritual fullness but deliver spiritual bondage.

Paul declares, “In Christ all the fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him.” Believers do not need additional rituals or spiritual experiences to be complete. They are complete in Christ.

Paul explains that through Christ’s death and resurrection:

- We have died to the Law
- Our sins are forgiven
- The record of debt is canceled
- The powers of darkness are disarmed

Christ’s victory is total. Nothing needs to be added.

CHAPTER 3 — THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Paul then turns to practical application. Because believers have died with Christ and been raised with Christ, they must set their minds on things above. They must put off the old self — anger, malice, impurity, greed — and put on the new self — compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and love.

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Paul emphasizes unity: “Christ is all, and in all.” The church is a new humanity where old divisions — Jew and Greek, slave and free — no longer define identity.

He then applies the gospel to relationships — marriage, parenting, work — showing that Christ transforms every part of life.

CHAPTER 4 — PRAYER AND MISSION

Paul concludes with a call to prayer, wisdom, and witness. He urges believers to pray for open doors for the gospel and to walk wisely toward outsiders. He sends greetings from his ministry team and encourages the Colossians to remain steadfast.

THE MESSAGE OF PHILIPPIANS & COLOSSIANS FOR TODAY

Together, these letters teach us:

- **Christ is our joy** (Philippians).
- **Christ is our life** (Colossians).
- **Christ is our example** (Philippians 2).
- **Christ is our fullness** (Colossians 2).
- **Christ is our unity** (Philippians 4).
- **Christ is our identity** (Colossians 3).
- **Christ is enough** — for salvation, for sanctification, for daily living.

Philippians calls us to rejoice in Christ. Colossians calls us to rest in Christ. Together, they call us to live in Christ.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **1 & 2 Thessalonians**, where Paul addresses hope, holiness, and the return of Christ.

LESSON 17 - 1ST AND 2ND THESSALONIANS

HOPE, HOLINESS, AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST

When we come to 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we encounter two of Paul's earliest letters — warm, pastoral, encouraging, and filled with hope. These letters reveal a young church, full of faith and love, but also facing persecution, confusion, and questions about the future. Paul writes to strengthen them, to clarify misunderstandings, and to anchor their hearts in the hope of Christ's return.

Thessalonica was a major city in Macedonia — wealthy, strategic, and deeply loyal to Rome. When Paul preached there during his second missionary journey, many believed, but opposition quickly arose. Paul was forced to leave the city sooner than he wanted, and the new believers were left facing hostility without his presence. Concerned for their spiritual health, Paul sent Timothy to check on them. Timothy returned with good news — the Thessalonians were standing firm — but also with questions that needed answers.

These letters are Paul's response. They are filled with affection, encouragement, correction, and eschatological teaching. They show us what a healthy church looks like and how believers should live in light of Christ's return.

Let's begin with **1 Thessalonians**.

CHAPTER 1 — A MODEL CHURCH

Paul opens the letter with gratitude. He thanks God for the Thessalonians' "work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope." These three virtues — faith, love, and hope — form the foundation of Christian life. Paul praises their

faith because it produced action, their love because it produced sacrifice, and their hope because it produced endurance.

He reminds them that the gospel came not only in words but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. Despite persecution, they received the message with joy. Their faith became known throughout Macedonia and Achaia. They turned from idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

This opening chapter shows us a vibrant, Spirit-filled church — a community transformed by the gospel and marked by hope.

CHAPTER 2 — PAUL'S PASTORAL HEART

Paul then defends his ministry. Critics had accused him of selfish motives, but Paul reminds the Thessalonians how he lived among them — with gentleness, integrity, and sacrificial love. He compares himself to a nursing mother and a caring father. He worked night and day so he would not be a burden. He preached boldly despite suffering.

Paul's ministry was not about personal gain; it was about the gospel and the people he loved. His example shows us what true spiritual leadership looks like — humble, gentle, hardworking, and deeply invested in people.

CHAPTER 3 — ENCOURAGEMENT IN AFFLICTION

Paul explains why he sent Timothy — to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. He knew persecution would come. He knew trials could shake them. But Timothy's report brought joy: the Thessalonians were standing firm in faith and love.

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Paul prays that God would strengthen their hearts in holiness and prepare them for the coming of the Lord. This theme — holiness in light of Christ’s return — runs throughout both letters.

CHAPTER 4 — HOLINESS AND HOPE

In chapter 4, Paul addresses two major topics: **holy living** and **the return of Christ**.

First, he calls them to sexual purity. Thessalonica was a morally permissive city, and believers needed clear guidance. Paul teaches that God’s will is their sanctification — that they abstain from sexual immorality, control their bodies in holiness, and avoid exploiting others. Holiness is not optional; it is the will of God.

Second, Paul addresses their concern about believers who had died. They feared that those who died before Christ’s return would miss out on His kingdom. Paul comforts them with one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture. He explains that when Christ returns, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord. “And so we will always be with the Lord.”

Paul’s purpose is pastoral: “Encourage one another with these words.” The return of Christ is not meant to create fear but hope.

CHAPTER 5 — LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Paul continues teaching about the Day of the Lord. It will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. But believers are not in darkness. They are children of light. Therefore, they must stay awake, be sober, and put on the armor of faith, love, and hope.

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He gives practical instructions: respect leaders, live in peace, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, and avoid every form of evil.

Paul ends with a blessing: “May the God of peace sanctify you completely.” Holiness is God’s work, and He is faithful to complete it.

2 THESSALONIANS — CLARITY ABOUT CHRIST’S RETURN

Shortly after the first letter, confusion arose again — this time more serious. Some believers thought the Day of the Lord had already come. Others stopped working, believing Christ’s return was imminent. False teachers were spreading misinformation. Paul writes 2 Thessalonians to correct these misunderstandings and strengthen the church.

CHAPTER 1 — ENCOURAGEMENT IN PERSECUTION

Paul begins by praising their growing faith and love. He acknowledges their suffering and assures them that God will bring justice. Those who afflict them will face judgment, and those who believe will share in Christ’s glory.

Paul’s message is not one of revenge but of hope. God sees their suffering. God will vindicate His people. God will make all things right.

CHAPTER 2 — THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

This chapter is one of the most challenging eschatological passages in the New Testament. Paul explains that the Day of the Lord has not come yet. Certain events must occur first — including the revealing of the “man of lawlessness,” a figure of rebellion who opposes God and exalts himself.

Paul reminds them that he taught these things when he was with them. He does not give every detail, but his purpose is clear: to calm their fears and anchor them in truth. He assures them that Christ will destroy the man of lawlessness with the breath of His mouth. Evil will not prevail.

Paul then encourages them to stand firm and hold to the traditions they received. He prays that God would comfort and strengthen their hearts.

CHAPTER 3 — A CALL TO DISCIPLINE AND DILIGENCE

Paul addresses another issue: idleness. Some believers had stopped working, perhaps thinking Christ's return made daily responsibilities unnecessary. Paul corrects this firmly. He reminds them of his own example — he worked hard, paid his own way, and refused to be a burden.

He gives a simple rule: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." This is not harshness; it is wisdom. The Christian life is not escapism. Believers must live responsibly, quietly, and faithfully.

Paul ends with a blessing of peace and grace.

THE MESSAGE OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS FOR TODAY

These letters speak powerfully to the modern church. They remind us that:

- **Hope in Christ's return strengthens us in suffering.**
- **Holiness is essential to Christian life.**
- **Spiritual leadership is gentle, humble, and sacrificial.**
- **The return of Christ is a source of comfort, not fear.**
- **Confusion about the end times must be corrected with Scripture.**
- **Believers must live responsibly and diligently while waiting for Christ.**
- **God is faithful to complete His work in us.**

The Thessalonian letters call us to live with **expectation, endurance, and encouragement** — looking for the blessed hope of Christ's return while living faithfully in the present.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **1 & 2 Timothy and Titus**, exploring Paul's pastoral wisdom for church leadership, sound doctrine, and faithful ministry.

LESSON 18 – 1ST AND 2ND TIMOTHY AND TITUS

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES — GUARDING THE GOSPEL

When we come to 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus — the Pastoral Epistles — we step into Paul’s final and most personal writings. These letters are not addressed to churches but to individuals: Timothy and Titus, two of Paul’s closest ministry partners, spiritual sons, and trusted co-laborers. Through these letters, we hear the heart of an aging apostle who knows his time is short and wants to pass on the gospel, the mission, and the responsibility of shepherding God’s people to the next generation.

These letters are pastoral in tone, practical in instruction, and deeply theological in purpose. They teach us how the church should be led, how the gospel should be guarded, and how Christian leaders should live. They are as relevant today as they were in the first century.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Let's begin with **1 Timothy**.

ORDER, SOUND DOCTRINE, AND GODLY LEADERSHIP

Paul writes 1 Timothy to address challenges in the church at Ephesus. False teachers have arisen, spreading myths, speculations, and distortions of the gospel. The church needs clarity, structure, and strong leadership. Paul sends Timothy — young, faithful, and timid by temperament — to set things in order.

CHAPTER 1 — GUARD THE GOSPEL

Paul begins by reminding Timothy why he left him in Ephesus: to confront false teachers. These teachers were misusing the Law, promoting endless genealogies, and stirring up controversy. Paul emphasizes that the goal of Christian instruction is love — love that flows from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Paul then shares his own testimony. Once a blasphemer and persecutor, he received mercy. Christ came to save sinners, and Paul calls himself the foremost. This personal reflection is not self-deprecation; it is a declaration of grace. Paul wants Timothy to remember that the gospel is powerful, transformative, and worth defending.

CHAPTER 2 — PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Paul instructs Timothy on public worship. He urges that prayers be offered for all people — including kings and those in authority — so that believers may live peaceful, godly lives. God desires all people to be saved, and the church's prayers participate in that mission.

Paul also gives instructions about order in worship, emphasizing modesty, humility, and learning with a teachable spirit. These instructions address specific issues in Ephesus, where false teachers were influencing certain women and disrupting the church.

CHAPTER 3 — QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADERS

One of the most important sections of 1 Timothy is Paul's list of qualifications for elders and deacons. Leadership in the church is not about charisma, gifting, or personality; it is about character.

Elders must be:

- Above reproach
- Faithful in marriage
- Self-controlled, hospitable, gentle
- Able to teach
- Not lovers of money
- Good managers of their households

Deacons must be dignified, trustworthy, and faithful.

Paul emphasizes that leadership is a stewardship. The church is “the household of God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Leaders must reflect the character of Christ.

CHAPTER 4 — TRAIN YOURSELF FOR GODLINESS

Paul warns Timothy that false teaching will continue. Some will forbid marriage or certain foods. Timothy must reject these distortions and train himself for godliness. Physical training has some value, but godliness has value for all things.

Paul encourages Timothy not to let anyone despise his youth. Instead, he must set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. He must devote himself to Scripture, teaching, and exhortation. Ministry requires diligence, perseverance, and integrity.

CHAPTERS 5–6 — PASTORAL CARE AND CONTENTMENT

Paul gives practical instructions for caring for widows, honoring elders, and addressing sin in the community. He warns against greed and the love of money, declaring that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” Timothy must flee from greed and pursue righteousness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

Paul ends with a charge: “Guard the deposit entrusted to you.” The gospel is a treasure, and Timothy must protect it.

PAUL'S FINAL LETTER – 2ND TIMOTHY

2 Timothy is Paul's last letter. He writes from a Roman prison, awaiting execution. The tone is tender, urgent, and deeply personal. Paul knows his race is nearly finished, and he wants Timothy to carry the torch.

CHAPTER 1 — DO NOT BE ASHAMED

Paul urges Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God. Timothy struggles with fear, but Paul reminds him: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control."

Paul calls Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul's chains. Suffering is part of ministry. The gospel is worth it. Paul reminds Timothy of the grace given in Christ before time began — grace now revealed through Christ's appearing.

CHAPTER 2 — A GOOD SOLDIER, ATHLETE, AND FARMER

Paul uses three images to describe ministry:

- A **soldier** who stays focused
- An **athlete** who competes according to the rules
- A **farmer** who works hard and patiently waits for the harvest

Timothy must endure hardship, avoid quarrels, and rightly handle the word of truth. False teachers are spreading error, but Timothy must remain faithful.

CHAPTER 3 — SCRIPTURE AND THE LAST DAYS

Paul warns that difficult times will come. People will be lovers of self, money, and pleasure rather than lovers of God. False teachers will deceive many.

But Timothy must continue in what he has learned. Paul reminds him that “all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.” Scripture equips believers for every good work.

CHAPTER 4 — FINISHING THE RACE

Paul gives his final charge: “Preach the word.” Timothy must be ready in season and out of season, correcting, rebuking, and encouraging with patience.

Paul then reflects on his own life: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” He looks forward to the crown of righteousness that the Lord will give him.

These are the words of a man who has given everything for Christ and is ready to meet Him.

TITUS - ORDER, SOUND DOCTRINE, AND GOOD WORKS

Titus was left on the island of Crete to “set in order what remains.” The churches there needed structure, leadership, and sound teaching.

CHAPTER 1 — APPOINT ELDERS AND CONFRONT FALSE TEACHERS

Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town. The qualifications are similar to those in 1 Timothy — character, faithfulness, self-control, and the ability to teach sound doctrine.

Crete had a reputation for dishonesty and immorality. False teachers were upsetting families and promoting legalism. Titus must rebuke them sharply so that the church remains healthy.

CHAPTER 2 — TEACH WHAT IS FITTING FOR SOUND DOCTRINE

Paul gives instructions for older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves. The goal is that believers live in a way that “adorns the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Paul then gives one of the most beautiful summaries of the gospel: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people... training us to renounce ungodliness and live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.”

Grace saves us — and grace trains us.

CHAPTER 3 — SAVED BY GRACE, DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS

Paul reminds Titus that believers were once foolish, disobedient, and enslaved to passions. But God saved us — not because of works, but because of His mercy — through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Because of this salvation, believers must devote themselves to good works. Good works do not save us, but they display the transforming power of grace.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES FOR TODAY

These letters speak powerfully to the modern church. They remind us that:

- The gospel must be **guarded**.
- The church must be **ordered** according to God's design.
- Leaders must be **people of character**, not charisma.
- Ministry requires **courage, endurance, and sacrifice**.
- Scripture is **sufficient** and authoritative.
- Grace both **saves and transforms**.
- Good works are the natural fruit of a redeemed life.
- The mission must be passed to the **next generation**.

The Pastoral Epistles show us the heart of a spiritual father preparing his sons to carry the gospel forward. They call us to faithful leadership, sound doctrine, and lives shaped by grace.

Our next lesson reviews a short, one chapter book with powerful implications: Philemon.

LESSON 19 - PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

When we open the book of Philemon, we are stepping into one of the most personal and emotionally rich moments in the entire New Testament. This is not a doctrinal treatise. It is not a theological argument. It is not even a pastoral letter to a congregation. It is a private appeal — a letter from Paul to a man named Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus.

And yet, in this short letter of only twenty-five verses, we see the gospel lived out with extraordinary clarity. We see reconciliation. We see forgiveness. We see transformation. We see the power of Christian love. And we see how the gospel reshapes relationships at the deepest level.

This episode will walk through the background, the story, the themes, and the message of Philemon — a letter small in size but immense in significance.

SETTING THE SCENE

To understand Philemon, we need to understand the people involved.

Philemon was a wealthy Christian living in the city of Colossae. His home was large enough for the church to meet there, which tells us he was a man of influence. Paul describes him as a man known for his love, his generosity, and his faithfulness to the saints.

Onesimus, on the other hand, was one of Philemon's slaves. At some point, Onesimus ran away — and it appears he may have stolen from Philemon in the process. Under Roman law, a runaway slave could face severe punishment, even

death. But in the providence of God, Onesimus fled all the way to Rome, where he encountered the apostle Paul.

Paul was under house arrest at the time, awaiting trial before Caesar. And somehow — we are not told how — Onesimus came into contact with him. Paul led him to Christ, disciplined him, and found him to be a faithful helper. Onesimus became so valuable to Paul that the apostle says, “I would have liked to keep him with me.” But Paul knew that reconciliation had to happen. Onesimus had to go home.

And so Paul writes this letter — a letter to be carried by the very man who had run away.

Imagine the tension. Imagine Onesimus walking back into Philemon’s home, handing him a letter from Paul, and standing there waiting for the response. Everything hangs on how Philemon will receive him.

THE HEART OF THE LETTER

Paul begins with warmth and affection. He praises Philemon’s love for the saints and his faith in Christ. He reminds him of the refreshment he has brought to others. Paul is not manipulating him — he is affirming the work of grace already present in Philemon’s life.

Then Paul makes his appeal.

He says, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.” Paul uses family language. Onesimus is not just a convert — he is a spiritual son. Paul is saying, “Philemon, this man is not who he used to be. He is a new creation in Christ.”

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Paul even plays on Onesimus's name. The name means "useful." Paul says, "He was once useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me." The gospel has transformed him.

Then comes the heart of the letter: "Receive him as you would receive me."

That is staggering. Paul is asking Philemon to welcome a runaway slave with the same honor he would give to an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And then Paul goes even further: "If he has wronged you or owes you anything, charge it to my account."

Paul is willing to absorb the debt. He is willing to pay the price for Onesimus's wrongdoing. It is a picture of Christ Himself — the One who took our debt and said, "Put it on My account."

Paul closes with confidence that Philemon will do even more than he asks. Many scholars believe this hints at granting Onesimus his freedom.

THE GOSPEL AT WORK

Philemon is not just a personal letter. It is a living demonstration of the gospel.

1. THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS IDENTITY

Onesimus is no longer defined by his past, his status, or his failures. He is now a brother in Christ. The gospel gives him a new identity.

2. THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS RELATIONSHIPS

Paul does not command Philemon. He appeals to him in love. The gospel changes the way we treat one another. It calls us to forgiveness, restoration, and unity.

3. THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Paul does not launch a political campaign against slavery. Instead, he plants a seed that undermines slavery at its roots. If a slave is your brother, how can you treat him as property? The gospel works from the inside out, transforming hearts and relationships until the old structures collapse under the weight of Christian love.

4. THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO RECONCILIATION

Philemon had every legal right to punish Onesimus. But Paul calls him to something higher — to forgive, to restore, and to embrace him as family.

PAUL'S PASTORAL WISDOM

One of the most beautiful aspects of this letter is Paul's pastoral skill.

- He affirms Philemon's character.
- He appeals to love, not authority.
- He identifies with Onesimus.
- He offers to pay the debt.
- He expresses confidence in Philemon's obedience.
- He even says, "Prepare a guest room for me," reminding Philemon that he will see him soon.

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Paul is not manipulating — he is shepherding. He is guiding Philemon toward the Christlike response.

THE MESSAGE FOR TODAY

PHILEMON SPEAKS POWERFULLY TO THE MODERN CHURCH.

1. We Are Called to Be Agents of Reconciliation

Broken relationships are inevitable. But the gospel calls us to pursue peace, forgiveness, and restoration. We cannot hold grudges and claim to follow Christ.

2. WE MUST SEE PEOPLE THROUGH THE LENS OF GRACE

People are not defined by their past. The gospel gives new identity, new purpose, and new life. We must see others as Christ sees them.

3. CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IS ROOTED IN LOVE

Paul could have commanded Philemon. Instead, he appealed to him. True leadership is not about power — it is about love, humility, and service.

4. THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES INJUSTICE

Paul does not endorse slavery. He undermines it. The gospel calls us to confront injustice, not with anger alone, but with the transforming power of Christlike love.

5. THE CHURCH MUST BE A COMMUNITY OF RESTORATION

When someone returns in repentance — like Onesimus — the church must be ready to receive them with grace.

CONCLUSION

Philemon is a small book with a massive message. It shows us what the gospel looks like when it is lived out in real relationships. It shows us how grace transforms hearts, how love heals wounds, and how Christ reconciles people who were once divided.

In Onesimus, we see ourselves — once lost, now found; once useless, now useful; once estranged, now embraced as family.

In Philemon, we see the challenge — to forgive, to restore, to love as Christ has loved us.

And in Paul, we see the ministry of reconciliation — standing in the gap, appealing for peace, and pointing everyone back to Jesus.

This little letter is a treasure. And its message is as needed today as it was in the first century.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **Hebrews**, exploring its rich theology of Christ's priesthood, covenant, and sacrifice.

LESSON 20 - HEBREWS

HEBREWS: JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

When we open the book of Hebrews, we encounter one of the most profound, elegant, and theologically rich writings in the entire New Testament. Hebrews is not a simple letter. It reads like a sermon — a carefully crafted message designed to persuade, encourage, and exhort believers who are growing weary. It is a masterpiece of biblical theology, weaving together the Old Testament and the person of Christ with unmatched depth.

The central message of Hebrews is clear: **Jesus is better**. Better than angels. Better than Moses. Better than the priests. Better than the sacrifices. Better than the old covenant.

Hebrews calls believers to hold fast to Christ because He is the fulfillment of everything God promised.

THE AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians who are facing pressure — social pressure, religious pressure, and perhaps even persecution. Some are tempted to drift back into Judaism, where life felt safer and more familiar. The temple still stood. The sacrifices still continued. The rituals were visible and tangible. Christianity, by contrast, required faith in what could not be seen.

The writer of Hebrews — whose identity remains unknown — writes to show them that turning back is not an option. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, the prophets, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system. To abandon Christ is to abandon the very thing the Old Testament pointed toward.

CHAPTERS 1–2 — JESUS IS GREATER THAN THE ANGELS

Hebrews begins with one of the most majestic openings in Scripture:

“God, who at many times and in many ways spoke to our fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”

The writer immediately establishes the supremacy of Christ. Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory, the exact imprint of His nature, and the One who upholds all things by His powerful word.

Why begin with angels? Because in Jewish tradition, angels were associated with the giving of the Law. If Jesus is greater than the angels, then the message He brings is greater than the Law.

The writer warns: “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away.” Drifting is subtle. It happens slowly. Hebrews calls believers to anchor themselves in Christ.

CHAPTERS 3–4 — JESUS IS GREATER THAN MOSES

Next, the writer compares Jesus to Moses — the greatest leader in Israel’s history. Moses was faithful as a servant in God’s house. But Jesus is faithful as a Son over God’s house. The Son is greater than the servant.

The writer then uses the story of Israel’s wilderness rebellion as a warning. The Israelites heard God’s voice but hardened their hearts. They failed to enter God’s rest because of unbelief.

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Hebrews urges believers to strive to enter God's rest — not by works, but by faith. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, exposing the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

CHAPTERS 4–7 — JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

This is the heart of Hebrews. The writer introduces Jesus as our **Great High Priest** — a theme found nowhere else in the New Testament with such depth.

A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST

Jesus is not a distant priest. He is a sympathetic one. He knows our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way, yet without sin. Therefore, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK

To explain Jesus' priesthood, the writer turns to Melchizedek — a mysterious figure from Genesis 14. Melchizedek was both king and priest, and Abraham honored him. The writer uses Melchizedek to show that Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus is a priest forever, not by genealogy, but by divine appointment. His priesthood is eternal, perfect, and unchanging.

CHAPTERS 8–10 — A BETTER COVENANT, A BETTER SACRIFICE

These chapters form the theological climax of Hebrews.

A BETTER COVENANT

Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant — the new covenant promised in Jeremiah. The old covenant was written on stone. The new covenant is written on hearts. The old covenant could not perfect the conscience. The new covenant brings forgiveness and transformation.

A BETTER SANCTUARY

The earthly tabernacle was a copy, a shadow of heavenly realities. Jesus ministers in the true sanctuary — the presence of God.

A BETTER SACRIFICE

The sacrifices of the Law were repeated endlessly. They could cover sin, but they could not remove it.

But Jesus offered **one sacrifice for all time**. He entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood. He sat down at the right hand of God — something no priest ever did — because His work was finished.

Hebrews declares: “By a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

This is the gospel in its purest form.

CHAPTERS 10–12 — HOLD FAST, ENDURE, AND RUN THE RACE

After laying the theological foundation, Hebrews turns to exhortation.

HOLD FAST

Believers must not throw away their confidence. They must not shrink back. They must hold fast to their confession.

THE HALL OF FAITH (HEBREWS 11)

Hebrews 11 is a celebration of faith — Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and many others. They lived by faith, not by sight. They died without receiving the fullness of the promise, but they saw it from afar.

Their lives testify that faith is not passive; it is active trust in God's promises.

RUN THE RACE (HEBREWS 12)

Hebrews calls believers to run with endurance, fixing their eyes on Jesus — the author and finisher of our faith. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him. If He endured, we can endure.

God disciplines His children, not to harm them, but to shape them. Discipline is a sign of love.

CHAPTER 13 — A CALL TO FAITHFUL LIVING

The final chapter offers practical instructions:

- Love one another.
- Show hospitality.
- Honor marriage.
- Be content.
- Remember your leaders.
- Offer sacrifices of praise.

The writer ends with a beautiful benediction: “May the God of peace... equip you with everything good for doing His will.”

THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS FOR TODAY

Hebrews speaks powerfully to believers in every generation. It reminds us that:

- Jesus is the **full revelation** of God.
- Jesus is the **perfect High Priest** who intercedes for us.
- Jesus is the **once-for-all sacrifice** for sin.
- The new covenant brings **forgiveness, transformation, and access to God**.
- Faith requires **endurance, focus, and trust**.
- The Christian life is a race — and Jesus is both the goal and the strength to run it.

Hebrews calls us to anchor our hope in Christ, to draw near with confidence, and to persevere until the end.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **James**, exploring its powerful call to authentic faith expressed through works.

LESSON 21 - JAMES

JAMES: FAITH THAT WORKS

When we open the book of James, we encounter a letter that is direct, practical, and deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus. James does not waste words. He does not wander into long theological arguments. Instead, he speaks with the clarity of a pastor, the urgency of a prophet, and the wisdom of a seasoned shepherd. His message is simple but challenging: **true faith produces a transformed life.**

James is one of the earliest New Testament writings, likely penned in the mid-40s AD. The author identifies himself as “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This James is almost certainly the brother of Jesus — the same James who became the leader of the Jerusalem church and a pillar of early Christianity. His letter is addressed “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” meaning Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman world.

James writes to believers facing trials, temptations, poverty, injustice, and conflict. His goal is to help them live out their faith with integrity, maturity, and wisdom. If Paul emphasizes the root of salvation — faith — James emphasizes the fruit of salvation — works. These are not contradictory messages; they are complementary. Paul confronts legalism; James confronts hypocrisy. Paul says we are saved by faith alone; James says the faith that saves is never alone.

Let’s walk through this powerful letter.

CHAPTER 1 — FAITH IN TRIALS AND TEMPTATION

James begins with a surprising command: “Count it all joy when you face trials of various kinds.” Joy? In trials? James is not minimizing suffering. He is

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reframing it. Trials test our faith, and tested faith produces endurance. Endurance leads to maturity. God uses trials not to break us but to shape us.

James then addresses wisdom. If anyone lacks wisdom — and we all do — we must ask God, who gives generously. But we must ask in faith, not doubting God's character or goodness.

James also speaks about temptation. God does not tempt anyone. Temptation arises from our own desires. Desire leads to sin, and sin leads to death. The solution is not to blame God but to take responsibility for our hearts.

James reminds believers that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights. God is not fickle or shifting. He is faithful.

James then introduces one of his major themes: **the Word of God**. Believers must receive the Word with humility and obey it. Hearing without doing is self-deception. The Word is like a mirror — it reveals who we are. But if we walk away unchanged, the mirror has done us no good.

James ends the chapter with a definition of pure religion:

- Control your tongue.
- Care for orphans and widows.
- Keep yourself unstained by the world.

True faith expresses itself in compassion, holiness, and self-control.

CHAPTER 2 — FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

Chapter 2 contains the heart of James's message. He begins by confronting **partiality**. In the early church, wealthy believers were given honor while the poor were treated with contempt. James rebukes this sharply. God chooses the

poor to be rich in faith. Favoritism violates the royal law: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

James then addresses the relationship between faith and works. Some claimed to have faith without works. James responds: “Can that faith save him?” His point is not that works earn salvation, but that genuine faith produces obedience. Faith without works is dead — lifeless, empty, useless.

James uses two examples: Abraham and Rahab. Abraham demonstrated his faith by offering Isaac. Rahab demonstrated her faith by protecting the spies. Their works did not replace faith; they revealed it.

James’s message is clear: **faith that does not act is not faith at all.**

CHAPTER 3 — THE POWER OF THE TONGUE AND THE WISDOM AND THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE

James turns next to the tongue — one of the most challenging areas of Christian life. He warns that teachers will be judged more strictly. Words have power. The tongue is small but dangerous — like a spark that sets a forest ablaze, like a rudder that steers a ship, like a spring that should produce fresh water but often produces bitterness.

James says no human being can tame the tongue. It is restless, poisonous, and inconsistent. We bless God and curse people made in His image. This should not be.

James then contrasts two kinds of wisdom:

Earthly wisdom is:

- Bitter
- Jealous
- Selfish
- Disorderly
- Evil

Heavenly wisdom is:

- Pure
- Peaceable
- Gentle
- Open to reason
- Full of mercy
- Impartial
- Sincere

True wisdom produces peace and righteousness.

CHAPTER 4 — HUMILITY, SUBMISSION, AND REPENTANCE

Chapter 4 confronts the root of conflict: selfish desires. Quarrels arise because we want what we do not have. We ask wrongly, seeking our own pleasure. Friendship with the world — meaning the world's values — is hostility toward God.

James calls believers to humility: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” The path to restoration is clear:

- Submit to God.
- Resist the devil.
- Draw near to God.
- Cleanse your hands.
- Purify your hearts.
- Mourn over sin.
- Humble yourselves before the Lord.

James also warns against slander and arrogant planning. Life is a vapor. We must live with humility, dependence, and awareness of God’s will.

CHAPTER 5 — PATIENCE, PRAYER, AND RESTORATION

James closes with practical exhortations.

PATIENCE IN SUFFERING

Believers must be patient until the coming of the Lord. Like a farmer waiting for rain, we must endure with hope. The prophets and Job serve as examples of perseverance.

INTEGRITY IN SPEECH

James warns against careless oaths. Let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

James emphasizes prayer in every circumstance:

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- Pray when suffering.
- Sing when joyful.
- Call the elders when sick.
- Confess sins to one another.
- Pray for healing.

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power.” James points to Elijah — an ordinary man — whose prayers changed the weather.

RESTORING THE WANDERER

James ends with a pastoral call: if anyone wanders from the truth, restore them. Saving a sinner from wandering covers a multitude of sins. The Christian community is responsible for one another.

THE MESSAGE OF JAMES FOR TODAY

James speaks with clarity and conviction to the modern church. He reminds us that:

- Trials produce maturity.
- Temptation begins in the heart.
- The Word must be obeyed, not merely heard.
- Faith without works is dead.
- Partiality violates the gospel.
- The tongue reveals the heart.
- Wisdom is seen in character, not intellect.
- Humility is the path to grace.
- Prayer is powerful and essential.
- The church must restore the wandering.

James calls us to a faith that is authentic, active, and aligned with the teachings of Jesus. His message is not complicated — but it is demanding. He challenges us to live what we believe, to embody the gospel in our actions, and to pursue holiness with sincerity.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **1 & 2 Peter**, exploring themes of suffering, hope, holiness, and the promise of Christ's return.

LESSON 22 – 1ST AND 2ND PETER

HOPE, HOLINESS, AND STANDING FIRM IN A HOSTILE WORLD

When we come to the letters of 1 and 2 Peter, we hear the voice of an apostle who walked with Jesus, failed Jesus, was restored by Jesus, and ultimately gave his life for Jesus. Peter writes as a shepherd, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and a man who knows what it means to stumble, repent, and stand firm again. His letters are filled with encouragement, warning, and a call to holy living in a world that is often hostile to the gospel.

These letters are written to believers scattered across Asia Minor — Christians facing pressure, misunderstanding, and persecution. Peter's message is simple but powerful: **Stand firm. Live holy. Endure suffering. Fix your hope on Christ.** 1 Peter focuses on **hope and holiness** in suffering. 2 Peter focuses on **truth and discernment** in the face of false teaching.

Together, they form a pastoral guide for believers living in difficult times.

Let's begin with **1 Peter**.

HOPE AND HOLINESS IN SUFFERING

CHAPTER 1 — A LIVING HOPE

Peter opens with a blessing: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He reminds believers that they have been born again into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading — kept in heaven for them.

Peter acknowledges their suffering, but he reframes it. Trials test faith like fire tests gold. The result is praise, glory, and honor when Christ is revealed. Even though they have not seen Jesus, they love Him. Their faith is precious.

Peter then calls them to holiness: “Be holy, for I am holy.” Holiness is not legalism; it is the natural response to God’s grace. They were redeemed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ. Therefore, they must live with reverence, love one another deeply, and crave the pure milk of the Word.

CHAPTER 2 — A CHOSEN PEOPLE

Peter uses Old Testament imagery to describe the church:

- A chosen race
- A royal priesthood
- A holy nation
- A people for God’s own possession

Believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house. They once were not a people, but now they are God’s people.

Peter then addresses how believers should live in society. They must abstain from sinful desires, live honorably, submit to authorities, and silence ignorance by doing good. He addresses slaves, encouraging them to endure unjust suffering by following Christ’s example — the One who suffered without retaliation and entrusted Himself to God.

CHAPTER 3 — MARRIAGE, SUFFERING, AND WITNESS

Peter gives instructions for husbands and wives, emphasizing mutual honor, understanding, and respect. He calls all believers to unity, compassion, humility, and blessing.

He then addresses suffering for righteousness. Believers must not fear intimidation. Instead, they must honor Christ as Lord in their hearts and be ready to give a reason for their hope — with gentleness and respect. Suffering for doing good is better than suffering for doing evil.

Peter points to Christ's suffering as the ultimate example. Jesus died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

CHAPTER 4 — LIVING FOR GOD'S WILL

Peter urges believers to arm themselves with the mindset of Christ — a willingness to suffer rather than sin. He reminds them that they have spent enough time living like the world. Now they must live for the will of God.

He warns that believers will face insults and rejection, but they are blessed when they suffer for Christ. The Spirit of glory rests upon them. Judgment begins with the household of God — meaning suffering refines believers and reveals genuine faith.

CHAPTER 5 — SHEPHERDING AND STANDING FIRM

Peter closes with instructions for elders and young believers. Elders must shepherd the flock willingly, humbly, and by example. Younger believers must submit to leadership and clothe themselves with humility.

THOMAS T. HALE

Peter gives one of the most comforting exhortations in Scripture: “Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”

He warns that the devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Believers must resist him, firm in the faith. After they have suffered a little while, God will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish them.

2 PETER — TRUTH, DISCERNMENT, AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

If 1 Peter is about **standing firm in suffering**, 2 Peter is about **standing firm in truth**. False teachers have infiltrated the church, twisting Scripture, denying Christ's return, and promoting immorality. Peter writes urgently, knowing his death is near, to remind believers of the truth and warn them of deception.

CHAPTER 1 — REMEMBER THE TRUTH

Peter begins by reminding believers that God has given them everything they need for life and godliness. Through His promises, they can escape corruption and grow in virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

He urges them to confirm their calling and election by growing in these qualities.

Peter then explains why he is writing: he knows his death is near, and he wants believers to remember the truth after he is gone. He assures them that the gospel is not a myth. He was an eyewitness of Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He also affirms the inspiration of Scripture: "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

CHAPTER 2 — WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

Peter gives one of the strongest warnings in the New Testament. False teachers are deceptive, arrogant, immoral, and destructive. They deny the Master who bought them. They exploit believers with false words. Their judgment is certain.

Peter uses examples from the Old Testament — fallen angels, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah — to show that God knows how to rescue the godly and punish the wicked.

He describes false teachers vividly:

- Waterless springs
- Mists driven by storms
- Boastful, empty talkers
- Slaves of corruption

They promise freedom but are themselves enslaved to sin.

CHAPTER 3 — THE DAY OF THE LORD

False teachers mocked the idea of Christ's return, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Peter responds by reminding believers that God's timing is not like ours. A thousand years is like a day to Him. He is patient, not wanting any to perish.

But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will pass away, the earth will be exposed, and everything will be laid bare.

Peter asks a powerful question: "Since all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?"

His answer:

- Live in holiness and godliness
- Look forward to the new heavens and new earth
- Be diligent to be found without spot or blemish
- Count God's patience as salvation

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

He warns that some twist Paul's letters, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Believers must grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

THE MESSAGE OF 1 & 2 PETER FOR TODAY

These letters speak with remarkable relevance to the modern church. They remind us that:

- Suffering is normal for believers.
- Holiness is essential to Christian witness.
- Our identity is rooted in Christ, not culture.
- Leadership must be humble, faithful, and sacrificial.
- The enemy is real, but God strengthens His people.
- False teaching is dangerous and must be confronted.
- Scripture is inspired, trustworthy, and authoritative.
- Christ will return — and His return shapes how we live now.

Peter calls us to **hope, holiness, discernment, and endurance**. He invites us to stand firm in grace, resist deception, and live with our eyes fixed on the coming glory of Christ.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **1, 2, and 3 John**, exploring themes of love, truth, and assurance.

LESSON 23 – 1,2,3 JOHN

TRUTH, LOVE, AND ASSURANCE

When we come to the letters of John — 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John — we encounter the voice of an apostle who has walked with Jesus longer than any other New Testament writer. John is now an old man. He has seen the church grow, face persecution, confront false teaching, and wrestle with internal conflict. And as a spiritual father, he writes with tenderness, clarity, and authority.

If Paul writes like a theologian and Peter writes like a shepherd, John writes like a father — firm, loving, and deeply concerned for the spiritual health of his children in the faith. His message centers on three themes:

- **Truth**
- **Love**
- **Assurance**

These letters are short, but they are powerful. They call believers to walk in the light, reject false teaching, love one another, and rest in the assurance of eternal life.

Let's begin with **1 John**, the longest and most foundational of the three.

1 JOHN — WALKING IN LIGHT, LOVE, AND TRUTH

THE PURPOSE OF 1 JOHN

John tells us exactly why he writes:

- “So that your joy may be full.”
- “So that you may not sin.”
- “So that you may know you have eternal life.”

John writes to strengthen believers who are confused and shaken by false teachers who have left the church and denied essential truths about Jesus. These teachers claimed special knowledge, denied the incarnation, and lived in moral darkness while claiming spiritual enlightenment.

John responds with clarity: **true Christianity is marked by right belief, right living, and right loving.**

CHAPTER 1 — WALKING IN THE LIGHT

John begins by grounding everything in the reality of Jesus Christ — the One he heard, saw, touched, and witnessed firsthand. Christianity is not a philosophy; it is rooted in the historical person of Jesus.

John declares that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Therefore, believers must walk in the light — meaning truth, holiness, and fellowship with God.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

John also addresses sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is one of the most comforting promises in Scripture.

CHAPTER 2 — OBEDIENCE AND LOVE

John teaches that obedience is the evidence of knowing God. “Whoever says, ‘I know Him,’ but does not keep His commandments is a liar.”

But John is not promoting legalism. He is describing the natural fruit of a transformed heart.

He then introduces the “new commandment” — to love one another. This echoes Jesus’ teaching in the Upper Room. Love is not optional; it is the defining mark of a Christian.

John also warns about the world — the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. These things are passing away. Believers must set their hearts on what is eternal.

Finally, he warns about antichrists — false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Christ. The antidote is to abide in what they have heard from the beginning.

CHAPTER 3 — CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

John reminds believers of their identity: “We are children of God.” This identity shapes how we live.

He contrasts the children of God with the children of the devil. The difference is not in words but in actions. Those who practice righteousness belong to God. Those who practice sin belong to the evil one.

John then returns to the theme of love. Love is not merely words; it is action. Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

CHAPTER 4 — TESTING THE SPIRITS AND PERFECT LOVE

John teaches believers to test the spirits — meaning to evaluate teachings and teachers. The test is Christological: do they confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? False teachers deny the incarnation.

John then gives one of the most beautiful teachings on love in the Bible: “God is love.” Love originates in God. We love because He first loved us. Anyone who claims to love God but hates his brother is a liar.

Perfect love casts out fear — not fear of reverence, but fear of judgment. Believers can have confidence because they abide in God’s love.

CHAPTER 5 — ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

John concludes with assurance. Believers can know they have eternal life because:

- They believe in Jesus.
- They love God’s children.
- They keep God’s commandments.
- They overcome the world.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

John also speaks about prayer, sin, and the protection God gives His children. He ends with a simple but powerful warning: “Keep yourselves from idols.”

2 JOHN — TRUTH AND LOVE IN COMMUNITY

2 John is a short letter written to “the elect lady and her children” — likely a local church and its members.

John emphasizes two themes:

1. WALK IN TRUTH.

Believers must remain faithful to the teaching of Christ.

2. WALK IN LOVE.

Love is obedience to God’s commands.

John warns the church not to welcome false teachers who deny the incarnation. Hospitality was important in the early church, but it must not be extended to those who undermine the gospel.

Truth and love must always go together.

3 JOHN — HOSPITALITY AND FAITHFUL MINISTRY

3 John is addressed to Gaius, a faithful believer known for his hospitality to traveling missionaries.

John commends Gaius for supporting the truth and caring for gospel workers.

He then contrasts Gaius with Diotrephes — a prideful leader who rejects authority, refuses hospitality, and spreads malicious talk.

John encourages believers to imitate what is good, not what is evil.

He ends by commending Demetrius, a man with a good testimony.

THE MESSAGE OF 1–3 JOHN FOR TODAY

These letters speak with remarkable clarity to the modern church. They remind us that:

- **Truth matters.** We must hold fast to the apostolic teaching about Jesus.
- **Love matters.** Love is the evidence of genuine faith.
- **Holiness matters.** Walking in the light is essential to Christian life.
- **Discernment matters.** Not every teacher is from God.
- **Assurance matters.** Believers can know they have eternal life.
- **Community matters.** Hospitality, unity, and mutual care strengthen the church.

John calls us to a faith that is doctrinally sound, morally pure, relationally loving, and spiritually confident.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **Jude**, a short but powerful letter calling believers to contend for the faith in the face of false teaching.

LESSON 24 - JUDE

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

When we open the book of Jude, we encounter one of the shortest yet most urgent letters in the entire New Testament. Jude is only twenty-five verses long, but it carries the weight of a thunderclap. It is a warning, a call to vigilance, and a passionate plea for believers to **contend for the faith** in a world filled with deception, distortion, and spiritual danger.

Jude writes as a pastor and a brother in Christ — and, remarkably, as a brother of Jesus Himself. Yet he introduces himself simply as “a servant of Jesus Christ,” showing humility and devotion. His letter is addressed to believers who are “called, beloved, and kept” — three powerful words that anchor the entire message. Jude wants his readers to know that even in times of confusion and spiritual attack, they are held securely by God.

Let’s walk through this powerful little book and hear Jude’s message for the church today.

INTRODUCTION — A LETTER WITH A BURDEN

Jude begins by expressing his original intention: he wanted to write a letter celebrating the salvation believers share. But something urgent changed his direction. False teachers had infiltrated the church, twisting grace into license and denying the authority of Jesus Christ.

So Jude writes with a burden: “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

This is not a call to be argumentative or combative. It is a call to **defend, preserve, and live out** the truth of the gospel in a world that constantly tries to distort it.

THE THREAT — FALSE TEACHERS WHO SLIP IN UNNOTICED

Jude describes the false teachers with vivid, almost poetic imagery. They are:

- Ungodly
- Morally corrupt
- Rebellious
- Deceptive
- Self-serving
- Spiritually dangerous

They “slip in unnoticed,” meaning they do not come with warning labels. They appear spiritual, persuasive, and confident. But their message undermines the gospel.

Jude says they “pervert the grace of God into sensuality.” In other words, they use grace as an excuse for sin. They deny Jesus by rejecting His authority. Their lives reveal their true nature.

To help his readers understand the seriousness of this threat, Jude gives three Old Testament examples of judgment.

EXAMPLES OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

1. ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

Though God delivered them from Egypt, many did not believe and perished in the wilderness. Privilege does not guarantee perseverance.

2. THE ANGELS WHO REBELLED

Angels who abandoned their proper place are kept in chains until judgment. Even heavenly beings are not exempt from accountability.

3. SODOM AND GOMORRAH

These cities serve as examples of judgment for immorality and rebellion.

Jude's point is clear: God takes sin seriously, and false teaching is not a minor issue. It destroys lives and dishonors Christ.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS

Jude describes the false teachers with a series of striking metaphors:

- **Hidden reefs** — dangerous, unseen threats that can shipwreck faith
- **Waterless clouds** — promising much, delivering nothing
- **Fruitless trees** — dead, uprooted, and useless
- **Wild waves** — chaotic and destructive
- **Wandering stars** — unstable, unreliable, destined for darkness

These images paint a picture of people who appear impressive but are spiritually empty. They are loud but hollow, active but unfruitful, influential but destructive.

Jude also references the prophecy of Enoch, emphasizing that God will judge all ungodliness. Nothing escapes His sight.

THE CALL TO BELIEVERS — HOW TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

After describing the danger, Jude turns to the church with practical instruction. How do believers stand firm in a world filled with deception?

1. BUILD YOURSELVES UP IN THE FAITH

This means growing in Scripture, doctrine, and spiritual maturity. Faith must be strengthened intentionally.

2. PRAY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Prayer is not optional; it is essential for discernment, strength, and perseverance.

3. KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

This does not mean earning God's love. It means remaining in the place where His love shapes our lives — through obedience, worship, and devotion.

4. WAIT FOR THE MERCY OF JESUS CHRIST

Hope in Christ's return sustains believers in difficult times.

5. SHOW MERCY TO THE STRUGGLING

Jude gives three categories:

- Those who doubt — show compassion
- Those in danger — rescue them
- Those deeply entangled in sin — help them with caution

Jude's approach is pastoral and balanced. He calls for truth and mercy, conviction and compassion.

THE DOXOLOGY — GOD KEEPS HIS PEOPLE

Jude ends with one of the most beautiful doxologies in Scripture:

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before His glory with great joy...”

This is the heart of Jude's message. Yes, the world is dangerous. Yes, false teachers are real. Yes, believers must contend for the faith.

But ultimately — **God keeps His people**. He guards them. He sustains them. He will present them blameless with joy.

The Christian life is not lived in fear but in confidence — not in our strength, but in God's.

THE MESSAGE OF JUDE FOR TODAY

Jude's message is incredibly relevant for the modern church. It reminds us that:

- Truth must be protected.
- Grace must not be distorted.
- Holiness matters.
- False teaching is subtle and dangerous.
- Believers must grow in faith, prayer, and love.
- Mercy must be shown to the struggling.
- God is faithful to keep His people.

Jude calls us to a faith that is discerning, courageous, compassionate, and anchored in God's keeping power.

In the next lesson, we will turn to **Revelation**, the final book of the New Testament, exploring its message of hope, judgment, and the ultimate victory of Christ.

LESSON 25 - REVELATION

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB AND THE HOPE OF THE NEW CREATION

When we come to the book of Revelation, we arrive at the grand finale of the New Testament — a book that is majestic, mysterious, symbolic, and overflowing with hope. Revelation is not meant to confuse believers or frighten them. It is meant to **reveal** Jesus Christ, strengthen the church, and assure God’s people that history is moving toward a glorious conclusion under the sovereign hand of God.

Revelation is a book of visions, symbols, and prophetic imagery. It is apocalyptic literature — a genre that uses vivid pictures to communicate spiritual realities. But at its core, Revelation is a pastoral letter written to real churches facing real persecution. Its message is simple and powerful: **Jesus wins**. And because Jesus wins, His people can endure.

Let’s walk through this remarkable book and hear its message for the church today.

INTRODUCTION — THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation begins with a declaration: this is “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is not primarily a revelation of the Antichrist, or of beasts, or of plagues — it is a revelation of **Jesus**.

John, the apostle, receives this vision while exiled on the island of Patmos. He writes to seven churches in Asia Minor — churches facing pressure, compromise, persecution, and spiritual fatigue. Revelation is God’s message to strengthen them and to strengthen us.

John sees the risen Christ in glory — eyes like fire, voice like rushing waters, face shining like the sun. Jesus stands among the lampstands, symbolizing His presence with the churches. He holds the stars in His hand, symbolizing His authority over their leaders. This opening vision reminds us that Christ is Lord of the church and Lord of history.

CHAPTERS 2–3 — LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Jesus speaks directly to seven churches, each with unique strengths and struggles.

Ephesus — Orthodox but loveless

They defended truth but lost their first love.

Smyrna — Faithful in suffering

They faced persecution and poverty but were spiritually rich.

Pergamum — Faithful yet compromised

They held fast to Christ but tolerated false teaching.

Thyatira — Loving but undiscerning

They excelled in service but allowed immorality to spread.

Sardis — A reputation without reality

They appeared alive but were spiritually dead.

Philadelphia — Weak but faithful

They had little strength but kept Christ's word.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Laodicea — Lukewarm and self-sufficient

They were wealthy but spiritually blind and poor.

These letters remind us that Christ knows His church — its strengths, weaknesses, struggles, and needs. He calls His people to repentance, perseverance, and renewed devotion.

CHAPTERS 4–5 — THE THRONE ROOM OF HEAVEN

John is taken into the throne room of heaven — one of the most breathtaking scenes in Scripture.

He sees:

- A throne
- The One seated on it
- Lightning and thunder
- Worship from living creatures and elders

Heaven is not chaotic. It is centered on the throne of God.

Then John sees a scroll sealed with seven seals — the scroll of God's redemptive plan. No one is worthy to open it... until the Lion of Judah appears. But when John looks, he sees not a lion, but a **Lamb who was slain**.

Heaven erupts in worship: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!"

This scene is the heart of Revelation. The victory of God comes through the sacrifice of the Lamb.

CHAPTERS 6–11 — JUDGMENT AND THE TRUMPETS

The seals are opened, revealing judgments that fall on the earth — war, famine, death, persecution, cosmic upheaval. These judgments are not random; they are God’s response to evil and injustice.

Before the seventh seal, John sees a vision of the redeemed — a great multitude from every nation, clothed in white, standing before the throne. They have come through great tribulation, and God wipes away every tear from their eyes.

The seventh seal leads to seven trumpets — more judgments that call the world to repentance. Yet many refuse to turn to God.

In the midst of judgment, God raises up witnesses — symbolized by two prophetic figures — who proclaim His truth. The world opposes them, but God vindicates them.

These chapters remind us that God is patient, but He is also just. Evil will not go unpunished.

CHAPTERS 12–14 — THE COSMIC BATTLE

John pulls back the curtain to reveal the spiritual conflict behind human history.

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

The woman represents God’s people. The dragon is Satan, who seeks to destroy the Messiah and persecute the church.

THE BEASTS

Two beasts arise — one representing oppressive political power, the other representing deceptive religious power. Together they form a counterfeit trinity opposed to God.

THE LAMB AND HIS FOLLOWERS

In contrast, the Lamb stands on Mount Zion with His redeemed people, marked by faithfulness.

These chapters show that the church's struggle is not merely earthly — it is spiritual. But Christ has already defeated the dragon through His death and resurrection.

CHAPTERS 15–16 — THE BOWLS OF WRATH

Seven angels pour out seven bowls of God's wrath — the final judgments before the end. These judgments echo the plagues of Egypt and demonstrate God's holiness and justice.

Even in judgment, many refuse to repent. Revelation shows the hardness of the human heart apart from God's grace.

CHAPTERS 17–18 — THE FALL OF BABYLON

Babylon symbolizes the world system — corrupt, seductive, wealthy, and opposed to God. It represents every empire, culture, or power that exalts itself against God.

THOMAS T. HALE

John sees Babylon's fall — sudden, catastrophic, and final. The world mourns her destruction, but heaven rejoices.

This is a reminder that no earthly power, no matter how impressive, can stand against God.

CHAPTER 19 — THE RETURN OF THE KING

Heaven opens, and Christ appears riding a white horse. His name is Faithful and True. His robe is dipped in blood — His own sacrificial blood — and He comes to judge and make war against evil.

The beast and false prophet are defeated. The enemies of God fall. Christ reigns victorious.

This is the blessed hope of the church — the return of the King.

CHAPTER 20 — THE FINAL JUDGMENT

John sees Satan bound, the saints reigning, and then Satan's final defeat. The dead are raised, and the books are opened. Those whose names are not in the Book of Life face judgment.

This is a sober reminder that every life will stand before God.

CHAPTERS 21–22 — THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Revelation ends with breathtaking hope.

John sees:

- A new heaven
- A new earth
- A new Jerusalem
- God dwelling with His people

There is no more death, mourning, crying, or pain. The curse is gone. The river of life flows from God’s throne. The tree of life bears fruit for the healing of the nations.

God declares: “Behold, I am making all things new.”

The Bible ends where it began — with God and humanity together, creation restored, and life eternal.

THE MESSAGE OF REVELATION FOR TODAY

Revelation speaks powerfully to the modern church. It reminds us that:

- Jesus is Lord of history.
- Evil will not prevail.
- Suffering is temporary.
- God is sovereign over every event.
- The church must remain faithful.
- Judgment is real.
- Christ will return.
- The future is glorious.

Revelation is not a book of fear — it is a book of hope. It calls us to worship the Lamb, resist the world's seductions, endure hardship, and look forward to the day when God makes all things new.

With this lesson, we complete the New Testament Survey — a journey from the birth of Christ to the new creation. But the story continues in us, as we live out the gospel and await the return of our King.