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**The New Testament Church**

**Introduction:** After the death of Jesus Christ, all of His followers were terribly distraught. This great man, Jesus, whom they had followed with love for several years, had suddenly left them! Was that all there was? Had it all been a lie? They did not have to wait long for an answer… Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead! Everything He had been telling them had actually been the truth! In forty days, Jesus would once again leave this earth to return to heaven to resume His place next to His Father, God. However, as we shall soon see, He promised His followers that He would send the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to strengthen, comfort, and guide them throughout their lives. The Church Age was about to begin. The Age of the Gentiles was coming. This lecture series will review the highlights of the New Testament Church – from its inception up to the third council of Carthage that convened in A.D. 397 to receive God’s help in choosing the New Testament cannon – the current collection of 27 books of the New Testament.

The lectures will cover three major areas: the 1st century Church, the epistles, and the Church in the 2nd through the 4th centuries. The book of Acts, written by Luke, will be reviewed in detail. This book discusses the very early days of the Church Age from Pentecost up until the mid A.D. 60’s. The missionary journeys (including the journey after his first Roman imprisonment) of Paul will be covered as well as the purported experiences of the other apostles. The epistles and Revelation will all be surveyed to give a better understanding of the principles, ideas and goals of the Christian Church. The last portion of lectures will cover the growth and development of Christianity in the 2nd through 4th centuries.

When possible, the information will be presented in chronological order, from the ascension of Jesus Christ to the confirmation of the New Testament canon. I believe this is at least one good mechanism by which the reader can get an historical view of how the Church grew and changed over this time period. Also, this gives an historical backdrop while discussing the problems with which the Church had to deal. The dates noted are best estimates based on a consensus of several different sources.

I made the decision to place my synopsis of all of the epistles and “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” as the last section of this treatise. I placed them in the same order as found in the New Testament, beginning with the book of “Romans”. However, many may find it more to their liking to read these summaries in the chronological order that they were written. Therefore, I have noted, as I wrote concerning Paul’s missionary journeys in the next section, *when* he wrote each of his epistles and *where* to turn in this book to find that epistle’s synopsis. The same is true with respect to the epistles of Peter, James, Jude and John – i.e. while discussing their lives, I point out when they likely wrote each corresponding epistle. While lecturing, I plan to review all of the epistles plus “The Revelation” *after* completing the history of the New Testament Church.

**The Book of Acts:**

**Authorship:** There is a consensus view that the physician, Luke, wrote this great book most likely between A.D. 60-64. The final event of the book, as we will see, describes Paul’s ministry in Rome. There is no mention of the persecution of Christians by Nero, which began soon after A.D. 64, and no mention of the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It is very likely that these significant events would have been mentioned had they already occurred when the book of Acts was written. The **Gospel of Luke** was written a little before Luke wrote **The Book of Acts**. Luke begins this book with the following words to his friend Theophilus…

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.  After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.   Acts 1:1-3

**~A.D. 30:**

Jesus Christ died a sacrificial death on the cross in approximately A.D. 30. Six weeks later, He ascended into heaven after promising to send the Holy Spirit to all those who trusted in Him as Lord and Savior. He also told His followers to wait for this event to occur…

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."  So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"  He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.  But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:4-8

Jesus did not reveal any dates as to when He would return to set up His kingdom on earth… the Millennial Kingdom.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.  "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk (about ¾ mile) from the city.  When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.  They all joined together **constantly in prayer**, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 1:9-14

So Jesus was now back in heaven seated at the right hand of His Father. There He will remain until one day, probably not too far in the future, when He will return with all of the saints to this earth. This He will do to put an abrupt stop to the Battle of Armageddon as He ushers in His Millennial Kingdom. In the meantime, all of His brothers and sisters have work to do… this work was begun by His disciples. They would begin in earnest to do the Lord’s work as soon as they received His gift from heaven… the Holy Spirit. From that point on, He tells them that they shall be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost ends of the earth. Matthew and Mark closed their gospel accounts with a similar request from Jesus to all of His disciples… those of that time and all Christians to come. His disciples went back to the city and waited in the *Upper Room* for their gift from Christ…

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Mark 16:15 Matt 28:19-20



**Mount of Olives**



**The Upper Room**

After the disciples had reunited back in the city, Peter stood to address the group of followers of Christ that had gathered… this numbered approximately 120 people. Peter noted that since Judas Iscariot had turned against Jesus and now was dead, another should be chosen to take his place. Peter stated that the other eleven disciples would choose someone who had been with the whole group since all the way back to the time when Jesus first came to meet John the Baptist. That way, he would have a similar knowledge of the Master as they did.

So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."  Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to **Matthias**; so he was added to the eleven apostles. Acts 1:23-26

 When the day of **Pentecost** came, they were all together in one place.  Suddenly a sound like the *blowing of a violent wind* came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be *tongues of fire* that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:1-4

Amazingly, after the disciples had received the gift of the Holy Spirit they spoke in other tongues (that is, different disciples spoke various and sundry foreign languages)! There were many people in Jerusalem for this feast day and they came to that area when they heard the commotion. Not only was the sound of the Holy Spirit arriving very loud, but the multitude of languages being spoken all at once also was somewhat alarming and got their attention. What really made the crowd incredulous was that… each one heard them speaking in his own language Acts 2:6

In other words, even though there were people there in Jerusalem that day from many different nations, these relatively few disciples were able to communicate with them verbally in their vast array of languages. The people wondered aloud…

It was certainly no coincidence that the Holy Spirit came upon the people on the day of Pentecost. Analogous to the fact that God visited his people in the days of the Old Covenant on this special day with His gift of the Law, now He visits them bringing His New Covenant gift of the Holy Spirit.

Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?  Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?  Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"  Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"  Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine. " Acts 2:7-13

Although being drunk would certainly not explain how these men could be speaking in real languages, this idea was suggested by one or two in the crowd. Peter once again stood up to be heard by the crowd...

These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

Peter then goes on to explain that the prophet Joel had prophesied concerning this event many hundreds of years earlier. Joel’s prophesy (Joel 2:28-32) not only spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power as they had just witnessed, but also spoke of the pouring out of the Spirit in the end-times to come. Peter then went on to preach the first recorded evangelistic sermon in history!

"Men of Israel, listen to this: *Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs*, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.  This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.  But *God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.* **David said about him**:   
"'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because *you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*  You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'   
"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that *the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.*  But he was a prophet and knew that *God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.* **Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.**  Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.  For *David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*   
*"'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*'   
"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."  When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"  Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.  The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."  With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."  Those who accepted his message were baptized, and **about three thousand were added to their number that day**. Acts 2:22-41

Peter had preached a wonderful sermon as he called attention to certain undeniable facts:

* Jesus had recently been put to death on the cross (and those in the crowd were partly to blame)
* Jesus rose from the dead on the third day
* King David spoke of one of his heirs, the Messiah, who would not decay in the grave
* One of King David’s descendents would one day sit on the throne… Jesus
* One in the line of David would ascend into heaven and sit at God’s right hand

After this sermon, 3,000 souls accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior and were baptized!

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.  All the believers were together and had everything in common.  Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.  Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

**~A.D. 30-33: The Early Church Years**

Thus this nascent Church began in earnest. The believers gathered together for fellowship, instruction, receiving the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. They shared what they had to help those less fortunate. Many supernatural miracles were in evidence as God blessed His Church.

One day, Peter and John were on their way to the Temple when they came across a beggar man, crippled from birth. He asked for some money from the two apostles. Instead, Peter replied…

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Acts 3:6

The lame man jumped to his feet, perfectly healed and ran into the Temple praising God for his healing. It is worth noting, I think, that Luke takes the time to write specifically of even the gate that the man had sat at before his healing (the temple gate called Beautiful) and the

place where Peter and John were when the people came up to them (Solomon’s Colonnade). When the people came and expressed their astonishment to the apostles it gave Peter another opportunity to preach the gospel…

"Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?  The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.  You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.  You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.  By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.  "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.  But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.  Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus.  He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.  For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.  Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'  "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.  And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'  When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Acts 3:12-26

The Sadducees had Peter and John arrested and placed them behind bars for the night. They were certainly hoping that they had just put this “Jesus” problem behind them… didn’t they just have Him crucified! Unfortunately, now the people following this “so-called Messiah” seemed to be multiplying! In fact, after Peter and John finished teaching and preaching that day, there were now about 5,000 men who had converted to Christianity! The authorities still had themselves a very big problem. Jesus had been seen by so many people since His crucifixion… no wonder so many were now following Him!

Note: As opposed to the Pharisees, the Sadducees maintained that the written law (i.e. the Torah) alone was obligatory on the nation, as of divine authority. The Pharisees had a large collection of oral laws that they maintained were God’s Law as well. The second distinguishing doctrine of the Sadducees was the denial of man's resurrection after death. The Sadducees did not last much beyond the first century A.D.

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.  Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"  Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!  If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.  He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone'. **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**" Acts 4:5-12

The ruling body that was hearing the case gathered together to discuss the matter. Annas and Caiaphas certainly must have been flabbergasted to have this problem concerning Jesus come up once again. Hadn’t they just finished Him off just a couple months earlier? Well, they decided that since so many thousands of people had witnessed the events of the previous day, it would not be very acceptable to the masses if Peter and John remained in prison. Yet, they certainly did not want the message they were spreading to continue. The decision was to let them go but to warn them sternly to keep the name of Jesus out of their conversation in the future. They were not to preach any more of the gospel that they had been spreading around the city. The responses they would get from Peter and John were so much different than the two disciples gave on that night when Christ was arrested. With what they had seen in recent weeks and now having experienced the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, their verbal response was one of power and faith…

But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.  For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."  After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.  For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. Acts 4:19-22

After their release, Peter and John returned to their friends and told them about what had just happened. All prayed in thanks to God and asked for His protection against those that would try to silence them in the days ahead. God gave them a powerful sign as after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:31

In those early days of the Church, the members shared their money and possessions. One example noted was of Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:36-37

This method of sharing to take care of the needs of the people in the Church did not always go smoothly. The Bible tells of a couple who learned the value of honesty…

a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.  Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have **lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?  Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."  When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.  Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.  About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."  Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.  *Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events* Acts 5:1-11

These two people were severely punished for lying to everyone concerning their gift to the church. They were not required to give the entire profit from their sale… but God does certainly ask all of us to be truthful as we give to His Church. Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of the sins of lying, greed and pride with just this one act. This punishment certainly got the attention of the new church. Obviously, God wanted to make a very important point in the early stages of the burgeoning Church Age.

In the following weeks, Peter and his fellow apostles continued their powerful ministry of preaching the gospel and healing the sick. Many miraculous works in Christ’s name were performed. Of course, this troubled greatly the Jewish leaders…

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.  They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.  But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.  "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."  At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. Acts 5:17-21

That same morning, the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles Acts 5:21

Of course, the apostles were not to be found in the jail. After that discovery, these Jewish leaders sent out some guards to usher the apostles from the temple courts where they were preaching to the meeting of the Sanhedrin. The apostles were scolded for ignoring their punishment and for continuing to teach about Jesus.

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!  The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.  God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.  We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Acts 5:29-32

After this response, most of the Sanhedrin were in favor of arresting the apostles and putting them to death. One of the more intelligent, learned and respected among them had a different idea, however…

A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.  Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.  Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.  After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.  Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.  But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.  The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.  Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:34-42

Gamaliel, was a great teacher of the Jews. The point of his two examples was that since Jesus was now dead, His followers would soon decide to get back to their normal lives and His message would soon die out. The problem with this analogy was that Jesus was not dead… therefore, His followers and His message would live on forever! Apparently, Gamaliel was honest enough to recognize a great truth that he spoke in his little speech above… “if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.” He sure was correct with that statement!

By the way, Gamaliel’s most famous student was a young man named Saul… we will hear a great deal about him a little later.

As the weeks turned into months, more and more converts came to trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord. There were many Hebraic Jews and Grecian Jews coming to Christ during those early days. At one point, some of the Grecian Jews complained that their widows were not getting their fair share of the community distribution of food. As this early church had already grown to a significant size, the twelve apostles decided that it would be more efficient for them to utilize their time teaching, preaching and healing the people instead of spending time with other issues such as food distribution. They therefore chose seven Spirit filled men that they trusted to take care of everyday duties of the church.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.  They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Acts 6:5-6

~**A.D. 34: Steven and Philip**

One of these men, Steven, also did great Godly wonders and signs among the people. This resulted in opposition from some of the Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. Acts 6:9

These men *falsely* accused Steven and brought him in front of the Sanhedrin. They began speaking…

"This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.  For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."  All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Acts 6:13-15

The High Priest turned to Steven and asked him if these charges were true. Steven’s answer was interesting. He gave a fairly long speech that was a review of the Old Testament history of the Jewish people… God’s “chosen people”. He began with Abraham, then spoke of Joseph, and then the great prophet Moses. He went into some detail when discussing Moses and noted…

"This is that Moses who told the Israelites, **'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'**  He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us. Acts 7:37-38

Steven continued on and noted how Moses built a Tabernacle for God. Later, he reminded the court of the Temple, the design by God given to King David and built by King Solomon. He ended his defense with these tough words…

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:   
"'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?  Has not my hand made all these things?'   
"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!  Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." Acts 7:48-53

This final response by the courageous Steven placed him in mortal danger from those in the room. The result of all of this was…

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.  "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."  At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.  While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."  Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:55-60

Steven became the first documented Christian martyr. He stood up for his Master, even to the point of death. Jesus personally ushered him into His presence in heaven!

Intriguingly, a young zealot named Saul was there at the stoning and gave his approval to the death of Steven. After this incident, a great persecution broke out against the growing Christian Church there in Jerusalem. Most of the new converts scattered out of the city into Judea and Samaria… it was much safer there at that time. They were also able to witness in these areas with less concern for the Jewish authorities. The apostles remained in the city for a while longer. Saul became one of the leaders of those who were charged with finding and capturing the Christians.

But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Acts 8:3

One of the newly selected “seven”, Philip, began his preaching career in earnest. He went initially to Samaria and proclaimed the gospel of Christ, authenticating it with signs and wonders. He cast out demons and healed many people, all in the name of Jesus. Interestingly, there was another man in that same area that performed sorcery. His name was Simon.

"This man is the divine power known as the Great Power."  They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.  But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.  Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. Acts 8:10-13

It was obvious to Simon that Philip had the true message from God. People were accepting the gospel and being baptized by Philip. Even Simon was convinced of the veracity of Philip’s message and wanted to be baptized. However, as we shall soon see, Simon had ulterior motives…

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.  When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.  Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17

In the very early days of spreading the gospel, it appears that there was a need for confirmation by the apostles when a new group of believers was brought into the Church. Certainly, this happened when the Church began at Pentecost. At that time, the Holy Spirit descended with blatant outward signs. Now, here in Samaria, God apparently wanted the apostles once again to be involved, as an outward sign to the all people, of the total acceptance of these *Samaritans* into the Church of Jesus Christ. There would be at least one other occasion when the indwelling of the Holy Spirit would come with obvious outward signs to a new group of Christians as will be seen when Peter deals with a *Gentile* named Cornelius in a little while.

During this visit by Peter and John, Simon was impressed with the demonstration of the power of the one true God. He therefore, unfortunately, committed the sin of asking these two apostles if he could give them some money to *buy* this ability/power from them. Peter admonished him and suggested strongly that he pray for God’s forgiveness that he even had such a thought. This power from God was not to be bought and sold. God’s power is only to be used in love to advance the Kingdom and to take care of those in need.

Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."  When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. Acts 8:24-25

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."  So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.  The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Acts 8:26-29

Here we see that Philip was already on his second missionary journey… as an angel of the Lord had sent him south toward Gaza. God had plans to introduce the gospel to an Ethiopian… one who was searching the scriptures for truth. God has always said that He will honor those who search for Him with all of their heart.

Philip heard the man reading the scriptures out loud and asked him if he understood the significance of what he was reading. The man said that he needed someone to teach him. Providentially, he was reading from Isaiah…

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.  In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." Acts 8:32-33 Isaiah 53:7-8

Philip took the opportunity to explain this verse from Isaiah and many others as he preached to him of the gospel. Not long into the lesson, the eunuch had asked Jesus into his heart. Philip baptized him in some water that they came to along the road and this newly transformed Ethiopian Christian went to his home rejoicing. Philip, on the other hand, was on his way to preach and teach and heal the sick in other towns and cities.

the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.  Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. Acts 8:39-40

~**A.D. 34-35: The Road to Damascus**

Although the Jewish leaders had seriously clamped down on witnessing for Christ in Jerusalem, the movement was gaining steam in the surrounding villages, towns and cities. The most fervent Jewish enforcer, Saul of Tarsus, wanted to leave Jerusalem and go the 100 or so miles to the synagogues in Damascus where a large contingent of people belonging to “the Way” was apparently arising. The “Way’ was one method of referring to Christian converts in that early period of Christianity (recall that Jesus had referred to Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life). The Sanhedrin had authority over synagogues abroad, and the extradition of Jews to stand trial was allowed for certain crimes. Saul’s plan was to bring this group of converts to stand trial in Jerusalem. He would bring them to the Sanhedrin where if found guilty they would face prison or even death!

Saul was a very intelligent and knowledgeable Pharisee. Although he was young, he had garnered much notoriety for his unwavering pursuit of these new Christians. He was relentless as he was convinced that he was serving God in this cause. Saul was raised in Tarsus and had an excellent Hellenistic educational background. After this classical schooling, he was sent by his parents to Jerusalem where he had outstanding religious training under the tutelage of the great Rabbi Gamaliel. Certainly, he was a prize pupil! It was against this background, that the young Saul was sent to Damascus to begin the extra-Jerusalem persecution of this new Christian sect. Of course, God had other plans…

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.  He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."  The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.  Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.  For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Acts 9:3-9

Paul’s companions recognized that Saul had just had an encounter with the Living God, yet they were not privy to the details of that interchange. Saul was changed forever. He now was going to use his intellect, writing and speaking talents and powerful personality for the cause of Jesus Christ instead of against Him. Whatever Saul did in his life, he did it to the fullest… as should we all. Saul was soon to be convinced of the truthfulness of the Christian message. Once this occurred, he used all of his abilities and energy to work to evangelize the world for the rest of his life. The change in the life of Saul is one of the many evidences for the truthfulness of the Bible. Why in the world would this Jewish Pharisee and religious fanatic “warrior” against the early Christian Church suddenly become the most valuable evangelist for Jesus? Only if he actually did have the Damascus encounter with the Savior!

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.  The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.  In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."  "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.  I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Acts 9:10-16

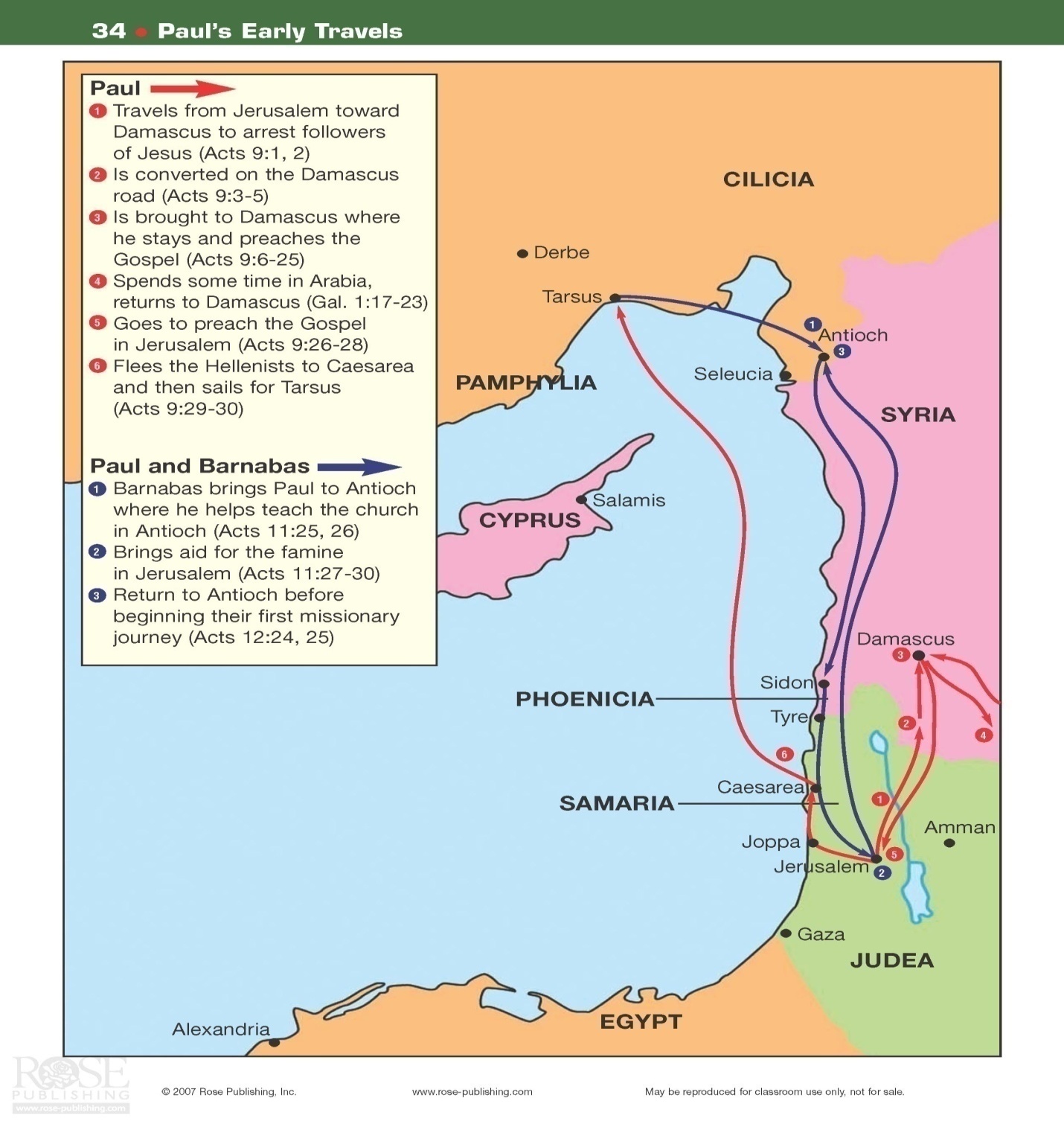
Ananias had to be assured that he would come out of his encounter with this zealot Saul alive. Jesus quickly did this and Ananias went to see Saul to deliver the message and restore Saul’s sight.

Ananias came to the house where Saul was staying and walked in to meet the young Pharisee. He placed his hands on Saul and prayed that Saul would be filled with the Holy Spirit and have his sight restored. Immediately, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. His sight also returned. Saul then got up and was baptized. This all happened in very short order.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.  At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.  All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"  Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.  After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.  But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. Acts 9:19-25

Note just how quickly and completely Saul turned from the greatest persecutor of Christians to their greatest advocate! God had, of course, wisely chosen this man to be the foremost evangelist to the Gentile nations of that time.

Saul left Damascus and, according to the epistle to Galatians, he spent approximately three years studying the scriptures in Arabia… with God as his teacher. Then he returned to Damascus and soon went up to Jerusalem to meet the other apostles. However, he had a problem. The Christians did not trust him, given his past position with the Sanhedrin… as their enforcer. Recall; he had been in charge of arresting Christians and sending them off to prison or worse. On the other hand, the Jewish authorities were very angry with his recent actions and he was in danger of punishment from them at any time. Fortunately, someone stepped forward to help…



~**A.D. 38: The Journeys of Peter**

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.  So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.  He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.  When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Acts 9:27-30

Saul had now made quite a start to his career as an evangelist. He went back to his home in Tarsus for a while. He would spend a great deal of time preparing himself to be God’s foremost instrument in carrying the gospel message to the Gentiles of that time.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord Acts 9:31

The Bible states that there was a relative time of peace for the new Church in the late A.D. 30’s in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Note, that the city of Jerusalem was not mentioned. Yet, the Holy Spirit was adding to the numbers of Christians during these years without too much persecution in the areas outside of the capital city. Peter spent much of his time in Jerusalem, but would travel to other cities and territories frequently as well. On one occasion, Peter went to Lydda and met a paralytic man named Aeneas. Peter healed him and this miracle caused a stir in that city. These healings occurred in various cities to help authenticate the message and, of course, to help the individual (and family and friends) that benefitted from the healing. Peter then had an encounter in the city of Joppa that led to a most amazing miracle…

 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.  About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.  Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"  Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.  Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.  He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.  This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.  Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon. Acts 9:36-43

Here we see that Peter was the instrument of the Holy Spirit in performing the greatest type of miracle… defeating death. Incredible miracles like these were a major reason that the Christian message was accepted throughout the land. Whereas the apostles always used the Old Testament scriptures when witnessing to the Jews, that method would not be of as much value when witnessing to a Gentile (of course, it was still worthwhile). On the other hand, raising someone from the dead, in the name of Jesus, would certainly get their attention! It is important to remember that hundreds of people who had actually seen the risen Christ still were very much alive and were witnesses to His power and person and able to tell others about the Savior from their first-hand knowledge.

Just up the coastline from Joppa, there was a centurion man named Cornelius who had an intriguing encounter with God. The book of Acts makes it clear that he and his family were God-fearing people and folks who took their commitment to others very seriously. They routinely gave to the poor and prayed to God regularly. Yet, he did not know of Jesus… but that was about to change. About three o’clock one afternoon, Cornelius had a strange vision from God. He saw and angel who told him…

"Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.  Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.  He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." Acts 10:4-6

Always remember that God answers our prayers. God does answer in His time, not ours. He does not always say “yes’ to our requests. Yet, when we pray in line with His will, we can be sure that He will grant us our requests. It is important that we pray and communicate to and with God frequently. I know of no one in the Bible that prayed more to God than Jesus! If Jesus, God the Son, found it so important to pray to His Father, how much more important is it for all of us to do the same? Obviously, it is critically important.

The very next day, Cornelius sent two servants and a valued soldier down to Joppa to find Peter. While they were making their way to Joppa, God was preparing Peter for his next step in spreading the Gospel.

Peter went up on the roof to pray.  He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.  He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.  It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.  Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."  "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."  The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."  This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. Acts 10:9-16

Jesus had and interesting lesson to teach His old friend Peter. No longer living under the Old Covenant, now it was certainly appropriate to eat any animal that God had created. If God had created an animal, it would now not be a sin to partake of it for sustenance. While Peter was still thinking about this vision he had just witnessed, the three men sent by Cornelius arrived at his front door. The Holy Spirit told him to go to these men to see what they wanted. Their answer…

"We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." Acts 10:22

Peter invited them into his house and they spent the night. The next day, all four of these men made their way back up the Mediterranean Coast to Caesarea. Upon their arrival…

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.  But Peter made him get up. **"Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."**  Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.  He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But **God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.**So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" Acts 10:25-29

Note here that Peter had made the correct interpretation of the vision that he had seen just two nights earlier. Not only was that vision related to the foods that we eat, but also indicated that God made all people equal and Christ was and is available to everyone that ever lived or ever will live. The gospel message is for all mankind. All men are sinners, but all men can be saved through Christ.

Peter continued to speak to this Gentile man and the crowd in the room…

Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.  You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached--  how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.  "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.  He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.  He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.  All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:34-43

Note how Peter succinctly told this man and the crowd that had formed around them the gospel message… pure and simple. Just then, for the third time God would confirm His gospel message to the world… this time to these Gentile people.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even on the Gentiles*.  For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."  So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days. Acts 10:44-48

After spending a few days with this fine family, Peter returned to Jerusalem. He had found himself and his wife a place to stay in the city as he certainly was now a full time evangelist and preacher. No longer would he be the fisherman of Galilee… now, as Jesus had once said, he would be a fisher of men for the rest of his life.

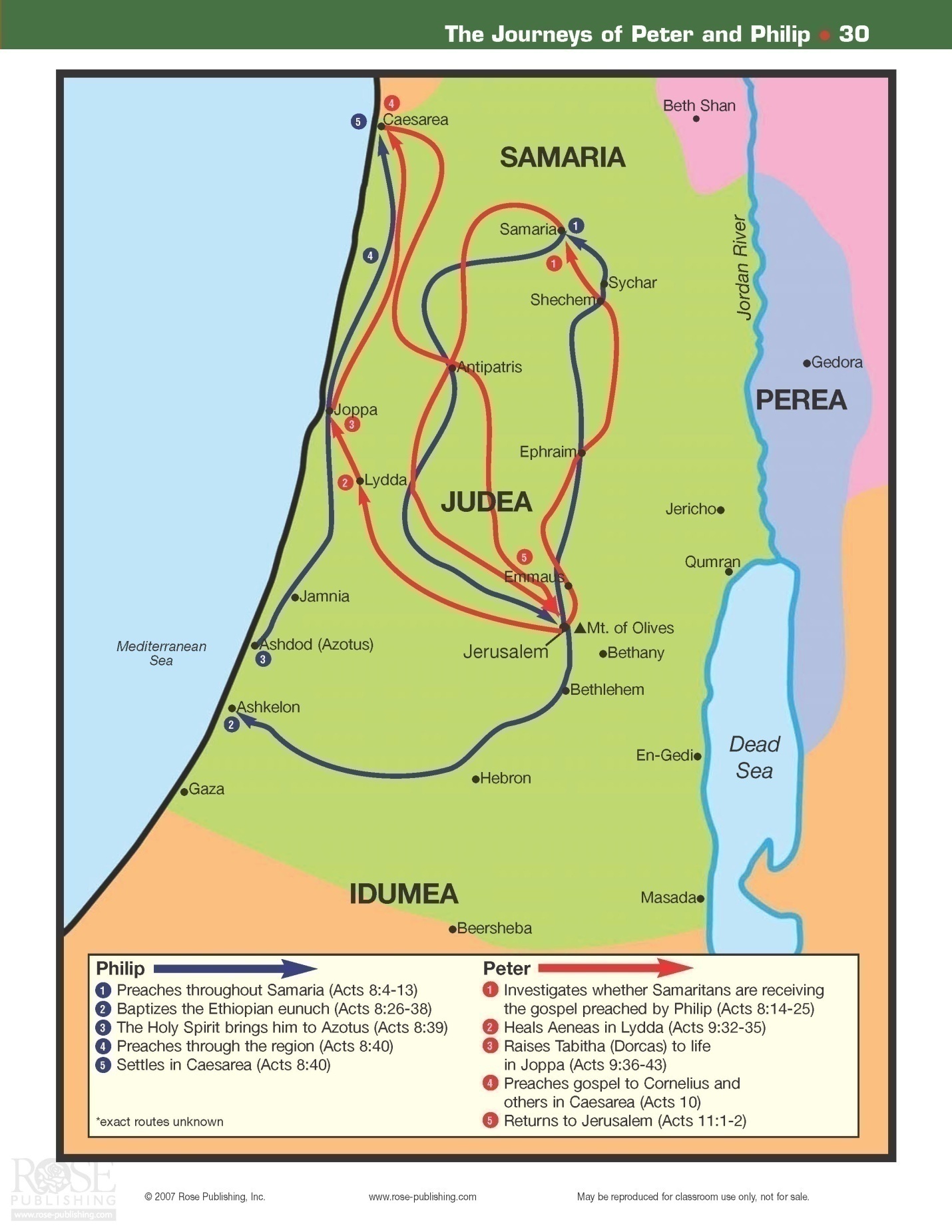
When Peter arrived back into the city, the story of what had taken place in Caesarea had been spread to most of the new Christian converts… all of the Christians living in Jerusalem were Jews at that time. Therefore, all of the men had been circumcised. That became an issue with many as they still held to the importance of this “sacred rite”. Of course, this rite was incredibly important to the Old Covenant Jew. What they soon would be taught by the Holy Spirit was that nothing but trust and faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel was needed in the New Covenant. As a matter of fact, any attempt at adding to this gospel of “faith alone in Christ” would actually pervert the true gospel!

Peter carefully and effectively explained the entire Joppa incident to his fellow Jerusalem brothers and sisters. He explained how God had showed him in a vision certain heretofore unknown truths – mainly…

"The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'  This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. Acts 11:9-10

In other words, no man (or animal for that matter) is unclean as God made them all. Certainly all men and women can be saved… if they only will trust in Jesus. Peter concluded this explanation with…

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'  So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" Acts 11:15-17



As these early days and years of Christianity passed, faithful men and women travelled far and wide from Jerusalem. After Stephen’s death, many people found their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. The gospel message, with few exceptions, was told only to Jews. With time, however, some of the Christians who settled in Antioch began to share this “good news’ with Greeks. Many converted to Christianity. This information reached Jerusalem and the Christian leaders there decided to send Barnabas up there to evaluate how things were going and to help out in any way that he could. When he got there, he was encouraged by what he saw. He also taught and preached more about the Lord and a great number of additional people came to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

The Church of Jesus Christ was growing very nicely in that city. Barnabas had a great idea. He thought of that dynamo Saul who had just about finished his preparation for full-time service for the Lord. Barnabas headed to Tarsus, found Saul and asked him to come back to Antioch and team up with him to lead the new growing local church in that city. Saul was pleased to have the opportunity to begin his ministry for the Lord.

**~A.D. 42-43:**

So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. **The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch**.  During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.  One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)  (Claudius reigned from A.D. 41-54) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.  This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:19-30

**~A.D. 44: King Herod’s Persecution**

Back in Jerusalem, trouble was once again coming to Christians. King Herod arrested and persecuted many Christians. He arrested and killed James (the brother of John) with a sword. This despicable act seemed to please some of the Jewish leaders so Herod also arrested Peter. He did this during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each while the King waited until Passover was over to take any punitive action against him. Peter waited in his cell, bound in chains and guarded by the soldiers…

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.  Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him.  Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.  They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Acts 12:7-10

Peter finally realized what had just taken place. He had been supernaturally freed from prison. Immediately, he headed to a friend’s house, the home of John Mark. There were several people inside praying for Peter. A servant girl came to the door and asked who was there. As soon as she recognized Peter’s voice, she ran back to the group of people inside, forgetting to let Peter in! She told them that Peter was at the door!

 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."  But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.  Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place. Acts 12:15-17

The next morning, the escape of Peter was made known to Herod. Unfortunately, he took it out on the soldiers as he had them killed.

Herod travelled to Caesarea and worked to resolve a quarrel that he had been involved in with some of the leaders of Tyre and Sidon. He planned the meeting with these people very carefully…

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.  They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."  Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.  But the word of God continued to increase and spread.  When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. Acts 12:21-25

**~A.D. 47-49: First Missionary Journey: (see map)**

The church at Antioch was growing nicely during these years. Two of the leaders of this congregation were Barnabas and Saul. The people were very dedicated to the worship of God and spent much time in earnest prayer. On one of the occasions while they were fasting and worshipping, the Holy Spirit told the group to ready Saul and Barnabas for a missionary journey. After they had fasted and prayed, the leadership laid their hands on the two men, prayed for their success and sent them off on their journey.

Saul and Barnabas decided to take Mark with them on this trip as their assistant. They left from the coastal town of Seleucia and sailed west to the eastern tip of Cyprus, to a town named Salamis. From there the three men taught and preached in the Jewish synagogues. During the next several weeks, they worked their way west all the way to the western coastal town of Paphos. Many people were converted to Christ on their journey through this island. There was one man, a proconsul named Sergius Paulus, who specifically asked to speak to these missionaries to see what they had to say about Jesus. His attendant, a sorcerer named Elymas did his best to avert this meeting. Saul was aware of what was happening and confronted Elymas…

"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?  Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.  When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Acts 13:10-12

It is interesting to note that the book of Acts states that Saul began to be addressed as Paul during this trip, his first missionary journey.

John Mark asked to return to Jerusalem when the trio of missionaries arrived in Pamphylia. Paul was none too pleased at the time, but eventually got over the fact that young Mark was not up to the task of finishing this particular mission trip.

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.  From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.  After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Acts 13:13-15

That was just the opening Paul was waiting for… he stood up and addressed the crowd. He then carefully reminded these men of their long history from Moses through the times of the Judges and then King David. Then Paul brought the history up to the time in which they lived…

"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.  As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'  "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.  The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.  Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.  When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.  But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.  "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. Acts 13:23-33

Paul continued to preach concerning Jesus. He quoted from the Psalms and Isaiah showing that Jesus would never suffer decay and eventually be seated at the right hand of His Father, God.

because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.  You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalms 16:10-11

Paul then pointed out to his audience that King David could not have been the One that God was referring to in the Psalm as David surely did die and suffer decay. But, David’s greatest ‘Son’, Jesus, would not.

"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.  But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.  "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that **through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.  Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything** you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.  Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:   
"'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.' " Acts 13:36-41

Paul told these Jewish listeners that Jesus could save them from their sins. This was something that the Law of Moses was never able to do. Obviously, God did indeed do something in their days that was phenomenal. Unfortunately, for so many in those days and our day… they did not believe.

After that service, Paul and Barnabas were asked to return the following Sabbath to preach again about Jesus. The following week, it seemed like the whole city turned out to hear the Word preached. This really bothered the Jews as they were not in any sense ready to share their God with the Gentiles. Certainly there were some who accepted the truth of the Gospel. Most Jews, however, rejected Jesus. Paul and Barnabas had this to say…

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.  For this is what the Lord has commanded us:   
"'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"   
When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Acts 13:46-48

The Word of the Lord spread throughout the region. Many people were becoming Christians. Yet, many of the leading men and women of the city wanted Paul and Barnabas to leave. They were able to muster a coalition of town leaders to expel the two great men from that region. Paul and Barnabas followed the advice of Jesus…

So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.  And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:51-52

As was their custom, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue to preach after their arrival in Iconium. Many Jews and Gentiles believed. Some of the Jews who did not accept the message, stirred up discontent among those in the synagogue against the visiting missionaries. The two preachers performed many miracles to confirm their message. Yet, the synagogue and city was divided…

The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.  There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.  But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news. Acts 14:4-7

God allowed them to escape south to Lystra and then they travelled east to Derbe where they continued to spread the gospel message. In Lystra, Paul noted a man with the faith to be healed and did heal him of his paralysis through the power of the Holy Spirit. This, of course, was noticed by many in the crowd. They had the following response:

"The gods have come down to us in human form!"  Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.  The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.  But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.  In the past, he let all nations go their own way.  Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."  Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. Acts 14:11-18

Due to the miraculous feats that had been performed by Paul and Barnabas, the crowd assumed that they were gods… those types of gods that they had read about since they were children. Immediately, the two Christian preachers set them straight as to who really was behind the healings… the only real God. God was now revealing Himself to the entire world. Jesus was available to all mankind… not just the Jewish people. In previous generations, God dealt primarily with His “chosen people”. Now that was going to change.

Some Jews visited Lystra from Antioch and Iconium and found Paul and Barnabas there. They once again started big trouble for the two men. In fact, Paul was stoned nearly to the point of death and dropped outside the city.

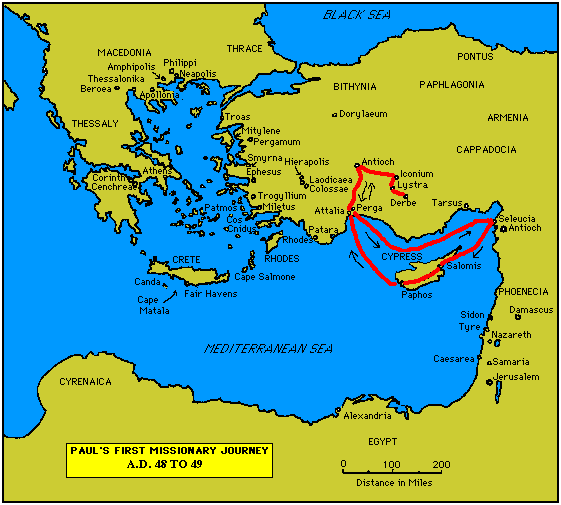
They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.  But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. Acts 14:19-20

Derbe was the last city that they visited on this first mission trip. As usual, their preaching and teaching resulted in many Christian conversions. Finally, they decided that it was time to go home.

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.  Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, **with prayer and fasting**, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.  After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.  From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.  On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.  And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Acts 14:21-28

It is interesting to note while reading the New Testament just how often the disciples not only prayed for the help of God but also added fasting to prayer. The practice of fasting has been abandoned, it would seem, for the great majority in the Christian world in modern times. I am sure that we are missing many blessings because of this fact.

Paul and Barnabas finally arrived back in Antioch having had a great success during their first missionary journey. The Gentiles were coming into the Church now in great numbers. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a long time. This became their base of operations, so to speak. Soon an interesting conflict was about to arise related to an old Jewish ceremony.



During one visit from some fellow saints from Judea, the topic of circumcision was broached. The visitors said that a person had to be circumcised to be saved. Trusting in Jesus was necessary, they felt, but not sufficient for salvation. Of course, this resulted in quite a debate between these visiting Judeans and the Christians in Antioch, in particular, Paul and Barnabas. This heretical idea apparently was prevalent among the Jews in Jerusalem and it was decided that this was such an important issue, that it must be settled once and for all. Therefore…

~**A.D. 48-49: Epistle to the Galatians written from Antioch (or while he was on his second missionary journey)**

This was written by Paul to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ and to discredit the Judaizers and other false teachers. He warned the Galatian congregation not to turn to another gospel.

Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.  The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.  When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.  Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."  The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

Was the blood of Jesus sufficient to save a person from their sins… or not! Maybe the men needed to be circumcised as well? What else must a woman do?

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe (he was referring to Cornelius and his family).  God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.  He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.  Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?  No! We believe **it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved**, just as they are." Acts 15:2-11

Peter here agrees with Paul and Barnabas that it is purely the result of trusting in Jesus that brings to a person the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which always indicates salvation. No other *work* is needed.

After Peter had his say, Paul and Barnabas spoke at some length concerning all of their experiences with the Gentiles. In particular, they pointed out how God had performed many miracles among these people, just as much as with believing Jews. There was no difference to God whether a believer in Christ was Jew or Gentile.

Then James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, summed up the conference. He quoted from Amos 9:11,12 to show that God had prophesied that, at some point in time, Gentiles would receive the blessing of salvation just as was offered to the ‘chosen people’. Well, that time had evidently come.

"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.  Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.  For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." Acts 15:19-21

James agreed with the others that the Gentiles need not submit to circumcision. He did ask that they abstain from sexual immorality, an obviously appropriate request. James also wanted the Gentile followers of Christ to abstain from certain foods – this was probably to appease certain Jews (a compromise of sorts).

When Paul and Barnabas were ready to return to Antioch, the leaders of the Jerusalem Church decided to send Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas along with them. The four of them brought a letter from the elders of the Jerusalem Church. The letter said:

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.  It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:  You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell. Acts 15:23-29

This letter and brothers Judas and Silas were welcomed warmly back in Antioch. The two visited for a short time and then returned to Jerusalem with the full blessings of the local church there in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch and continued their preaching and teaching.

After some time, Paul wanted to go back to see how the churches that they had planted were doing… and maybe have the opportunity to start some more. A problem arose, however, when Barnabas wanted to take Mark once again. Paul was adamant that they not take Mark at that time because of his turning back on their previous trip. Barnabas was just as certain that Mark would be fine now that he had matured and was more ready to handle the difficulties of their mission work. Unfortunately, or providentially, they could not reach an agreement. So, at least for that second mission trip, they went their separate ways.

~**A.D. 50-52 (18 months): Paul’s Second Missionary Journey**

Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.  He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts 15:39-41

Apparently Silas had impressed Paul during their recent time together. Paul had Silas come up from Jerusalem to accompany him on this, his second missionary journey. Barnabas took Mark and left for Cyprus, the island on which they had begun their first missionary journey. Paul and Silas began by ministering to nearby churches, then left for Tarsus, Paul’s hometown.

After spending some time with his old friends and family, Paul and Silas went west to the town of Derbe. This was the last town that Paul had preached to on his first mission trip a few years earlier… and he wanted to see how the church there was getting along. After Derbe, the two preachers continued on…

to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek.  The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.  Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.  As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Acts 16:1-5

In Lystra, Paul found a lifelong friend in the person of a young man named Timothy. Timothy’s mother was a Christian Jewess. In many ways, their relationship was more like father to son. Paul would often speak highly of Timothy in the years to come. He taught this young man many things over the next decade or so. Timothy became a great minister for Christ and a great comfort for Paul. Timothy allowed himself to be circumcised, although he knew that this was not needed to be a true follower of Christ. Paul suggested that his new young friend have this procedure so as not to be a stumbling block for the many Jews in the area as he witnessed there for Jesus. Since Timothy had been raised a Jew, it made it easier have a ministry among the Jews with his racial position made clear… so he was circumcised. Later Paul would not allow the Gentile Titus to be circumcised as this might be perceived as having been necessary for his salvation… which, of course, it was not.

Paul and Silas also delivered the letter that had been composed by James concerning the recommended practices of the new Gentile Christians. This, of course, did not include the rite of circumcision.

It is very interesting to note that the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul in some manner to direct him to the various towns along the way. Paul had planned to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit directed him on a westward course. They traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. The Spirit then continued to direct his ministry…

When ***they*** came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.  So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.  During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."  After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:7-10

So Paul continued westward into Greece.

From Troas ***we*** put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there ***we*** traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And ***we*** stayed there several days. Acts 16:11-12

Paul started many churches along the way. In the large city of Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia, Paul and Silas ministered one Sabbath outside the city gate to a group of women. Luke, the author of the book of Acts had apparently just recently joined the two missionaries as now he speaks using the term “we” when describing the action. The first convert from this area was described next… and she was a woman…

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.  When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. Acts 16:14-15

Although the Bible states that she was from Thyatira, she obviously had a home in that region as well. After accepting Christ into her heart, she was baptized. Then it was a time for celebration and fellowship as she invited her new friends to her home.

The Bible next relates an interesting anecdote that happened while Paul was still in Philippi. There was a slave girl that had a demon spirit that caused her to become involved in fortune telling. Apparently, she was pretty good at this evil craft… to the point where she was earning a decent amount of money for her owners. As it turned out, she kept following Paul and Silas around and intermittently speaking out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."  She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. Acts 16:17-18

Unfortunately, the owners of the girl were not pleased. She no longer was involved in fortune telling and, therefore, they had lost their “meal-ticket”. Of course, they took out their anger on Paul and Silas. They brought them up in front of the magistrates…

"These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."  The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.  After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.  Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. Acts 16:20-24

Of course, this was not the first time that Paul had suffered for Christ. It most certainly would not be the last. Yet, he did it all willingly as he knew that what he was to gain eternally was worth the losses and suffering that he would endure while living on this earth for Christ. Any suffering or loss that we endure for Jesus Christ will be worth it when we get to heaven… if not before we get there.

Paul and Silas were put into prison. That night, they were signing praises to God when an earthquake struck the area. The prison doors opened and the chains were loosed. The jailer was shocked. Certain that the men had escaped, he was about to kill himself when Paul yelled out to the jailer not to harm himself as they were still there in their jail cells.

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.  He then brought them out and asked, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**"  They replied, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."  Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house**.  At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.  The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family. Acts 16:29-34

The next morning, magistrates sent some officers to the jailers to tell them to let the prisoners go. The newly baptized jailer told Paul and Silas that they were free to go. Paul was not going to let it go that easily…

But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." Acts 16:37

As you can see, Paul was not lacking in courage! When the magistrates were told that the two men that they had so callously had beaten and thrown into prison were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They immediately went to the jail and did their best to appease Paul and Silas. They hoped that they had calmed the situation down as they wished the two men good luck for the rest of their journey. Paul was not quite ready to leave the area, so…



**Paul’s Philippian Jail Cell**

After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. Acts 16:40

Paul made sure that he left that city on his own terms… not the city magistrates.

The two missionaries next stop was Thessalonica by way of Amphipolis and Apollonia. As was his custom, Paul went to the local synagogue each Sabbath (for three straight weeks) to preach the gospel message. He used the scriptures to show how Jesus was the Messiah. The bottom line of the sermon was always the same…

"This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.   Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. Acts 17:3-4

While in that city, a man named Jason welcomed Paul and Silas into his home to stay while they witnessed to the city. Unfortunately, as was invariably the case, a group of malcontents arose and went through the city looking for Paul and Silas. When they could not find them one day, they went to Jason’s home, dragged him in front of some city officials and began saying…

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."  When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.  Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. Acts 17:6-9

Knowing that Paul and Silas were in mortal danger, the brothers of the church helped them escape that night and they went down to Berea.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**  Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. Acts 17:11-12

These Bereans have a great lesson to teach to all people today and for all time. Far too many people simply believe what they are told, pure and simple. This is true for virtually anything in life. So many people simply follow, like lemmings, what another person says concerning political matters… economic and social matters as well. I am not saying that we should not listen to those that we respect when these people teach us certain things. I am saying that we should still study on the subject so that we can be sure that what we are hearing is actually true! In that day, a terrible Gnostic religion was just starting up at about that time. This religion was to gain many converts. Yet, it was false! People did not spend the needed time to read and study to see who and what was correct… was it the apostles or the false teachers? What did the scriptures say? What did actually happen to Jesus? What did Jesus do and say? The people of that time had plenty of eye witnesses to the person and work of Jesus. Most chose not to pursue the truth with their own effort.

We need to study and search the scriptures when we hear things taught to us concerning the incredibly important topics that are covered in the Bible. No one wants to be wrong on issues that relate to eternal life! Oddly enough, a tremendous number of people never pursue life’s most important questions: Is there a God? If so, who is He? What is the meaning of life? The answers exist. They can be found in the Holy Bible and by understanding as much as we can about the universe in which we live.

So, please study and see if what you read and/or hear from me is correct. Read the Bible. Study the Word of God. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Remember, God promises to lead you to the truth. But, He does ask that you do study and spend the time necessary to find this truth. There is literally nothing more important than God and His message. Make time for Him and the Bible. And do not just believe everything you hear without checking it out for yourselves.

When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching the Gospel in Berea, they went there to cause trouble as usual. The Christian brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, while Silas and Timothy stayed back in Berea. Paul was escorted to Athens; then his escorts returned to Berea with instructions to send Silas and Timothy there as soon as possible. Athens was quite a distance from Berea, so it would take a while before the three travelling companions would be back together again.

Paul, while he awaited his friends, spent his time in the local synagogue and out in the marketplace. He was quite distressed to see how many of the residents worshipped idols. Paul went on preaching the good news of Jesus. His words confused some of the Stoics and Epicureans philosophers in the city.

Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.  Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?  You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean."  (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Acts 17:18-21

Paul had the perfect opportunity for a sermon. He was ready with a good one, as usual!

 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus (Mars Hill) and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.  For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.  "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.  From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.  God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.  'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'  "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill.  In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.  For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:22-31

Paul used the Athenian Greeks belief in mythological gods to teach them about the one true God… Paul referred to Him as their *Unknown God*. He went on to show how this Unknown God could not be in the form of any idol… such as they were generally worshipping. Although in times past, God had made allowances for ignorance of His nature, this was no longer going to be the case. Since God had just sent His Son, Jesus the Christ (Messiah), God expected people to recognize Jesus for who He is… God the Son. Jesus had done everything that was necessary while on earth to prove to all that He was God. Then, after His crucifixion, He arose from the dead. It was now incumbent on the world to believe on Him to be saved. Paul gave them the message… it was up to them to believe his report. As is always the case, some did, and some did not.

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."  At that, Paul left the Council.  A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. Acts 17:32-34



**Altar to the “Unknown God”**

[](http://www.holylandphotos.org/browse.asp?s=1,4,11,35,123&img=GSATAG02)

**Mars Hill – Areopagus**

**A.D. 51-52 – Latter Half of Paul’s Second Missionary Journey**

* **1st Thessalonians – A.D. 51 from Corinth**
* **2nd Thessalonians – A.D. 51-52 from Corinth**
* **Possibly Galatians written during this time (or earlier as noted above) A.D.49 or 52**

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.  There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.  Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Acts 18:1-4

Paul left Athens and went southwest about 50 miles to visit Corinth. Corinth had been made the capital of Achaia (Greece) by the Romans. It had a population of approximately 650,000. It was located on a narrow strip of land near two busy seaports.

The city was replete with temples. The most infamous was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The Temple to Apollo used young men in sexual acts as part of the worship activities of men and women. The city was known for its immorality.

Upon arrival, Paul met two people who would prove to be great Christians and great friends… Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. They had recently arrived themselves as they had been expelled from Rome by Claudius. Besides their common faith, Paul also shared the occupation of tentmaker in common with this married couple. He went to them and they gladly gave Paul a place to stay and even work so he could make some money. Every Sabbath, as always, Paul preached his gospel message in the synagogue.

Timothy and Silas finally met up with Paul in Corinth (not Athens). After they arrived, Paul spent his time preaching almost exclusively. He was winning converts, as always, but also making enemies among the dogmatic Jews. When these Jews became abusive, Paul finally said to them…"Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Acts 18:6

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.  Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.  One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.  For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."  So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. Acts 18:7-11

God assured Paul that he would be safe from physical harm while in Corinth. Paul stayed there for 1 ½ years preaching, teaching and writing. He wrote two letters to the church at Thessalonica (1 and 2 Thessalonians) while in Corinth during that time.

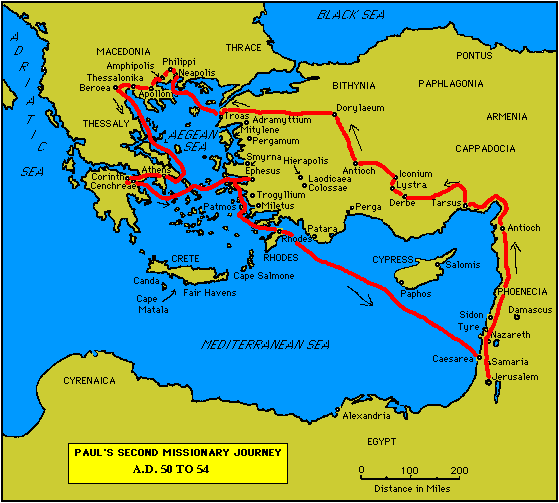
While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court.  "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."  Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.  But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law--settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things."  So he had them ejected from the court. Acts 18:12-16

Gallio came to power as proconsul of Achaia (Greece) in A.D. 51-52. He decided not to become involved in what he perceived as internal squabbling of the Jewish church… Christianity in these early years was at times viewed by the Romans as a sect of the Jewish religion. By not ruling against Christianity at that time, Gallio created a legal precedent that stood for the next ten years - the Christian religion was looked at as one of the legal religions of the Roman Empire.

Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever. Acts 18:17

The crowd took their anger out on Sosthenes. He was the new ruler of the synagogue since Crispus had converted to Christianity. Gallio remained unmoved. Later, it appears that even Sosthenes became a Christian.

Paul decided to leave Corinth after 1 ½ years. He took with him Priscilla and Aquila. Upon landing in Ephesus, Paul went to the synagogue and had discussions with the Jews concerning the gospel message. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there to help in spreading the word as he was not ready to stay there at that time. The people in the synagogue wanted him to spend more time, as they were intrigued by his message. He answered that he certainly would be back if it was God’s will. He then set sail on the 500 mile trip to Caesarea. After landing there, he went straight over to Jerusalem to report on his trip. After a little while there, he was off to his base of operations in Antioch.



**~A.D. 53-57: Paul’s Third Missionary Journey**

Paul spent much of the next year in Antioch. Then, he felt called by the Holy Spirit to embark on his third missionary trip to the West. He retraced his steps of his second trip and visited the churches in the various cities of Galatia and Phrygia. Some of his epistles suggest that he may have begun this journey when he did in an effort to mitigate the damage that was being done to the true gospel by certain Gnostic opponents that had arisen.

While Paul was strengthening his brothers in that region, there was a Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria, who came to Ephesus. He was quite an intelligent and learned man, well versed in the scriptures. Apollos was aware of Jesus, but was not aware of the gospel. He knew of the baptism of John, but not the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This wonderful gift from God would come to believers after trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior. His lack of knowledge was soon rectified as Aquila and Priscilla invited him into their home and taught him all about Jesus. Later, he was to go on to Achaia (Greece) where he proved himself to be a great preacher and defender of the faith.

At about the time Apollos was in Corinth, Paul had arrived in Ephesus as he just continued across the land westward from Iconium. Remember that Paul had only briefly stopped there a couple of years earlier near the end of his second mission trip. He had told these Jews in the synagogue that he would return if it was God’s will. Now, here he was. Paul was curious as to whether the new converts had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Their answer was…

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."  So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.  Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."  On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.  When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. Acts 19:2-7

Ephesus was a city ranking with Antioch and Alexandria as a great port city in the mid first century A.D. There were approximately 250,000 people there at its high point in the first century. They had a popular temple to the Greek goddess, Artemis (Diana was her Roman name). Paul stayed in Ephesus for approximately three years. While there, he would write:

* **1st Corinthians to the church at Corinth from Ephesus (A.D. 55)**
* **2nd Corinthians to the church at Corinth (A.D. 55-56) from Ephesus or Macedonia**
* **The book of Romans from Corinth (late winter A.D. 56/57)**

Paul asked these Ephesians if they had received the Holy Spirit, as he knew that many of them had not had the opportunity to hear the true gospel. He also knew that if they had not been filled with the Spirit, they were not Christians! In fact, the group he had asked had only been aware of John’s message of repentance but not the gospel… that is, the belief in Jesus Christ and the total and complete efficacy of His sacrificial death on the cross for their sins. On hearing this message and accepting it as truth, they then were baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Paul continued to preach there for about three months. Then, as was becoming typical, a group of malcontents stirred up trouble and Paul decided to leave that synagogue for a place more conducive to preach and teach.

He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.  This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.  God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Acts 19:9-12

Paul was well known for his ability, through Jesus, to drive out demon spirits from those afflicted. Many Ephesians engaged in the practice of exorcism for profit. They typically would rattle off a list of names of gods hoping to land on one that might have some power to drive out the evil spirit. As we see today, with enough theatrics, an unsuccessful exorcism can come across, temporarily, as having succeeded. Since Paul had such obvious real success with his exorcisms, some of the charlatans began using his name and that of Jesus in an attempt to gain some real power. The problem was that these fakes did not know Jesus themselves. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were calling on the name of Jesus, blithely. A real dangerous situation resulted…

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. Acts 19:16

This encounter became known far and wide. The name of Jesus was not used lightly any longer. The knowledge of the power of Jesus was certainly becoming known.

A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.  In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. Acts 19:19-20

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."  He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. Acts 19:21-22

Paul was ready to head on to Jerusalem, but first he thought that he would pay a visit to Macedonia and Achaia… places like Philippi, Athens, Corinth and Thessalonica. While he stayed behind in Ephesus for a short while, a problem was just about to erupt.

A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines for the merchants in the area, began to complain about how much business Paul was costing everyone involved in the selling of these products. It had become big business to buy and sell these kinds of trinkets related to the goddess Artemis. Paul, Demetrius said, was casting aspersions on their temple worship and on the goddess herself. When the merchants recognized this fact, they became irate. Not only that, but in short order, many of the people of the city became upset that their goddess was being maligned. Shouts of “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” rang out through the city. The people became belligerent and seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. Paul wanted desperately to come out and confront the crowd but his disciples would not let him. They said it was far too dangerous. Even some of the town officials, who liked Paul, sent him word to stay away until the crowd dispersed.

Some of the Jews tried to reason with the crowd by sending forward a spokesman named Alexander. Apparently, he was going to try to explain that this man named Paul was not speaking for the rest of the Jews in the city. He was quickly shouted down as the mob had become very unruly by this time.

Finally, a city clerk stepped forward and was able to quiet the commotion as he spoke to their beliefs…

The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?  Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash.  You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.  If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges.  If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.  As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it."  After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:35-41

The image that fell probably refers to a meteorite which was associated with the worship to Artemis. Apparently, a meteorite that had fallen nearby, at some time in the past, was housed in the temple and highly venerated by the people. This *rock* from heaven gave the temple and goddess more importance than they otherwise may have garnered.

After the uproar had quieted down, Paul sent for his friends to say good-by as he set out for Macedonia. He travelled all throughout the area speaking words of encouragement to the people. He eventually ended up in Corinth where he spent three months. He originally planned to sail from the port there, but he heard about a plot against him if he should leave from that port. Therefore, he went back by land basically the way he came. He was accompanied by several friends, such as Luke, Timothy, Gaius (from Derbe) and a few others. The men, with the exception of Luke, went on ahead and waited for Paul and Luke at Troas. Paul and Luke decided to sail from Philippi and reunited with the others in Troas five days later. These travels occurred during the Passover season.



**Corinth**



**Greek Goddess Artemis**

On the next Sunday, Paul and his brothers came together to ‘break bread’. Paul was going to leave the next morning, so he talked well into the night. Around midnight, with the lanterns all lit, Paul was still talking. Some of the men were having a bit of trouble staying awake. Unfortunately, a young man named Eutychus fell into a deep sleep. As he was seated in a window sill, he fell three stories to the ground! Luke, a physician, noted that he was dead! But then Paul went to him…

Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!"  Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.  The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. Acts 20:10-12

Paul next travelled by foot to Assos where he boarded a ship to Mitylene. Luke was with him on that portion of his travels. The ship continued on to Kios, Samos and to Miletus. Paul sailed by Ephesus as he was trying hard to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost.

Although Paul did not go to his friends in Ephesus, he did send for the elders of the church to come see him at Miletus. He wanted to see them and leave them with some parting comments. He figured that he would not be seeing most of them again. He reminded them of how he lived when with them…

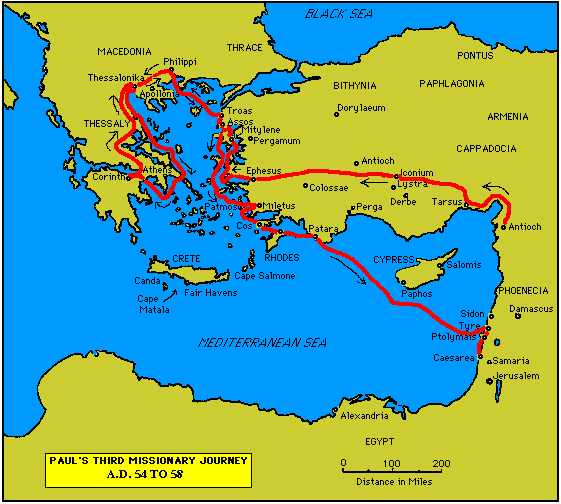
I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.  You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.  I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.  "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.  I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.  However, **I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-**-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.  "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.  For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.  Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.  I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.  Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.  So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.  "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.  I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.  You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.  In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:19-35

Paul spoke to the elders from the church at Ephesus and told them that he felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He understood that hardship and even prison, or worse, may be waiting for him when he got there. Nevertheless, he had to go. He beseeched them to continue to preach the one, true gospel. He warned them that after he left, unscrupulous men would come into their city and attempt to lead people into another gospel.

That situation continues even in our current day. Unfortunately, so many people are being hoodwinked into buying into false religions that have some of the trappings of Christianity… in order to draw people in… but are certainly not the message of the real gospel. That is why it is so very important for every person to search the scriptures, as the Bereans did, and determine the actual words of the Bible! We need to know the Bible, not just what people tell us about the Bible. And one more important point concerning this… many of these false teachers and preachers take one or two verses out of context and build an entire ministry out of these couple of verses. Wrong! The entire message of the Bible has to be taken into consideration when learning how we should live and follow Christ.

After these words, Paul and the elders knelt and prayed. They were in tears as they all embraced him. What bothered them most was his comment that he probably would not be seeing them again. After this sad farewell, they accompanied Paul to his ship.

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to **Cos**. The next day we went to **Rhodes** and from there to **Patara**.  We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail.  After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at **Tyre**, where our ship was to unload its cargo.  Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem (they were worried about his safety).  But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. Saying good-by to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.  We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at **Ptolemais**, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day.  Leaving the next day, we reached **Caesarea** and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.  He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.  After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named *Agabus* came down from Judea.  Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"  When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.  Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."  When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."  After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.  Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. Acts 21:1-16



**~A.D. 57: Paul is arrested in Jerusalem**

Paul and Luke had now made it to Jerusalem. There was a lot of reason to fear for the safety of Paul. Several of the brothers along the way had been made aware of the likelihood for trouble when Paul arrived in Jerusalem. Paul was certainly aware of the danger. On the other hand, Paul was following what he perceived to be the leading of the Holy Spirit. He knew that as long as he did this, God would honor his actions. Even if he ended up in prison… or dead, if God was behind his action, he would be blessed because of his faithfulness!

This is still true today. Sometimes we cannot be absolutely sure of God’s will in every situation. I am fairly certain, if we do our best to ascertain what God’s will is (by prayer, studying the Bible and conversing with fellow Christians) on any particular topic, and then proceed using our best judgment of what His will most likely is, He will honor and bless our attempts to follow Him. God may make a mid-course correction (ex. maybe we misinterpreted certain things in our decision-making process), but He will be pleased with our attempts to follow His will.

On the morning after his arrival, Paul met with James and the church elders to tell them of his recent missionary journey. The men were very pleased and praised God for His blessings that His Church was growing throughout the world… both among the Jew and Gentile. But they had a problem that they then wanted to discuss…

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.  They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. Acts 21:20-21

There are four men with us who have made a vow.  Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.  As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." Acts 21:23-25

James and the elders were telling Paul that the thousands of Christian Jews in Jerusalem still did their best to follow the Law and they still practiced the rite of circumcision. These Jerusalem Jews had been told that Paul was putting down these practices, including living by the Law. That was not true, it was only that Paul was pointing out the very important fact that living within the Law did not save anyone… only Christ and His shed blood would do that. Paul had no problem with Jews continuing with their old traditions, for example, celebrating the Feasts and circumcision, as these were poignant reminders of what God had done for them in Old Testament times. However, he did insist on the fact that all Christians realize **that these ceremonial rites and festivals did not add one iota to one’s salvation.** James and the elders also pointed out that they had no issue at all with the Gentiles’ current practices… they did not need to adopt any of the Jewish customs except the few that they had written to them about in the past… the letter that Paul had delivered years ago.

The solution to this sticky problem was for Paul, if he were willing, to undergo a ritual purification rite to show the Jews that he still was living in obedience to the Law. Paul went along with this “show” because he did not want this issue to be a stumbling block to the spread of the gospel to the Jews. He went with four other men to the Temple to engage in a 7-day rite of purification. He even paid the offering for this purification rite for these other men. Paul wrote in a couple of his epistles on this type of situation…

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.  To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.  To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.  I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Cor 9:20-23

Certainly, there is a lesson here for all Christians. If we sometimes need to “bend” a little in order to win people to Christ, as long as it does not pervert the message of Jesus, we should “bend”. That is what Paul is saying here in his letter to the Corinthians.

Unfortunately, Paul’s attempts to appease the Jews there in Jerusalem failed. As Paul was nearing the end of the purification rite, he was noticed by some Jews from Asia-Minor (Turkey) while in the Temple.

They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place."  (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.) Acts 21:27-29

Amazingly, these few foreign Jews were successful in causing a mob riot against Paul! Within minutes, Paul had been dragged out of the Temple and was in the process of being beaten! Fortunately, the Roman soldiers became aware of the situation… the news reached them that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. They came quickly, and when the rioters saw the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The commander of the troops asked what Paul had done. He got answers from several different directions, all very confusing because of the uproar. Therefore, he ordered that Paul be arrested until things could be sorted out. While Paul was being brought to the jail, he asked the commander if he could say something…

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied.  "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"  Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."  Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. Acts 21:37-40

In A.D. 54, an Egyptian had indeed led a revolt of Jews from Jerusalem. This was now A.D. 57 and the commander, a man named Lysias, thought that Paul may have been this man returning to begin his insurrection once again. Three years earlier, that Egyptian had rounded up a large group of fanatical followers and brought them to the Mount of Olives. He said that he would speak the word and the walls of Jerusalem would fall and that would mark the beginning of the fall of Rome! Governor Felix had other ideas. He arranged for troops to put a prompt and bloody stop to the revolt. Hundreds of Jewish citizens were killed and the Egyptian leader escaped into the desert, apparently with many other Jews running behind him!

Now, Commander Claudius Lysias was going to give Paul a nice platform to communicate with the people. Paul was ready…

When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."  When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.  I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. Acts 22:1-5

Paul continued on in his speech to thoroughly explain his meeting with Christ on the road to Damascus, his becoming blind, how he met Ananias after his arrival in Damascus, the restoration of his sight, and his subsequent conversion to Christianity. He went on with…

"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'  "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you.  And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'  "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" Acts 22:17-21

Paul had hoped that this testimony would gain him acceptance by the unruly crowd. Unfortunately, it did not sway many in the crowd at all. Instead, there response was…

They raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"  As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.  As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"  When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."  The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered.  Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them. Acts 22:22-30

Commander Lysias kept finding out more information about his prisoner, Paul, that was disconcerting. When he found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, he really became concerned. Being a Roman citizen was a really big deal in that day. One could not treat citizens of Rome without due respect and due process of law. Before going any further, it was time to get to the bottom of this entire issue in some detail. So, he called for the chief priests and the Sanhedrin to come to him that next day so he could find out exactly just what crime they were accusing Paul of committing.

The meeting took place as scheduled:

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.  Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"  Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"  Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.' " Acts 23:1-5

Ananias became high priest in A.D. 48 and reigned in that position until A.D. 58-59. He was described by Josephus as profane and hot-tempered. Those traits came out in this encounter with Paul. It was certainly inappropriate for Ananias to order Paul struck on the mouth… Paul had not even stood trial yet. The meeting continued…

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."  When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.  (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)  There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"  The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.  The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Acts 23:6-11

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were present in the room. The Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection… the Sadducees did not. They only accepted the Torah as scripture and they did not find evidence for a resurrection in these first five books of the Old Testament. During his life here on earth, Jesus had shown some of the Sadducees where in the Torah God had pointed out that there was, indeed, a heaven. However, most Sadducees still did not believe in a bodily resurrection into heaven.

Paul used his native intellect and the Holy Spirit’s guidance at that moment to broach a topic that ended up in an argument between the two sects… the Pharisees and the Sadducees. More importantly, this argument resulted in the Pharisees backing Paul on the issue. Finally, Paul was taken to a safe haven – the barracks - by the troops. He had temporarily escaped additional punishment.

The very next night, Paul learned why the Holy Spirit had led him to come to Jerusalem. Jesus spoke to him and told him that he would be going to Rome to testify about Him (i.e. Jesus) as Paul had just done there in Jerusalem.

The following morning, forty Jews formed a pact that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They hatched a plan whereby the elders, chief priest and Sanhedrin would ask the commander to allow them to question Paul once again to gather some additional information about his case. When Paul was brought to them, these other men would see to it that he was ambushed and killed! Fortunately, God’s providential care resulted in Paul’s nephew hearing about this ambush. He went directly to the commander and told him of the plot. The commander took the information under advisement and told the young man to keep quiet about this. The commander was not about to allow this to happen. Therefore…

He called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."  He wrote a letter as follows:

Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency,

Governor Felix:

Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen.  I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin.  I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.  When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris.  The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.  The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace. Acts 23:23-35

**~A.D. 57-59 Paul’s Caesarean Imprisonment**

So, at least Paul had escaped the ambush that had been planned for him back in Jerusalem. Now he awaited his trial in Caesarea in Herod’s palace. As a Roman citizen, Paul would be tried in a Roman court. Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for this region. Now, they would wait for his accusers to make their way to that coastal city.

Five days after arriving in Caesarea, Paul’s trial was ready to begin. Ananias, the high priest from Jerusalem, along with certain select elders and the prosecuting attorney, Tertullus, had arrived in the city and were ready to present their case in front of the Roman governor, Felix. They began by commending Felix for his service and asked politely that he hear their report concerning the “troublemaker” Paul. They stated…

"We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.  By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."  The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true. Acts 24:5-9

Their accusation of his attempt to desecrate the Temple was, of course, absurd. Yet, it was a charge that could result in the death penalty if Paul was found guilty. There were plenty of Jews present to chime in and lie to support the attorney’s assertion. Paul then was given the opportunity to respond and he did very effectively…

When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense.  You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.  My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city.  And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.  So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.  "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.  I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.  But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me.  Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin-- unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'" Acts 24:10-21

At this point, Felix postponed the case until Lysias arrived in the city…

"When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." Acts 24:22

Felix was reasonable and allowed Paul some freedom of movement while he waited and allowed some of his friends the opportunity to see to a few of his needs. Interestingly, a few days later, he sent for Paul and asked him to share with him concerning the Lord Jesus. He was accompanied by his Jewish wife, Drusilla. Paul, of course, spoke of the gospel message in detail. He also spoke of the judgment to come…

Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."  At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. Acts 24:25-26

Incredibly, Felix kept Paul in prison for the next two years! During that time, he often talked with Paul about spiritual things. Apparently, however, he never converted to Christianity.

Felix was called back to Rome in A.D. 59 and was succeeded by Porcius Festus in Caesarea. Festus was a more reasonable man than Felix. Just three days after he was appointed governor, Festus went to Jerusalem. He met with the chief priest and elders and asked concerning Paul. The Jewish leaders requested that he allow Paul to return to Jerusalem to face trial in front of them once again. Actually, there was a plan to ambush Paul on route. Festus said no to this idea. Instead, he told them to come to Caesarea once again and present their case against Paul. He would decide Paul’s fate at that time.

After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea (actually, Caesarea is northwest of Jerusalem), and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him.  When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.  Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."  Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"  Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well.  If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"  After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" Acts 25:6-12

So Paul was now going to go to Rome. He had wanted to go there for many years. His prayers had been answered, although not in the manner that he had originally desired. However, this is what God had in store for his great evangelist, Paul. Paul would not get down about this situation. In fact, he would continue to win many souls to Jesus.

A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. Acts 25:13-14

Festus reviewed his experiences with Paul over the last several days. He concluded his discourse with Agrippa by telling him he was holding Paul until he could send him west to see Caesar. Agrippa was intrigued and said…

"I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him." Acts 25:22

The next day, Paul was brought in to see Agrippa who was there with Bernice and many high ranking officials. Festus began…

Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.  I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome.  But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him." Acts 25:24-27

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Acts 26:1

Agrippa had given Paul the opportunity to defend himself of the groundless claims that had resulted in Paul now standing before the King and in danger of conviction… and possibly the punishment of death. Paul stated that he was thankful for the opportunity to present his case to him as he knew that the King was familiar with the Jewish customs and recent controversies. Paul said that the Jews all knew his history very well. He lived as a young man in Tarsus and later trained and lived in Jerusalem. He had lived and worked as a Pharisee for years and now was on trial for simply believing the scriptures as these scriptures had promised the twelve tribes of Israel the hope of eternal life in heaven.

And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.  Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? Acts 26:6-8

Next Paul told of his time as chief persecutor of the Christians. He told of the many Christians that he had put in prison and cast his vote against them that resulted in their death.

He then spoke of his Damascus road experience with Jesus in some detail. He followed this with…

"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.  First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.  That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.  But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen-- that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." Acts 26:19-23

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."  "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable.  The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.  King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."  Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"  Paul replied, "Short time or long--I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."  The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them.  They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."  Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Acts 26:24-32

Paul was very adamant in his testimony. **Even while on trial, he was preaching the gospel to his judge!**  Although Festus was getting upset, Agrippa could see the logic of Paul’s argument. Agrippa was not ready to become a Christian, but he certainly recognized that Paul was not guilty of any crime. In fact, he said that the case could have been dismissed if the appeal to Caesar had not already been made. But, the wheels had already been set in motion, and Paul would soon be sailing for Rome.

~**A.D. 59-60 Voyage to Rome and Shipwreck:**

Not long after this meeting with Agrippa, Paul and a few other prisoners set sail for Rome. Interestingly, Luke was able to accompany him. A centurion named Julius was in charge. They left from the coastal port of Adramyttium and made the very long voyage to Rome. The second day, Julius allowed Paul to visit some friends in Sidon and gather a few belongings for his trip and stay in Rome. They soon set sail again, passed to the north of Cyprus and stopped again in Myra in Lyra. Julius transferred the prisoners and Luke to another ship sailing to Italy. Travel went slowly due to a lack of wind for many days. They decided to take a southerly course as winter was fast approaching and sailed to the southern side of Crete where they put in near the town Lasea… at a place called Fair Havens.

Paul, having experienced ship wrecks on more than one occasion in the past, was very wary of continuing on and voiced his opinion. He said, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." (Acts 27:10) The pilot and owner of the ship had other ideas and convinced the centurion that they could go on. Since the harbor at Fair Havens was not very suitable for wintering the ship, they pressed on hoping to make it to Phoenix and winter there. This was on the southwestern tip of Crete.

They waited until a soft south wind began to blow, then headed west along the southern coast of Crete. Unfortunately, a hurricane force wind, called a “northeaster” (similar to those kind of storms with the same name in New England), came up suddenly. The captain did his best as he navigated the ship to a small island called Cauda. There they secured a lifeboat and passed ropes under the ship to secure the timbers as securely as possible.

Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.  We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.  On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.  When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. Acts 27:13-20

The men were hungry, tired and afraid. Paul stood and issued some words of encouragement…

I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.  Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'  So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.  Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island." Acts 27:22-26

Two weeks into this portion of the trip, the winds were still driving the ship across the Adriatic Sea. One night at about midnight, after taking two soundings, several of the sailors feared that they were about to crash against the rocks. Pretending to be using the lifeboat to help them with the anchors, they planned to jump into the lifeboat and abandon the ship. Paul knew this and told the centurion and the soldiers that the men had to stay on the ship or everyone would be lost. Quickly, the lifeboat was cut free and that halted the attempted mutiny. Once again, Paul tried to give some words of encouragement…

Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything.  Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.  They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.  Altogether there were 276 of us on board.  When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. Acts 27:27-38

The very next morning, they saw a beach and headed toward it. First, they cut the anchors and untied the ropes that help the rudders. They headed toward the beach, struck a sandbar and ran aground. The ship began to break up but everyone was safe.

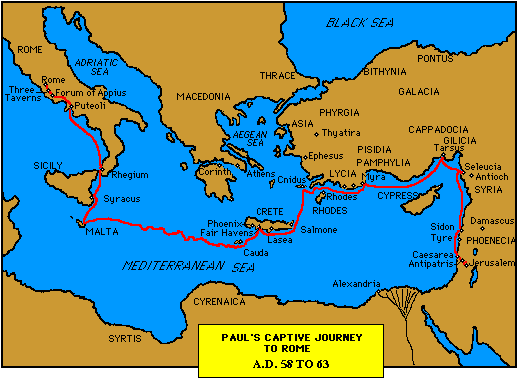
The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners as they had no way of keeping them under control in their present situation… and they did not want to risk any escape. Paul, fortunately, had an ally in the centurion…

But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.  The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety. Acts 27:43-44

Once the men were safely on shore, they discovered that they had landed on Malta. They were greeted by very hospitable folks who built a nice fire and welcomed them all. Paul was lending a hand by collecting some brush and twigs to get the fire going when a viper attached itself to his hand. The people were shocked to see this, but figured that Paul was probably a murderer and that “divine justice” was about to result in his death. Intriguingly, nothing happened to Paul as the minutes and hours passed! Then those observing this miracle, changed their opinion of Paul and called him a god.

Nearby the shipwreck, there was an estate that belonged to the chief official of Malta, Publius. He was a fine chap and welcomed the crew to his home and entertained them all for three days. Unfortunately, his father came down with a serious case of fever and dysentery. Paul prayed over him and he quickly was healed! When this news spread, many sick people came to see Paul and he healed them all. This kindness (and power from God) was certainly not forgotten when the crew was ready to leave the island. The people of Malta honored the shipmates in many ways and furnished them with plenty

Three months after their arrival via the shipwreck, another ship was ready to head out for Rome. The winter weather had now passed. They were able to gain passage on an Alexandrian ship that had wintered in the island. After stops in Syracuse and Rhegium, a nice southerly wind helped them sail on to Puteoli. There they found some Christian brothers who invited the whole crew to spend some time with them… a very pleasant week, in fact. Their next stop was the great city of Rome. Knowing that they were coming, many Christian brothers went to meet Paul and Luke as they came down the Appian Way. His friends met up with him at Three Taverns, an inn along this famous route, about thirty miles south of Rome. When Paul saw these men coming to greet him, he gave thanks to God and he was very encouraged.



**~A.D. 60-62: Paul spends time in “prison” in Rome**

When Paul got to Rome, the authorities allowed him to live by himself, in a rented house, with only a soldier to guard him. It was a very loose arrangement. Just three days later, when Paul had gotten situated, he called together the leaders of the Jews. He explained why he was there and why he was under this “house arrest”.

When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death.  But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar--not that I had any charge to bring against my own people.  For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

The Jews that had come to this meeting said that they had not heard anything of his situation…

They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.  But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect (i.e. Christianity)."  They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.  Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.  (of course, this is pretty much always the way the gospel is received… some folks accept Jesus, other do not). They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement (to those who did not believe): "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:   
"'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."  For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'   
"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"  For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.  Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 28:7-31

During Paul’s house arrest in Rome, he wrote several more epistles to the following churches:

* **Ephesians (A.D. 60-61)**
* **Colossians (A.D. 60-61)**
* **Philemon (A.D. 60-61)**
* **Philippians (A.D. 61-62)**

After Paul was released from his Roman incarceration he wrote three additional letters. The first two were written while he was on what some refer to as his 4th missionary journey. There is not enough information to be absolutely sure when he visited the various cities that he travelled to during this time. However, by piecing together information gathered from various epistles, one reasonable timeline of that journey can be determined. Keep in mind that although the cities mentioned below are known to have been visited by Paul during this time, the exact sequence is only inferred from an analysis of certain epistles – and the order may be incorrect.

Paul was finally released after serving his house arrest in Rome in A.D. 62-63. Some believe that he finally had the opportunity to visit and evangelize Spain at this time. No one knows for sure. Clement of Rome noted in his writings that Paul had gone to the extreme west during his missionary journeys. Many believe that Clement was alluding to Spain with this remark. In any event, either after a short trip to Spain or directly after his release from his Roman house arrest, Paul travelled east, probably to Crete in approximately A.D. 63. While there, he worked with Titus to build up the fledgling church located on that island. He left Titus there to continue that work while he moved on. (The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you) Titus 1:5

Paul then headed north toward Asia-Minor. His first stop was likely Miletus. (I left Trophimus sick in Miletus) 2 Tim 4:20

After leaving Miletus, Paul headed inland to visit the church at Colossae. He had written ahead from Rome to tell them of his intention to visit after being released. (And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers). Philem 1:22

The next stop was probably Ephesus (although some scholars believe that he went directly on to Troas and bypassed Ephesus at this time). If he did travel to Ephesus at this time, this would be the time when he left Timothy there to minister to that city’s church. (As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies). 1 Tim 1:3-4

In any event, he did go north to Troas at some point in approximately A.D. 63-64. After spending some time there, he travelled west to Macedonia. He had the opportunity to visit his friends in Philippi. (And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.) Phil 2:24 Paul had written the fellowship of believers in Philippi while on house arrest announcing his intention to visit them as soon as he could. He also wrote in his first letter to Timothy during this time period, that he was in Macedonia. This is where Philippi is located.

Most believe Paul next headed down to Corinth where he spent some time before heading to Nicopolis. Some think he went straight to Nicopolis after Philippi. The epistle to Titus was therefore written from either Corinth or Nicopolis in approximately A.D. 63-64. Most commentators believe that Nicopolis was the city known as Epirus (in northwestern Greece). This city was west of Philippi and north of Corinth. (As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there). Titus 3:12 The fact that Paul says the he decided to winter “*there”* is why most believe he wasn’t there at the time of his writing of Titus, but rather in Corinth. Paul wanted Titus to leave Crete as soon as he made sure that everything was in good order. Either Artemas or Tychicus would take over for him as soon as Paul decided which one would go to Crete.

Paul was now nearing the end of his time as a free man. On 18 July, A.D. 64, more than half of the city of Rome burned down over a period of seven days. Although there is not a total consensus, many historians believe that Rome’s terrible leader, Nero, was responsible for this tragedy. In any event, many in that great city blamed him. In an effort to deflect the blame from himself, Nero accused the Christians in the city of having set the fires. They had become a scapegoat in the years leading up to the burning of the city. In the early years of Christianity, the Roman hierarchy looked upon Christianity as a sect of Judaism. This allowed the Christian church the opportunity to grow in its early years without Roman restraint as Rome did not persecute the Jews at that time for their religion… at least not to a significant degree. By A.D. 60, however, it was becoming apparent to Rome that the Christians had a totally different religion and a particularly strong devotion to their religion… and its founder, Jesus Christ. They were involved in what many of the elite considered odd activities plus they refused to honor Caesar as God. After the fire in Rome, a great persecution began against the Christians. They were captured, imprisoned and often killed. Many times they were literally thrown to wild animals… such as lions, dogs, etc. Much of this was done for its entertainment value!

Paul was nearing the end of his freedom of movement by this time. Sometime soon after his letter to Titus, probably in only a matter of months, he was arrested. He may even have been taken prisoner while in Nicopolis or he may have been arrested a couple months later after he left that city and was in Troas. Many theologians think he was arrested while in Troas. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he asked Timothy to bring him some of the possessions that he (i.e. Paul) had left behind in Troas. In any case, Paul was indeed captured and taken to an underground prison in Rome where he was kept in chains. No longer was he given the freedom of movement of his previous “house arrest”. This is where he was when he wrote his second letter to his “*son*”, Timothy. Soon after that letter was written, tradition has it that Paul was beheaded for his faith and work for his Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the following two letters between his two Roman arrests:

* **1st Timothy (A.D. 63-64)**
* **Titus (A.D. 63-64)**

After his second arrest, as already noted, Paul wrote his final letter to his great friend Timothy:

* **2nd Timothy (~A.D. 66-67)**

**Note:**  In addition to the maps and charts of Paul’s journeys shown in the pages above and

below, there are several additional maps detailing these mission trips at the end of this

section of this treatise.





Tradition says the Peter spent the latter portion of his life in Rome. At some point after the fire in July, A.D. 64, Peter, along with thousands of other Christians, was arrested and placed in prison. Sometime between A.D. 64 and A.D. 68, probably closer to A.D. 68, Peter was martyred for his faith in Jesus. The early Christian historian, Eusebius, wrote that Origen (an early Christian church father) said, “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.”

Peter wrote his epistles while in Rome during these years:

* **1 Peter (A.D. 64)**
* **2 Peter (A.D. 67)**

James, another writer of an epistle, was the half-brother of Jesus. He had an incredible encounter with Jesus after Christ had arisen. Although a non-believer prior to Christ’s death, James became a strong Christian after this meeting with Jesus. In fact, James the Just (he was known by this moniker by the early Christians to differentiate him from the many men named James in those days). He was on a level comparable to the original twelve apostles when it came to decisions and running the early church. As a matter of fact, for many years he was the acknowledged leader of the church at Jerusalem. He probably wrote the earliest epistle of the New Testament.

* **The Epistle of James (A.D. 44-48)**

These were the years that followed the Herodian persecution that resulted in the killing of James (son of Zebedee) and almost resulted in the martyr’s death of Peter… except that God freed him miraculously. This was a time that many Christians left Jerusalem for safer territories. Although there is a difference of opinion on how exactly he came to be executed, James was martyred in Jerusalem probably in ~A.D. 62. The Jewish historian, Josephus, stated that the high priest of the Jews at that time, Ananus, took advantage of a temporary lack of Roman control (they were between procurators), by gathering a group of judges to quickly convict James of “breaking the law”. Somehow, they used this trumped-up conviction to stone James to death! Another version of his death is as follows:

*According to tradition, James was thrown down from the temple by the scribes and Pharisees; he was then stoned, and his brains dashed out with a fuller's club*—Smith's Bible Dictionary

Before moving on to the next topic, let me mention the two other epistles that were written during this decade:

* **Hebrews (~A.D. 67-69)**
* **Jude (~A.D. 69)**

**The Fall of Jerusalem:**

In the year A.D. 66, the Roman Emperor, Nero, needed more money. Recall that just two years earlier a significant portion of Rome had burned down. The way to raise this money was the same as it is today… via taxes. Nero also ordered his representative in Judea, Gessius Florusto, to collect some of the money from the Jewish Temple treasury. The increasing taxes, and especially the raiding of the Temple treasures, really caused marked dissension among many of the Jerusalem community. The famous Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, wrote that there were a few Jewish people who mocked Florusto by openly “passing the hat” around for the “poor ol’ procurator Florus”. To show his displeasure and power over these people, he had policemen arrest and crucify a passerby… a man who was arbitrarily chosen by the police as they could not determine who had actually done the mocking. Finally, certain elements of the Jews, primarily the Zealots, erupted in rebellion against their Roman oppressors. They had some initial success. In September, A.D. 66, a Roman garrison surrendered and the men in it were promptly lynched. However, the odds against the Jewish Zealots were tremendous. Although the Jewish forces did win a few more battles in and around Jerusalem, they were about to go up against many Roman reinforcements. Many people, including most of the Christians, left Jerusalem, knowing the trouble that was about to come. The radicals awaited the advancing Roman legions. Nero had appointed a new general, Titus Flavius Vespasianus. Titus, one of the general’s sons, was one of his officers. A younger son, Domitian, stayed behind in Rome as insurance that his father would carry out Nero’s orders. The next series of events is rather interesting. The Zealots continued to put up a good fight all over Judea. Vespasian proceeded cautiously and slowly gained control of most of the region. By the spring of A.D. 68, he had secured Galilee, the coastal region and south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was ready for the taking. Just before that happened, however, Nero committed suicide! Nero’s successor was a man named Galba. He was promptly assassinated. At that point, a civil war broke out between two other ‘pretenders for the crown”, Vitellius and Otho. Seeing an opportunity, Vespasian quickly returned to Rome, putting the Jewish War on hold for a while. With some impressive political maneuvering, he was able to wrestle the Empire from his competition by early A.D. 69. Since he was now the Caesar, Vespasian turned over the command of the Roman army in Judea to his namesake, his son Titus. Now it was the younger man’s job to subdue the Jewish revolt. On Passover, A.D. 70, Titus began his siege of Jerusalem. The Jews were a tough foe to defeat. It was exceedingly difficult to breech the walls of the city. Finally, after many months, the Romans were able to storm the city and the Temple. Jerusalem finally was wrested from the Jews. Approximately 100, 000 Jews were killed. Many were nailed to crosses outside the city walls during the months of the Roman attack. It would be 1889 years (1967) before the Jews would again gain possession of their God given capital city. Jesus had predicted this terrible defeat and the leveling of the Temple just 40 years earlier.

So by A.D. 70 there had been quite a change in the Jewish and Christian communities. The Jewish uprising had been squashed in Judea. Hundreds of thousands of Jews had either been killed or had escaped from Jerusalem. Most of the Jerusalem Christians also had relocated to surrounding areas. One group that left Jerusalem before the end of the Roman siege was the extremist group that had been intimately involved in starting the war with Rome. They were the Sicarii Jews. They were commanded by a man named Elazar ben Ya’i. As the war in Jerusalem was drawing to a close, additional Sicarii were expelled from Jerusalem as they had come into conflict with the majority of Jews in the city. Their policies had certainly brought the city and Temple to the brink of extinction. For a couple of years, these men (and their families) were able to expel the Roman army from Masada and use it as a stronghold. However, by A.D. 73, the Roman governor Lucius Flavius Silva marched against Masada with a Roman legion and attacked the fortress of the Sicarii. After several attempts and the building of a rampart using tons of stones and earth, the Romans were able to breach the wall and enter onto the home base of the Sicarii Jews. They found a mass of 960 dead people. The Sicarii had chosen to all die rather than face slavery or execution at the hands of the Romans. It is said that because Jews have a rather dim view of suicide, each person was killed by another until the last man. No one knows whether this is true… but, it is certainly true that the Romans found everyone dead when they breached the walls and entered into their “fort”. This was the last significant resistance that any Jewish group put up against the Roman Empire.

As has just been discussed, the Jews and Jerusalem were handed a terrible defeat as the eighth decade began of the first century. As already mentioned, the Christian community of the Roman Empire was experiencing its worst period since its inception as well. Several of its most prominent leaders and evangelists had been martyred in the space of just a few years. The Roman leaders were using them as a scapegoat for many of their own shortcomings. The next era of Christian history was about to begin. Before proceeding to the next period of Christian history, let me take the time to briefly review what tradition tells us happened to the apostles – other than Paul and Peter who have already been discussed. Also, because of their significance in the 1st century church, a few other stalwarts of the faith will be mentioned.

**Great Christian leaders of the 1st century:**

**Thomas: “**Doubting” Thomas was one of the many fishermen who became disciples for Jesus. After the resurrection, Thomas was one of the few apostles who headed east. Paul and many of the others evangelized west of Jerusalem (ex. in Asia-Minor, Greece and Rome, etc.). However, Thomas began by going to Babylon, followed by Persia and then India. He established Christian churches everywhere he went. Some reports suggest that he may have even reached into China with his gospel message. He was martyred in India. The tradition among Christians in India is that Thomas was speared to death near Madras, and is now buried at Edessa.

**Andrew:** Andrew was the brother of Peter. Both were fishermen of Galilee. Fellow apostles, James and John were in the same business until all were called to follow Jesus. After the ascension, Andrew spent some time in Asia-Minor as did many of the apostles. After a while, however, Andrew continued north into an area near the Caspian Sea. He evangelized the Scythians in what is present day Georgia. He also was considered the first to preach the gospel in Constantinople (aka Byzantium). This is present day Istanbul in Turkey. Tradition says that he then made his way to Greece where he eventually arrived in Patros. That was the city where he was martyred for his belief in and witness for Christ. It is said that he was crucified on an X-shaped cross where he lay dying for three days. His last words are recorded as being “Accept me, O Christ Jesus, whom I saw, whom I love, and in whom I am; accept my spirit in peace in your eternal realm." It is said that he died in November A.D. 69… the same decade as James, Peter and Paul.

**James (son of Alphaeus):** James was known as James the Less by the first century Christians. Remarkably little is known about this James. One tradition has it that he was martyred by crucifixion while preaching in Ostrakine, Egypt. His body was supposedly sawn into pieces. Another tradition states that he was the first bishop of the Syrian church. Frankly, no one really knows what James, the son of Alphaeus, did later in his life. There is very little doubt, however, that he did devote his life to his Savior, Jesus Christ.

**James (son of Zebedee):** Jameswas the eldest brother of John the apostle. James, John, Peter and Andrew all were fisherman in Galilee before meeting Jesus. Some say that his mother, Salome, was the sister of Mary, mother of Jesus. He was the first of the apostles to be martyred. By order of Herod Agrippa I, James was beheaded in Jerusalem around the time of the feast of Passover, A.D. 44. It is believed that within the 14 year period from the death of Jesus, James visited the Jewish colonist and slaves in Spain to preach the Gospel.

**Philip:** Philip was born in Bethsaida. He was a friend of Nathaniel and led him to Christ. Later, after the ascension of Jesus, they both left for Asia-Minor to evangelize that territory. Philip’s sister, Miriam, also went with and helped the two apostles with their work. Tradition also notes that the three of them went to preach in Athens for a time. Upon hearing of the Phrygian cult that was preaching their false gospel in Asia-Minor, they returned to rebut the heretics. The people in Hieropolis were worshipping a giant serpent. Through the power of prayer, Philip killed this serpent. Another tradition states that Philip led the wife of the proconsul of that city to Christ. Whether it was because he angered the pagans who worshipped the serpent or he angered the proconsul because he evangelized his wife, Philip, Nathaniel and Miriam ended up being nailed to three crosses. Only Philip died from this crucifixion. The other two were released prior to succumbing (presumably they lived because an earthquake occurred just at that time and the crucifixion was stopped).

**Bartholomew:** Bartholomew was also known as Nathaniel. It is believed that Bartholomew/Nathanael was a missionary with Philip in Asia-Minor not long after the ascension of Christ. Later, while in Hieropolis, both Philip and Bartholomew were crucified (possibly upside down). Philip died. However, as noted above, an earthquake occurred just prior to the death of Bartholomew and he was freed - the people took the earthquake as a sign that God was judging them. After this incident, tradition tells us that Bartholomew went east to India and Armenia. He translated the gospel of Matthew into their language. While in Armenia, he was martyred for his faith. His evangelism saved the king, Polymius, and his wife. Many others in the region also became Christians. He also cured the king’s daughter of insanity. However, the king’s envious brother had Bartholomew crucified, skinned and beheaded.

**Simon (the Zealot):** There is virtually nothing written about the ministry of this apostle. The fact that he was a “Zealot” tells us something about the man. A Zealot was a person who was assiduous in his opposition to Roman control of Palestine. Tradition suggests that he evangelized in Egypt, Persia and Armenia. There are literally over five suggestions as to where he was martyred. Given that, it is not even reasonable to mention any of these… as they are likely false.

**Matthew:** Matthew was a tax collector when Jesus asked him to leave his work and follow Him. Jesus had a much more important job in mind for Levi (Matthew). He probably was the brother of James the Less… their father was named Alphaeus. Tradition says that he preached and taught in Jerusalem for approximately fifteen years after the ascension. About A.D. 45, he left to preach the gospel in Persia. Some say that he also preached in Ethiopia, Africa. Those that say he went to Africa, say that he was martyred in Egypt upon his return from Ethiopia. Others say he was martyred in Parthia. In any case, as were virtually all of the apostles, Matthew did eventually give his life for his Lord via a martyr’s death. Before his death, Matthew wrote the important **Gospel of Matthew (~A.D. 60)…** the gospel most especially directed at the Jews.

**Jude (Thaddeus**): Jude was one of the original twelve disciples of our Lord. After the ascension, Jude was a very busy man. Tradition has it that he ministered and spread the gospel in several different areas, including: Judea, Samaria, Idumaea, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Libya. He died a martyr (as did all of the apostles except John). Tradition says that he died together with his partner in the ministry, Simon the Zealot, while in Persia (or possibly Lebanon), likely around A.D. 65. Jude is also a patron saint of Armenia, as he is linked with Bartholomew as having brought the gospel to that region.

**Matthias:** Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. He was one of the seventy additional disciples that Jesus chose to help spread His message late in His life on this earth. The only constant in the traditions concerning this apostle was that he ministered in Ethiopia. It is reported by some that he also was martyred there. Others agree that he was martyred for his faith in Jesus. No one knows exactly where this took place.

**John:** John the Apostle wrote the Gospel of John plus 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He wrote them all in a period of a few years in approximately A.D. 90. He was one of the original twelve apostles and had a special place among the disciples. Jesus even called him to watch over His mother after he had gone to heaven… and asked His mother, Mary, to take care of John as if he were her son. For many years after the ascension, John preached and taught in Jerusalem. Later in his life, there is no doubt that he became a leader of the great church in Ephesus. More about his life after the fall of Jerusalem will be told in the next section.

**Other Great First Century Christian Fathers:**

**Timothy:** Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother, Eunice, and a Greek father. He was raised by a very religious mother and grandmother.He was led to [Christianity](http://saints.sqpn.com/ncd01999.htm) by [Saint](http://saints.sqpn.com/ncd07466.htm) [Paul the Apostle](http://saints.sqpn.com/saintp12.htm) around the year [47](http://saints.sqpn.com/year0047.htm) in Lystra, Asia-Minor. Over the course of the next twenty years, Timothy grew from a protégé to a close friend of Paul. Paul looked at Timothy more like a son than anything else. Timothy was the head of the church in [Ephesus](http://saints.sqpn.com/ncd03042.htm) in the mid-60’s A.D. Later, he and the apostle John were both involved in the leadership of that church. There is debate as to when he died. He was [martyred](http://saints.sqpn.com/pst00808.htm) for opposing the worship of Dionysius. This occurred in either A.D. 80 or 97 depending on the source one believes.

**Titus:** Paul placed Titus on the isle of Crete to organize that early church in the mid-60’s A.D. Titus is said to have been made permanent bishop of the island, and to have died there at an advanced age. The modern capital, *Candia*, claims the honor of being his burial-place.

**Barnabas:**  Barnabas was a Levite from the island of Cyprus. He was an apostle, although not one of the original twelve… which suggests that he must have been quite the impressive man to be given this honor. His cousin was John Mark. We know much about him from the book of Acts. He spent much of his early Christian years in Jerusalem. Then, he went off to Antioch where he brought Paul down from Tarsus to help in his evangelizing of the people. They both were chosen to lead the first major missionary journey to the Gentiles. His second mission trip with Mark was to his hometown of Cyprus. Tradition says that Barnabas was martyred. The details of his death are not known, however.

**Silas:** Silas joined Barnabas and Paul in Antioch as they left the Jerusalem Council in ~A.D. 49. He later joined Paul on his second missionary trip. Nothing is known of his later life.

**Philip:** Philip was one of the seven deacons appointed by the twelve apostles in the early months of the church. The Bible notes that he was one of the first to preach to the Gentiles… he did so in Samaria. He also preached and converted the Ethiopian eunuch in Gaza leading to the beginning of the Ethiopian Church. Years later, he lived in Caesarea Maritima where he and his four daughters were visited by the apostle Paul. “One tradition places the scene of his death at Hierapolis in Phrygia. According to another, he died bishop of Tralles.”—Smith's Bible Dictionary

**Luke:** Luke was born in Antioch and became a physician. He was apparently a Gentile. In secular history books, he also was noted to be a fine painter. Luke joined Paul during that great evangelist’s 2nd missionary journey… apparently at Troas. He stayed at Philippi during that trip, later to be picked up there when Paul passed through again. There is little information on his later life. He was the author of the **Gospel of Luke** **(~A.D.59-60)** and the **Acts of the Apostles**. Tradition says that he died a martyr’s death at the age of 84 in Boeotia, Greece.

**Mark**: John, whose surname was Mark, was the son of a Jewish woman named Mary who lived in Jerusalem. He was born in the city of Cyrene in Pentapolis, the western part of Libya, west of the border of Egypt. The family moved to Jerusalem where his mother eventually became an important member of the early Church. It was to her home that Peter went after his release from prison. His older cousin was Barnabas. Early in his Christian life, John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. However, Mark returned early to Jerusalem for unknown reasons. Although this was the reason Paul did not want Mark to team with him on a subsequent mission trip, Mark did travel with his cousin Barnabas on their own missionary journey. Later, Mark was a great comfort to Paul when that great apostle was held prisoner in Rome in the A.D. 60’s. He spent much of his later life in Rome and in Alexandria.

Church tradition states that St. Mark visited Egypt, founded the church of Alexandria, and died by martyrdom. When he was celebrating the feast of the Resurrection in the year 68 A.D. in Alexandria, he was martyred. That the same day coincided with the great pagan celebration for the god Syrabis. The fact that Mark was leading so many people to Christ and away from their pagan religion caused the people to tie him with thick ropes and drag him through the streets of Alexandria until dead.

Mark wrote the **Gospel of Mark (probably around ~A.D. 55).**

**The New Testament Church after the fall of Jerusalem:**

After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the martyrdom of James, Paul and Peter in the A.D. 60’s, the faith and power of this New Testament Church would certainly be tested. In the following pages, I will discuss a variety of factors that affected the establishment of the Christian Church. As will be seen, there were powerful forces - negative and positive – working to influence the outcome of this Church of Jesus Christ. I will break this down into five significant topics as follows:

* The persecution of the Church by Roman authorities
* The effects of false religions attempting to pervert the true gospel message
* The various Christian creeds and practices (ex. baptism and Lord’s Supper) and the codification of the New Testament all helping to define Christianity
* The influences of the early Christian “Fathers” on the Church
* The many positive reasons for the advancement of Christianity including the brotherhood, miracles, God’s Holy Spirit, etc.

**Roman persecution of the Christian Church:**

As has been noted, by the time Nero had committed suicide, the Romans had already begun to look at Christians in a markedly negative way. Nero had begun a significant period of persecution against this new religion, which was now no longer looked at as a brand of Judaism. The Christians had already paid a heavy price for that degenerate and incompetent emperor’s actions. Although Nero had not absolutely banned Christianity in the empire, he still was actively involved with their persecution. The famous Christian historian, Eusebius notes that Nero “was the first of the emperors who displayed himself an enemy of piety towards the Diety.” Nero had announced that he was an enemy of the Christian God. Of course, some great men of faith died right there in Rome during his reign, including Peter and Paul. After he took his own life, there was a year of confusion while various men attempted to wrest control of the Roman Empire. Finally, the general Vespasian won control. He became the new Emperor. He was succeeded by sons Titus and then Domitian (who ruled from A.D. 81-96). During this period of the first century A.D., the Christians came under intermittent persecution by the Roman leaders. John was the pastor of the church in Ephesus during the reign of Domitian. Tradition tells us that he wrote his gospel and his three epistles during this time… during the A.D. 80’s. Unfortunately, Domitian was apparently at least the equal to Nero when it came to the persecution of the Christians. He unjustly killed many, he exiled many, and he confiscated the property of many more. As Eusebius wrote, he “established himself as the successor of Nero in his hatred to God.” Since John was such an important individual in the Christian movement, he was exiled to the isle Patmos. God certainly did make great use of John’s time at this island. That is where John received the vision of “*The Revelation of Christ*”. After Domitian’s fifteen year reign ended, John was allowed to return to his duties in Ephesus. He remained there for the remainder of his life… probably dying at the end of the first century as a very old man in his mid- 90’s.

In addition to his gospel (written approximately in A.D. 90), John contributed four other important books to the New Testament. In fact, they are the last four books of the Bible:

* **1 John** (~A.D. 92) written while in Ephesus
* **2 John** (~A.D. 92) also written in Ephesus
* **3 John** (~A.D. 92) also written in Ephesus
* **The Revelation of Jesus Christ** written while exiled at the Isle of Patmos (~A.D. 95)

As the first century drew to a close, the Christian community continued to grow. However, Christians still faced significant persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. This came on at least two fronts… the government and many of the non-Christian population. Although the Christians generally were very respectful of others as well as the government, they still had many detractors. For one thing, many of the intellectuals in the empire ridiculed Christians for their beliefs, especially their belief of a coming resurrection in the “end-times”. More problematic was the perception that some had concerning their worship activities. Interestingly, the fact that they called each other “brothers” and “sisters” had some believing that they engaged in incestuous rituals during their worship services. A variety of lies and stories were circulated to defame the Christian religion and the individuals adhering to the Christian doctrines.

A really big issue involved their unwillingness to recognize the many gods of Rome (ex. Jupiter, Venus, Apollo, etc.). Eventually, many were saying that the problems of the Empire were caused by the gods’ anger at these Christians who failed to worship them. It became fairly common for people to accuse Christians of a variety of crimes and misdeeds and the mere fact that they were Christians was generally enough to result in their conviction… regardless of any evidence or truth to the claim. Even more problematic was the persecution aimed at them by governmental authorities – including the emperors. Historians state that the five emperors who ruled the Roman Empire from A.D. 96 through to A.D. 180 were very effective leaders. Under their leadership, "the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of wisdom and virtue" (Gibbon; History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire). Essentially, these five men were benevolent dictators… except toward Christians. They were certainly not friends of Christians. For most of the second century, the problems for Christians came from various provincial rulers. Intermittently in the various scattered Roman provinces, Christians were arrested for a variety of bogus reasons… generally simply because they were Christians. One big reason for these arrests was the failure of the Christians to worship the Emperor as god. One good example of this problem was preserved in the letters of Pliny the Younger, a governor of Bithynia (a Roman province). He wrote to the Emperor Trajan (reign-A.D. 96-117) that he was *executing* Christians if they did not renounce their faith. The answer Pliny received from Trajan was typical of all five of the “good Caesars” – Trajan said that the Christians should not be sought out for this punishment, but any that were reported to the governor should be dealt with just as Pliny had been doing. Obviously, this was a worrisome problem for the Christians of that time. At any time, just on a whim, one could be reported just because of their faith in Jesus, and this could and did often result in death! On the other hand, during this time period, there was no general policy enacted by the Roman Emperor himself that led to the arrest and execution of Christians simply for their faith. That would come later, however. With the death of Marcus Aurelius (reign-A.D. 161-180), the continuous reign of reasonable and good rulers had passed. Commodus, the son of Aurelius began a long string of typically selfish and generally ineffective emperors. Their treatment of Christians remained essentially the same as with the previous Caesars. In A.D. 249, Emperor Decius came into power and remained until killed in battle against the Goths two years later. He began the first attempt by an emperor to eliminate all Christians! It was a simple process. Every person in the Roman Empire was ordered to make a sacrifice to the gods. All who did this were issued a certificate. If a person refused to worship these false gods, they were killed. Sadly, many Christians were martyred during this period. Many succumbed to the weakness of the flesh and either made the sacrifice required to receive the certificate… or they tried to acquire forged certificates. Many great church leaders were tortured in an attempt to get them to recant their faith in Jesus. Decius was bright enough to realize that the martyr’s death of a well known leader could well result in the growth of Christianity. On the other hand, if they could get the leaders to admit that they were trusting in a lie, it would surely be detrimental to the Christian cause. This tact did not work. People such as the great Origen were tortured, but resisted for the cause of Christ. He eventually died as a result of that torture. That time period was well known for the number of martyrs for the faith. The bishops of Rome and Jerusalem withstood the torture but eventually died while in prison. Although many Christians had been killed, those who had somehow remained alive were strengthened in their faith by what they had witnessed. Decius was killed in battle only two years into his reign. He was succeeded by another tyrant and Christian hater, Valerian. He continued the persecutions and executions of the Christians. While emperor, he was at war with Persia and suspected the Christians of disloyalty… which was untrue. However, once again, the paranoia against the Christians resulted in many deaths with the resulting mounting numbers of martyrs.

There was one more period of terrible persecution of the Christians before a major change was to come to the Roman Empire. This persecution occurred between the years A.D. 303-311. The emperors Diocletian (A.D. 284-305) and Galerius (A.D. 305-311) issued the following decrees against Christians:

* All scriptures were banned
* All clergy would be arrested
* All Christians would sacrifice to the pagan gods or be executed

Historians say that enormous numbers of Christians died during these eight years. This horrible period of persecution ended when Galerius, on his deathbed, asked all Christians to pray to their God for his health. God did not grant his healing. This ended this terrible period of persecution. Then, a tremendous change occurred in the Roman Empire.

In the early 4th century, the Roman Empire had grown very large. Partly due to this fact and partly due to the lack of one superb and charismatic leader, various portions of the Empire were ruled by different regents. One of these co-regents was named Constantius Chlorus. He ruled a significant portion of the western Empire, including Britain. He did not really have any desire to enforce the edicts against the Christians… therefore, Christians were fairly safe in that region (incl. Spain, Gaul and Britain). Upon his death, his son, Constantine, was declared Caesar by his troops. He was at York at the time. He had designs on becoming the overall Roman Emperor in time. He began this quest a few years later as he marched toward the capital city, Rome. While is Spain, he was met in battle by a capable foe, Maxentius. Maxentius was known to “depend” on pagan magic and spirits when going into battle. Interestingly, Constantine had come to the conclusion that there may well be something to the God of the Christians. He thought it would be a very valuable asset to have a powerful God on his side - if this Christian God were, in fact, real. The evidence he was acquainted with certainly seemed to suggest that this God was powerful and real. However, he did not know how to approach this God. According to the well known historian, Eusebius, Constantine actually told him that God appeared to him in a vision one afternoon while he was praying. The vision was of a “cross of light in the heavens bearing the inscription, ‘Conquer by this’”. Soon after this vision, God apparently confirmed the vision by coming to Constantine in a dream repeating the message and adding that Constantine should have his forces carry this symbol into battle. Subsequent to this encounter, Constantine did carry out what he was convinced was a message from God to him. The following year, A.D. 313, Constantine met with the Caesar on the eastern empire, Licinius in Milan. The result of the meeting was that Christianity was now going to be tolerated. It is true that Constantine also allowed pagan religions to continue. There was simply going to be freedom of religion in the Empire. Eventually, later emperors would make Christianity the sole state religion. That was not the case under Constantine.

In A.D. 324, Constantine became the sole Emperor of Rome. As time passed, he instituted more and more Christian ideas and practices into his family and empire. Upon his death, his three Christian sons assumed command. They continued to turn Rome into a Christian empire. They stopped the practice of pagan sacrifices, they ordered certain idols removed from the Senate, and supported the ideals and concepts of Christianity during their reigns. For these reasons, Christianity grew rapidly during the mid-late 4th century. Huge churches were built during this time; some remain to this day.

Rome was fast becoming a Christian dominated empire. Millions of people were turning to Jesus. Estimates vary from about 10-50% of the population as becoming Christians by the end of the 4th century. There was one last gasp effort to slow the march of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Caesar Julian (A.D. 360-363) succeeded Constantius II (one of Constantine’s sons). Although he did not persecute Christians physically, he did interfere with their religious worship and he did attempt to bring back pagan worship. With his death in A.D. 363, the last overt Roman governmental opposition to Christianity was gone. As would be expected, there did persist some pagan worship. This was seen primarily in rural districts and mountain valleys… especially in the western empire. Another group who harkened back with fond memories to the pagan worship of old was some of the aristocrats. They liked the “good old days”… those days of Rome’s past glory. Most realized that the “glory of Rome” was now beginning to be in serious jeopardy. The “barbarians” were soon to make their move. However, the fact of the matter is, Christianity had survived 250 years of persecution by the Roman government and still had emerged as the largest religion in the world.

**False religions and doctrines-their attempt to pervert the true gospel message:**

As we have just seen, the Christian brothers and sisters were strong enough to withstand over two hundred and fifty years of Roman persecution. During that time, many thousands of Christians were martyred for their belief in Jesus and His message… i.e. the gospel. That then begs the question… what exactly was the gospel message? Obviously, if a person considered something important enough to die for, with these deaths frequently involving torture, it made all the sense in the world to be sure that the message was well understood and well defined. The fact of the matter was that there were different groups of people who believed various other “gospels” – not the true gospel of Jesus Christ. This next section will show the major false religions that were competing with Christianity in the early Church. Their beliefs will be explained. Most of these religions claimed to be Christian, and that was the problem. They had to be exposed and weeded out so the ordinary person would not be hoodwinked into following a false gospel message – a message not espoused by Jesus. The following were the main religions causing difficulty for early Christians due to their false teaching:

**Judaizers**: This group has been discussed in some detail already. They were most problematic in the days of Paul’s missionary journeys. As you may recall, this was a group of Jews who had recognized Jesus as being a very special individual, including noting that He had died and been resurrected… most of their message was synonymous to the Christian gospel. Unfortunately, they perverted the gospel when they insisted that the Christian convert must also follow the Law of Moses in order to be truly saved. This is not true. The sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus on the third day provided everything that any believer needs to be saved… to be a Christian. Paul addressed these false teachers in several of his letters, in particular, those epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Paul repudiated the Judaizers that had come and preached in the churches that he had founded. Eventually this resulted in the realization that their teachings were wrong. The result of many of his epistles had the effect to divorce Judaism from Christianity – which, of course, it should be. There certainly is a marked difference between the Old and New Covenants. With the realization of the fact that Christianity was not a subset of Judaism and the sad fact that as the first century came to a close, fewer Jews were converting to Christianity, the problems presented by the Judaizers dissipated markedly.

**Platonism:** The influence of the great Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Socrates was still felt by the Romans. Plato was certainly one of the heroes of the Greek philosophers. His influence on religion came primarily due to his conception that the physical world was only a pale reflection of the much more important spiritual world. New Christian converts that had previously been adherents of the Hellenistic philosophy of Plato, sometimes had a difficult time trusting in the pure gospel message. The major problem related to their attitude toward *matter*. They had been taught to regard anything that was material as being bad. That is, the flesh was evil. The soul was good. Where did that leave the person of Jesus Christ? They also spoke of a “World Soul” which was a sort of divine being. The fact was that this philosophical idea was extremely esoteric. Unfortunately, there were some great Christian apologists that were influenced by their Hellenistic heritage (ex. Augustine, Origen). It was as if they had to incorporate some of this thought into the gospel in order to be accepted as intellectual enough for their times. The fact is that the gospel message is really very simple and beautiful. Platonism, Neo-Platonism and their ilk are complex ideas that have an incorrect conception of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is not appropriate to try to synchronize Hellenistic philosophy with Christian truth; it does not work. The error of attempting to do this eventually went by the wayside completely. Fortunately, even in the early years of Christianity, the vast majority of Christians did not get bogged down in trying to Hellenize the simple gospel message.

**Gnosticism:** This religious belief system was probably the most problematic of all of the non-Christian religions in the first few centuries of the Church. Proponents of this religion attempted to usurp the actual gospel and define Christianity in terms of Gnosticism. Simon Magus, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, was a Gnostic. The Gnostics were not just one group of believers, but a variety of several movements, all with a similar concept of religion. Some of these people attempted to define Christianity as a Gnostic religion. So, what is Gnosticism? For one thing, they held that general Hellenistic concept of dualism… the spiritual world was good and the physical world was evil. Obviously, they were influenced by Platonism. The Gnostics then took this basic concept of the world and universe to another level as follows:

* The Good God lived as a spirit – that had to be as only a spirit could be good
* A good God cannot create an evil world – therefore, a lesser God, a Demiurge must have created the physical world (some Gnostics continued on with this idea to explain how this Demiurge and matter all began. Valentinus, a famous Gnostic, said that the spiritual world contained thirty-one deities (arranged from best to worst). The lowest deity, Sophia, displeased with her position in life, rebelled. Although she eventually was restored, her “passion” was cast out and became the real world of matter and the Demiurge. Demiurge decided to use his powers to create the world we live in… actually the universe. Demiurge was thought of as the God of the Old Testament!
* Since we all now lived in a fallen, evil world, eventually we all needed to escape back into the spiritual world somehow
* Only some people had a “spiritual spark’ and the chance of salvation. Gnostics were a secret society of believers that supposedly had secret knowledge that would help them eventually gain their salvation. Eventually, when one had gained the required amount of revealed truth that would be given over time in the form of mysteries, he would be ushered into the pure spiritual world. Salvation would have been obtained.
* Some Gnostic believers believed that it made no difference how one lived in the material world as it is all evil anyway. Others thought that by living austere lives now (staying away from material things as much as possible) that they might begin the process of regaining the lost “spiritual spark” and returning to the spiritual world
* Jesus was looked upon by the Gnostics who were perverting the gospel as the individual who gave the secret knowledge required for salvation – but who exactly was He?
* The Good God could not be associated with matter. Therefore, since Jesus was good, He could not actually have been a material being while on earth. There were at least two ways that Gnostics therefore viewed Jesus:
  + - the **Docetics** stated that He really only appeared to be a material being but was actually completely spiritual
    - Another school of Gnostic thought said that the ‘man’ Jesus was sent by the Demiurge, whereas the ‘spiritual’ Jesus who lived somehow within this material Jesus was sent by the Good God. When the baby Jesus was born, this spiritual Jesus came to live in him. Just *before* Jesus died on the cross, the spiritual Jesus left to return to the spiritual world.

Hopefully, all who just read the description of the Gnostic beliefs see them as quite ridiculous. I surely do. Yet, this teaching was not viewed in this way in the first few centuries A.D. Gnosticism, at the very least, turned many people away from following the true gospel. It is impossible for any of us today to put ourselves in the place of the people of that day. They had such a different set of circumstances and knowledge base. They had to have a vastly different way of looking at things… including religion. Therefore, in their day, it was not such a strange thing to believe some of these strange ideas.

**Marcionites**: Marcion came to Rome in A.D. 139 from his hometown of Sinope. He had many of the basic Christian beliefs and belonged to the church in Rome. However, soon some of his beliefs resulted in his being expelled from the congregation. He had altered the Bible to his own liking. This, one cannot do. As noted, Marcion had some beliefs in common with the Christian Church… just as the Mormons of today. Yet, he maintained that the God of the Old Testament (and of the Jews) was an evil God! He named this God the Demiurge as had the Gnostics. He said that this God had created man, both body and spirit. He differed from the Gnostic here. He then went on to say that a good, loving God sent Jesus into this world to save mankind (even though this good God had not created men). Christ, coming from this good God had nothing in common with humanity and had no relationship with the Demiurge. Marcion also took the tact of the Docetic philosopher in saying that Jesus only appeared to be a real person – really He was a phantom who looked like a man. This Jesus had come to save mankind from the Demiurge. All it took for salvation was to place one’s faith in the good, loving God. Jesus, in his phantom form, had sacrificed himself for all of mankind. Marcion really had excelled in perverting the Scriptures. He took partial truths and mixed them with very big lies. Once lies enter into the picture (ex. the God of the Old Testament is a bad God, Jesus was not really a man, etc.), it is time to reject the teaching. As one would have expected, Marcion took the gospel of Luke and Paul’s epistles, edited out the parts that did not suit his ideas, and used the remainder of these writings as scripture. His church members practiced lifelong celibacy and married persons were required to separate. No sex was allowed ever. Interestingly, his odd form of religion retained some following for several centuries before fading away.

**Montanism:** In the latter part of the 2nd century, another movement was started that had some deleterious effects on the Christian Church. A man named Montanus, from Phrygia, Asia-Minor, began to teach that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that the world was just about to come to an end. He also had two women prophets, Prisca and Maximilla, who also claimed to have received this message. They stated that this event would be accompanied by the “New Jerusalem” coming down from heaven… and this would land and be centered in his hometown, Phyrygia. Generally, the other doctrines that they taught were consistent with those of mainline Christianity. Other differences included:

* They typically had ecstatic demonstrations in their services, especially involving the prophetesses.
* Women had a prominent role
* They taught a very strict way of living
* They taught that post-baptismal sin could not be forgiven – this, of course, is not biblical

Even though the world did not end when they predicted, the movement continued for a couple of centuries. It was particularly popular in Africa.

**Ebionism:** This group of believers taught that Jesus was a only a *man… not God.* They were Jews who believed that the Law now had to be followed in the light of the teachings of Jesus. They were really a later iteration of the Judaizers. They existed mainly in Jerusalem and in portions of Persia. They revered James and rejected the teachings of Paul when he preached on the topic of being saved by faith alone. [Irenaeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irenaeus), in A.D. 180, was probably the first to use the term "Ebionites" to describe a heretical judaizing sect, which he regarded as [stubbornly insisting upon the keeping of the Law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legalism_(theology)). The Ebionites never had a very large following. They did remain in small groups in scattered regions of Europe for several hundred years. They were only a big concern for the proper development of the Christian Church when they were just coming into existence… in the time of Paul. At that time, the term Judaizer was used to describe people with these beliefs.

**Arian conflict:** Arius (A.D. 250-336) was a priest in Alexandria who had a set of beliefs that were ruled as heretical in the First Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). His largest doctrinal error was that he did not give Jesus His proper position in the Triune Godhead. Arius taught that there had been a time in the distant past when Jesus came into existence. Jesus was not at the same level as the God the Father. Prior to Arius expressing his ideas unapologetically, other theologians had had similar ideas… that is, that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not at quite the same level as God. Later in this paper, I will mention how Origen and Justin Martyr held similar beliefs… except that Arius took this idea one step further. He taught that Jesus was not divine. Jesus, he taught, was a great creature, a mighty archangel… but not God. For this belief, he was exiled to Palestine. During his time there, he implored his followers and those who condemned him to give him a chance to state his case. Eventually, the Christian Emperor, Constantine convened the First Council of Nicea to settle the issue of doctrine. At that council meeting of all the bishops in the world, Arius was again stated to be preaching and teaching heresy. Importantly, a clear statement of the appropriate doctrine of the Christian Church was adopted as well. This will be further discussed in the next section.

There were, of course, many other religions during those early years of the New Testament Church. Examples include Buddhism, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. However, these other religions were generally quite separate from Christianity and really did not serve to confuse the potential convert to Christianity with a perversion of the gospel. Therefore, they were not much of a threat to the furtherance of the true gospel message.

The Christian Church had two major problems to deal with during its early years. As we have shown, many of the believers were persecuted even onto death for their belief. Thousands died martyrs’ deaths. Second, partly because Jesus and the apostles did not leave a totally clear-cut doctrinal statement, there were several individuals who attempted to convert men and women to their ideas on what it meant to be a Christian. These individuals did not follow the teachings of the Jesus and the apostles. As we see in many cults today, many of their concepts were actually Christian. However, all of the false religions of that day went into heresy on the important issue - the identity of Jesus. Just as modern day cults do not preach the true identity of Jesus, the false religions of the first few centuries had the same fatal error. In the next section, we will see what was done through those first three to four hundred years of the Church to ground Christianity in proper doctrine. This took a lot of time, but was a very important thing to do. When this was complete, the Church had an authoritative Bible and Creed.

**Christian** **creeds and practices and the codification of the New Testament:**

As has just been shown, there were several attempts to define Christianity in ways that were not consistent with the words or deeds of Jesus or the teaching of the Holy Spirit as written down by the apostles. In order for Christianity to flourish, and not be “poisoned” by false teaching and teachers, certain things had to be accomplished. In particular:

* The apostles had to pass on their knowledge of Jesus and the teachings of Holy Spirit to those Christian leaders that would follow – in an accurate manner
* An accurate and clear description of a Christian had to be agreed upon. There had to be a system that would allow for a universal brotherhood of believers. Every Christian would be a brother (or sister) because they all would put their faith in the same gospel
* Holy Scriptures had to be agreed upon and used for instruction and inspiration

**The Early Guardians of the Gospel:**

In the early years of Christianity, preachers would teach from what they had learned from the apostles and what they had actually heard and seen concerning Jesus Christ. Initially, of course, most of the Word was spread by the apostles themselves. The Jerusalem Church had as its leader the half-brother of Jesus, James. Peter also preached and taught there and took mission trips to surrounding areas, including Rome. Of course, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Mark, Titus, Timothy and all of the remaining apostles were diligent all of their lives evangelizing as their Master, Jesus, had commanded. Do not forget the knowledge, the power and the conviction with which they would have lived and taught. They had all seen Jesus and known him intimately. They were all given special power by the Holy Spirit of God to preach with authority and power… including the ability to perform miracles. They were very able to get the Church of Jesus Christ off to a great start as they were passionate in their love of Christ and their mission to evangelize the world. All were aware that they had to pass along the torch to those leaders that would follow… and they did. For example, Paul taught many people including, of course, Titus and Timothy. He not only taught them Christian doctrine, but also sent them epistles on how to organize and run a local church. All of the apostles and early church leaders took care to leave their churches with appropriate leadership. The church leaders were called “bishops”. The apostles passed on their ministry to the next generation of bishops. Eusebius gave the lists of several of the churches from their first bishop all the way to his day… ~A.D. 300. This amounted to fifteen for the Church of Jerusalem. He also listed the succession of bishops for the Church of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and others. The relevance of this is to point out that there was a direct line of church leaders from the apostles down through the early church history. This succession was evidence that the teaching of the Church had been consistent through time. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, wrote in the last half of the 2nd century that he knew Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. He stated that Polycarp had been personally instructed by the apostles. Irenaeus was upset by the heresies that were threatening the Church. Therefore, he wrote that everyone should understand that there was an unbroken chain from Jesus to the apostles to the early Church fathers (such as Polycarp) and on down. This entire chain was ordained by the apostles… they were guardians and guarantors of the gospel.

Even in the very early years of the church, it became evident that there needed to be more than just a preacher to properly run a church. Therefore, as was noted in the book of Acts, the apostles appointed seven additional men to perform many of the administrative aspects needed in the church… such as feeding the poor. Over time, an organizational system developed that was effective in running the church. Before the end of the first century, there were different offices set up to run the different churches. Certainly in these early years it would have been very hard to coordinate the organizational structure of so many churches. As time passed, however, a pattern did emerge. Typically, there were three offices of note in each city church: the bishop (who was God’s representative), presbyters and deacons. Other documents from that time mention the offices of teacher and prophet. Whatever the specifics, the Christian church had developed an organization in each city and between cities. As early as the First Jerusalem Council, there were intermittent meetings that brought the bishops together to coordinate the activities and make sure that the gospel was being preached without perversion. This was going to require some mechanism to make sure that everyone knew what a Christian was plus a way to pass down the teachings of Christ and the Holy Spirit of God… there was a need of a New Testament to add to the Old Testament.

**Christian Creeds – What is a Christian?**

Another issue that needed to be worked out in some manner was a mechanism by which all Christians could tell whether another person was their brother or sister. Even in the early years (A.D. 50-70), the Judaizers and the Gnostics came along to infiltrate the Christian Church and pervert the gospel. Since many differing views on Christianity would develop over time, somehow those people who wanted to follow Christ and the apostles of Christ needed to come up with a proper definition of their belief system. The actual words of Jesus and His appointed apostles, who wrote under the control of the Holy Spirit, had to be evaluated and used to come to an agreement on what it meant to be a Christian. Just what was the gospel? Those who believed in this gospel would be deemed Christians. Those that decided on another path would be excluded from the brotherhood (and sisterhood). This sounds pretty simple, but it would take much time and effort to make these two “needs” a reality.

There are no historical documents to describe the exact steps to becoming a Christian until the second century. As we see in Acts and the epistles, it would seem that in the first century church it was primarily a matter of hearing the word, accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, followed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, baptism with water, followed by obeying Jesus, including regular participation in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. The Christian Church also settled on Sunday as being the “Lord’s Day” as it was the day of His resurrection. Many still observed the Sabbath as well. Later, there became a little more structure to conversion, primarily to be sure that a person really understood what following Christ was all about. Justin Martyr wrote the method by which people were admitted into the Church at Rome in the mid-first century.

* “As many are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and **undertake to be able to live accordingly**, are instructed to **pray and entreat God with fasting**, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are **regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves regenerated**. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they **then receive the washing with water.”**

In A.D. 215, Hippolytus described an elaborate process that was required to become a member of the Church in Rome at that time. First, the candidate’s suitability was assessed. If they were involved in professions such as prostitution, divination, pagan games, etc., they were excluded. Even military commanders could not join as they had to order executions. If one qualified, the typical instructional time was three years… some could be admitted earlier. In Alexandria, Clement had a very structured school to learn what it meant to become a Christian… he had produced the earliest form of catechisms. This teaching also took three years. After this instructional time, the individual would join the church and be baptized.

Due to the difficulties with the false religions and their teachings, eventually certain creeds were used to “spell out” the exact belief system of the Christian Church with respect to certain major doctrinal points. Although the Apostles Creed would not be written in its final form until the sixth century, earlier forms of it were used even as early as the second century when people would join the church. The Nicene Creed was formulated in A.D. 325 at the council of Nicaea that was called by Constantine. This creed also was to establish the basic doctrine of Christianity and separate it from apostate religions of these and future times. The specific theological problem addressed at that time was Arianism as mentioned earlier. The Creed showed that beliefs of Arianism were not consistent with the Christian religion. This Creed was updated at another council meeting in A.D. 381.

Both of these creeds were used to differentiate Orthodox Christianity from the heretical teachings of Marcion, Gnosticism and Arianism, etc. Below are these two famous creeds:

* **Apostle’s Creed**  I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.
* **Nicene Creed** (A.D. 381)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,

maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,

eternally begotten from the Father, God from God, Light from Light,

true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same substance as the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father (*and the Son*).

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. *Amen.*

There were two other creeds that came along after the two noted above. The **Athanasian Creed** was created in order to explain the Holy Trinity. Specifically, it was used to demonstrate that there were not three distinct Gods, but a “Trinity in unity”. A portion follows:

* **Athanasian Creed**: “We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity. We distinguish between the persons, but we do not divide the substance. For the Father is a distinct person; the Son is a distinct person; the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. Still the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and the Holy Spirit is. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated and the Holy Spirit is uncreated…………..Nevertheless, there are not three eternal beings, but one eternal being.” Actually, this creed is very long (longer than the portion noted here) as it goes into great detail discussing the Trinity. I believe one can see how this is very effective in telling the world the manner in which orthodox Christianity looked at the Trinity.

One more creed deserves mention… the **Chalcedonian Creed**. Simply put, this creed, written in A.D. 451 by church leaders, was used to show that Jesus was fully human and fully God.

* **Chalcedonian Creed**: Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, **our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man**, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

With the use of one of these four creeds, it was much easier to gain a universal understanding of what the Christian Church believed in. The first two tell the world what it means to be a Christian. The next two define the concept of the Trinity and tell about the Savior, Jesus. Those people who wanted to become members of the Church were required to recite and then live by one or more of the creeds. Certainly these creeds differentiated the true Church from the many false religions that were proclaiming some perverted gospel of Jesus. The only thing left on the agenda was to codify the scriptures so that the words of Jesus and the teachings of the Holy Spirit (through the words of the New Testament writers) could be passed down through the ages.

**The Holy Scriptures – The New Testament:**

It was important to codify the proper belief system of Christianity and it was important to define those books that would make up the New Testament. In A.D. 140, the heretic Marcion had already defined his own canon of his New Testament… while at the same time editing books such as Luke to fit his perverted theology. It would be important for orthodox Christianity to delineate the true New Testament for use by the Church in the centuries to come. This next section will reveal just how this was accomplished. When St. John, the apostle, finished writing The Revelation of Jesus Christ, no one knew that all the books that would eventually make their way into the New Testament had been written. The Holy Scriptures at the turn of the century only consisted of the Old Testament It is important to take a moment to see what written documents were in the hands of people in the Church as the first century closed. Many letters had been exchanged by the apostles as well as other church leaders, but the importance of these documents had yet to be determined. All of the gospels had been completed when John wrote his gospel sometime in ~A.D. 90. Matthew, Mark and Luke were completed by A.D. 80 – and very likely prior to A.D. 70. Paul and Peter obviously had written all of their epistles prior to their deaths in the mid to late A.D. 60’s. James, the half-brother of Jesus had completed his book prior to his death… prior to A.D. 62. Jude and the author of Hebrews certainly had completed their epistles by A.D. 70. The last three epistles that would find their way into our Bible were written by John probably around A.D. 90. The Revelation of Jesus Christ was written in ~ A.D. 95 while John was on the island of Patmos. So all those documents that would together make up the New Testament were available for study and instruction… and at some point they would become codified. It would prove to be very important to decide what to include in the document that would explain to the world just what the New Covenant of God was all about. It would take some time, as we shall see, to codify this Testament.

Polycarp and Clement of Rome wrote that they used some of the epistles and gospels as their “New Testament”. They did not define the specific books however. Irenaeus in the late 2nd century, was using all of our current New Testament books as Scripture except for 2nd and 3rd John, James, 2nd Peter and Hebrews. Many others had been using the four gospels as canon even before this time. The four gospels were generally all accepted before the end of the 2nd century. The gospel of John was the last one to gain universal acceptance. Most of the epistles were almost immediately accepted by the various churches in the Empire. The books that took longer to gain acceptance were as follows:

* Hebrews – took a little longer as its writer was not known for sure… likely Paul
* James – because there was some debate over his emphasis on works
* 2nd Peter – not too much doubt here
* 2nd and 3rd John – they seemed a little too personal for some
* Jude – he quotes from the book of Enoch; some were bothered by this as Enoch is not in the Old Testament itself. Yet, there is no reason that a secular source cannot be used. People such as Clement of Rome, Origen, Athanasius, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and others accepted it without problem.
* The Revelation – the abstract and mysterious language bothered some and its authorship remained in question for some time

The test that was finally used to determine whether to accept a book for the canon was whether it was written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle or apostles (ex. Luke, Mark). Another test was by usage. In other words, if the church had been using a book for hundreds of years and it had proved to be useful, without error and totally consistent with the other books in the Bible, it could gain acceptance. Hebrews, even without positive identification of its author was accepted partly for this reason, for example.

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, was the first to specify, in writing, the twenty-seven books he felt should make up the New Testament. He wrote a letter to his congregation in A.D. 367 concerning the New Testament Canon. He chose those books that currently make up our Bible. He excluded at that time the 1st letter of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermes. Twenty-five years later, his list was approved at both the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397). This is when the canon became official and it has not changed since.

The bottom line is that the process of canonization was very complex and lengthy. It began by bishops choosing to use certain epistles or gospels to preach and teach their messages. Over the years there eventually came to be a compilation of the books that were used throughout the churches in the Roman Empire. These books chosen were written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle. As time passed, a particular grouping of books came together as they passed certain other tests: they had to be accurate historically, consistent with the other scriptures and the actual words of Jesus, and valuable to the reader.

“One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and general apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa — at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397 — but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.” F.F. Bruce

The determination of the proper and complete New Testament was needed for several reasons:

* To allow proper church doctrine to be determined
* To use this doctrine to stand against heresy
* To be able to use these scriptures in church services
* To give people the appropriate scripture material to study and learn as they worshipped God and worked toward sanctification

The passing of St. John brought the church into the post-apostolic times. Until John had died and went to his just reward in heaven, there had been a direct link with our Lord and Savior. From this time onward, it would become increasingly important to protect the words of the Lord as written in the gospel accounts and the words of the Holy Spirit as He directed the writing of the remainder of the New Testament.

**Post-Apostolic Christian Fathers:**

After the passing of the apostles, the Church continued to grow throughout the Roman Empire. There were many reasons for this growth as will be discussed in the next section of this treatise. One reason was that certain men stepped forward with great faith and ability to lead the Church through its early years. The following will be a very brief biography of a few of these leaders.

**Polycarp:** There is no doubt that Polycarp (A.D. 69-155), bishop of Smyrna is one of the more celebrated of all early New Testament Church Fathers. According to one of his pupils, Irenaeus, Polycarp was a pupil of the apostles. He spent much time with John, who consecrated him as the bishop of Smyrna. John may have been the last survivor of those who talked with the Lord. Polycarp referred to both the Old and New Testament books as Holy Scripture. This gave much authority to the writings that would later become part of the canon of the New Testament. Much of Polycarp’s fame came by virtue of his actions and speech when on trial for his life because of being a Christian. He, like so many others was arrested by the Roman government. In Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, it is noted that he had a dream three days prior to his arrest that he was about to be burned at the stake for his Lord. Although he knew that men were coming for him, he did not try to escape. Instead, when they came to the door, he offered them a hearty dinner. He begged to be allowed to pray for an hour. This they allowed and many were sorry that this old man was going to be put to death. After the meal and after his prayer, they started out for the city.

After their arrival, he soon went to trial. The proconsul urged him to save his life by cursing Christ. Instead, he replied: "Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The proconsul once again urged him to swear by the fortune of Caesar. Polycarp replied, “Since you so vainly strive to make me swear by the fortune of Caesar, as you express it, affecting ignorance of my real character, hear me frankly declaring what I am – I am a Christian, and if you desire to hear the Christian doctrine, assign me a day and you shall hear.” At that, the proconsul told him that he would send wild beasts to tear him apart. “Call for them,” replied Polycarp; “for repentance with us is a wicked thing, if it is to be a change from the better to the worse, but a good thing if it is to be from evil to good.” Then the proconsul told Polycarp that he would set him ablaze with fire. “You threaten me with fire, which burns for an hour, and is soon extinguished; but the fire of the future judgment, and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, you are ignorant of. But why do you delay? Do whatever you please.”

The magistrate was reluctant to kill a gentle old man, but he had no choice. Polycarp was sentenced to be burned. As he waited for the fire to be lighted, he prayed:

“Lord God Almighty, Father of your blessed and beloved

child Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of

you, God of angels and hosts and all creation, and of the whole

race of the upright who live in your presence: I bless you

that you have thought me worthy of this day and hour, to be

numbered among the martyrs and share in the cup of Christ, for

resurrection to eternal life, for soul and body in the

incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. Among them may I be

accepted before you today, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice,

just as you, the faithful and true God, have prepared and

foreshown and brought about. For this reason and for all things

I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal

heavenly high priest Jesus Christ, your beloved child, through

whom be glory to you, with him and the Holy Spirit, now and for

the ages to come. Amen.”

Polycarp was bound but, on his request, was not nailed as usual. The fire was then lit and shortly thereafter a soldier stabbed Polycarp to death. His friends took his remains down and gave him an honorable burial. They wrote an account of his death to other churches. This incredible incident became well known to all the churches in the Roman Empire. Polycarp became a symbol of great Christian faith and love for Christ.

**Clement of Rome:** Pope Saint Clement 1, was either the 2nd or 3rd bishop of Rome, following Peter. He was an important early Father of the Church who knew intimately Peter and Paul according to several early Christian sources. He was a link from the apostles to the early second century Church. For example, note this pronouncement by Clement, “The apostles received for us the gospel from our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Lord Jesus Christ received it from God… The apostles appointed bishops and deacons, and gave a role of succession, so that when they had fallen asleep, others, who had been approved, might succeed to their ministry.” Clement wrote an epistle to the Church at Corinth asserting the authority of the elders as rulers of the Church on the grounds that they had been appointed by the apostles. This epistle was used as a guideline for other churches as well in the latter part of the first century. He served as Pope (bishop) of the Roman Church from A.D. 92-99. Tradition states that he died either in A.D. 99 or 101. Historian Eusebius wrote that Clement wrote of the early post-ascension Church as follows: “Peter, and James, and John after the ascension of our Savior, though they had been preferred by our Lord, did not contend for the honor, but chose James the Just as bishop of Jerusalem. The Lord imparted the gift of knowledge to James the Just, to John and Peter after His resurrection, these delivered it to the rest of the apostles, and they to the seventy of whom Barnabas was one.” Clement wrote also that Mark obtained most of the information that he used for his gospel from Peter.

In summary, Clement of Rome was an early Church Father who played an important role in keeping the Christian Church growing in its infancy. He effectively preached and taught the gospel that had been handed down to him from apostles such as Peter and Paul. He also had an important role in determining early church organization.

**Ignatius:** In the early years of the second century, Ignatius served as the second bishop of Antioch. He succeeded Evodius. He worked hard to advance the cause of Christ as manifested in His Church throughout his life. He wrote letters to many Christian churches and communities to outline his proposals. These letters were written while he was on his way to a martyr’s death in Rome. Rome, Ephesus, Philadelphia and Smyrna are just a few of the churches to receive his communications. Emperor Trajan had him arrested for failure to worship the pagan gods. He was to be brought to Rome from Antioch. Along the way, he spoke of the importance of the unity of the church under the leadership of Jesus Christ. He felt that each community should have a bishop as the leader under Christ, with priests and deacons to assist in the running of the church. He also stressed the importance of the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist. He believed that it was the greatest expression of the unity of man with Christ. The Eucharist was a wonderful way to bring the entire church together for a deep worship experience. It is also interesting to notice how much emphasis he placed on martyrdom. Since, unfortunately, dying for the cause of Christ was not uncommon in those days, Christians actually thought about the possibility of this happening to them. Ignatius and many other Christians of that time had so much faith in their salvation and subsequent union with Jesus in heaven, that they did not fear death… even the painful death of a martyr.

Another topic that Ignatius addressed in these letters was the heresy of the Judaizers as well as the heresy of Docetism. Recall that Docetism stated that Jesus was not actually a man… He only appeared as such. Ignatius, in no uncertain terms, states that Jesus was fully human and fully God as well. He was one of the earliest Christian theologians to be so adamant in referring to the Lord Jesus as God. The exact position of Jesus in the Trinity would be open for debate during the first few hundred years… but, not for Ignatius.

As his martyrdom approached, Ignatius pointed out that through this type of death a person could truly imitate Christ and proclaim the gospel. He believed that it was, in a sense, like a baptism. One would actually die and rise with Christ… and then go to be with Him in heaven. Martyrdom was also a way to live out the Eucharist, he thought. Partaking in the Lord’s Supper allows one to receive the body and blood of Jesus and be conformed unto His likeness. Through martyrdom, he said, one is fully conformed into the true likeness of Christ as well. Note what he wrote to the Roman Church below:

Historians note that in the ninth year of the reign of Trajan, the emperor was in Antioch when he called for the arrest of Ignatius… the bishop of that city, the leader of the Christian Church there. Ignatius, not worshipping and sacrificing to the Roman gods, certainly had to be punished. Ignatius appeared before Trajan and was bold in his comments. He valiantly spoke of his faith in Christ. He was courageous and obviously not afraid of the sentence awaiting him. He was ordered to be placed in chains and taken to Rome, there to become a spectacle for the people as he was to become food for the lions.

His letter to the Christians of Rome as he came to that city…

“I am writing to all the churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.” - *Letter to the Romans*

With his martyrdom, he became a great symbol of faith and courage for the young Church. He was a great teacher and leader while alive and a great example in his death.

**Irenaeus:** Irenaeus was born in Smyrna, Asia-Minor. He was a disciple of Polycarp. He at one point went to Rome and studied under Justin Martyr. Eventually, he went to preach the gospel in Lyons, France. Although he respected his teacher, Justin Martyr, he did not appreciate the philosophical approach to the study of the Bible. He believed that the truth of the Bible rested on “revelation, tradition, and on the power of the Holy Spirit.” His “Against Heresies” was a defense of the Christian faith against the Gnostics. He hated what they were teaching. For one thing, he thought it absurd that they taught that the material world was evil. God had made this world. He thought it terribly wrong to teach of different gods for the Old Testament and New Testament times. He strongly believed in the Old Testament and was convinced that the one, and only, true God had been working in those times to prepare the way for His Son’s appearance. He recognized that the Gnostics had denigrated the apostles and their writings. He insisted that the apostles had accurately written the words of the Holy Spirit in their epistles and that the gospels were accurate accounts of Jesus. He emphatically defended apostolic succession and stated that Christ himself was responsible for the unbroken line of bishops that had followed. He wrote the following: “Now the church,… received from the apostles and their disciples its faith in one God, and the Father Almighty, who made the heaven, and the earth, and the seas, and all that is in them, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets proclaimed the dispensation of God.”

Irenaeus began to collect what he believed to be the inspired writings that would eventually become the New Testament. He was the earliest witness to the fact that there were four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He also noted that ‘The Gospel of John’ was written by John the apostle and ‘The Gospel of Luke’ was written by the doctor, Luke. He also began the collating of the epistles that he felt were appropriate for inclusion and excluded many of the Gnostic books. This task would not be completed for another 200 years. He was a fine example of orthodox Christianity of the late 2nd century. Interestingly, whereas Justin Martyr held that the ‘Logos’, who had become flesh in Jesus Christ, was a second God, Irenaeus had another idea. He held that the ‘Logos’ became incarnate in Jesus, but that Jesus was the Son of God, the Mind of God, and God, the Father, Himself! He stressed that Jesus was both man and God and did not rate Jesus subservient to God, the Father. He stressed the unity of the Godhead, not their differences. His conception of the Trinity was very similar to that of the orthodox Christian today. As man, Jesus fulfilled the requirements that God had for Him to die for the sins of mankind. Irenaeus believed that Christ would always have been sent, even if humanity had never sinned; but the fact that they did sin determined his role as a Savior. He sees Christ as the new Adam, who systematically undid what Adam did: where Adam was disobedient relating to the fruit of the *Tree of Knowledge*, Christ was obedient even to death on a tree. Irenaeus was one of the first who had the belief that the Church in Rome was the premier church of the Empire and that all churches should follow their lead. This concept would one day find its fulfillment with the Catholic Church in Rome. Very little is known about his death. The general consensus is that he died just as the 2nd century came to a close. Most believe his was also a martyr’s death.

**Justin Martyr:** Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) was an early Christian apologist. He called himself a Samaritan and he was brought up a pagan. Early in his life, he studied Hellenistic philosophy. After hearing the Christian evangelical message, he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, he never was able to eliminate the impact of his Greek philosophical roots as he developed his own Christian philosophy… as we shall see. He travelled widely but ultimately settled in Rome. He accomplished many things in his sixty-five years. He was one of the earliest to write on what it meant to be a Christian.

“As many are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and the Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.”

He was one of the earliest Christians to write that when Christians met they would read and study the epistles of the apostles. Martyr continued to wear his distinctive cloak of the philosopher after his conversion to Christ as he wanted to show the world that he had found the “Truth” – which is the search of the philosopher.

As mentioned above, Martyr was influenced by the Hellenistic philosophy that he studied as a youth. His intellect and writing style gave Christianity much more respect among the upper class and intellectuals of Roman Empire society. On the other hand, this Hellenistic influence got him off track with respect to the orthodox teachings of the Bible at times. He was unable to excise some of these ideas from his mind. For example, he inherited the idea of the ‘Logos’ or World Soul from his earlier training. Certainly, this is not anywhere to be found in the Bible. Yet, Martyr merged this old philosophical idea with the truth of Christianity. It must have been intellectually pleasing for him to do this. Now this Logos was the power of God on earth… also known as Jesus Christ. Jesus existed as the Logos before coming to earth. Jesus, as the Logos, ordered and ran the universe. Jesus, however, was not quite at the same level as the Father, God.

These writings by Justin Martyr were primarily meant for the Hellenistic world as an attempt to show this culture the logic of Christ on and in *their* terms. On the other hand, he believed in the Old Testament as the word of God. He believed in the veracity of Old Testament prophecy. He also had ultimate faith in the Church, and had faith in Christ as the Son of God the Creator. He believed that Christ was made manifest in the flesh, crucified, rose from the dead, and was the propitiation for the sins of mankind for those who believed. Therefore, certainly most modern theologians consider him to be a Christian.

By the way, as we will see later, Origen and Augustine also have some non-orthodox ideas in their theology. However, all three of these men were attempting to understand God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as well as they could, given the times in which they lived and the limited resources from which to learn and study. All these men were blazing a trail that would eventually lead to our Christine doctrines of today.

Justin Martyr died a martyr's death somewhere around A.D. 165. Eusebius, the early church historian, said he was denounced by the Cynic Crescens with whom he engaged in debate shortly before his death. Justin was beheaded along with six of his students.

**Origen:** Origen Adamantius (A.D. 185-254) was one of the more brilliant early Christian scholars. He apparently was Egyptian and studied at Alexandria. At the age of 17, his father was killed due to the breakout of another Christian persecution. He then taught in the same school in Alexandria as Clement (of Alexandria) taught. Apparently Clement had been driven out by the persecution. Many years later, he had a disagreement with the patriarch of that city, Demetrius, and moved to Caesarea Maritima (in A.D. 231) where he later died after being tortured for his beliefs… another in an amazingly long line of martyrs’ death.

Origen was a tireless worker for Christ. Once he had decided to devote his life to Christianity and the study of the scriptures, he lived an ascetic lifestyle. Tradition also states that he made himself a eunuch. Once he began his writing, he did not stop. He produced an updated Septuagint using his knowledge of Hebrew. He also wrote commentaries on the Old Testament and the epistles. He wrote a masterpiece called *On First Principals* – a philosophical outline of Christine doctrine. He interpreted the Bible in an allegorical manner. He looked at God as being the *First Principal* and Christ as being the *Logos* (commonly done in that time as we have seen). He, in a similar manner as Martyr, viewed the Trinity as a hierarchy, the order being God, Jesus and then the Holy Spirit. This and many other views of Origen were not considered orthodox. As was the case with Justin Martyr and later with Augustine, Origen worked to blend his theology with his Hellenistic philosophical roots. Sometimes this attempt at synching Greek philosophy with Christianity led him to some inconsistencies. He truly believed in the veracity of the Bible and that it was the actual Word… the *Logos of God.* However, he interpreted the Bible in the light of his Hellenistic philosophy of life… material things are essentially worthless, the spirit is of utmost value. He adhered to the fact that the whole Bible was inspired by the one true God … contrary to the Gnostic view that the Old Testament was the history of an inferior God. To Origen, man was an entity just waiting to free his soul from his body so it could enter heaven since Jesus had successfully paid the necessary debt. In other words, he certainly did trust in the Lord Jesus for his salvation and did believe in verses such as John 3:16. He enjoyed digging deeply into scripture to find hidden meanings. He believed that God had written the Word in such a way that there were many layers of truth within the text, including an allegorical layer. At one point, he visited Rome and heard the theologian Hippolytus lecture. On that visit, he purchased dozens of books to further his research into Christian theology. He then went back to continue his prolific writing career in Alexandria. Later, he started a school in Caesarea where he taught higher education, including physics, theology, cosmology and philosophy. In A.D. 249, Emperor Decius began yet another persecution against Christians. He ordered Origen arrested and tortured… to just short of death. Decius desperately wanted him to renounce his faith in Christ. Origen had to endure the “rack” which permanently crippled him. He would not yield. Within a couple of years he succumbed to his torturous injuries and died at the age of 69 years old… another martyr for Christ. He was buried in Tyre.

It is worth pointing out that Origen did have many atypical conceptions of Christianity. Among these were the *preexistence of souls,* [*universal salvation*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_reconciliation) *and a hierarchical concept of the* [*Trinity*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity). He believed that at some point all mankind would be saved. God may have to punish them at some point, but all would end up one day in heaven. Another unorthodox teaching was that all human souls had existed from eternity past. These teachings, and some of his followers' more extreme views, were declared [*anathema*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anathema) by a local council in Constantinople 545, and then an ecumenical council ([Fifth Ecumenical Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Council_of_Constantinople)) pronounced "15 anathemas" against Origen in A.D. 553. So he certainly had his detractors. However, he loved Jesus and was willing to suffer the “rack” for his belief in our Lord.

**Tertullian:** Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (aka Tertullian; A.D. 160-220) was an early Christian apologist. He came from Carthage in North Africa. Most believe that he was a lawyer before becoming a Christian. He coined the term *Trinity* andexplained how he viewed the definition. He also coined the terms of Old Testament and New Testament. Although he had much in common with orthodox Christianity, later in his life he split with mainstream Christianity and became a member of the Montanist movement. He wrote against the Roman persecutions of Christians and wrote many papers on Christian theology (ex. the Trinity). His *Apologeticus* was a treatise sent to the Roman magistrates in defense of freedom of religion. In it he boldly asked for fair trials for the Christians before they were convicted of heresy… and especially that they not just summarily be condemned to death. His abilities as a lawyer and writer allowed him to effectively convince much of the Roman hierarchy and most of the Roman people that Christians were not the barbarians that they had been portrayed to be since the time of Nero. Not only did he show that the Christians were not guilty of the crimes such as infant sacrifice and similar pagan rituals, but he also drew attention to how barbaric the Roman government was by authorizing such rituals as throwing Christians to the lions and sending gladiators in to fight to the death. He was the first Christian to effectively defend Christians against these lies. He also helped by pointing out that Christians actually made very good citizens and were certainly not a threat to Rome. Tertullian also was active in writing and speaking out against the Gnostic heresy of those times. In A.D. 207-208, he wrote extensively against the heretic Marcion and his views. He viewed the scriptures as a divine “foolishness”… it may well seem absurd to man, but it is, in fact, truth… just as the Bible states.

Over the sixty years of his life, Tertullian wrote extensively on his views concerning the theology of Christianity. Some were not mainstream. However, overall he did much good for the Church as noted above by his active defense of Christianity against Roman persecution and his stand against blatant heresy. It is true that some of his theology is not viewed as orthodox today… or even in that day… but he was a man who loved Christ and viewed Him as Lord and Savior.

**Augustine:** Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) had the greatest influence on western Christian thought of all of the early Church Fathers. He was born in Thagaste, a city in what is present day Algeria. He resisted his Christian mother, Monica, and remained a pagan during his youth. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to school in Carthage. While there he joined a Gnostic sect, Manichees, that emphasized the spirit, disparaging the physical… as they all did. He remained involved in this sect for nine years until he got tired of their belief system and their hypocrisy. During these years, he met a woman and she had his son, Adeodatus. Unfortunately, his son died at the young age of seventeen years old. Augustine lived with this woman for about thirteen years. In A.D. 383, he sailed for Rome. He was to teach rhetoric at the imperial court in Milan. His mother followed him to Milan and pressured him into rejecting his concubine to become engaged to an eleven year old girl for societal/political reasons. During this time, he took another concubine for two years… while he waited for his prospective bride to grow up. It was during this period that he uttered his famous prayer, "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet". During these years, at the age of 32 (A.D. 386), Augustine had quite a personal experience that shaped the remaining years of his life. While struggling for answers to life’s questions, he heard the voice of a child while in his garden in Milan. This voice kept saying the words “take up and read”. Augustine took this to mean that he should study the Scriptures. Right at that moment, he grabbed the nearest text to him, which was Paul's [*Epistle to the Romans*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Romans), and opened it at random to 13:13-14, which read: "*Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put on the Lord* [*Jesus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus)[*Christ*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ)*, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*."

He also had the opportunity to study under Bishop Ambrose at that time. Ambrose baptized both Augustine and his son in the year A.D. 387. It was at this time, in his thirties that Augustine learned of the Neo-Platonist synthesis of Christianity and Greek philosophy. This is what had intrigued Origen so much seventy-five years earlier. Soon after this conversion, Augustine took his mother and son and left to return to Africa. Unfortunately, both his mother and son died shortly thereafter leaving Augustine wondering how he would go on. He soon sold his possessions and gave them to the poor. He used his house as a place of study. In A.D. 396, due to his performance the previous nine years, he was named bishop of Hippo. He remained in that post for the rest of his life. He was an excellent and prolific author and made Hippo a center of Christian thought. Over the next 34 years, Augustine wrote on many subjects. His Confessions is an autobiography that also contains his ideas on human nature and how God deals with people. In his equally famous The City of God, Augustine discusses the issues that came with the fall of Rome to the barbarians in A.D. 410. On the Trinity was written as a discourse on the topic noted in the title. These were probably his three greatest works, but he also wrote on many other topics over an almost forty year period of time. Augustine, like Tertullian and Origen came up with many ideas that were not what we would call mainstream theology today. He was from the same school as Origen when it came to enjoying the allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. For writers that look for deep hidden meaning in the words of any text, including the Bible, there is a marked likelihood that they will read into the text something that was not intended by the writer… in this case, that would be the Holy Spirit. The only way this would be not true is if the Holy Spirit led each person to see the *hidden* message(s). The question one must ask is whether that happened on those occasions back then when Origen and Augustine and others wrote on many esoteric subjects… culled from abstract interpretations of the Scriptures. I, personally, doubt it very much. Why? Because if the Holy Spirit did lead these (Origen, Augustine, Tertullian, etc.) and other theologians to write what He, the Holy Spirit, *meant to say*, so to speak, everyone writing on the same subject should come up with the same interpretations. They surely do not. I believe that these 2nd through the 4th century Christian writers just got too caught up in trying to mesh their Greek philosophical background knowledge with their knowledge of the Bible. They do not go together. The fact is that God did not make the Bible to be mysterious… it says what it means and means what it says.

Augustine had many different views on a variety of theological topics. Here are just a few of his less esoteric beliefs:

* He said that God created the world instantaneously… not in six days
* Evil is but the absence of good
* Men and angels have rational free choice – Adam used this free will to sin
* Adam’s sin is passed on as “original sin”
* Man cannot raise himself out of sin on his own. He needs Christ to do this
* Baptism washes away original sin and sins committed up until that time
* Unbaptized people, including babies, will not go to heaven upon dying. In a later writing, he said that if a person confesses Christ but does not have the time to get baptized, he will achieve salvation. He also wrote words that suggest that he may have had a change of opinion with respect to non-baptized infants as well
* The Lord’s Supper is necessary for salvation
* Mary remained a virgin
* Mary was free of any temporal sin
* He was the first to promote the eschatology of a millennialism… Christ will rule the world triumphantly through His Church from His vantage point in heaven
* He viewed sexual desire as sinful
* He had an odd view on abortion. He said that a fetus received a soul at 40 days of age if male and 90 days of age if female. Any abortion after this time would be a grievous sin

As can be seen, most of these views are consistent with Roman Catholic theology… although, not all. His view on abortion certainly is not.

Augustine died on August 28, 430 A.D. during the siege on Hippo by the Vandals. He was one of the few Christian Fathers who was spared a martyr’s death.

So this concludes a short biography on eight of the more important post-apostolic Christian Fathers. These men were very important to the spread and growth of Christianity in the first few centuries after Christ. A summary of these men and their lives and work shows that they contributed to the amazing growth of the Church for the following reasons:

* Many of these great leaders were martyred and their courage and faithfulness was a strong impetus for Christians to stay united and for non-Christians to consider converting to faith in their powerful God – their God must be someone special and real for these great and intelligent men to die for
* Together they worked to define church protocol, hierarchy and doctrine
* They were tireless in spreading the gospel through their writing and evangelization
* They effectively stopped the spread of Gnosticism in the Roman Empire
* Their efforts resulted in the eventual conversion of an emperor which led to freedom of Christian religious worship in the Roman Empire
* They continued the unending search for truth in the study of God’s Word – writing on topics such as the Trinity, Original Sin, Salvation, Heaven, Eschatology, etc.

As we have seen, there were major obstacles that the Christian Church had to overcome in order to even survive. The Roman Empire for three hundred years tried to stamp out Christianity by putting to death, by the tens of thousands, those that believed in Jesus. Some actually estimate that up to one million Christians were martyred! Another very difficult trial that Christianity had to face was the infiltration of its Church by false teachers with their false gospel. There had always been many religions in the world and there always will be. In those early years, only a relative few people knew the real message of Jesus. This had to be safeguarded in order to assure the growth of the one religion that had the only true message from the God of the universe… Christianity.

In order to define the gospel message, we discussed how the church developed creeds and defined the Word from God that we call the New Testament. Because of the creeds and the Scripture, Christians could now be reasonably certain that their message was being spread around the earth in the proper manner. The post-apostolic Church Fathers that we just reviewed, served as the human backbone for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus. Their knowledge, faithfulness, and strength propelled Christianity forward so that by A.D. 400, it was the major religious force in the world. More details with respect to this amazing growth follow in the discussion below.

**The Growth of Christianity:**

Obviously, Christianity did not begin until the death of Jesus Christ. Seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and certain other close followers of our Lord. From that auspicious beginning in Jerusalem, Christianity grew against significant odds until it had spread throughout the entire Roman Empire and far beyond. It became the largest and the most significant religion in the entire world within just a few hundred years. No religion before or since has been its equal. There are many reasons for the phenomenal growth of Christianity… a religion, as we have seen, that the Roman government worked hard to destroy for three hundred years. Yet, they failed. Just how and why did the religion of Jesus Christ do so very well? Although it would be virtually impossible to list everything that contributed to its rapid growth, nine significant reasons are noted below…

**Dedicated Missionaries:**

Certainly one important requirement for any religion to grow is to have individuals spread the message of that religion across the land. Christianity surely had the people with the skills and desire to do this. Beginning in Jerusalem, where James led the Church, the gospel message soon began its spread across the Roman Empire. Very early on, the Christian message was heard all across Judea and Samaria. Paul, as we have seen, had evangelized Asia-Minor and Greece and into Italy. It is reasonably likely that he made a mission trip to Spain as well. Although Paul was the most famous of the missionaries of that day, he was certainly not the only one. Via the famously effective Roman road system, people were able to travel better, faster and farther than at any previous time in history. John Mark took the gospel into Egypt. Thomas travelled into India and the surrounding area to preach of Jesus. Thaddeus and Bartholomew spread the word into Armenia. Over the next three hundred years, hundreds of missionaries carried the message across the entire length and width of the Roman Empire to Mesopotamia and beyond. Before the end of the third century, Christianity had spread to Britain. These men and women had the means (road system) and the desire to spread the message of Jesus Christ. Trade routes were used to spread the gospel. By the end of the third century, Armenia had experienced a great conversion to Christianity. Persia, India and other points east were being continuously exposed to the message of Christ… and many believed. One could ask the very good question as to why they thought that this gospel message was so important… they surely had to believe it extremely valuable as they typically preached this gospel in spite of the very real danger of losing their very lives. So, what was behind all of this?

**The veracity of the Gospel Message:** Obviously when a salesman attempts to sell his product for any type of an organization, the particular product that is being sold to potential buyers is critically important. If it is a good product, chances are markedly better that the salesman and his company will have long term success. Admittedly, a good salesman may be able to sell a faulty product in the short term, but this will not continue over time. The gospel was and is the product being “sold” by missionaries and evangelists. Jesus is what the Christian message is all about. Every single thing taught about Jesus Christ was glorious and was verifiable by the apostles and those they appointed to follow them. Thousands of people had seen Jesus work His miracles and heard His preaching. These people were able to pass this knowledge concerning Jesus along to others. Hundreds of people had seen Jesus after His ascension. His resurrection and its significance was known to thousands and taught to tens of thousands more. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, the Christian religion would not have even begun… let alone grown at its incredible rate. The most impressive reason to back up the truth of the gospel is the historically known actions of the disciples, Stephen, Saul and James (plus others) after the crucifixion. Recall that none but John was “man” enough” to even come to Golgotha, let alone *fight for or defend* Jesus. The friends of Jesus were simply too cowardly… let’s be frank… to stand up for their great teacher and friend, Jesus. Then, less than two months after His terrible death by crucifixion, every one of these men was only too willing to die a martyr’s death for his Savior. Something amazing must have happened to change these people. That something had to be the resurrection plus the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell them. There really is no other possible answer… that is not ludicrous. So, why did Christianity grow so incredibly? Because its message is true… and this was verifiable!

**Miracles and healings:** During the years of Jesus’ ministry, and for many decades after His ascension, God demonstrated His power and glory often by having Jesus or His apostles heal the sick, raise the dead and perform other supernatural miracles. Certainly, these events are *attention getters*. Of course these were done to help those in need at the time. However, they were primarily done to authenticate the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember, there were many other religions in the Roman Empire (in fact, there have always been counterfeit religions). God appropriately wanted and needed to distinguish the only true God from all of the false gods. He did this in a variety of ways as we are now discussing. It is obvious that the miracles and healings done in the name of the Lord by His faithful apostles were effective means of gaining converts to Christianity. Obviously, this contributed significantly to the growth of the Christian religion. It seems that the frequency of miracles performed by the leaders of the Church began to diminish with time as more and more people became Christians. Although miracles certainly do still happen in our present day, they typically are not as blatant as many of those described in the first century. [A blatant miracle would be a man going to sleep with one leg and waking up with two……. or, a woman with two empty eye sockets suddenly having two beautiful, functioning blue eyes]. There are probably several reasons for this. I believe that one reason is that God wants us to demonstrate our faith as we trust Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. This is better accomplished if we do not see miracles performed on a routine basis. Second, it is doubtful that God would want to intervene frequently to change the Laws of Nature. Third, God already proved His point with the miracles in that first century. The evidence is clear that the gospel is true. On the other hand, I do believe that God still does perform phenomenally incredible miracles at certain times and in certain places… even today… maybe just not so often in the USA. This is only my opinion, by the way. Others I have spoken to are convinced that God still works these “blatant” miracles as frequently as ever.

**The Holy Scriptures: (prophecy, high morals, etc.) vs. other religions**

The Holy Scriptures definitely had a role to play in the spreading of the Christian religion. In the first century, the apostles and other evangelists used the Old Testament to demonstrate that Jesus had been prophesized to come all throughout those scriptures… even scriptures written almost 1500 years earlier! Dozens of verses could be referenced to show that the coming of the Messiah, in the person of Jesus, was clearly predicted… and that no one other than Jesus fulfilled these prophesies.

A little later on in New Testament Church history, the gospels and the epistles were used to teach the message of Christ. This “New Testament” had great power and influence as it was written by people who actually witnessed Jesus or were intimate friends of those who had. Great moral truths were taught in these “new” scriptures.

No other religions of that time (nor of our time) had the equal of these Christian scriptures. No other religious scriptures had scores of prophetic messages… that were verifiable and proven to be true. No other religious scriptures taught such great moral truths. No other religion had scriptures written by over forty different men over 1500 years that all had a consistent message and taught the same truths. No other religion had scriptures that taught that the path to salvation would be provided by the sacrificial death of God Himself… that there was no way that a person could earn his/her salvation, but needed to accept it as a free gift from God. The concept of the need for a perfect sacrifice for mankind’s sins was taught from the earliest writings in the Bible. What awaited was the perfect sacrifice to make His appearance… Jesus. The time had arrived. Jesus had just recently made His appearance, showed and taught everyone how to live, then gave us His greatest gift… He died for all mankind’s sins. All of these features were unique to Christian scriptures.

The message of Jesus was revolutionary and beautiful to those who heard or read it. Because of the Christian scriptures, many desired to follow Jesus… and many gave themselves to Him.

**The unique God of Christianity:** Jesus Christ is a totally unique God in the world’s religions. He has so many characteristics that are unique. Let’s look at a few and it will become obvious why so many people were attracted to His gospel:

* He was born on this earth as a baby boy, yet He has existed from eternity past
* He is all human and all God
* He led a perfect life on this earth – for all to witness
* He performed many documented miracles, including healing the sick and raising the dead
* His message (teaching) was revolutionary in its beauty and scope
* He was a God of love, forgiving to all peoples, man and woman alike
* He gave His life as a living sacrifice for all mankind… He shed His blood for our sins
* He rose from the dead as was prophesied in the Old Testament (and Himself)
* He is still alive and now lives in heaven at the right hand of His Father, God
* He intercedes continuously for those who put their faith in Him
* He is coming back someday for His faithful followers… His Church

Due to all of those characteristics, many people wanted to give over their lives to the loving care of the Lord. Life is very difficult. Certainly most people will agree. Since Jesus gave so much evidence that He was who He said He was… Lord and Savior, it is not that hard to understand why so many people would want to give their lives to Him. He tells people that His “yoke is easy, and my burden is light” Matthew 11:30” It only takes a small step of faith to yield one’s life to Him. Many, many people in the Roman Empire believed this step a very excellent one to take.

**The Christian message of faith, hope and love:** The Christian God, Jesus, brought to this earth a gospel message that was unique.

**Death was defeated**! The manner in which this was accomplished was certainly unique. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, came down to this earth and demonstrated the perfect way to live. People now had actually seen God! People now had someone to emulate. Jesus then sacrificed Himself for all mankind – He paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross. God poured out the punishment for our sins onto His only Son… instead of us. People now had the amazing gift of salvation… and it was free. Of course, the gift had to be “opened”. That was not made a complicated task. All one had to do was to turn away from his previous life of sin, that is, repent of one’s sins, then recognize just what Jesus had done on the cross, and ask Jesus to come into his life as Lord and Savior.

A person is asked to turn to Jesus *in* ***faith***. In those days of the apostles and even in the post-apostolic church, there was so much evidence of the truth of the gospel, that it was, at most, a small leap of faith to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. Many, in that first hundred years, had been there to hear His preaching and to see Him perform amazing miracles and healings. Others even saw Him after His ascension. Still others intimately knew friends who had seen these things. Whatever the time period, all any individual is asked to do is to turn to Jesus, *with the faith that they are given,* and ask Him into their life, trusting in Him for salvation and for help to live this life on earth.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

The message of Jesus is one of ***love***. However, His message of love was unique in its scope:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'  But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.  If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?  And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Matt 5:43-47

This concept of loving one’s enemies was certainly revolutionary. Simply put, the Christian was taught to love other people as they loved themselves. In fact, Jesus stated that there were two great commandments. The first related to loving God with all of one’s heart. The second:

'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:31

Jesus certainly has given the world a message of ***hope*** as well. He will help all of His brothers and sisters as they struggle through the difficult times of their lives. He will never forsake those who turn to Him… never. His message on this subject is clear.

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.  In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.  These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.  Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3-9

while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:13-14

No longer was there the impossible requirement of perfectly following the Law that had been the previous Hebrew standard for entrance into heaven. Jesus had come to give His life a ransom for many. Now, any person had the opportunity to turn to Jesus and receive eternal life. The offer was there… who would take it? Many people would turn to Christ in those early years of the church.

**The Christian lifestyle and brotherhood:** When a person became a Christian, they became a part of a very real new family… the family of God. For most Christians, this family was more important than the “blood” family that they had been born into. Interestingly, even this new family was created by blood… the blood of Jesus Christ. Everyone that is a Christian has received a new life due to the shedding of the blood of their Savior, Jesus. When a person joined this Christian family in the days of the Roman Empire, they obviously were making a huge commitment. As noted earlier, people who converted were instructed in the beliefs and practices of Christianity. A believer would spend a lot of time in study, prayer, fasting and worship. Fellowship time was also important. It was common knowledge in most of the Empire that being a Christian had significant risks. Jesus does make some demands on His followers… all of them are for their own good, however. For one thing, a Christian cannot have any other God except Him. This eliminates any possible adherence to the Roman law of giving allegiance to the emperor as a God… hence, the persecution of Christians. Christ also, of course, tells the believer to live a moral life. For this reason, Christians tended to live rather austere lives and they avoided most of the Roman forms of entertainment… most of this entertainment was tainted with immorality… if not being blatantly immoral. Christians refused to participate in the many ceremonies that honored the pagan gods, as well as all of the festivities that were quite immoral in their tone. They lived chaste lives. Many of the Romans were sexually immoral. In other words, the life of the typical Christian was much different than the average Roman citizen. For these reasons, there was quite a brotherhood (and sisterhood) among the believers. They simply did not fit in any longer with the pagan world. Instead, they were a group of people who had found the wonderful answer to life’s perplexing questions… Jesus Christ. They had a wonderful new family and wanted to share their time and ideas with this group of people. When spreading the “good news”, this camaraderie was certainly a positive to the prospective Christian. For many people, the idea of joining a group with high morals and ideals, a group that would go out of their way to help and protect one another, a group that actually loved each member of the “family”, and a group with a wonderful God as its leader and Father, was a very comforting and inviting concept.

For the first century or so, Christians typically met in homes. This was a comfortable place to meet with fellow believers. Of course, different homes were used at varying times for the services. It was not until later, that the church building began to become the preferred area of worship. Another development of early Christianity is the catacomb. The catacomb began with a stairway that descended down about forty feet into the ground. Then, turning horizontal, a series of pathways would extend out for many feet in various directions. There were often several layers (underground ‘floors’) and certainly many horizontal pathways. Into the walls of these pathways, slots large enough to house dead bodies would be dug. Millions of these carved out graves were created during the first few centuries A.D. The Christians often would bury their dead in these catacombs because they were inexpensive and it was a place that all of them could wait until Jesus came to rapture them up into heaven one day. There was a feeling of brotherhood that was very strong in this community of believers. In fact, sometimes meetings were held in the catacomb to remember the dead and look forward to their resurrection. One other thing that became prevalent in the catacomb was Christian art. Pictures of Jesus are seen often, as are symbols of Christianity such as: dove (Holy Spirit), fish (a sign that one was a Christian), anchor (steadfastness of the dead), phoenix (a bird that represented resurrection). At times, Christians would use these symbols to communicate with one another without outsiders understanding.

The Christian Church was made up of a devoted group of followers of Jesus. The feeling of brotherhood was very strong within the Church. Frankly, wherever one finds a group or a family with strong ties and love and devotion for each member, that group will be a magnet for new members. There are many examples of this in life, especially in those groups that are experiencing persecution. This “Christian brotherhood” was certainly one very important reason for the growth of the Church in those early centuries.

**Christian Martyrs:**

The Roman government, as we have discussed, did their level best to stop the Christian movement for almost three hundred years after the Church began. This was done almost exclusively through physical persecution, often leading to death. Of course, this did discourage some from following Christ for fear of this persecution. Also, reportedly tens of thousands (some say up to one hundred thousand) of great and courageous Christian men and women died martyrs’ deaths because of the Romans. However, in the long run, this horrendous Roman persecution resulted in the advancement of the kingdom of God!

Keep in mind that when a person is martyred it tends to generate sympathy, even empathy, in certain groups of people. That is why even in our day, the Fundamentalist Muslims use the “martyrdom” of their members as an effective recruitment tool. Certainly virtually all Americans get very patriotic feelings of revenge when we see our soldiers getting tortured and killed by the enemy… as is sometimes even shown on television.

There are many reasons why Christian martyrdom resulted in the spread of the gospel:

* As a group they were very peaceful people and good citizens – creating sympathy in the general populace
* They were so fervent in their allegiance to their God, Jesus – this was felt to be a noble characteristic in a person
* *All Christians that remained became more determined to live for Jesus and spread the message…* not less so
* *The martyrs were celebrated as heroes of the faith and stories of their courageous death experiences were spread throughout the Roman Empire* (Polycarp’s death is one example of this)
* The majority of non-Christians recognized these persecutions as terribly inappropriate
* Using simple logic, *thinking people recognized that if there were so many reasonable-minded people willing to be tortured and die for a cause… in this case, their belief that Jesus Christ was their Lord and Savior - it made sense to an open minded person to at least consider this religion for their own.* How could so many thousands of good people be so sure that Jesus was God that they would be tortured and die for Him? This was a big reason people throughout the world gave the time to listen to missionaries and read the Christian scriptures when they were given the opportunity… and many of these people converted

There was another aspect of martyrdom that should be mentioned. As already noted, many people were martyred during those times. It did become a “badge of honor” to suffer in this way for Christ. Most felt that while they did not want to die, at least when they died a martyr’s death, they were identifying with their Savior in dying for Him. They were all convinced that they would be with Jesus immediately after their death… and He would give them a wonderful welcome as they entered into heaven.

**God’s supernatural intervention - The Power of the Trinity:** Certainly, the major factor in the development of the early church was the omnipotent God of Christianity. There is no doubt that wanted His church to thrive. God, in all three persons of the Holy Trinity, contributed to the tremendous growth directly. Let us take a look at the role of each:

* **Jesus Christ** – Jesus, of course, came to this earth with the ultimate purpose of giving His life as a sacrifice for all mankind (our justification). Certainly, another important purpose was to show us how to live our lives as we strive to be more like Him (our sanctification). During those early years of the Church, the memory of Jesus was incredibly fresh in the minds of so many people. Because of who He was and what He had done, tens of thousands were attracted to His gospel. His amazing love, teaching, power and His sacrificial death drew these people to His gospel… He was the Rock upon which the Christian Church was built.
* **The Holy Spirit** – Every person who gave their life to Jesus (i.e. became a Christian), was indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. The first major manifestation of this great gift was the very first Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. As discussed earlier in detail, this was a major event in Christian history as all of the apostles were suddenly changed and given great power to advance the gospel of Christ. Keep in mind the amazing transformation in the lives and attitudes of the disciples from their timidity and lack of faith before they had received the Spirit compared to their power, faith and courage after they had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brought many gifts to the believers. Each person is given at least one special gift that helps them become effective disciples for the *body of Christ*. The Holy Spirit’s power manifested within each early Christian was an important aspect to the growth of the early church. Consider the courage required for tens of thousands of Christians to willingly go to martyrs’ deaths for their Savior. The Holy Spirit certainly was within each of these people helping them remain faithful… even to the end of life on this earth.
* **God the Father** – Of course, God, the Father, also had an important role in the early Church. God always uses His providential care to direct the events of history. History is replete with examples of this fact. For instance, God turned the treacherous acts of the brothers of Joseph into a positive as God brought Joseph into great power in Egypt. God also used various foreign and godless nations, such as Assyria, Babylon, and Media-Persia to accomplish His desired result for His people. God even gave the name of the king (Cyrus) who would allow the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. God told this to Isaiah 150 years before the actual event! In other words, biblical evidence shows us that God is always working “behind the scenes” (and sometimes more blatantly) to influence the course of human events. He does this by supernatural intervention to cause particular things to happen to particular people and certain events at different times in history. Due to the many examples given in the scriptures, we know that God had to be working to mold the events of Roman history to yield a significant positive influence on the growth of Christianity.

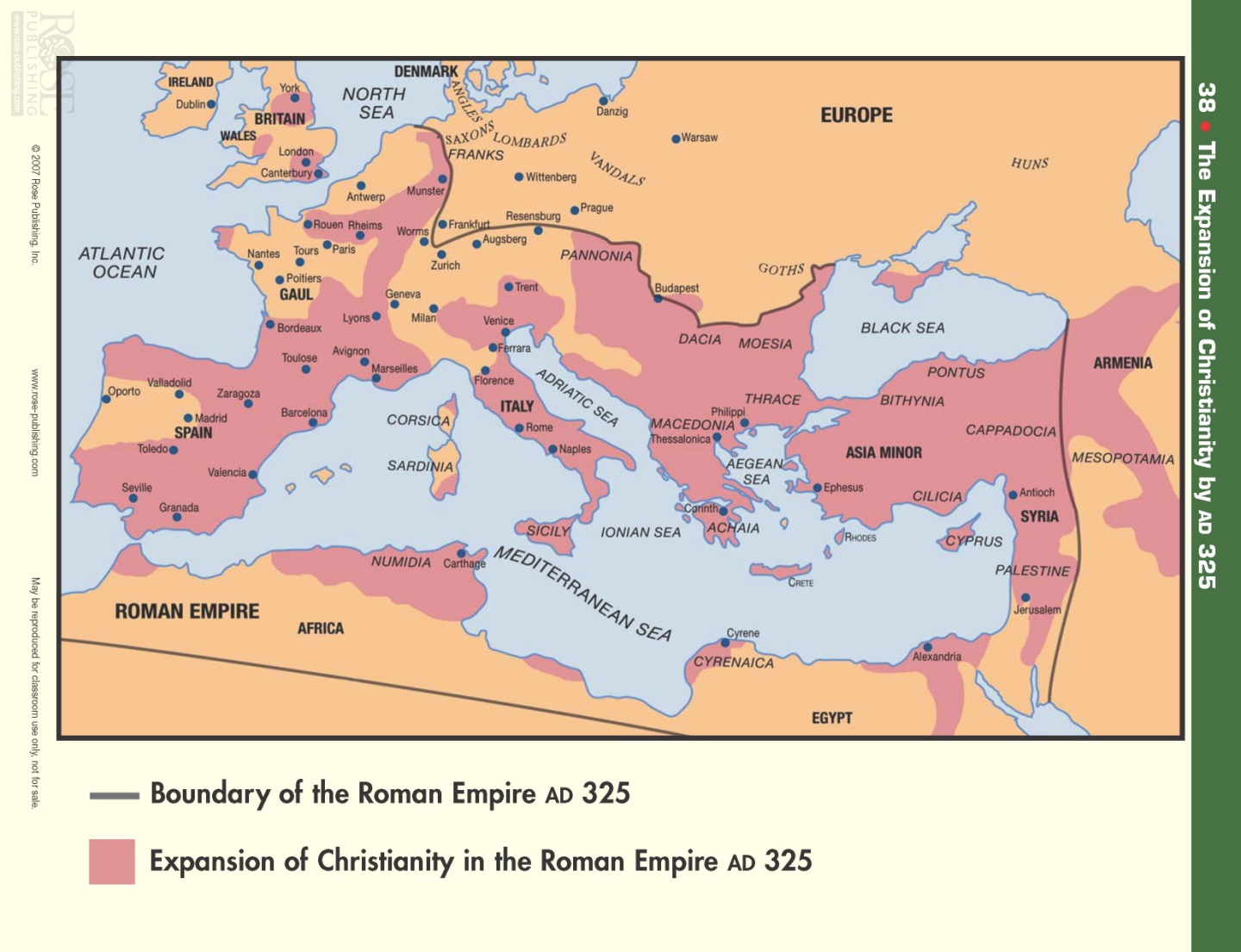
**Conclusion:**

This concludes our historical look at the New Testament Church from the time of its inception at Pentecost until the appearance of Augustine as the fifth century began.

We have seen how once the apostles were given the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, they were able to evangelize much of the known world of the first century. After their death, Christianity continued its rise into prominence for the many reasons outlined. Over the next 350 years, Christianity became the most prominent religion in the Roman Empire. Simply put, because of God and the truth of the gospel message, there would be no stopping of the spread of Christianity throughout the entire world. In fact, that is what has happened.

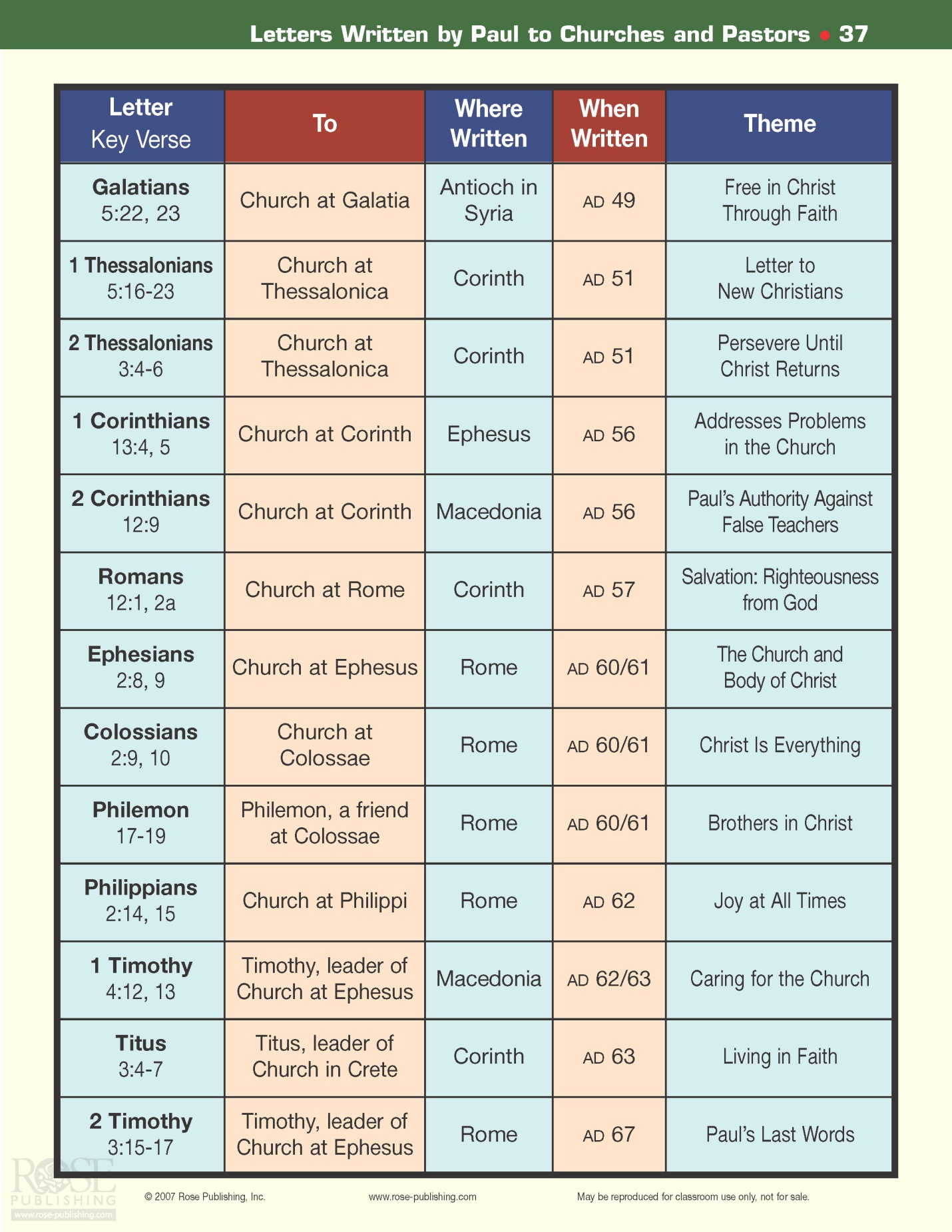
Today, the gospel continues to spread throughout each and every nation in which it is preached. In fact, many say that the word of our Lord has now been preached into every nation in the world (considering radio, television and the internet evangelism). It is certainly getting close to the time that our Lord will return! As the Bible says, “Look up, for your redemption is nigh”. (Luke 21:28)

In the **next portion of this treatise**, I will summarize every epistle in the New Testament plus “The Revelation”. I will discuss them in the order of their appearance in the Bible. The author, date and place of writing, purpose, key facts and synopsis of each will be covered.









**Romans**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: The book of Romans may well be the most important epistle in the Bible. This appears to be the consensus of opinion among theologians. Some believe that it was written by the apostle Paul in the winter of A.D. 57; others say that he wrote it one year earlier. Paul was in Corinth nearing the end of his 3rd missionary journey when he wrote this lengthy letter. Paul had not yet been to that great city… he would go there as a prisoner just a few years later. Phoebe was given the responsibility of delivering this important letter to the fledgling Christians in Rome.

**Purpose:** The main purpose of this letter to the Roman Christians was to describe in detail the doctrine of salvation under the New Covenant. It was still very early in the New Testament Church and no one had, as yet, written a doctrinal treatise concerning this topic. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did so in this epistle. He had written on this theme a few years earlier when he wrote to the churches in Galatia. Now, however, Paul was going to elaborate even further on this critical topic. Other topics would include God’s future dealings with His chosen people, Israel and practical instruction on the daily living of a Christian. Paul also wanted to let these people know just how much he wanted to visit them. He certainly had a visit to Rome in his plans.

**Synopsis:** Paul began this great epistle by introducing himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ set apart by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. He goes on to say that…

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.  For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:16-17

Paul here notes the very new concept of the New Covenant. From now on, the righteous person… the Christian… will live by faith, “from first to last”. This is revealed in the gospel message that Paul is about to discuss in great detail.

Before going into more detail about salvation by faith, Paul pointed out that all mankind is without excuse when it comes to sin. Just via the observation of our universe, all humanity should recognize the existence and nature of God.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.  They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Romans 1:25,28-31

Simply put, all men and women are sinners and in need of salvation. The Jews were given the Law of Moses to teach them the way to live. The Gentiles did not have this Law… but they have a law of sorts written on their hearts… i.e. their conscience. That is, all people are without excuse as all people know how they should live, but they fail, at least at times. Even those committing one sin have committed one too many to gain entrance into God’s perfect heaven.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.  For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.  (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) Romans 2:12-15

To summarize then…

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.  All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12

Paul then pointed out the value of the Law. It was used by God to show man just how impossible and futile it was to attempt to lead a perfect life via self-effort.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:20

So then if no one can lead a life, on their own effort, worthy of eternal life in heaven, what might be the solution?

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.  This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, **and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**  God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Romans 3:21-26

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.  Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.  Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. Romans 3:28-31

Paul explained the New Covenant of justification by faith in his words above. God is the God of all mankind, the Jew and the Gentile. Everyone who is justified is justified by their faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Paul went on to explain that even Abraham was justified by his faith in God, not his works. He was justified by having the faith to trust in God as he set out for the “promised land” from Ur, the faith to trust God for the birth of Isaac even though he was approaching 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old. He had the faith to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as God directed him to do. These demonstrations of faith are what led to the salvation of Abraham, not his works. Faith is what was credited to him as righteousness Romans 4:22

Faith in God is what saved all of the Old Testament saints. Faith is what is required to save anyone. Faith gives people righteousness before God due to their belief in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus.

to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. Romans 4:5

Therefore, since we **have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.  Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:1-4

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned Romans 5:12

For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!  Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.  For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. **For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**  The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, **just as sin reigned in death, so also** **grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** Romans 5:15-21

Paul noted that Adam’s sin brought condemnation onto this world and resulted in his offspring being born with a sin nature. There was never any realistic hope that a man or woman would be able to live a sinless life after that first sin committed by Eve and Adam.

However, now God had sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who was able to lead the life of a sinless human. He also was willing and able to take on the punishment for all of mankind’s sins as he went to the cross to suffer and die. One man, Adam, brought death into the world… now one man (God-man) Jesus had brought life back into the world as a free gift for those who would accept it.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For **we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,** **that we should no longer be slaves to sin**-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.  Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.  For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.  The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.  In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.** Romans 6:5-12

Paul instructs all believers to recognize that they have been crucified with Christ. Christians are united with Him in His death… and they are also united with Him in His resurrection. Christians are no longer slaves to sin and should live using the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to conquer the fleshly desires that remain in the old, mortal body. Do not forget that the Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit to call upon every morning, afternoon and night to help in the process of sanctification. Once we are saved, our goal is to become more like Jesus every day… we are to yield ourselves through prayer and meditation to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Christians are no longer slaves to sin, but have become slaves to righteousness. Romans 6:18

Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.  **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**  Romans 6:22-23

At times, the Christian will battle with his “old sinful nature” and be tempted to give in to sins of the flesh. Paul even noted that early on in his Christian life, he often had this problem.

For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. Romans 7:15

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.  For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.  What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?  Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:21-25

This was the battle that Paul was facing… that most Christians face. So what does Paul suggest is the solution? That answer is found in what many believe to be the most valuable chapter in the most important book of the New Testament… Romans chap. 8.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

Once a person accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes and abides with him. The Spirit of God lives within each Christian for a purpose, of course. This purpose is to help the Christian obtain sanctification as they learn to yield to the prompting and leading of the Spirit.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Romans 8:5

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God Romans 8:14

It is important to be led by the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do… it takes effort on the part of any Christian. However, God certainly gives us instruction as to how to do it. We need to follow the example of Jesus, for one thing. Think of how many hours He spent in prayer to His Father, God… far more than anyone I have ever met. If Jesus knew that this was important for Him, how much more important is it for mortals like us? Paul also reminds all of us in his epistles to constantly call upon the Holy Spirit to help lead our lives, each and every day.

As one of the children of God, we are considered co-heirs with Jesus for all that God has to offer…

Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:17

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:18

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**  For those God foreknew **he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,** that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.  **And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.** Romans 8:28-30

One of the most comforting verses in the Bible is Romans 8:28. Due to the omnipotence of God, He is able to take all things that happen to one of His children and somehow, through His providential care, make them work together for good. Obviously, not all things are good… but, God can use even our mistakes and even the terrible things that happen to us and, ultimately, use them together for our benefit. Paul then points out that if we as Christians have God as our Father, we have nothing to worry about…

**If God is for us, who can be against us?** Romans 8:31

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** **Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?**  As it is written:   
"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." (Psalms 44:22)

Paul quoted from the Psalms to tell his readers that as Christians we will all suffer at one time or another. Yet, with God on our side…

**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.  For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Romans 8:35-39

Jesus loves His children… Christians… and He will take care of His children in every situation imaginable. Nothing can defeat us as nothing can defeat Him. Nothing at all! When we give our lives to Jesus, we truly do become His forever.

After Paul presents the total superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant and how to live life in the power of the Holy Spirit, he spends a little time writing about his countrymen, the Jews. For one thing, Paul is sad that so many of the Jews have turned their backs on their own Messiah. He notes that they have had such a great history as God’s chosen people… but now they were not trusting in their promised Messiah…

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.  For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.  Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Romans 9:2-5

Some might ask, why would God not have mercy on all people, including those Jews who now were rejecting His Son. Paul answers…

For he says to Moses,   
"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Romans 9:15

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"  Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? Romans 9:20-21

the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.  Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written:   
"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Romans 9:30-33

This “stumbling Stone” was Jesus Christ. In the “Church Age” that the world entered after Pentecost, Gentiles would be the predominate people who would turn to Christ and accept Him for the Messiah and Savior that He is. Of course, there are Jews who also are Christians. In fact, the Jews were most instrumental in the early Church. Look at Peter, James, Paul, John, and all the other apostles. Yet, as time went by, less and less Jews would turn to Christ and His Church. One day, this will all change… but not until the end of the age. Paul continued his discussion about his fellow Jews noting that they had the heart for God but were not recognizing the facts that would have led them to salvation. Unfortunately, like so many others, the Jews of that time did not come to the study of the scriptures seeking the truth. Paul, like so many others after him, believed that the evidence for the veracity of the gospel message was readily apparent… if one looked at all of the evidence with an *open mind*.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.  For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.  Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Romans 10:1-4

While the Jews, as a whole, would turn away from Christ, the Gentiles would have the opportunity to find Jesus. Many Gentiles would turn to Jesus in this “Church Age”… the “Age of the Gentiles”. This is just another example of the love of God and the fact that He wants everyone to be saved. However, it remains true that Israel has a special place in His heart and He certainly will not forsake them. One day in the future, God will deal directly with Israel again as the “Church Age” draws to a close. During the ‘End Times’, Israel will turn to Jesus, the Messiah that so many of them had once rejected.

 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:   
"The deliverer (Jesus) will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.  And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." Romans 11:25-27

Paul used the latter portion of his letter to the Romans to teach them how to live the Christian life. He did this in several of his letters. Of course, the primary purpose of this great epistle was to outline the New Covenant of salvation by the sacrificial death of Christ. However, Paul wanted to give some instruction on how Christians should conduct themselves. He basically reviewed those things that Jesus taught while He was on this earth. These topics included many things. For example, he pointed out that Christians should not be judgmental nor place stumbling blocks in the way of fellow Christians.

Paul was really looking forward to visiting Rome and Spain…

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.  Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. Romans 15:23-25

Unfortunately, Paul would not be able to go to Rome in the manner that he would have preferred. A few years later, he did get escorted there, however. He then spent two years on house arrest. He had been arrested secondary to his brilliant service for Jesus Christ.

Finally, Paul and Tertius (who was Paul’s scribe for this letter) signed off by sending greetings to a large variety of people they knew in the Roman church.

Then, Paul’s final words of this epistle…

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. Romans 16:25-27

**Conclusion:** Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church in order to introduce himself, as he planned a visit to Rome. More importantly, he used this epistle to explain in significant detail the gospel of Jesus Christ. In it, he wrote down the basics of salvation… why it is needed and the method by which people are to obtain it. He noted that all men and women are without excuse for their actions. We all are sinners and we all have many reasons to know that there is a righteous, moral God that will hold us accountable for these sins. In fact, all people require the grace of God because of the penalty for these sins…

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul then presented the New Covenant concept of salvation – **salvation through faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ… **not through works**. As Adam had brought sin and death into the world, Jesus was the author of life and salvation. Paul pointed out that even the Old Testament saints, such as Abraham and David, were saved by their faith, not their works.

The wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit was discussed as the new believer’s helper in leading the Christian life. Christians will find it terribly frustrating, as did Paul, if they try to live their lives under the Law. As a child of God, a brother of Jesus Christ, we must learn to live with the help of the Spirit. Christians are no longer “under the Law”. Instead, we are sealed by the promise of Christ unto salvation. All Christians have been chosen by God from eternity past, that is “elected”, to be called, justified and eventually glorified. Certainly, Christians face many difficulties in life, but… Romans 8:28 lets us know that **“in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”.** God tells His children, in this epistle, that they are joint heirs with His Son, Jesus. Therefore, one day in the future, we will inherit an incredible future in heaven.

Paul spent a significant amount of time in this book lamenting the plight of his Jewish brothers. They were not taking to the gospel as readily as Paul would have liked. They would not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. This was very disappointing as he loved his countrymen and knew the consequences of their lack of faith. The Gentiles were the people more willing to accept the gospel message. The “Age of the Gentiles”, the “Church Age”, had begun. Paul does note that his Jewish brothers will one day turn to Jesus as they recognize Him as their Messiah. This will be in the end times, just before Jesus comes to set up His kingdom on earth.

Paul’s final theme in Romans is to exhort Christians to service. He gives them some instructions on how to live a life that will be pleasing to God.

**1 Corinthians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Corinth while in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Paul lived and ministered to the people in Ephesus for three years. He most likely wrote this letter to the Corinthians in A.D. 55. Although this is referred to as 1 Corinthians, this was not Paul’s first letter to the people in Corinth. In fact, Paul mentions an earlier letter in 1 Cor. 5:9. He had addressed the topic of sexual immorality among the people of the church with that first letter. Paul first taught the Christian message in Corinth from approximately A.D. 50-52 while on his second mission trip. He was there for about 1 ½ years. A fairly large group of people had been won to Christ over the years in that cosmopolitan city, but were now having some significant difficulties that Paul wanted to address with this letter. Corinth is situated in southern Greece in the Roman province called Achaia. It was only 45 miles west of Athens. As a great port city, it gained wealth and prominence within the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, it also deteriorated into a morally decadent city. Many of the problems of the church stemmed from the fact that this city was a very immoral place. It apparently had not been so easy to break away from their sinful sexual habits after becoming followers of Christ. In fact, some were not even sure that this was particularly necessary. Hence, the need for this letter.

**Purpose**: Paul wrote this long epistle to the church at Corinth to attempt to answer several questions that had been asked of him by certain members of that congregation. He also wanted to address several problems that related to activities of members of that church. It is a practical letter, not a theological letter such as the epistle to the Romans.

**Synopsis:** Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother **Sosthenes**, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: **Grace and peace to you** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 1:1-3

Paul has his classic opening here as he introduces himself and, in this case, Sosthenes. Sosthenes probably was the scribe for the letter as Paul almost always used a scribe when writing his epistles. He was the synagogue leader that was beaten during an attack on Paul mentioned in Acts 18:17. Paul invariably opened his letters with the words “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”… as he did here. The key words here, of course, are Grace and peace… the two wonderful gifts God was now giving every believer through Jesus His Son.

Paul then goes right into reminding these people how they have been given so many great things from God… including salvation, knowledge, spiritual gifts, assurance and fellowship. Given these gifts from God, Paul exhorted them to remain faithful and united as a church body. Apparently there had arisen many divisions among the people there, unfortunately. Some claimed to be followers of Paul, others Peter, others Apollos and still others Christ. Paul pointed out that they all needed to realize that Christ was the only One to be followed… Jesus Christ alone. Jesus Christ is the One who has given them salvation. They were all baptized into Jesus… no one else. Paul wanted them to understand this clearly.

The next issue that Paul addressed related to the lack of belief in the power of Jesus Christ crucified. He noted that the Jews were looking for a certain type of Messiah that would come and take the world by storm. The Greeks in their “wisdom’ did not believe that God would actually come to this earth to die on a cross. Jesus did not fit their idea of a god. Yet, Paul again reminded them of the truth of the Gospel… regardless of the people in the city telling them otherwise…

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.  For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 1 Cor 1:22-25

Most of the new Christians in the church in Corinth were the “common” men and women of the city. They were not too proud to listen to the message… and believe. Paul again reminded them just how much they had in Christ that they did not have before they turned to Him…

you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, **our righteousness, holiness and redemption.**  Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." 1 Cor 1:30-31

As Paul continued in his letter, he said that he did not come to preach to them with eloquence or the wisdom of man. Instead, he came to give them the message of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was not Paul’s job (nor is it our job) to persuade any given individual to believe in Jesus as their Savior. It is out job, as Christ tells us in the Gospels, to go out and tell people about Him. Yet, it is the Holy Spirit that will convict a person of the truth of the Gospel… that final decision is between God and that particular individual.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:14&16

Of course, once a person does accept Jesus into their heart, the Holy Spirit comes into them… literally… and from that time on that person is a new creature in Jesus. The Christian will look at certain things differently than the non-Christian due to this fact. Probably the best example of this would be the Holy Bible. To many, the Bible is a book of fiction, not to be believed and of no real value. To the dedicated, sanctified Christian, the Bible is the Word of God and of eternal value.

Although Paul did not come to twist anyone’s arm to believe with fancy speech and intriguing arguments, he does say that the scriptures are filled with the wisdom of God. For those who study the Word, they will gain great knowledge that would definitely be lost on the non-believing scoffer. The Holy Spirit will help the true student of the Word to understand the message that God has for them. As a Christian goes through life, the Holy Spirit will grant them glimpses of their eternal destiny. These “glimpses” may come in any number of ways… but, they do tend to come to the faithful student of the Word.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. 1 Cor 2:9-10

After writing about the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, Paul once again returned to his admonition concerning the divisions in the Corinthian Church. There simply was a great lack of unity there because too many people were following a person and not Jesus. Paul once again encouraged all of them to put their faith in Jesus, not any man. It is true that every believer has an important role to play in the building of the Church. However, Jesus is the cornerstone.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.  If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.  If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.  If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.  Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?  If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for **God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple**. 1 Cor 3:11-17

All Christians are told to work for Christ while on this earth. Remembering that each individual believer literally is the Temple of the Holy Spirit should cause every believer to think before doing, speaking, eating, drinking, seeing, or hearing anything that would bring dishonor to the Holy Spirit… and shame to that individual Christian. The same can be said for the collection of believers known as the Church. Every local church should strive to keep its members beyond reproach… those that dishonor Christ with sinful lives need to be confronted in a biblical manner and hopefully they will repent. If not, they need to be excommunicated.

Paul next directed his remarks to those that were involved in running the local church there in Corinth. He wanted the church to unite behind the teachings of Christ… not the teachings of any individual, often only out for power, money or fame. This problem is endemic in our world today… especially in televangelism. There is certainly no doubt about that.

Men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now **it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.**  1 Cor 4:1-2

It is interesting how Paul approaches this next point. He uses sarcasm in a big way to demonstrate the differences between those who really want to share the gospel and the love of Jesus Christ verses many of the leaders in Corinth who seemed to be more interested in improving their lot in life than furthering the gospel and teaching Christ’s message.

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings--and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.  We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!  To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 1 Cor 4:8-11

When one studies the Bible, it is really amazing to see just how similar things are today to the way they were in those times. As Solomon said, “there is nothing new under the sun.” Today, there are so many teachers, preachers and evangelists who have gotten absurdly rich off of their “work”. I know that this troubles many people who wonder why these people do not act more like Paul. If Jesus has given them so very much, which He has, why not give most of this financial bounty to the poor and sick and homeless? What a great testimony that would be! Instead, so many of them literally fly around in their private jets to their various mansions! Well, Paul was not like those leaders in Corinth, nor those of today who wallow in money made on preaching or teaching of the Word.

Then, Paul gave these leaders some sage advice…

I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. 1 Cor 4:16-17

I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.  For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 1 Cor 4:19-21

Paul was very much like Christ in the way that he lived. His only real concern was for the advancement of the kingdom of God. He told the folks at Corinth that he planned to come to see them soon. He would not be coming to teach and preach like those “arrogant” leaders that had recently been preaching to their congregation. Instead, he would show them the true power of Christ as he would come in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s next subject to be addressed in this epistle related to the terrible sexual sin and pride that was now characterizing the church in Corinth. There was at least one man who was involved, apparently openly, in fornication (probably with his stepmother). Paul had been told that the church members did not even flinch at this knowledge. This shocked the apostle…

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.  And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 1 Cor 5:1-2

Paul did not waste any words on this terrible situation. He told the church that they must confront the man and…

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Cor 5:4-5

What Paul was saying was that they must excommunicate this man, assuming he would not truly repent. Then, it was up to the individual sinner and God what the final result would be. They could not let “a little yeast work through the whole batch of dough”. (1 Cor. 5:6) Sin cannot be tolerated in the Church. Paul noted that it was not his or their business to judge those outside of the Church… but it was their job to do so within the Church.

I am writing you that **you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler.** With such a man do not even eat. 1 Cor 5:11

Throughout the middle portion of the letter, Paul answered many questions that had come to him concerning how a Christian should handle certain issues. These topics included:

* Lawsuits between two Christian brothers – these should not occur… but the problem should be handled within the brotherhood of the church
* Flee from sexual immorality - Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Cor 6:19-20
* Paul expounds on marriage
* Circumcision – should not be an issue at all
* Virginity – an honorable situation
* Do not eat food sacrificed to idols – this looks bad to some and therefore should be avoided as there is no need to make anyone stumble --- Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.  But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.  Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 1 Cor 8:7-9

Paul next turned to the topic of his credentials to oversee their church. He certainly was telling them that they were doing things poorly and needed to change their ways. So why should they listen to him?

Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?  Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 1 Cor 9:1-2

Paul had been the evangelist that had introduced these people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had all of the qualifications of apostleship. The Lord Jesus had specifically chosen him to be the primary missionary to the Gentiles. There was actually no one with better credentials in the world! Interestingly, some of the church members looked down at Paul and Barnabas because they worked so hard to earn their own living instead of living off a salary from the church. Apparently, the other apostles and their families did take advantage of this appropriate system. However, just because Paul and Barnabas wanted to go out of their way to save the money due them (so it could be used for people more in need) was certainly no reason for the people of the church to look down at them. There is no evidence that Paul took money from any church other than a little from the church at Philippi. Both Paul and Barnabas should have been looked upon with even greater respect. Instead, some thought that if Paul did not take money from the church treasury, maybe he did not think he was deserving of it. If one thinks about it, things like this still happen in the world today. Sometimes the more money people have, regardless the reason they got it, the more respect they get. Odd but true.

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.  Don't we have the right to food and drink?  Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas (Peter)?  Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? 1 Cor 9:3-6

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? 1 Cor 9:11-12

After Paul points out the fact that apostles and ministers such as he and Barnabas have every right to a reasonable salary, he goes on to say that he doesn’t want one. He much prefers to do his preaching and teaching for the pure love of Jesus. Taking pay, it seems to Paul, would diminish its eternal value… at least in his mind. Paul tells his readers that he is going to work to win as many people to Christ as he possibly can. Although it is true that Paul does not covet money or fame in this world, he does have a “prize” in mind as his goal while striving to please God and Jesus…

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. **Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training**. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but **we do it to get a crown that will last forever**.  Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.  No, **I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize**. 1 Cor 9:24-27

Paul wants everyone to discipline themselves, in an analogous manner to an athlete, so that each person will strive to take an active role in spreading the gospel and teaching the Bible (or in some other way make one’s life count for Jesus). By identifying and using one’s spiritual gifts for the glory of God, this life task can and should be accomplished.

Paul goes on to give an example of why it is so important to live a holy life by referencing the history of Israel. He spoke of Moses bringing the Israelites out of their Egyptian bondage and how all of the people were so well protected and provided for by God. Unfortunately, the people quickly fell into sin. God punished them… some unto death.

Paul listed some of the sins that these Old Testament people were guilty of:

* Idolatry
* Murmuring/complaining
* Grumbling
* Testing the Lord
* Sexual immorality

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.  So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!  No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor 10:11-13

Paul’s point was that anyone and everyone can potentially fall. People should always be on the alert and working to stay on course for Christ. There are so many traps that our old nature can lead us into. Satan is alive and well and is always trying to get a Christian to fail. Life is not easy. That is why we all need to live one day at a time (ask God for “our daily bread”) and place the Holy Spirit in charge of our life each and every morning with a heartfelt prayer. Also, read the Bible every day.

Before moving on to write on the topic of spiritual gifts, Paul wanted to make two more points related to their worship services. Apparently, he had been notified that some of the men and women were not dressing properly for the custom of that city when they attended church. In those days, that showed a lack of respect for the spouse and a lack of respect for the worship service itself… and, therefore, God. That needed to be corrected. The second problem was even worse. They were making a mockery of the Lord’s Supper. Some had turned the sacrament into a gluttonous feast! Paul warned them of the dire consequences of taking this very serious occasion lightly in the following words…

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.  A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.  For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.  That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.  But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.  When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. 1 Cor 11:27-32

Paul’s words for the Corinthians should be remembered by all Christians today… and practiced. Paul concluded this section of his letter by writing…

And when I come I will give further directions. 1 Cor 11:34

After concluding his message concerning their etiquette during worship, Paul then broached the subject of spiritual gifts in some detail. The people in the church at Corinth were very attuned to the use of the various spiritual gifts. Unfortunately, instead of using the gift(s) of each member of the congregation to build a great church for God, there had developed rivalries between various factions in the church as to who had the greatest number and/or types of spiritual gifts. This was ridiculous and Paul pointed this out. First of all, Paul warned them that they never confuse God given spiritual gifts with those rants directed at idols that some of them had been involved with prior to coming to Christ.

You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.  Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 12:2-3

As is typical with most things in life, by the fruit of a person, you shall know them. Paul says that anyone really using the gift of tongues will always be found to be edifying the Lord Jesus. If someone is supposedly using this gift and is saying something at odds with the scriptures, they are being influenced by some sort of ungodly spirit or they are just speaking on their own. As always is the case… “by their fruits, ye shall know them.”

Paul listed many of the spiritual gifts: ***apostles, prophets, teachers,*** ***wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, distinguishing between spirits, administration, exhortation, helping others, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues***

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 1 Cor 12:11

In the church at Corinth, the use of the gift of tongues had become highly valued. In fact, there seemingly was somewhat of a competition between the various factions in regard to who was the most impressive individual during their meetings when it came to demonstrating this gift. Paul wanted this kind of thing to stop immediately. He pointed out that every gift was of significant value to the body of believers. Then, Paul writes some of the most famous words in the Bible…

 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. 1 Cor 12:31

The entire 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians follows…

 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.  If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.  If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.  Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.  It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.  Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.  It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.  Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.  For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.  When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.  **Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.  And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** 1 Cor 13:1-13

After Paul wrote these beautiful words, he returned to the subject of speaking in tongues. Since this church in Corinth had so much difficulty with this one spiritual gift, Paul gave them some important guidelines and words of advice concerning the use of this gift. By taking his advice, their services would be much better and certainly more reverent.

At this point, Paul began to bring his long epistle to a close.

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.  By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.  For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.  After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.  Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.  For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.  But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. 1 Cor 15:1-11

As can be seen, Paul gives a synopsis of the gospel to open this portion of the letter. He went on to say that he worked harder than all the other witnesses to the resurrection, partly because of his past record of persecution of the Church. Actually, Paul was chosen by God because God knew the kind of man this rugged, driven individual was. He was the chief antagonist of the believers of Christ, as a Pharisee. Then, after his incredible conversion experience, he became the chief missionary to the Gentiles for Christ.

This troubled church not only was having problems with living the Christian life, they also were beginning to follow the doctrines of some false teachers. Many aspects of the message that Paul had brought and taught them a few years earlier were being distorted. In fact, if they were to adopt some of these false beliefs, they really would not be able to rightly call themselves Christians. Chief among these distorted beliefs was the doctrine that Christ did not rise from the dead and neither would others. Paul then embarks on a defense of the resurrection of the dead.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?  If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.  And **if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.  Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.  If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 1 Cor 15:12-14&17-19

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.  But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.  Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.  For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.  The last enemy to be destroyed is death.  For he "has put everything under his feet." 1 Cor 15:20-27

Paul continued on this topic to explain that people like him have risked everything, including death, because they were totally convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. It would make absolutely no sense at all for the apostles to live the lives that they had lived… dying martyr’s deaths after suffering massive persecution, if their Savior had been a fake. And, Jesus would certainly have been a fake if He had died and stayed in the grave. Then, Paul tells them a “mystery” concerning the future resurrection bodies of Christians…

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.  As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.  And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.  I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.  Listen, **I tell you a mystery**: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.  For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.  When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: **"Death has been swallowed up in victory."   
"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"   
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.  But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** 1 Cor 15:47-58

After that rousing teaching on the future resurrection of the saints, Paul concluded this epistle with a request that they collect an offering for the saints in Jerusalem… a church with a great many poor members. He also had a few personal requests… i.e. he asked them to treat Timothy well if he came to visit them and he wrote that he hoped to winter there.

I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you.  For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.  All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 1 Cor 16:17-20

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus had taken the time and interest to deliver Paul the letter (with its many questions) from the church at Corinth that this epistle was addressing. Paul suggested that they treat these three men with respect and recognize them for their good deeds when they returned. Priscilla and Aquila were well known to the folks in Corinth as they had lived there in the recent past. Now they were working with Paul in Ephesus.

**Conclusion:** This epistle of Paul is a practical letter to address certain difficulties that were facing the new church in Corinth. There were apparently many factions vying for power within that congregation. Each one would tout the leader of their group, or the person who had led them to Christ, as the individual that needed to be followed. Paul pointed out clearly that the only leader of the Church was Jesus Christ, Himself! He then used the early portion of this letter to remind them of exactly what Christianity was all about.

Paul then turned to address the many questions that he had been asked to comment upon. He spoke on the subjects of immorality in the church (and how to handle it), lawsuits between Christians, marriage and single life, church services, and more. This church was going through some difficult times as many members were obviously not trying to imitate the life of Christ.

After Paul next exhorts the members of the Corinthian church to live a much more moral life, he went into detail concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He concluded this topic by noting that the greatest gift of all was the gift of Love.

Finally, Paul concluded his writing to these Corinthians by reminding them of the gospel… in some detail. He had to be concerned that many were not really of a full understanding of all that Christ had done for them and the faith that they were expected to demonstrate in return. Some had the false notion that there would be no resurrection. He wrapped this portion up in a stirring manner by speaking of the victory that Christ gives to all those that trust in Him over humanity’s greatest foe… death. Through Christ we have victory over death!

**2 Corinthians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: The Apostle Paul spent approximately three years in Ephesus ministering to the people there. That is where he wrote 1 Corinthians. In late A.D. 55, he again heard disturbing news concerning the many false teachers that had infiltrated the church at Corinth and were leading it significantly astray. He decided to visit Corinth immediately and see if he could correct the problem. Unfortunately, his visit there at that time did not end well. Apparently, he was insulted and was unable to rid the congregation of the false teachers on that occasion. He returned to Ephesus and stayed there a little longer. Paul decided to write them another letter… often referred to as the “severe letter” and he sent it to Corinth with Titus. A little while after Titus had gone to Corinth, a riot broke out (sparked by Demetrius) in Ephesus and Paul headed north to Troas. He was so anxious to see how the church had responded to Titus and his “severe letter” that he continued on to Macedonia hoping to see Titus as soon as possible. He was very happy when Titus met up with him in Macedonia and told him that a large portion of the members of the Corinthian church had repented and were now following the true gospel message. Paul was extremely pleased and soon began to write them one last letter… now known as 2 Corinthians. He wrote this epistle in approximately A.D. 56. Interestingly, this is the fourth letter that Paul wrote for which we have at least some evidence. The first and third letters have been lost.

**Purpose:** Paul’s primary reasons for writing this epistle were:

* Defend his apostleship
* Discuss the inevitable trials a Christian must face and the hope that God gives to help through these difficult times
* Exhort the Corinthians to resume their collection for the poor in Jerusalem
* Confront the false apostles
* Talk of the need for church discipline

**Synopsis:** Paul begins his epistle in his classic style…

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:  Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Cor 1:1-2

Timothy is with Paul as he writes this letter from Macedonia. He immediately writes to them of the comfort of God, including words that are the title of a famous book by Hannah Whitall Smith… The God of All Comfort. Paul introduces God and praises God as…

**the God of all comfort**, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.  For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Cor 1:3-5

Paul then went on to give a personal testimony of the terrible hardship that he had endured, almost even to death, while in Asia-Minor. He thanked them all for their prayers as God had answered them and kept saw him through those dark days. Paul then explained why he changed his earlier plans to visit Corinth… he did not want to come until he would be able to come under better circumstances. He had already made one very painful visit and he did not feel another would be a good idea.

So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.  For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?  I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. 2 Cor 2:1-3

Now, however, many of the congregation had repented and that was very encouraging to Paul. In fact, one of the people that they had excommunicated had repented of a very serious sexual offence and now wanted to resume fellowship in the church. The rest of the members were balking at this. Paul tells them…

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.  I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. 2 Cor 2:7-8

Paul began to remind them of the message he had brought to them years earlier… a message that false teachers had tried to distort ever since. Paul reminded them of the inability of the Law of Moses to save anyone… it only was able to convict people of their sins. Although this was important, of course, Jesus had come to bring salvation from these same sins. The New Covenant was infinitely better.

Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.  But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.  Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:15-18

Paul continues to write of the New Covenant and the difficulties that Christians have to face through their lives. Fortunately, God gives us the Holy Spirit to live within our bodies… Paul refers to the body as a ‘jar of clay’. This, of course, is symbolic of a weak, perishable container… which we certainly are. Why would God do this?

But we have this treasure in jars of clay **to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**  We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed 2 Cor 4:7-9

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.  So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Cor 4:16-18

Due to our new relationship with Jesus, we do not have to concern ourselves anymore with the weakness of our bodies. We now have the knowledge and the power to keep our minds on the Lord through all of the difficulties and trials of life. Of course, this still takes effort as we must keep our minds looking at Christ in all of our trials.

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.  Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.  For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Cor 5:1-5

Paul uses the metaphor of an ‘earthly tent’ to represent our weak, present day body. Although we may ‘groan’ often due to our weakness, and yearn for our heavenly body, God has given us the Holy Spirit to be a down payment as well as a reminder to us that one day we will receive a glorious and powerful body. While we are in this human body it is our job to work for Christ and become conformed to Him. Then, one day, we will leave our current body and be with the Lord. Paul then reminded the reader that everyone will have to face the Lord as judge some day… so be ready.

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.  **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**  2 Cor 5:9-10

There were apparently many men that were preaching a different gospel in Corinth at that time. They were doing what a lot of the false preachers do today. They would take certain portions of the gospel message and use them, but then add other things… usually some necessity of the performance of ‘good works’ in order to gain one’s salvation. These men also tended to be interested in making money and gaining power – not simply spreading the word about Jesus. Essentially all of these characters denigrated Paul and his message as they wanted to usurp his authority… and, certainly his pure gospel message had to be disparaged. Paul therefore, tried to set the record straight. He told his audience…

We know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.  We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 2 Cor 5:11-12

Paul said that he simply carried to them the straightforward gospel message. He then retells this message and points out that he and his co-preachers (such as Timothy) were simply sent by God as the ambassadors for Christ…

**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**  All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.  **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.  **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** 2 Cor 5:17-21

Paul continued on this topic as he pleaded with the people there in Corinth to turn their backs on those trying to lead them away from the true gospel of Christ. He reminded them of the incredible trials that he had endured in order to bring the gospel to them and others… beatings, jail time, riots, sleepless nights, hunger, etc. They should recognize that he (and his fellow evangelists such as Titus and Timothy and Silas) did this because of their love for Christ, the gospel message and the people to whom they were witnessing… that is, the Corinthians. He said…

We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.  As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also 2 Cor 6:12-13

Once more he asked that they turn away from the false gospel that some in their congregation were considering. Instead, they should stand united under the gospel of Jesus Christ…

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Cor 6:14

We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 2 Cor 6:16

Given this great promise from God, Paul exhorted these people to push forward toward sanctification.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Cor 7:1

At this point in his letter, Paul wrote of his recent meeting with Titus. He noted that Titus was very impressed with the kindness shown him by the members of their congregation. He said that Titus also told him about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. 2 Cor 7:7 In other words, Paul was paying them a compliment at this point in his epistle. He also pointed out that although he was concerned with how they would react to his recent stern letter, he now realized, after hearing from Titus, that many in the church had repented and gotten back on the right track after the initial sorrow and indignation.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.  See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. 2 Cor 7:10-11

When Titus brought them the “painful’ letter of reprimand from Paul some months earlier, many of the church members were, at first, either upset, sorrowful and/or indignant. However, after thinking about the points that Paul had made, they realized the error of their ways and repented. Paul was pleased at their response and let them know it. He even told them how he had been boasting about them to Titus…

I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well.  And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.  I am glad I can have complete confidence in you. 2 Cor 7:14-16

The next point in 2 Corinthians was specifically related to the collection of money for the poorer church in Jerusalem. The Corinthians had begun a collection many months earlier, but because of their recent problems, this collection had faltered. Paul reminded them of the real need to pick up once again on this collection…

 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.  Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.  For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.  Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 2 Cor 8:10-13

Paul then gave a general principal about giving to the Lord’s work…

Remember this: **Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.**  **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**  And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Cor 9:6-8

The last section of the letter to the members of the Corinthian church was where Paul dealt with those who had been challenging his ministry. He had just spent several paragraphs complimenting most of the members for their recent actions. They had repented from following the false teachers and turned back to Jesus and the pure gospel. However, the false teachers were still there and trying their best to hoodwink the people into following them and their false teachings. Paul began by telling them that it was much easier for him to tell them difficult things by letter than face-to-face. Therefore, he was about to tell them some important things, but difficult things. First, Paul asked them to look at the people and the message that they had been taught to follow carefully before deciding on who and what to believe. Too many of the members of that church had been following men who were more like the proverbial “used-car salesmen” of our day… no offense to any used-car salesmen reading this. They were not carefully looking at the actual person and message carefully and with an analytical mind. That is what is necessary for everyone in the world today. Far too many people either reject Jesus without even considering whether He is the Son of God and our Savior… and others get caught up in following any glitzy speaking evangelist with an appealing, although bogus, message. We are expected by God to read His Word and know what He really is telling us. God and Jesus have told us everything we need to know to be saved and to live our lives to their utmost. However, we have to try at least a little bit!

Returning to this epistle, Paul asked the readers in Corinth to compare the interlopers to him… and not to look at the surface only… to really look at the man and what they were doing and saying. He was telling them to beware of these “super-apostles” (of course, super-apostles was written sarcastically).

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.  But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.  For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.  But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles."  I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. 2 Cor 11:2-6

In those days in Corinth, and even to significant degree in our day, we evaluate the value of a person by how much money he makes or charges for his services. Paul had not asked for any financial support from these people as he wanted to get the gospel across to them simply because he knew its ultimate value. He was able to make enough to live on via some monetary contributions from the church at Philippi and from his tent making. However, the fact that Paul preached and taught gratis in their church, tended to make him less significant in their eyes than some of the ‘slick’ false teachers. They *charged* for teaching the church members their false gospel. How ironic. No doubt, this kind of thing still happens at times in our world. Paul explained the situation to them… that just because he did not ask them for any support, they should not discount his message. Those other men were teaching a lie…

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.  And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.  It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 2 Cor 11:13-15

You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise!  In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. 2 Cor 11:19-20

Paul scolded those people in the church that were so naïve to believe the lies of the devil… to trust in the false teachers and ignore and even reject those that taught the truth… including, of course, Paul.

Paul then challenges these wavering church members to take a good look at the facts. He presented them with his resume in comparison to these false teachers:

* Paul was a Hebrew as were the false teachers
* Paul worked much harder than they did
* Paul had been flogged, imprisoned and on the verge of death on numerous occasions, all for Christ – the false teachers had no such claims
* Paul had gone without food and water for Christ – the false teachers had not
* Paul had been shipwrecked for the cause of Christ – the false teachers had not
* Paul had been stoned – the false teachers had not
* Paul had been on missionary trips for many, many years – the false teachers had not
* Paul had been cold and naked for the cause of Christ – the false teachers had not
* Paul donated his services because of his love of Christ and the people – the false teachers had not
* Paul had planted a multitude of churches – the false teachers had not

So, the question? Who are you going to follow? The answer should be obvious.

Paul also mentioned that God had blessed him with a vision of the “third heaven” (what the modern man would now just call heaven). He said that that he heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. 2 Cor 12:4

Because of all that God had permitted Paul to see and do (such as the many miracles and healings, etc), Paul said that God gave him…

a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.  Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.  But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.  That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:7-10

Paul was planning on visiting them in the near future. He told them that he was coming, hoping that when he got there that they would have repented of their sins. He told them of his concerns:

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.  I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged. 2 Cor 12:20-21

He told them of his plan when he came to visit…

On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.  For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. 2 Cor 13:2-4

Paul had spent a fairly large portion of this epistle pointing out that he certainly was an apostle of God, the founder of their church, and an extremely hard worker for Christ. When he returned, he would demonstrate his apostolic power by disciplining those that had still not repented. It was very obvious that he did not want even one member to stray from the true gospel… but, the writing and coaxing and talking was now done. When he arrived on his next visit, he would have to exercise the proper discipline in order to be doing what was best for the church. Now, as the letter was drawing to a close, Paul turned the tables and asked them to examine themselves and see whether or not they really were Christians. Did they have the Holy Spirit living within? Was Jesus the Lord of their life? If not, they should get right with God.

His final words to them…

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Cor 13:14

**Conclusion:** Paul wrote this letter to the members of the church at Corinth after meeting up with Titus in Macedonia. He heard from Titus that the folks at that church had read his letter known as 1 Corinthians, learned from it, and repented of many of their sins. Paul then decided to write this letter as he wanted tell them that he was happy to hear of their recent actions and to address a few other issues.

In the early portion of the epistle, Paul told them to allow the member that had repented of his sexual sin to come back into the church. They had been hesitant to forgive this man although they should have known that God had forgiven him.

One significant problem that had arisen was that of false teachers infiltrating the church and attempting to lead people away from the true gospel message. Some members of the Corinthian church were following a few of these men instead of the gospel of Jesus which had been previously taught to them by Paul. Paul was diligent in reminding them of his qualifications as an apostle. He reminded them of his background, his unceasing work for Christ, the amazing suffering he endured for the cause of Christ, his love for them, and his lack of any interest in financial gain. For all of these reasons and more, Paul exhorted them to turn away from those men who were attempting to lead them into destruction and to return to the gospel taught by Paul and the other apostles – that truth taught to them by Jesus Christ.

Another topic broached by Paul was that of the difficulties of life faced by all of us… including Christians. Paul realized that our bodies were made of “clay” and easily damaged and eventually even destroyed. Not only that but we also will at times struggle with emotional difficulties, including doubt and worry and fear. Yet, we as Christians have the very real “blessed hope” of one day being resurrected into a “glorified body” in which we will spend an eternity in heaven with Jesus and millions of other Christian brothers and sisters. The important thing was to stay faithful to Christ all the way to the end. That is our life’s “race”. We need to win that “race”.

One final point made by the apostle Paul was for the members of that church to be generous in the support of those Christians less fortunate than themselves. In particular, there were many in the Church of Jerusalem that were in need of money and food. Paul asked that they give from their heart to help their brothers and sisters in Christ.

As an exciting point near the conclusion of the epistle, Paul spoke of being caught up into the “third heaven” and seeing things so incredibly wonderful that he could not even describe them. This “third heaven” (we refer to this as heaven) is where all Christians will ascend into someday!

**Galatians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: Paul wrote the letter to the Galatian churches as one of the earlier, if not the first, of his New Testament epistles. He probably wrote it in A.D. 49 (soon after the Jerusalem council) while in Antioch with Barnabas. Some believe he wrote it a few years later. No one knows for sure. The cities in Galatia that this letter was sent to included those in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (in Pisidia). Of course, this letter was also meant for all Christians.

**Purpose:** Paul had established churches in the above mentioned cities in Galatia on his first mission trip with Barnabas. Sometime later, however, he began hearing that there had been an influx of Judaizers that were confusing the new converts to Christianity… especially the Gentiles. Specifically, these Judaizers were teaching that salvation not only required the sacrificial death of Christ but also required strict adherence to the Law of Moses… including circumcision. Upon hearing of this heresy, Paul wrote this letter to set them straight on the true gospel.

**Synopsis:** After greeting them as an apostle of Christ, Paul immediately got to his main point…

 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.  But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!  As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Gal 1:6-9

Paul had previously taught these people concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, he was unable to stay behind at any one city and continue to minister. Obviously, there were no New Testament scriptures for the new Christians to study and become more grounded in the faith. In fact, the problem was that certain Jews came into their cities and towns and attempted to pervert this New Covenant. It just did not make sense to so many Jews that no longer would the Law of Moses play a direct role in the salvation of mankind. This new concept of salvation purely as a gift from God… salvation by grace… seemed too easy to these Jews who had spent all of their lives living under another covenant… the Old Covenant. That is why they were now adding the necessity for certain “good works” to the gospel message. Paul said that this new message was “no gospel at all”. The problem with these Judaizers was that they did not understand how the gospel of Jesus Christ actually worked. They were unaware of the change that would come upon a person who *truly* *trusted* in Jesus for their salvation and turned their lives over to him. The indwelling Holy Spirit would constantly work to change the lives of those people and help them live the kind of life that would be pleasing to God. As Jesus’ half brother, James, put it when he wrote his own epistle, this faith would automatically result in good works… otherwise, this would not have been an actual saving faith.

Paul continued on to write concerning his credentials to teach these people about Jesus and salvation. These false teachers had been disparaging him by saying that he did not have the authority of an apostle and therefore had no right to be teaching them anything concerning God and the scriptures. Paul however, reminded them of his past in some detail including his time as the chief persecutor of Christians, his Damascus experience, his time of study in Arabia and, importantly, his time in Jerusalem with the other apostles. Among other things, Paul noted that he certainly did not get involved in the evangelization of Christ Jesus to make life easy for himself. He actually had a very nice life, as the world looks at things, before he made all of these changes after his conversion to Christianity. He continued in this review of his credentials by noting that when he finally came to see the other apostles in Jerusalem, they accepted him as one of them…

"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me. Gal 1:23-24

Paul continued on to say that on his trip to the Jerusalem council, the apostles once again verified his position as an apostle…

they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.  For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. Gal 2:7-9

Paul then came to the major point of this epistle. He wanted to show these churches that the only means of salvation was through faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross. There was no place for any other addition to this gospel… not circumcision, not any particular rite or Law… nothing at all. Therefore, Paul brought up one of the more difficult situations in the early history of the Church.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.  The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.  When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?  "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. Gal 2:11-16

The essence of the above discussion is that Peter and James wavered themselves when it came time to clearly state the case for the gospel of Christ. For a time, even Peter and James (and Barnabas) were allowing themselves to be adversely influenced by this crowd of Judaizers. They taught one thing when they were with the Gentiles, but allowed themselves to associate with those Jews who were living a false gospel and did not correct them. In fact, Peter was withdrawing from the Gentile members of the Church because he was concerned with how he looked in the eyes of the Judaizers. That was clearly wrong. Paul beautifully summarized just how one should live after accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord and the absolute necessity of the sacrificial death of Jesus…

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.  I do not set aside the grace of God, for if **righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"** Gal 2:20-21

Paul next tries to teach them more about the gospel and why no one should suggest that the Law of Moses has anything to do with our salvation. But first, he asks a question…

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Gal 3:3,5

These, of course, are rhetorical questions. Obviously, God was willing to sacrifice His only Son Jesus because that was the *only* way that mankind could receive salvation… by trusting in His finished work on that cross *by faith*. Certainly, if there had been any other way, God would have used it… following the Law of Moses was inadequate, as no one could do it successfully… except Jesus. Since a new Christian believer receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon their acceptance of Jesus, Paul asks (rhetorically) why that person would try to reach their goal of sanctification by adhering to the Law of Moses and the many different ceremonial rites of the Jews. If they did not work for salvation, why should these rituals be used for sanctification? They should not. Instead, a Christian should take full advantage of the Holy Spirit within his body/soul to live a life pleasing to his Master… Jesus. In fact, that is really the only way that the life of a Christian should be lived. Anyone who attempts to live their life and gain salvation via the keeping of the Law will not be blessed… instead, they will receive a curse…

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."  Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "**The righteous will live by faith**." Gal 3:10-11

It is true that if any given person did live a perfect life, they would be saved for an eternity in heaven… but no one can do this! Therefore, we must receive our righteousness from Christ… an imputed righteousness. Thus, as Paul says, “The righteous (just) shall live by faith.”

In order to show the Galatian readers that this was not anything new, Paul reviewed the life of Abraham and showed how their great patriarch was granted righteousness through his faith in God… not because of any of his good works. In fact, Paul went on to show that the Abrahamic Covenant stated… through your offspring (Seed) all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Gen 22:18 The Law, which came later at Mt. Sinai, did not set aside this Covenant. Why? Because…

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed (Jesus) to whom the promise referred had come. Gal 3:18-19

Paul’s point is that God’s Covenant is actually a promise that He gave to Abraham. God gave an inheritance to Abraham, and this Abrahamic Covenant was not dependent on the Law of Moses. It was given to Abraham through God’s grace just as God gives all those who turn to Jesus salvation through His grace. So some might ask what the purpose of the Law was. The Law was given for at least a few reasons:

* To demonstrate to the Jews how they should live and, therefore, to help the Jews live as good a life as humanly possible
* To point out that it was impossible to keep the Law perfectly so that the need for a Savior would become apparent
* To show the need for a “perfect blood sacrifice” for the forgiveness of sins – in the case of the Law, it was an animal sacrifice. One day, Jesus would be the ultimate fulfillment of this “blood sacrifice for humanity’s sins”

The Law has served its purpose. Now all Christians are no longer under the Law…

the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.  Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Gal 3:24-25

All Christians are sons of Abraham… either through genetics or adopted. It does not matter which way we come to a saving faith in Christ… Jew, Gentile, slave, women, men… any person has the same opportunity to turn to Jesus and ask Him into his/her heart.

Those that turn by faith to the Lord Jesus become sons of God. Christians are no longer slaves to sin or slaves to the Law. The Holy Spirit lives within. Certainly, the goal of all Christians needs be to turn their lives over, day by day, to the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Because you are sons, **God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts**, the Spirit who calls out, *"Abba*, Father."  So **you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.** Gal 4:6-7

Jesus is God’s only begotten Son… all Christians are God’s adopted sons or daughters and Jesus is our brother!!! In fact, we may even call God, “Abba” (i.e. Daddy), respectfully, at appropriate times.

Paul goes on to ask the readers in these churches what has happened to them of late. He notes that when he left them not that long ago, they seemed to be “on fire” for Jesus. They seemingly understood the true gospel message. Not only that, but they had taken such good care of him when he was sick. So, what happened? Why were they being so easily hoodwinked by the Judaizers? Why did they think it made any sense to slip back into the Law as a necessity for salvation? Hadn’t they covered that topic clearly on his previous visit?

Paul next gave them an intriguing example that he hoped would help them understand the difference between living a life in bondage to the Law vs. living a life freed by the grace of God. He used Sarah and Isaac and Hagar and Ishmael as his two examples.

Hagar bore Ishmael via natural birth (both were slaves) and this union between Abraham and Hagar was certainly not blessed by God. Paul said that Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children Gal 4:25

Sarah, a freewoman, bore Isaac via the supernatural intervention of God. Isaac was Abraham’s heir. He equates Sarah with the heavenly Jerusalem above as she is free.

Paul noted that Ishmael and his descendents have persecuted the descendents of Isaac over the centuries… even down to this day. No doubt about that. Yet, the important point that he wanted the Galatian people to get was…

what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."  Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.   Gal 4:30-31

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.  Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.  Again **I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law**.  **You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace**.  But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.  For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The **only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**  Gal 5:1-6

Do not let the importance of Paul’s words slip by. He told these people… the Holy Spirit is telling us, that if any person thinks that keeping even one part of the Law has anything to do with their salvation, he has to keep the whole Law to be saved. Since this is impossible to do, Paul is saying that anyone who believes that they must do anything other than put their faith and trust in Jesus for their salvation… will not be saved! Wow! That is a very important concept for all to learn. These people in the Galatian churches thought that they must believe in Jesus plus be circumcised in order to gain entrance into heaven. Paul told them if they did not correct that doctrinal error, they would be “alienated from Christ”. As the next verse shows, Paul was really upset at those false teachers who kept insisting on the need for circumcision…

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and **emasculate** themselves! Gal 5:12

So Paul injects a bit of wry humor here…

Now, after Paul spent most of the letter urging his beloved friends in the churches of Galatia not to get caught up in the Law, he next points out the importance to be led by the Holy Spirit as they live from day to day…

  So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.  For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.  But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.  The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.  Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.  Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.  Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Gal 5:16-26

So to summarize Paul’s points here in this portion of Galatians:

* Do not add anything to salvation by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.
* Be led by the Holy Spirit day by day, hour by hour, as we live our lives
* The fruit of the Holy Spirit will be seen in our lives as we strive toward sanctification
* “Love your neighbor as yourself” Gal 5:14

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.  The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Gal 6:7-8

Paul tells all of his readers that God will settle everyone’s account someday. God knows all of our hearts. He cannot be fooled. He sent His Son to die and suffer horribly in order to save you. He then rose from the dead. All that anyone has to do is recognize this fact and believe it by faith. There certainly is massive evidence that this did happen… i.e. it surely does not require a “blind leap” of faith; that is for sure. However, Paul also told us here in Galatians that **God does not want anyone adding on anything to His mechanism for salvation**. This is absolutely forbidden. Indeed, the major reason for writing this epistle was to get across this point. Paul then closes with…

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.  Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.  Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.  The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. Gal 6:14-18

**Conclusion:** Galatians is a very early epistle written by the apostle Paul. In it he expresses similar ideas as he does in his letter to the Roman church. Paul is primarily concerned with telling his reader of the newfound liberty they have as a believer in Christ. The Christian no longer is a slave to the Law, no longer a slave to sin, and no longer a slave to religious rules and regulations. Instead, with Christ, a person is free to serve the living God with the help of the Holy Spirit that lives inside him.

Paul early on in his letter to the Galatians reprimands them for so quickly turning from the gospel. Many in that church had begun to be influenced by some fast talking Judaizers – Jews who said that *works of the Law* were necessary for salvation in addition to faith in Jesus. Paul was adamant in his refutation of this teaching. He pointed out that "**The righteous will live by faith**." Paul’s point here was not only that the individual is *saved by faith*, but the Christian must *live by faith* as well.

Paul explained the importance of the Law in showing people how they should live, yet also just how impossible it was to follow the Law perfectly. As it says in Galatians, “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.  Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Paul went on to give additional examples of the need and reason to live by faith and not under the Law. He told the Galatian Christians to live using the help of the Holy Spirit that lived within them. He emphasized the importance of never turning back to the Law – that would be a grievous sin.

One important final point that Paul would make was that living under the freedom of grace as a believer in Christ was absolutely not a license to sin. A Christian is to try to emulate Christ each and every day. This is accomplished via the reading of and meditation on the Word and continual prayer. We must keep our minds and hearts fixed on Jesus.

**Ephesians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Ephesus was a very important port city in Asia-Minor in the middle of the first century A.D.. Paul first visited this city as he made his return trip to Jerusalem as he was concluding his second missionary journey (A.D. 53). He went back there in A.D. 54, on his third mission trip and preached and taught there for three years. In A.D. 61, while a prisoner on house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote this letter to the folks in the church there. He also wrote three other epistles during his house arrest; Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians. Paul was able to have visitors while on house arrest. Mark, Timothy, Epaphroditus and Tychicus were four men who helped him a lot during those years. Tychicus carried the letter to the Ephesians upon its completion. Over the years, this church had a series of great leaders. Paul, of course, was leading the church during his three year stay in the mid-50’s A.D. Prior to Paul’s visit, Apollos had taught there and was instructed himself by Priscilla and Aquila. Paul later commissioned Timothy to lead the Ephesian Church. Decades later, the apostle John spent a great deal of time ministering in this city – he wrote his gospel while living there. As can be seen, this church has quite the impressive history of pastors.

**Purpose:** This epistle was intended to be read by all of the churches in Asia-Minor, not just the church at Ephesus. Paul presented the church as Christ’s spiritual “body” of believers, Jew and Gentile, with Christ as the head. All Christians were to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ of the eternal gifts from God. He also reminded them of the richness of blessings that Jesus has given to each Christian. He concluded the letter with a discussion on how to defend against the spiritual warfare that every Christian will face at one time or another.

**Synopsis:** Paul began this epistle with a greetingto the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. Eph 1:1

Then he reviewed with them the gospel message in some detail even including a mention of their being predestined by God to be His adopted sons. As he was concluding this portion of the epistle, he added…

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory. Eph 1:13-14

Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. One day, we will realize our promised goal, an eternity in heaven with Jesus.

Paul told the believers that he was continually praying that God would illuminate them…

in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.  And God **placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body,** the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Eph 1:18-23

With these words, Paul began his teaching using the analogy of the Church and the human body. Before he continued on with his teaching on the “body” of Christ, he returned to remind them once again of the reason for their salvation. He used words that have since become very famous and very worthy to be memorized…

**It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.  For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** Eph 2:8-10

Paul then goes on to explain that there is now no barrier between the Jew and the Gentile… Jesus has died for the entire world and to reconcile all people to Himself…

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.  He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.  For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Eph 2:14-18

Since this was a new teaching at that time, Paul referred to it as a “mystery”. A “mystery” was an eternal, biblical truth that God had “hid” (or waited) until a later time to reveal…

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Eph 3:6

At the mid-point of his letter, Paul wrote this beautiful prayer…

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.  Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Eph 3:16-21

After this prayer, Paul urged his readers to live their lives for Christ in a manner that was worthy of Christ’s holy calling. This, of course, included being humble, kind, gentle, patient and loving. He stated that just as there is one Holy Spirit that lives in all Christians, there also is one church ‘body’ that should live and work together in harmony. He noted that Christ apportioned out varying gifts to each member of His Church body…

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:11-13

Each Christian is given certain gifts that are to be used to build up the entire “body of Christ”. One of our goals in life should be to find, and then use, our gift (or gifts) to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. By each person working together, using these spiritual gifts, the Church will not be tossed about by false teachers and false doctrines. Instead…

Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Eph 4:15-16

Along with using our spiritual gift for the Lord, we must also…

Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness Eph 4:22-24

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.  And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**  Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.  Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Eph 4:29-32

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.  Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.  For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Eph 5:3-5

In other words, let us keep at least two things in mind:

* Find and use our spiritual gifts for the body of Christ… His Church
* Obey Christ and live a holy life

After urging all Christians to obey Christ and lead holy lives, Paul specifically addressed the husbands and wives in his audience…

Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body.  "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."  This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.  However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Eph 5:28-33

The bottom line in this teaching is that men are to be as loving and protective to their wives as Jesus Christ is to His Church. Jesus gave His life for His Church and set the perfect example concerning how to live a human life. Just as the Church should and does love to follow Jesus, women should and would want to follow a husband that treats her as Christ treats all Christians (His Church).

Next, Paul has a few words for parents and children…

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.  "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."  Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Eph 6:1-5

These are certainly good commandments for all parents and children to follow.

Paul then concluded this epistle with famous words concerning how to fight against our fleshly desires and the attacks of the devil…

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.  Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.  For **our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**  Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.  Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.  In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.  Take the **helmet of salvation** and the **sword of the Spirit, which** **is the word of God**.  And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Eph 6:10-18

Paul then sent his friend, Tychicus, to deliver the letter to the church at Ephesus. He mentioned that Tychicus would be able to fill them in on how things were going for Paul while in Rome on house arrest. Then, Paul’s final words written in this letter…

Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. Eph 6:23-24

**Conclusion:** In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminded that church that, “**it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.  For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** With these words, Paul pointed out two important truths: *people are saved purely through faith*… but, *the saved person is saved to live a life of good works for Christ.*  Paul also continued on and reminded the members of that congregation of their glorious position in Christ. They were all sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit of God. One day they would be joint heirs with Christ in heaven.

Paul went on and noted that Gentile and Jew alike were heirs of the promise of Christ. No longer was God’s message meant particularly to the nation of Israel. The church included all who accepted Christ as Savior.

The final three points that Paul expounded upon in this epistle were:

* The presentation as Christ as the head of the Church with each believer an important member of the *body* of believers – each with his/her own special role to fill
* Christians need to use their spiritual gifts for the advancement of the cause of Christ and obey Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit of God
* Christians should remember to be vigilant against the schemes of the devil. They need to put on the “whole armor of God” – the method by which this is done is described by Paul in a beautifully descriptive manner

**Philippians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: Philippi was the first town in Macedonia where Paul established a church. He did this on his second missionary journey in A.D. 51. Many years later he became a prisoner in Rome on house arrest where he stayed for two years. This was the last of four letters that he wrote during those years of his arrest. This one was probably written in A.D. 61/62. Philippi was an important city in the Roman Empire at that time as it was a gateway city to the east. Since this was the first church Paul founded in Macedonia, it represented the first major penetration of the gospel into Europe and to the Gentiles there.

. The members of the church had continued to remember Paul and to lift him up in prayer and help him with financial gifts through the years… even while he was in prison. A man named Epaphroditus had travelled to Rome sometime earlier to bring Paul a financial gift. This money apparently provided Paul the means to rent a house in which to live during his two years of confinement. Epaphroditus became ill and almost died while in Rome. Fortunately, he recovered. When he returned to Philippi, Paul sent this letter along with him.

As an interesting historical aside, Octavian and Marc Antony defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius in the famous “Battle of Philippi” in 42 B.C. that ushered in the Roman Empire.

**Purpose:** Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Philippi. He wrote to commend the church there for its faith and to encourage them. He also sent it to thank them for their prayers and financial gifts. Paul also took the time to remind the believers there to be diligent to watch for those that would try to disrupt their relationship with God.

**Synopsis:** Paul begins with a greeting from Timothy and himself. He wishes them grace and peace from God. He then sends his sincere thanks for all of their prayers and help over the years and wishes that they continue to grow and prosper in Christ.

Paul notes that even though he is in chains while under arrest in Rome, things have continued to work out for the best. God has used his confinement to allow him to win many of the palace guards to Christ. Also, because of his current situation, other Christian saints have stepped up and have begun to spread the good news of the gospel. Paul then adds some very great words of wisdom concerning his predicament. He was just sure, by faith, that God would continue to use his confinement for good. Therefore, he continued to rejoice…

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,  for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.  I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.  **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**  If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!  I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.  Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. Phil 1:18-26

So Paul gave us here those wonderful words – “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” While on this earth, we should live with joy at the opportunity given to all of us to serve Jesus Christ… but, when our time comes… WOW!!! We then enter into and through the gates of heaven and live eternally with God and our Lord Jesus! While on earth, we are asked to suffer for our Lord at times, as well. Look at the incredible suffering that our Lord had to endure for us. Paul was acutely aware of the sufferings for Christ as were all of the other apostles. While on this earth, we are to be bold and **stand up for Jesus even when it costs us dearly**. When the chips are down, do we really believe and trust in God?

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Phil 1:29-30

Paul next asks that they consider all of the gifts that they have received and will receive from and because of Jesus Christ. Consider also His love, His purpose, and the comfort provided by the Holy Spirit. Then, after reflecting on those things… **be willing to** **live for Christ.**

then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.  Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.  **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:** Phil 2:2-5

What is our purpose in life? First, to find Jesus. Second, to ask Him into our heart to be our Lord and Savior. Third, to live the rest of our lives with our goal to become more like Jesus and to witness for Him to all the world.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.  And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!  Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:6-11

Jesus humbled Himself immeasurably when He came down to earth to be born as a baby. Then, He continued to give of Himself for the following 30+ years until He finally suffered horribly and died for all of mankind. We are supposed to become like Christ, to follow His example, while we are down here on this earth. Obviously, that means we are also to give of ourselves to others.

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. Phil 2:14-16

Here Paul tells them that they should not only give themselves humbly in the service of the Lord, but to do it joyfully. If they did this, Paul will surely be proud on the “day of the Lord” and know that the efforts that he put forth for all of the years of his life had resulted in a great harvest for God.

Paul follows this thought by telling the folks there in Philippi that he plans to send Timothy along with their friend Epaphroditus with this letter. He then praised Timothy for being a great example of the type of life that a Christian should strive to lead… looking out for the interests of Christ, not their own. He also commended Epaphroditus on his selfless service as well.

The next portion of this epistle has Paul reminding them to be careful not to follow those who come to them with any other message other than Christ and Christ alone. That includes the Judaizers who continued to put emphasis on the Law… that is, the “flesh”.

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.  But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.  What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.  I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Phil 3:4-11

Paul had come to the correct conclusion that we are saved only via our relationship with Jesus Christ. He had all of the right pedigree and training to be saved, if were possible, by the flesh… the Law. However, after meeting Christ on the road to Damascus, he realized that gaining salvation on one’s own merits was impossible. All he wanted now was to be ‘in Christ’. He knew that in Christ he would receive the righteousness needed to one day see God in heaven and to live for Him victoriously while on this earth.

Even in Old Testament times, God constantly was showing His people that their lives (i.e. their eternal lives as well) depended solely on Him. That is why on so many occasions God purposely diminished the power of the people and fought the battles essentially alone. For example, just remember how he cut down the Israeli army from 22,000 men to 300 men before he had them go into battle under the leadership of Gideon. Of course, they then easily won. Remember how they took Jericho… simply by marching around the massively fortified walls of the city and carrying the Ark of the Covenant, blowing trumpets and shouting as He had commanded. Once again, God was showing how His power *alone* will save His people. There are many more examples such as this in the Bible. The point is… God will save people. People just have to trust in Him. Jesus (alone) is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to the Father but through Him. John 14:6

There are many beautiful verses in this epistle that should be memorized. Paul continued on discussing the process of sanctification…

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.  Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** Phil 3:12-14

What is our goal? The Christian’s goal and purpose is to strive all of their lives to be more like Jesus (as I stated previously). The prize was to become more and more like Jesus and then someday we will enter our home in heaven and get a brand new wonderful “glorified body”…

our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Phil 3:20-21

In the last section of the letter, Paul pleads with two women named Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Their quarrel was upsetting the cause of Christ in the church and community. Strife among church members unfortunately often seems to hinder the advancement of Christ. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, tells all Christians not to let this happen. Forgive one another… work together. Do not gossip. Do not hold grudges. Keep a joyful heart. In fact…

 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!  Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.  **Do not be anxious about anything**, **but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.  And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers,** **whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Phil 4:4-9

Paul concluded this letter by letting the Philippians know that even in his confinement and old age, he was doing just fine. He had learned the secret of life…

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Phil 4:13

He signs off after thanking them again for their thoughtful gifts and sends them greetings from himself and many of the Roman Christians … most notably from the new Christians in Caesar’s household!

Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.  All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.  The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Phil 4:21-23

**Conclusion:** The epistle of Philippians is a most beautiful letter from Paul. It contains great advice on how to live the Christian life with joy. He pointed out that no matter what one’s current life situation - given that we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and have received so much and will receive so much in the future - we should be content. He went on to remind those in the church of Philippi to be wary of those people who attempt to add anything to the gospel of Christ as the reason we may gain our salvation. Paul also reminded the readers that the Christian’s purpose in life is to imitate Christ. We should pursue that goal with all of our heart. We must never grow faint in the “race that is life”. What an incredible prize awaits those who finish this race!

**Colossians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: Paul wrote this epistle while in house arrest in Rome in A.D. 60-62. He wrote this letter during the same time period that he wrote Ephesians and Philemon. He wrote it to the people of the church in Colossae, Phyrgia (in modern day Turkey). This city is located about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The Christian church there had significant members of both Jewish and Gentile believers. This church got its start when Paul evangelized Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Epaphras was the founder of this church.

**Purpose:** Paul wrote this epistle after Epaphras came to him in Rome and told him of the problems he was having dealing with the attacks of heretics that were becoming all too prevalent during those years. So Paul wrote this letter to refute the heretical teachings and emphasize the total sufficiency of Christ… for this life we live on earth now and for our eternal life to come. This heresy appears to have been a mixture of false pagan and Jewish teachings. Tychicus left from Rome with this letter as well as the letter to Philemon.

**Synopsis**: Paul opens with his typical greeting, as he and Timothy wish grace and peace from God to the church members there in Colossae. He told them that he and his friends there in Rome always thank God for the faith and love that the members of the church at Colossae clearly have demonstrated since turning to Christ. He continued by telling them that they prayed that God would continue to fill them with the knowledge of His will and with spiritual wisdom. At that point in his letter, Paul gave them a great mini sermon on the glory and power and sufficiency of Jesus…

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.  For **by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,** whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.  He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.  And **he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy**.  For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.  Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.  But **now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.** This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Col 1:15-23

This is the essence of the Christian message. The people in that church were hearing a lot of falsehood concerning Jesus at that time. It was very important that they totally understand exactly who Jesus was and what He had accomplished. Paul would continue by stating that God had commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul said that he was struggling with the fact that he had not been able to come to them, nor the Laodicean church. He really wanted to help them become more knowledgeable about the “mystery of God, namely Christ” (Col 2:2). Many of the false teachings would be much less of a worry if the leaders of these fairly new churches had more wisdom and knowledge on the subject of Jesus. Paul, of course, was the expert, but he was currently under arrest in Rome. Given that knowledge was what was needed to fight against the false teachers, Paul continued with his primer course in the gospel…

**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form**, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.  In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, **having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God**, who raised him from the dead.  When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. **He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Col 2:9-15

Then Paul told the readers to not believe those who told them such things as:

* A person needed to follow certain Holy Days in order to be saved
* Circumcision was a requirement for salvation
* Only certain foods could be eaten
* Do not follow false teachers who speak on such things as the worship of angels

The Christian religion is a religion that is based on an individual… Jesus Christ. It is totally unlike any other religion all of which are based on following rules and regulations of some sort or another. Paul wanted all of those folks in Colossae to be wary of any preacher of teacher who did not preach **“Christ alone” as the answer for all of life’s questions**.

Paul then tells them how they ought to live. He gave them some rules for holy living.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.  Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.  For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.  When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3:1-4

Then Paul lists some important areas that all Christians can work on as we all work toward sanctification:

* Put to death our earthly nature (lust, greed, evil desires, etc.)
* Learn to forgive others
* Eliminate anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Col 3:8
* Do not lie
* clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience Col 3:12
* Love one another
* Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts
* Be thankful to God
* Study the Word of God and keep it in your hearts
* Sing songs and hymns to God
* whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Col 3:17

Paul also spoke briefly concerning the proper attitude of wives and husbands, fathers and children and even the about the attitude and actions of slaves toward their masters and masters toward their slaves. In summary, Paul gave these Christian people guidelines on how to live the Christian life. The key to working effectively toward sanctification was well addressed by Paul when he wrote…

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Col 3:23-24

Paul then concludes with a note that includes those that are currently with him back in Rome as he serves out his sentence. It is interesting to note who these men are:

* Mark, the cousin of Barnabas who had skipped out on Paul about 15 years earlier when they were on the famous first missionary journey. Paul and Mark were now best of friends
* Aristarchus – a fellow prisoner with Paul in Rome
* Jesus, who is called Justus – a friend of Paul
* Epaphras (the founder of the Colossian church)
* Luke the doctor (the writer of Acts and Luke)
* Demas – a companion of Paul during his first imprisonment

Paul also asked them to read the letter to the church at Laodicea. He also wanted them to read the letter that he had written to that church. Most theologians believe that the letter Paul is referring to is the one we now call **Ephesians** as it was written to all of the churches in that area of Asia Minor. Of course, it may have been a separate letter that we do not have today.

 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Col 4:18

Almost all of the Pauline epistles were dictated by Paul but written by a recording secretary. This one was no exception. Paul then ended this letter as he did with many others, with a personal signature line to make the letter more personal.

**Conclusion:** Paul wrote this epistle while on house arrest in Rome. He had heard that the church at Colossae had been infiltrated by false teachers as had so many other churches. He wrote a letter to encourage the members of that congregation and remind them of certain important truths.

Paul spent the first portion of this letter describing the gospel. He explained in great detail the person and work of Jesus as the Son of God and our Savior. Christ is the firstfruit of salvation. Because of Him, we can join Him some day in heaven. “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

Paul warned against the Judaizers and the Gnostic teachers. They all preached a different gospel, a false gospel. Paul emphasized that it was faith in Christ and Christ alone that led to salvation.

Once saved, a Christian was to pursue sanctification in this life. This is accomplished by obeying Jesus to the best of each person’s ability… with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Thessalonians**

**Author, Date and Key Facts**:

During Paul’s second missionary journey, he stopped in the Macedonian port city of Thessalonica to witness to the people concerning Christ. The Bible implies that Paul and Silas (and probably Timothy) stayed with a man named Jason while preaching there. Even within the first several weeks, Paul’s preaching had won many converts to the New Covenant in that European city. Unfortunately, that resulted in the expulsion of the missionaries from the city. In fact, Jason had to provide some sort of a bond assuring that his visitors and house guests would not return and begin their evangelizing work again.

Their first stop was in Berea where they found a receptive group of people. Many accepted Christ. However, when the Jews at Thessalonica heard that Paul was down at Berea, they went to that town and began making trouble again. So, Paul then left for Athens. Paul sent his young student and friend Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage the newly planted church and to see just how they were doing. A few months later, Timothy rejoined Paul and Silas in Corinth … he brought with him a full and very hopeful report on their brothers and sisters in the church at Thessalonica.

At that time, Paul penned this letter to his newly made friends in that Macedonian city… he wrote this epistle in A.D. 51.

**Purpose**:

Paul had several reasons for writing this epistle to Thessalonica:

* To commend the brothers for their steadfastness in following Jesus
* To defend himself against slander from false teachers that had followed him there
* To encourage the new Christians to continue to stand firm against those who were spreading a false gospel
* To answer some of their questions about the afterlife

**Synopsis:**

Paul begins this epistle, as usual, by sending his warm greetings (and those of Timothy and Silas) in the name of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he immediately compliments all of the members for their faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ. He continued and noted how they were well to imitate Jesus as they worked toward their sanctification. In fact, Paul stated, their faith and works was becoming well known in the surrounding area…

The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. 1 Thess 1:8-10

Paul next reviewed the goals and methods of his ministry (with his associates Silas and Timothy). He reminded the brothers that they came to them to humbly share the gospel. They never had any grand ideas to gain fame or fortune. In fact…

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.  You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.  For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 1 Thess 2:9-12

Then Paul once again commends the members of that fledgling church for their stand against persecution from their countrymen. He noted that it was analogous to those new Christians in Judea who had to withstand the sufferings heaped upon them by their fellow town folk as well.

Paul said that he very much wanted to return and visit them but was not able to do so at that time (probably related to the situation with Jason posting bond on his previous visit). However, he reminded them that he had sent Timothy to encourage them and was very pleased with his report on how well they were doing. Then Paul wished them well with this prayer…

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.  May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thess 3:11-13

A few additional words of instruction are then added that they “may excel still more”. 1 Thess 4:1

Paul then gave them three more tips on living for God and continuing to pursue sanctification…

For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 1 Thess 4:2

* It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body 1 Thess 4:3-4
* Paul urged them to excel even more in brotherly love… which they already practiced
* Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business 1 Thess 4:11

The last section of the letter has Paul answering a question that apparently Timothy had brought to him from the brotherhood of that church. They were perplexed concerning what would happen to those Christians who had already died before the Lord had come back. Paul answered…

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.  We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.  According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.  For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.  After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.  Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Thess 4:13-18

Paul continued on this theme of the ends times. He told them that the sons of darkness would not have any idea when Jesus would return. On the other hand, since they lived in the light and had so much scripture to read and learn, they should not be caught totally unaware.

Although, it is true that..

**The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night**. 1 Thess 5:2

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.  You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.  For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.  But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.  For **God did not appoint us to suffer wrath** but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.  He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.  1 Thess 5:4-11

After this discussion concerning the end-times, Paul concludes with an exhortation to live a steady Christian life: be joyful, kind, thankful, pray continually, avoid evil, encourage the weak, be kind to their leaders. He concludes with these words…

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.  Brothers, pray for us.  Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.  I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.  The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 1 Thess 5:23-28

**Conclusion:** Paul wrote this short letter to the church at Thessalonica. He began the letter by commending the members of that congregation for their faith in Jesus. Paul certainly missed them and hoped that he could visit them soon.

Timothy had returned from a visit to that church with a question or two for Paul concerning the end times. The folks at Thessalonica asked what would happen at the rapture to those Christian men and women who had already died and been buried. Paul’s answered that they would actually rise first (from their graves) and be re-united soul and body. Those Christians still alive at the time of the rapture, will be “caught up” with them - all Christians would then meet up with the Lord in the air. This event will come as a “thief in the night”. However, Christians should not be totally caught unaware as there will be signs that suggest the general time of the end. However, especially because Jesus could come at any moment, we all should live just, righteous and moral lives each day.

**2 Thessalonians**

**Author, Date, Key Facts and Purpose:** Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Thessalonica not very long after his first letter there. He had written about the end-times and the rapture in that first letter, but apparently, there had been some misunderstanding. Some there were under the impression that the tribulation was already beginning and that they apparently had missed the rapture. In fact, they were just going through the typical persecution that many Christians had to endure in those days… and even today… for their faith. False teachers were adding to their confusion on these issues as well. Paul wrote this letter to set them straight.

Paul wrote this letter in approximately A.D. 52 from Corinth.

**Synopsis:** Paul began this letter with his typical greetings, this time the letter being from Paul, Timothy and Silas. He notes that he has heard good things concerning their faith and love even through the trials that they have had to endure for Christ. He then reminds them that God will not have them endure these trials in vain…

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.  He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.  They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. 2 Thess 1:6-10

In the following chapter, Paul reminds them of his teachings concerning the end times. He notes that it certainly is not what they are experiencing at that time. He told them to relax and not follow every new prophecy that they heard or read about. Certain things would occur before the tribulation would begin, and Paul then mentions a few…

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.  Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come **until the rebellion occurs** and **the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the man doomed to destruction.  **He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything** that is called God or is worshiped, so that **he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.** 2 Thess 2:1-4

Paul goes on to say that this wicked Anti-Christ will not be revealed until something is removed from the earth… most commentators believe he is alluding to the Holy Spirit. When Christians are raptured at the onset of the seven year tribulation, the Holy Spirit will no longer be living in the millions of Christians now here on earth. That it, the Holy Spirit will no longer be the positive force keeping the man of sin from totally dominating this earth. There are others who think that this “what” that is holding “him back” might be:

* The government – police, military, etc.
* Angels
* The Church
* Preaching of the gospel
* Michael, the archangel

In any case, there will be some supernatural intervention by God that will some day allow the man of sin to have his “day” here on earth… resulting in seven horrible years referred to as the Great Tribulation. Jesus will come at the conclusion of these seven years to destroy the plans of Satan and put a stop to the battle of Armageddon.

And now you know **what is holding him back**, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.  And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 2 Thess 2:6-8

Paul notes that there will be many that will believe the lie of Satan and turn away from God and the gospel, leading to their condemnation and death. He then thanks God that those in Thessalonica to whom he is writing will be among those brothers who are…

loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.  He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ 2 Thess 2:13-14

Paul then concludes his short letter by asking for their prayers and by actually then commanding them to…keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 2 Thess 3:6-7

He continues on this theme of idleness…

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."  We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.  Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.  If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.  Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. 2 Thess 3:10-15

This concept seems to be lost on many in the world and the United States today. To Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit, diligent work was commanded… unless, of course, a person was unable to do this because of their age or health. God did not put us on this earth to be lazy and idle. As a side note here, Jesus has a couple of parables that address this issue as well.

Paul then told the members of that church that they should deal with those who did not follow these instructions in brotherly love and not deal with them as if an enemy. However, they needed to be dealt with in order to correct their wayward condition.

Paul then concludes with the statement…

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.  I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.  The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. 2 Thess 3:16-18

**Conclusion:** The primary objective of this letter was to clear up a misunderstanding that resulted from his first letter to this church. Some in that church were under the impression that the rapture had already occurred and they had missed it. Paul said that the day of the Lord would not come until the Anti-Christ was revealed… and that had not happened yet. He went on to discuss this topic a little more. His main point was to assure the Christians in that church that they would surely not miss the event as they would be a part of it themselves. This goes for all Christians of all time.

Paul had one final point to make in this letter. He warned the people not to become lazy. Paul spoke of this idleness as something that should be addressed and dealt with by the church.

**1 Timothy**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle to his young protégé, Timothy after he was released from prison in Rome in approximately A.D. 62. It was written from Macedonia (northern Greece). This letter, along with 2 Timothy and Titus, are often referred to as the pastoral epistles as they include instructions for church pastors… in particular, Timothy and Titus. Paul probably first met young Timothy when he evangelized Lystra on his first missionary journey. As you will recall, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city and left for dead during that visit. That must have made quite an impression on Timothy. Paul again passed through Lystra on his second mission trip. That is when Timothy accompanied him throughout the land. Paul loved Timothy and wanted him to continue to preach the word and help run the Church after he passed on to heaven. Much of this epistle deals with Paul giving him good advice on how to continue in the ministry most effectively. This letter was sent to Timothy in Ephesus in ~ A.D. 63. Apparently, Paul and Timothy visited Ephesus after his first Roman imprisonment and preached and taught there for a while. When Paul left to continue on his fourth mission trip, he left Timothy there to continue lead the church in that city. Now, he was writing to give some additional encouragement and instruction.

**Purpose**: Paul wrote this letter to encourage Timothy and give him instructions on organizing and running a local church as well as personal conduct. He also warned him to beware of false teachers and false doctrine… this problem was becoming prevalent in that time.

**Synopsis:** Paul began this letter in his typical style…

To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Tim 1:2

However, he added the words “true son” as he thought of Timothy in this way. Immediately, following this greeting, Paul launches into the body of the letter. He begins by discussing one of the bigger problems of that time for the Christian Church… false teachers and false doctrine. He reminded Timothy that he had asked him to stay behind there in Ephesus for just that problem. He then went on to encourage him to be strong in his dealings with these heretics.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith.  The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk.  They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. 1 Tim 1:3-7

One type of false doctrine that was being taught was from the Judaizers. These Jews were convinced that salvation was still secondary to the keeping of the Law. Paul agrees that the Law certainly has a good purpose, but it has absolutely nothing to do with a person’s salvation. That comes from Christ and Christ alone… and is due to His sacrificial death for us. He took our sins upon Him and shed His blood for us, died, and paid the penalty for our sins. The penalty for our sins had to be paid… and only a perfect person could do this… Jesus qualified and He gave His life for all mankind. All one has to do for eternal life is to repent of one’s sins, turn and believe by faith in Jesus and accept His free gift. Paul put it this way…

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.  The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.  Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.  But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would **believe on him and receive eternal life.** 1 Tim 1:13-16

Paul used himself as an example as he was “the “worst of sinners” being saved by Jesus. It is certainly no coincidence that God chose Paul to be the chief missionaries to the Gentiles. Paul had a great testimony. He was able to show to all that he evangelized just how merciful Jesus was. He had been the most rabid Jewish Pharisee of them all and the most vehement and effective persecutor of Christians. Now they could look at this man and see a totally changed, loving man… a great and beautiful example of the power of Jesus Christ. Paul concluded this portion of his letter by encouraging Timothy to hold on to his faith and not drift down the path that some men had been led by the teachers of these false doctrines.

Paul then instructed Timothy on his primary mission there in Ephesus…

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.  This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.  For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. 1 Tim 2:1-6

Paul pointed out that every church member should be praying and working to win souls to Christ. Every person has the right to know the truth… just what they have waiting for them if they accept Jesus into their lives. God does indeed want all men and women to be saved.

The next portion of this first letter to Timothy involved a description of what Paul saw as Timothy’s job there in Ephesus. Paul instructed him on various aspects of the ministry. He wrote concerning the qualifications for overseers and deacons. He also discussed the role of both men and woman in the church. As one would expect, he pointed out that the pastor, as well as the deacons, should be people above reproach and men of excellent character. They should also be good husbands and good fathers. After these instructions, Paul told Timothy that…

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.  Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:1-2

Paul returned here to his warning against false teachers and their false doctrine. He told Timothy that it was important that he point this out to all of the brothers in the church in order to safeguard them from this heresy. It is also interesting that Paul told Timothy not to let anyone look down at him because he was still somewhat young… and Paul knew that Timothy was still somewhat shy. Paul went on to say that Timothy needed to set a great example by his life… lead a pure, loving, faithful life. He should work hard on his gift of preaching and teaching so that he would be of significant value to Jesus Christ. That would result in the salvation of many people.

Paul then continued with his practical instruction on how to deal with the various categories of people in the church. For example, he wrote concerning the appropriate instructions to give to older men, younger men, older women and younger women. They are all to be treated with respect, of course, but each somewhat differently due to their age and sex. He even gave instructions concerning the widows and elders of the church. After completing the instructions on how to deal with the different groups of people within the church, Paul addressed the situation between slaves and their masters. Here he noted that although both should be respectful of each other and act as Christian brothers, they still should maintain the appropriate relationships of their position in their day to day activities. As an aside, it is interesting that the issue of slave-master relationship is not really addressed here in the epistles. Apparently, the Holy Spirit allowed for the message and spirit of the Holy Scriptures to eventually eliminate this kind of relationship among people… and it has been eliminated in Christian nations today.

Paul’s concluding words to Timothy in this letter…

We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.  But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.  People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.  **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, **man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.**  **Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** 1 Tim 6:7-12

Thus, Paul finished by telling Timothy to warn the wealthy that their riches cannot save them… only Jesus can. He finished with the words… Grace to you. 1 Tim 6:20b

**Conclusion:** In this short epistle, Paul wrote to his good young friend, Timothy, with some kindly advice. Paul reminded him to be vigilant in his role as pastor of the church in Ephesus to defend the faith… that is, the gospel of Christ. False teachers were springing up everywhere during those times and their heretical message was also being taught to many within the church. Paul also addressed the issue of church leadership, discussing the attributes needed by “overseers” in the church. He also spoke on the proper manner of dress and attitude for men and women in the church. He also covered topics such as the proper relationships between men, women, children, widows, masters and slaves. He concluded with very encouraging words to Timothy – Paul’s nice attempt to give his young friend more confidence.

**2 Timothy**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** The epistle of 2 Timothy was written by Paul shortly before his death at the hands of Roman government. After his fourth missionary journey, Paul was placed under arrest once again in approximately A.D. 66-67. This time, the imprisonment was by Nero and was not at all as reasonable. Nero had begun a ruthless persecution of Christians after a fire burned down Rome in A.D. July, 64. Some blamed him for the fire. He tried to deflect the blame onto the Christians. This began a decadent time for Rome… a time that included having prisoners thrown to the lions! Instead of a rented house to serve out his term, Paul was placed in chains in a Roman dungeon. Instead of a two year sentence, his punishment would now be death. Before this occurred, Paul wrote this letter to his great friend, Timothy. Timothy was just like a son to Paul. Timothy had come to know Jesus through the ministry of Paul, probably on his second missionary journey – Timothy’s grandmother and mother were first to come to know Christ. Of course, they were a great influence on their son as was Paul. It was difficult for his friends to find him and difficult to meet with him at this time. However, he finally was able to send this letter to Timothy who was in Ephesus.

**Purpose:** Paul was alone in prison. No longer did he have the comfort of friends that were allowed to visit him during his earlier house arrest in Rome, five years earlier. Luke was with him some of the time, but there is no mention of anyone else. Paul had apparently been abruptly arrested while in Troas probably at the home of Carpus. He had no time to bring any personal belongings with him – maybe he was not allowed to take any. Given his situation, Paul wrote to ask Timothy to please visit him. Also, although knowing that Timothy was a fine servant of Jesus, Paul was aware that this younger man would benefit by all of the encouragement that he could give him. This letter was therefore a letter of encouragement and exhortation for Timothy. Even at death’s door, Paul was working to provide adequate leadership for the Church upon his passing.

**Synopsis:** Paulbegan by greeting Timothy as his dear son and wished him grace, mercy and peace from God. Next, Paul immediately exhorted him to stay strong in the faith.

I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.  **For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.**  So do **not be ashamed to testify about our Lord**, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. **This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**  And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.  That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because **I know whom** **I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day**. 2 Tim 1:6-12

Paul hoped that Timothy would remember all that he had been taught concerning Jesus. Paul wanted him pass on this knowledge and have other leaders of the church do likewise.

the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.  Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 2 Tim 2:2-3

Paul continued to exhort Timothy to endure any and all suffering that may come his way as he served Christ. He even quoted a song that those in the church sang in those days…

If we died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we disown him, he will also disown us;

if we are faithless, he will remain faithful,

for he cannot disown himself. 2 Tim 2:11-13

Paul then warned him to beware of those that preached a false gospel. Gnostic teaching was gaining a real foothold in that entire region at that time.

He also told him to avoid quarreling as it did not lead to any good thing. Even when trying to win souls to Christ, arguments are to be avoided.

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.  Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.  And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.  Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Tim 2:22-26

Paul then turned to a prophecy concerning the last days. Even at that time, it was possible that Jesus could return at any moment so it was appropriate for all Christians to be ready. Now, however, the signs are incredible regarding the likelihood that we are truly in the “last days”. So many of the events that the Bible prophesied would come true have already happened and so many just in the last sixty years. Take the following for an example…

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.  People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God--  having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 2 Tim 3:1-5

Does this not describe the majority of the world today… even much of the United States. More importantly, when taken together with about fifty other predictions concerning the “last days” (especially those concerning Israel), we all really should keep at least one “eye on the sky” as Jesus may well be coming through the clouds at any time as He said He would.

everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived 2 Tim 3:12-13

As we come closer to the coming of Christ, those who are believers will come up against more and more persecution. Evil will increase. There will be more and more false teaching. Today, there is an amazing amount of heresy being taught in the name of Christianity. These preachers and teachers are not Christian, but they claim to be Christian. Far too many people are being tricked into following these false gospels. Not only that, but there are so many other false religions that do not even suggest that they are Christian. There are over two billion Hindus and Muslims (combined) in the world. That is quite a lot of people who do not believe the true gospel.

Just before the Great Tribulation, Jesus will rapture the saints (all Christians are considered saints in the Bible) to heaven. Until that time comes, Paul told Timothy to keep on with his preaching and teaching. He says the same to Christian leaders today. Preach the Word of God without compromise until Jesus comes…

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.  For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear (there is absolutely no doubt that this is occurring in our world today- millions gather around to hear the newest fad in religion. It is amazing what foolishness so many people will believe. Now even Oprah Winfrey has got on the “New Age band-wagon” and has led thousands of people down the path to destruction).  They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.  But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 2 Tim 4:2-5

Sadly, then Paul then speaks of his soon coming execution…

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.  Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing**. 2 Tim 4:6-8

Paul speaks of his death as if it is analogous to a sacrificial drink offering poured out before God. He is only weeks from finishing his “race” – and what a “race” he had just run! Paul led a great life for his Master, Jesus Christ. Paul also notes that those Christians who “long for” the rapture of the Church will receive a crown when the appropriate time comes.

Paul then wraps up the letter by asking for Timothy to come and visit. He hoped that Mark could come with Timothy as well. He also asked that Timothy stop by Carpus’ house in Troas and pick up Paul’s cloak and parchments… he had to leave them there when he had been abruptly arrested. He said that everyone had deserted him when the heat was turned up against the Christians in Rome. On the other hand, God had faithfully stood by him to see him through all of these tough months and would see him through to heaven.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. 2 Tim 4:18

Then, in conclusion, Paul writes…

Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.  Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.  Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers.  The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. 2 Tim 4:19-22

Soon thereafter, Paul was beheaded. It is unlikely that Timothy or Mark made it to see him before that happened. The world’s greatest evangelist had finished the course God had set out for him and now was with Christ… his first choice of places to be.

**Conclusion:** This last letter of the apostle Paul to Timothy was written while Paul was in chains in a dungeon awaiting death at the hands of the Roman government. It is a poignant letter as Paul attempts to encourage Timothy even as Paul is at death’s door. Paul told him that although he faced eminent persecution and death, he was not afraid. He knew that God would take care of him. He would soon be in heaven enjoying his reward for his work for Christ while on this earth.

Paul then exhorted Timothy to be strong even in the face of future persecution, to continue to preach and spread the gospel, and to not get bogged down in minor arguments.

Paul then turned to a word concerning the “last days”. He noted that in that those days the world would be terribly immoral. Even the church will be infiltrated by those teaching a false doctrine that diminishes the standing of Jesus. It will be very difficult to be a Christian during that time. However, Christians need to stand firm in their beliefs and not be swayed by these demonic teachings. The times in which we not live are eerily similar to what Paul was describing here.

Paul concludes by telling Timothy that he had fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith. He was ready to die and meet his master… the Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Titus**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Paul wrote this very short letter to Titus sometime during the time between his first and second Roman imprisonments (approx. A.D. 63-65). He wrote it from either Nicopolis or Corinth and it was probably delivered to Titus in Crete by Zenas or Apollos.Titus presumably was converted to Christianity by Paul early on in Paul’s missionary journeys. At one point in his ministry, he decided to stay in Crete and that is where Paul wrote to him at this time. Titus had known Paul for many years and Paul looked upon him as a son… similar to the way Paul viewed Timothy. It is interesting to know that even at Pentecost there were many Jews from this little island. Some were filled with the Holy Spirit and upon their return to their homeland, the gospel began its spread, over thirty years before Paul penned this letter.

**Purpose:** Paul wrote this letter to give Titus clear instructions on certain aspects of organizing and running the church on the island and to bolster Titus’s authority by virtue of having received this letter from the famous apostle, Paul. Paul and Titus probably travelled to Crete after Paul got out of his house arrest in Rome. After ministering together for a while, Paul went on to other cities in Greece and elsewhere (possibly even Spain). While relatively nearby in Nicopolis or Corinth, Paul sent this letter down to Crete to help Titus in his ministry.

**Synopsis**: After a beautiful opening, Paul quickly tells Titus the reason for leaving him in Crete. We can be sure that Titus knew the reason, but this would be a reminder of the work that Paul wanted him to accomplish and the letter would be valuable to show that Titus had the great apostle Paul behind him in this work…

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.  An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.  Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.  Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.  He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:5-9

Here Paul gives some specific instructions concerning the type of man needed for the position of elder. Many Cretans (the name even sounds bad) had a reputation for immorality and laziness. Paul here gives important guidelines for those who are placed in charge of the church… at that time and that still apply today. Paul went on to say to Titus to be aware of the false teachers in Crete who had been described earlier in the following way…

Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. Titus 1:12-14

Paul then goes on to give Titus specific instructions on how to teach different groups of the church: older men, younger men, older women, younger women and slaves. The bottom line of all this teaching was…

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.  It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.  These, then, are the things you should teach. encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. Titus 2:11-15

The last two sentences above are meant to give Titus the confidence and the authority to do what was necessary to develop a strong group of churches in the island of Crete. Paul did not stop there. He went on and told Titus to remind the people just how much Jesus had done for them and how much He had given them. It was the remembrance of those things… the gifts and sacrifices of Jesus that should stimulate all Christians to live a Holy life for their Savior. Then Paul concludes the letter by asking for a visit from his friend Titus, if possible…

As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there.  Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need.  Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives. Titus 3:12-14

**Conclusion**: This is a very short letter to Titus. Paul had put Titus in charge of developing the Christian Church on the island of Crete. Apparently, there were some in that island that made his job difficult. Paul, therefore, sent this young pastor some good advice on how to run a church. Looking at Titus as a great friend, Paul asked for him to come to him as soon as he had things under control there in Crete.

**Philemon**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Paul wrote this short epistle to a man named Philemon while he was a prisoner in Rome sometime between the years A.D. 60-61. A friend of Paul’s, Tychicus would deliver the letter in the same trip in which he delivered Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae.

**Purpose:** Paul had made good friends with a person named Onesimus during the time of his Roman house arrest. The two men spent a lot of time together, talking and worshipping God. Paul led Onesimus to Jesus and wanted to help him out as much as possible… as he certainly had some serious problems. Onesimus was a run-away slave and a thief! Onesimus had escaped from his master and stolen from him as well. However, now that he was a Christian, he knew that it was appropriate to return to his master, a man named Philemon – a leader of the church at Colossae. Of course, he had a great deal of trepidation in the idea of returning to this man. He very well might suffer severe punishment… even death. Fortunately, Philemon was a Christian, as well. In this letter, Paul attempts to get Philemon to accept Onesimus back without exacting a penalty. Exactly how Paul plans to accomplish this task is the essence of the letter.

**Synopsis**: Paul begins the letter with greetings to not only Philemon, but also to Apphia, and to Archippus (probably the wife and son of Philemon) and to the entire church that met in their home. Paul then compliments Philemon on his faithfulness as a Christian brother. Paul has heard that he was a fine man and a very faithful and loving Christian brother. Then, it was time to submit his request to the man…

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.  I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you.  I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.  But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced (maybe, Philemon will send Onesimus back quickly to help Paul and keep him good company while Paul is under arrest in Rome). Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother (note how Paul subtly suggests that Philemon free Onesimus here). He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord (Paul points out that these two men should not be looked at as master and slave… but as two men who are simply brothers in Christ). So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.  If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.  I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back--not to mention that you owe me your very self (Paul tells Philemon that he will pay back anything that Onesimus owes… although, Paul suggests that Philemon consider just how much he owes Paul for those things Paul has done for him over the years… in particular, bringing him the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ).  I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.  Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. Philem 1:8-21

Paul concludes by suggesting that Philemon prepare a guest room for him as he hopes to soon be released from prison (in answer to their prayers) and then would come to visit his good friends in Colossae… especially, Philemon and his family.

 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.  And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.  The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philem 1:23-25

Mark, Demas, Aristarchus, Luke, Timothy and Onesimus all must have been men that spent a great deal of time with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment.

**Conclusion:** This is a very simple and short letter from Paul to Philemon. The gist of it is that Paul plans to send an escaped slave, Onesimus, back to his master, Philemon. Onesimus has recently become a fine Christian man and a great help and comfort to Paul (who is on house arrest in Rome). Paul wrote the letter in an attempt to get Philemon to accept back Onesimus in Christian, brotherly love… and not exact any punishment on his slave. Paul even suggested that Philemon consider releasing him and allowing him to return to Rome to be with Paul.

**Hebrews**

**Author, Date, Key Facts**: There is not a consensus as to the human author of this excellent New Testament epistle. Today, most theologians believe that Paul probably wrote this letter, but good arguments can be made for other human authors. Just for interest, those authors include Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, Clement of Rome and Silas. The real author, of course, was the Holy Spirit. It is also difficult to give a date when this letter was written. The final words of the letter suggest that it may well have been written from Rome. Most theologians place the date sometime between A.D. 67-69. However, it is possible that a somewhat later date is correct. Certainly it was written before A.D. 95, as this letter was quoted by Clement of Rome at that time.

**Purpose:** The message given in this general epistle to all Hebrew Christians in the mid-first century A.D. was to demonstrate that the New Covenant brought to the world through Jesus Christ was infinitely better than the Old Covenant. Many of the recent Hebrew converts were having second thoughts about this New Covenant and were dangerously close to abandoning their walk with Christ. The writer gives them many reasons to hold on to their new found belief system as he shows them how following Christ is the proper way, and the only way, to salvation and an eternity in heaven. Another theme of this epistle is that with the New Covenant the Christian now has direct access to God. This was certainly not the case under the Old Covenant. Upon the death of Jesus on the cross, the veil of the Temple was torn. This symbolized the new and direct access of the believer (in Jesus) to God. Jesus had made this possible.

**Synopsis:** The writer begins with a powerful presentation of Jesus Christ…

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.  The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Heb 1:1-3

With this opening, the writer points out many great things concerning Jesus:

* Jesus is heir to everything in the universe
* God is speaking through Jesus in these “last days” – from that time until the Millennial Kingdom
* Jesus is synonymous with God the Father
* Jesus sustains the universe by His Word
* Jesus died on the cross to provide salvation for mankind
* Jesus currently is sitting at the right hand of God, the Father

The entire first chapter of Hebrews is concerned with showing just how Jesus is superior to the angels. Angels were very important to Jews in Old Testament times and during the first century A.D. In fact, they were more highly venerated at that time than in the modern world. Angels bring God’s messages to people, they carry out punishment, they protect God’s people, they fight the forces of evil and are responsible for many other important duties in God’s universe. Even given their importance, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is far greater than the angels.

In putting everything under him, **God left nothing that is not subject to him**. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.  But **we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.** Heb 2:8-9

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.   Heb 2:14-16

God made Jesus flesh and blood. Because Jesus was a man, He was able to be the perfect sacrifice for mankind’s sins. Jesus came to the earth to die for men and women… not angels.

**For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants**.  For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.  Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Heb 2:16-18

Next, the writer shows how Jesus is even greater than their hero of the faith, Moses… or any other of the Old Testament saints. For example…

Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. Heb 3:5-6

The point is that although the great Old Testament heroes are wonderful in their own rite, they pale in significance to the actual Son of God.

After telling these Hebrew Christians of the singular importance of Jesus Christ, he goes on to the main purpose of his letter. He warns them about slipping back into their old ways and beliefs. He reminds them of what happens when they (the Jews) do not trust in God and obey Him…

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."   
Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?  And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?  And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed ?  So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Heb 3:15-19

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they soon rejected God’s plan of marching into the “promised land” to take possession of it. This lack of faith resulted in a total of forty years of wandering in the wilderness plus the fact that none of the men who rejected God’s plan were allowed to enter into that land of promise… ever. The hope of the writer was that none of his Hebrew friends would weaken in their faith and turn from Jesus. That would prove eternally fatal.

And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Heb 3:18-19

In Hebrews, the writer talks about a “Sabbath Rest”. This rest represents the potential eternal rest that is offered to all mankind. This rest is given to those who follow Jesus. That being the case, it is obviously of utmost importance to stay strong in the faith. However, it was a matter of great concern to the writer of Hebrews that some of his readers were beginning to weaken in their commitment to Jesus. This brought on this warning…

 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance Heb 6:4-6

There is a difference of opinion on how to interpret the above warning. Those who believe that once a person is saved, they are always saved, suggest that this and similar warnings given in Hebrews are to folks who may profess to be Christians but are not… or to those who are just thinking about giving their life to Christ, but have not yet made that commitment. Those who believe that a person can be saved, but at a later date actually turn away from Jesus, look at this and other verses of this nature as warnings to Christians. They would say that they would be in danger of losing their salvation. One thing that is certain, no one should ever look lightly at turning away from Jesus and His teachings. No one should gamble their eternity by rejecting the Savior.

There follows an interesting discussion about a priest named Melchizedek who was first mentioned in Genesis. Without going into much detail, the essence of the argument is that Melchizedek was actually a priest of a higher “order” than the Levitical priests. Jesus was then stated to be a priest of the “order of Melchizedek”. While Aaron’s order of priests (the Levites) could never provide salvation to the people, Christ was able. The Levitical priests would die, Jesus would never die. The Levitical priests offered up animals as a sacrifice; Jesus offered up Himself. The necessary sacrifice was only offered by Jesus. Man trusting in the old system would never inherit eternal life. Man trusting in Jesus would inherit eternal life.

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.  Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.  Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.  Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.  For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever Heb 7:23-28

Here is stated the conclusion to the primacy of Jesus versus the Old Covenant sacrificial system. One was not able to save… the sacrifice of Jesus is unto salvation.

The need for a New Covenant is next addressed in the letter. God stated that the people did not honor the Old Covenant. They continually ignored the Law of Moses and turned away from His leadership. This was amply demonstrated in the time of the Judges and during the centuries of the Divided Kingdom. Now, God had given them a New Covenant where the Laws would not be written on stone, but would be written on their hearts.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. **I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**  No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.  For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."   
By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Heb 8:10-13

The superiority of Christ continues to be demonstrated as the author notes that our High Priest, Jesus, of the New Covenant entered into the heavens to be our intermediary with God, His Father. This certainly is superior to the High Priest of the Old Covenant who was only able to go into the Holy of Holies once a year to meet with God on behalf of the people. Jesus can and does intercede for all Christians at all times. He does it right there in heaven itself.

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.  He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. Heb 9:11-12

Jesus Christ died for us once and for all. There will be no further need for any sacrifice for anyone’s sins. Jesus did it all on that cross at Calvary.

**For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.**  Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.  Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now **he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.**  Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so **Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.** Heb 9:24-28

After once again warning his Hebrew friends of the imperative of faith in Jesus, the writer decided to write a chapter to demonstrate the faith exhibited by many of the heroes from the Old Testament days. His purpose was to stir them up to put their trust in Jesus as these well known Old Testament saints had put their faith in God… looking forward to the Messiah who had now, just recently, come. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often referred to as the Hall of Faith. It begins with a great verse…

**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.** Heb 11:1

The remainder of the chapter reminds the Hebrew readers of the great faith of nearly twenty of their Old Testament saints. The purpose of this review is two-fold. Of course, the hope would be that by recalling how the great leaders of their nation had put their faith in God, the Hebrew Christians and those considering following Christ, would similarly put their faith in Jesus. Secondly, the writer noted how there was a great cloud of witnesses in heaven that would be proud of those that chose the right path… the path set down by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, **since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.  Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb 12:1-3

The readers are also told that they may, at times, be disciplined by their loving heavenly Father… for what loving father does not properly discipline his children?

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because **the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.**"   
Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?  If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Heb 12:5-9

There are some that believe that all problems and illnesses come secondary to our sins and our unrepentant hearts. This is clearly not true. Jesus spoke to His disciples on this very subject. On the other hand, there are instances where God does allow difficulties into the lives of believers when they sin in order to teach them certain lessons. This is as a loving father should do assuming that he cares about the proper development of his child… and God certainly does care.

A final appeal is made once again to the Jewish readers who were in danger of turning their backs on Jesus Christ and returning to their old ways and Old Covenant. This would only result in terrible sorrow as these Jews now knew the truth of the Gospel. They would be facing heaven, figuratively in the face, but by rejecting the only One who could get them there, they would instead face eternal destruction. Either a person follows Jesus and has eternal life with Him in heaven or a person rejects Jesus and His Word and perishes. Those are the only two choices.

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant Heb 12:22-24

**since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for** **our "God is a consuming fire."[** Heb 12:28-29

The epistle of Hebrews concludes with an exhortation to live a holy life. They are once again reminded never to follow false teaching and to continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.  And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Heb 13:15-16

The concluding words are…

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.  Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.  I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.  Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.  Grace be with you all. Heb 13:20-25

**Conclusion:** The letter to the Hebrews is a tremendous defense of the infinite value and importance of Jesus Christ. This epistle was written to Hebrew Christians who were being adversely influenced by false teachers. The writer of Hebrews (probably Paul) realized that certain false teachers, in particular, Judaizers, had infiltrated most of the new Christian congregations and were spreading their false teachings, creating doubt in the minds of the young Hebrew Christians and potential converts. Therefore, this letter was passed from congregation to congregation to remind the people of the critically important differences between the Old and New Covenants and the ultimate and unique importance of Christ.

In the early portion of the letter, Paul lays out the incomparable value of Jesus as compared to anyone in the universe. No one can compare to Jesus Christ - not angels, not great and powerful Old Testament saints, and not any type of priests. All pale in insignificance to Jesus. He had entered into the Most Holy Place; Jesus had entered into heaven, thereby preparing a place for all that would follow Him.

However, some of these Hebrews were beginning to stray from the necessary faith in Jesus and His sacrificial death on the cross. This faith, of course, was required for salvation. Too many in that day were beginning to doubt. They were beginning to return to the ideas of the Old Covenant. Paul warned them of the grievous error that some were considering making.

The famous chapter 11, parades a Hall of Fame of Old Testament saints in front of the reader of this epistle, reminding them of how their forefathers were willing to place their faith in God. Now, these great men and women were in heaven as witnesses to those still striving here on earth. They are, in a sense, our cheer leaders as we strive to lead a life worthy of our Savior. The writer concludes by noting that God may, at times, discipline those He loves. This is only natural and should not be misunderstood. We should worship God in awe for all that He has done for us as we look forward to our final destination in heaven one day.

**James**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote this general epistle. At first, James was not a believer in Jesus… but, after seeing and visiting with his brother after He was resurrected from the dead, that belief changed. He actually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and, apparently, remained in that position until his death. According to Josephus, he was martyred in A.D. 62. Most theologians date this book as the earliest of the epistles, written sometime between A.D. 44-48.

**Purpose:** This letter was written to all of the new Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout Judea (and even further west to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, etc.) by the A.D. 40’s. Recall that these new converts had been forced to disperse by the persecution that began taking place in Jerusalem; Stephen’s stoning really being the major impetus for this dispersal. This got even worse under Herod Agrippa in ~A.D. 44. The topics James covered in his epistle related primarily to faith in Jesus put into action. He wanted his audience to understand that true faith always results in good works… always. He gives them several *tests* that they could use to evaluate whether they had true faith.

**Synopsis:** James begins by addressing this letter to the twelve tribes of Israel, scattered“among the nations”. He then starts out with some great advice…

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that **the testing of your faith develops perseverance**.  Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.  **If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.  But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.  That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.** James 1:2-8

The main point made here is to face all of life’s trials with a positive attitude. A Christian should realize that God will use these trials to build a better, more Christ-like person. Becoming more like Christ should be every Christian’s primary goal in life. When a Christian faces difficulties and sorrows, he should ask through prayer for God’s help… strongly trusting that God will provide this help. No one should doubt that God will answer their prayers. When a Christian does persevere under the trials of life, blessings will follow:

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

James next corrected the idea that God Himself may at times tempt a person. He says that this does not happen.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. James 1:13

It is true that all temptation and all difficulties that we experience in life are *allowed* by God. However, He is not the *cause* of any temptation and He will not allow the Christian to be tempted beyond what he can endure. We must put our faith in God to see us through the trials of life. I surely do not suggest that this will be easy.

James then begins his teaching on true, saving faith. It is simply not enough to simply say that one believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior. If this is actually true, that person’s actions will reflect this belief. James gives some very practical advice to those listening to the preaching and teaching of the Word…

get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.  **Do not merely listen to the word**, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**  Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.  But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does. James 1:21-25

The next lesson concerns the topic of favoritism. James was concerned that some in the church were showing more concern for wealthy guests and members than for the poor. Since all people are the same in the sight of God, Christians should provide the same love and care and service to everyone regardless of their station in life.

Then James returns to the topic of saving faith…

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?  Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.  If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?  In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.  **You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.**  James 2:14-19

Saving faith is not simply believing the historical record concerning Jesus. As James says, demons believe in these facts. Saving faith requires repentance from our previous life of sin, the invitation of Jesus to come into (and change) our lives, and, to the best of our ability, to “walk as Jesus did”. (1 John 2:6)

Two excellent examples are then given to show exactly what James meant. Both Abraham and Rahab proved their **faith** in God by their **actions**:

* Abraham was prepared to actually sacrifice his son
* Rahab gave shelter and direction to the Israeli spies

It would not have been enough for those two Old Testament people (or any other person for that matter) to claim to have faith in Jesus yet not demonstrate this faith in some tangible way. Genuine faith produces good works for God.

Interestingly, James spends a reasonable amount of time discussing the **power of the “tongue”.** This little organ possesses great power if you think about it. It can be used for great good… beautiful singing, great and powerful speeches have changed history, superb preaching has led millions to Christ, etc. On the other hand, the tongue can be very destructive. Therefore, everyone must be very careful of what they say and how they say it. Our goal should be to let the Holy Spirit control our entire body, including our tongue.

**Teachers in the church are held to a higher standard than the average member**. Since they are in a position that does result in becoming a role model to some in the church, the teacher, just as the preacher, must watch carefully what they do and say.

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. James 3:1

James next addresses the battle that Christians are involved in throughout their life as they are faced with the joys and stresses of the intriguing gift that God has given to all mankind… ***free will.*** Just what are we going to do with this freedom? We certainly do have choices. Will a person decide to live for Christ or, instead, satisfy many inner personal lusts or other desires. What will be our choice… the *world* or a *life for Christ*? A person cannot do both. James has some advice…

Submit yourselves, then, to God. **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you**.  Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.  Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:7-10

James continues with several more pieces of advice. Do not brag about what things you have in store for your future. No one can know what the future holds… no one except God. Any one of us may be here one minute and gone the next. As James says…

You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes James 4:14

So what should we do then? Ask God to direct our paths, be humble and do the best with the time that God gives us on this earth. Then, when it is our time to face God, we will be ready to enter into eternity in very good stead!

Do not be like some wealthy people who hoard their money and possessions, and even steal from their employees. God will judge these sinners. James continued by telling the readers who may have been suffering persecution to persevere, as God would surely come. He asks that they be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. James 5:8

He reminds them of Job, a wonderful example of perseverance and faith. Eventually, all will be made right for the believer. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. James 5:11

James concludes with a few more words of advice. He reminds them of the value of prayer… especially the prayer of a righteous man. He also told the readers to remember to witness to sinners… to those Christians that continue in sin and to those who have not yet turned to Christ.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. James 5:20

**Conclusion:** The epistle of James emphasizes “faith in action”. James wanted people to understand that if anyone truly had saving faith in Jesus Christ, his/her life would be changed. This change would be evidenced, at least in some manner, by how a person lives. James would certainly have had a difficult time believing that a person who continued unabated in a life of sin, after supposedly turning their life over to Jesus Christ, was truly a Christian. Simply put, James did not believe in “easy-believe-ism.”

Saving faith in Jesus is more than just an intellectual assent that Jesus lived and died. As James said, even the demons know and believe this. Saving faith requires a deeper faith in the Savior, trusting Him to help you live your life for Him as you repent from the sinful ways of your previous life and turn to live a life of obedience to Him… with the help of the Holy Spirit of God.

James gave other advice in his letter, of course. However, the major importance of his epistle is the attention that he brought to the concept of “saving faith.” We should all remember his words… “**faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.  **You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.”**

**1 Peter**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Christians in the first century were subject to persecution for their faith. As we will see, virtually all of the apostles actually were martyred for their faith in Jesus. This persecution reached horrifying levels at the hands of Nero just after the burning of Rome in A.D. 64. He blamed the Christians for the destruction of much of Rome and set out to punish them – this was done in large measure as his attempt to deflect blame from himself. Peter wrote this first epistle to all the Christians in the world at that time… the time was approximately A.D. 63/64, just before Nero’s great persecution really began and just after the death of James. The letter states that it was written from Babylon. Babylon could have either been the ancient city that is on the Euphrates River or been “code” for Rome (Rome was referred to as “Babylon” by victims of the oppression during that time). Peter was purportedly crucified upside down on a cross only 4-5 years after he wrote this letter (~ A.D. 68). He asked to be crucified in this manner as he did not believe himself worthy to be crucified in the same way as his Master, Jesus.

**Purpose:** Peter wrote this letter to:

* Encourage Christians (Jewish and Gentile) to stay strong
* To instruct people in the means to salvation and point to the many blessings received by Christians
* Give instructions concerning proper submission to authority
* Discuss how to live for the Lord even through much suffering

**Synopsis:** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been **chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,** through the **sanctifying work of the Spirit**, for **obedience to Jesus Christ** and sprinkling by **his** **blood**: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. 1 Peter 1:1-2

These are the opening words of Peter. Note that he is addressing this letter to the many Christians scattered throughout the entire region in which the apostles had been ministering. He also pointed out several important facts:

* God chose His people according to His foreknowledge
* the Holy Spirit works in each Christian for the purpose of sanctification
* the Christian’s duty is to obey Christ
* the shed blood of Jesus was required for our salvation.

Peter continued and said that all Christians should praise God for all the blessings He has given them… most notably the gift of eternal life in heaven with Him. It is true that all Christians will suffer at some time for their faith, especially those who obey Christ as they should. Yet, this suffering will result in good:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.  These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.  Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9

Peter spoke of how the prophets in Old Testament times spoke often of the coming of the Messiah. None of them knew when that time would arrive. Well, Christ had gloriously come in their day and most of the readers of this epistle had been alive when Jesus walked the earth – and when He died on the cross for their sins. Given the fact that all Christians have so much to be thankful for, they need to live their lives accordingly…

 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.  As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.  But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy** in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy 1 Peter 1:13-16

Another very important reason to live a holy life is that God will judge each person impartially. All need remember that every person’s **salvation was bought with** something far more precious than money or gold, but instead it was purchased…

with **the precious blood of Christ,** a lamb without blemish or defect.  He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.  Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:19-21

**Love one another deeply**, from the heart.  For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1:22-23

Peter goes on to describe the Church of Jesus Christ…

As you come to him, the living Stone (Jesus) --rejected by men (the majority of Israel) but chosen by God and precious to him-- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (all Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit and should live for Jesus at all times).  For in Scripture it says:   
"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone (Jesus, of course), and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."   
Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,   
"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." 1 Peter 2:4-8

Jesus is the Rock upon which the Church is built. He is the power unto salvation for those who ask Him into their hearts. However, for those who reject Him, such as most of Israel did in that day, He becomes a stumbling block, so to speak. Why? Because there is only one way to heaven and it is through Jesus. (see John 14:6)

Peter goes on to exhort his readers to fight against sin in their lives at all times. He notes that they may be able to win others to Christ simply due to their example…

Dear friends, I urge you, as **aliens and strangers in the world**, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.  Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:11-12

Peter uses an interesting couple of words to describe Christians… “aliens and strangers in the world.” Keep this in mind. We are not citizens of this world once we accept Jesus Christ. Our new country is the “far country” … heaven. Someday we shall go home. Until that day, we are to live a life as holy as possible with the help of the Holy Spirit… day by day… one day at a time.

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. 1 Peter 2:17

As Paul wrote in several of his epistles, although we are citizens of heaven, we should still be good citizens of earth and our nation. This point was stressed by both of these great men. There is no excuse for not living by the laws of the land… unless these laws contradict the Law of God. For example, there is talk of forcing all OB-GYN doctors perform abortions. Difficult to believe, but this is up now for debate. This would be a case where all Christian doctors must choose to break the law of man as it is definitely at odds with the Law of God.

Peter continued with instructions on how to live in harmony with others…

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.  Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.  Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.  For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.  Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and **treat them with respect** as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. 1 Peter 3:1-7

In the world in which we live today, some of the words Peter wrote may be looked upon with scorn by many women. We live in a world of liberation, including “women’s liberation”. I suggest that if husbands treat their wives as Christ treats His church… and that is how husbands are commanded to treat their wives, then it is reasonable and appropriate for wives to treat their husbands as God commands as well. Husbands should be perfectly kind and considerate and protective of their wives. They should protect them and sacrifice for them just as Christ did for His Church. They should realize that:

* woman are spiritual equals
* as the physically weaker sex (typically), the husband must make sure to protect his wife and certainly never abuse her in any way
* wives are an equal half in the marriage – when a man and a woman marry they become **one flesh** and **must work together** **in harmony**

In turn, wives should honor and respect their husbands. In the present day United States, the idea of a wife being submissive to a husband may be laughable to many women… or worse. This concept has certainly not always been looked at in that way (as being absurd) by men or women. I believe that God recognized that there had to be one individual in any two person partnership that had to have the final say in certain situations. I believe that the Bible is clear that He chose the husband to have that final say. I also believe that the goal of this edict is to have a marriage that runs smoothly and efficiently, with less strife… not more difficulties. Undoubtedly, it is a picture of marriage that our Heavenly Father expects and commands. This topic could be a good one for a long discussion sometime… but not here or now.

Here is some additional advice for living the Christian life:

in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,** keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.  It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:15-17

Peter was aware that even more persecution was about to come to the Christian world. He wanted to prepare these people to be ready when those days of suffering commenced. Peter said that Christians should arm themselves with the proper attitude to be able to withstand the verbal and physical abuse that may be thrown at them for their belief in Christ…

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1-2

**The end of all things is near**. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because **love covers over a multitude of sins**.  Offer *hospitality* to one another without grumbling.  Each one should *use whatever gift he has received* *to serve others*, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.  If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.  But **rejoice** **that you participate in the sufferings of Christ**, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.  **If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you**.  If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.  For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; 1 Peter 4:7-17

Peter was sure that the time was near that the Romans would be coming after the Christians with a vengeance… as it turned out, he was correct. Soon, many Christians would be losing their earthly lives for their allegiance to Christ (of course, they immediately found themselves face to face with Jesus after their martyrdom). Peter wrote of how best to react to the coming persecution: with self-control, love of the brothers, and by helping one another with one’s spiritual gifts. He pointed out that certainly God would honor their allegiance to His Son… all those who suffer in the name of Christ will be blessed.

After asking the elders to remember to lead their flock and set a good example in the difficult days and years to come, Peter concluded with some well known words to all Christians…

**Humble yourselves**, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you**.  Be self-controlled and alert. **Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.  Resist him, standing firm in the faith,** because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.  **And** **the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**  To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6-11

Peter then signed off while mentioning that he was with Mark and Silas at the time of writing the letter. Silas wrote the letter and then probably took the letter himself to the first church. Then, the letter would have made the rounds to the many other churches in the region and beyond.

Peter’s final words in this epistle…

She who is in Babylon (probably Rome), chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:13-14

**Conclusion:** Peter wrote his first epistle late in his life. In it, he summarized much about the life of a Christian. He spoke in detail of the gospel of Christ. He spoke concerning the Church of Christ as well. He commanded Christians to live holy lives, to trust and obey God, and to work toward sanctification.

He reminded all believers that they were aliens and strangers in this world as our home is in heaven. Because we now live in a hostile world, we will suffer persecution, some people more than others, of course. Peter told his readers not to worry, but instead rejoice for the opportunity to suffer for Christ’s sake. The joy to come will make up for the problems we face down here on this earth.

Peter also reminded Christians to obey Christ and live holy and humble lives. Christians need to be good brothers and sisters to one another, good citizens, good husbands and wives, etc. Christians should also obey the command of Jesus to be witnesses for Him to the world of unbelievers. He pointed out near the conclusion of the letter that after this life is complete, with all of its trials and tribulations, and all of its joys and happiness, all Christians will be welcomed home into heaven by the Lord, Jesus Christ.

**2 Peter**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Peter wrote this epistle in approximately A.D. 67, not very long before his martyrdom. He was crucified upside down during the wicked reign of Nero. Peter wrote it while in the city of Rome. Rome had become a terrible place for Christians ever since A.D. 64 when fire destroyed a large portion of that great city. Nero, it is said, ordered the fire in order to destroy enough of the city to allow for a new palace for himself. The fire got out of hand, however. In order to deflect the blame many were placing on him, Nero accused the Christians as the perpetrators as they made an easy target. They were a small group of people and many thought that they were against the Roman government. They were known to refuse to worship the emperor. Nero began to round them up, for imprisonment, torture, entertainment (throwing them to the lions) and death. These practices would soon result in a great many well known Christians’ deaths… such as Peter and Paul. As you will recall, Peter was put to death in ~A.D. 68.

There are many similarities between this epistle and the epistle of Jude. One may have used the other as a resource while composing their letter. It is not known if this is true for certain or who wrote their letter first.

It is also interesting to note that Peter references Paul as “our dear brother”. Obviously, the two of them were good friends notwithstanding their misunderstanding more than a decade earlier concerning the issue of the need for circumcision for Gentile Christians. It was not necessary, as Paul pointed out to Peter.

**Purpose:** This letter was written to warn the churches of Asia Minor, Greece and the surrounding area of the influx of false prophets and their false gospel. Peter also wrote to encourage the people in their faith and Christian walk. In the final portion of the epistle, he wrote of the second coming of Christ.

**Synopsis:** After his introduction, where he wished the readers grace and peace through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, Peter reminded them how God had given them everything that they needed to live a life of godliness and holiness. Because of that, he told them to make every effort to grow in faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and brotherly love. He said that the possession of these qualities would make them effective and productive servants and disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ. By pursuing sanctification he noted that Christians would someday…

you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:11

Peter went on to say that he would intermittently remind them of these things as long as he had life. He knew that the Lord Jesus would want him to do this. He also told them that he knew that it would not be much longer before he would be going to be with Jesus. At this point, Peter went on to tell his readers of his personal experiences while living and walking with the Lord Jesus Christ approximately thirty five years earlier. He told them how he had been there at the Mount of Transfiguration when God had spoken about His only begotten Son. There, Jesus had…

received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 2 Peter 1:17

Peter also wrote that another very important reason to believe on Jesus as the Son of God and that He is our Savior is the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. There are multitudes of Old Testament prophecies that Jesus had fulfilled… far too many to be just coincidences.

After pointing out the importance of the Christian leading a holy life and pursuing sanctification, given the veracity of the New Covenant and the reality of Jesus Christ, Peter went on to speak to them about the false teachers and false doctrines that were becoming far too prevalent at that time in history.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.  In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. 2 Peter 2:1-3

Peter described these false preachers as…

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; but these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.  They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. 2 Peter 2:10,12,13

Peter actually went on in fairly great detail describing how terrible these false teachers were and how terrible their false doctrines were and how they would lead many people into the paths of destruction. He also went on to say that God would punish them some day…

These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 2 Peter 2:17

The final point of discussion in his second epistle related to “the day of the Lord”…

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.   You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.  They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."  But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.  By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.  By the same word **the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire**, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3:1,3-7

But Peter pointed out that the whole concept of time was different for God than for man…

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: **With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.**  The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**   2 Peter 3:8-9

God is giving many millions of people the opportunity to come to a saving relationship with His Son. He does not want anyone to perish. However at some point in time, God will bring this “Church Age’ to an end. Then those days of opportunity will be over.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 2 Peter 3:10

There are many Old Testament books and verses that talk about the “day of the Lord”. Here is just one example…

I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. Isaiah 13:13

All Christians should be looking forward to that day and be living a holy life. Given that this “day of the Lord” can come at any moment, all Christians should be living each day as if it is the day that the Lord will come. At some point in the future, although this earth will be destroyed by the fiery elements as described above, God will give us a new heaven and a new earth… out of the ashes, so to speak. In other areas in the Bible, this is noted to happen immediately after the Millennial Kingdom concludes. If any of this begins to come to pass in the near future, all Christians can be assured that they will have been raptured before this total destruction by fire commences.

Peter, in his concluding paragraphs, told his friends…

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.  Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 2 Peter 3:14-15

Peter ended this second letter with:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2 Peter 3:18

**Conclusion:** Peter wrote this second letter a short time before his execution by the Roman authorities. He wanted to make sure that the churches would hear one last time of his first hand experiences with Jesus. He reminded the members that he and others had actually heard God speak and testify concerning the identity of His Son, Jesus. Peter also reminded them not to forget how the Old Testament speaks of the coming of Jesus.

Given all of this evidence, Peter told the readers not to fall for the lies of the false teachers. Some in that day were scoffers as they wondered why the Lord had not already returned. Peter told them that this was not an issue. When Jesus was ready, He would come. In the meantime, there would be more opportunity to add to the numbers of Christians. Peter also strongly suggested that they all be found “spotless and blameless” when Jesus did arrive! Soon after this letter was sent, Peter was crucified in Rome.

**1 John**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** This first epistle of John was written by the apostle John in approximately A.D. 90 from Ephesus. He wrote to those believers in Asia Minor, but to no specific church. Therefore, this epistle is known as a “general” epistle.

**Purpose:** John wrote this letter to counter the growing heresy that was infecting the Church as the first century was drawing to a close. Gnosticism was growing. One important subset of this heretical teaching, known as Docetism, was also on the rise. Docetism was a belief system that denied that Jesus had actually been born to Mary in a human body… that is, as flesh and blood. Instead, they believed that Jesus Christ did not actually have a real body, but *only the appearance of a body*. This ridiculous idea came from the concept that matter was inherently evil. Therefore, God could not inhabit any matter… including that of a human body. That also eliminated the possibility of death and resurrection. That eliminated the whole basis of Christianity! Hence, John wrote this letter.

There were some people that had an association with the churches in the various towns and cities in Asia Minor and elsewhere, that had decided to split away and follow these false doctrines. John wanted to send important information to the Christians that were following Christ all around the region so that they could better understand the error in the thinking of these heretics. This epistle was written to build up in faith the followers of Christ.

**Synopsis:** John begins his important letter by telling his readers that he (and many others, including all of the apostles) has seen everything that he is about to tell them concerning Jesus Christ… with their own eyes! This was the same Jesus who had existed from eternity past. John had actually seen Jesus Christ in bodily form. John had touched Him, ate with Him, talked with Him, and saw Him perform dozens of miracles. Then he saw Jesus crucified, dead, buried and then risen from the grave… even later he saw Jesus rise up through the clouds into heaven. Those were the facts, and they needed to be believed. John said that he was writing them so that they might share in the fellowship with the Father and Jesus and that their joy would be complete. He continued with…

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.  If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.  But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**  **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.  *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***  If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives 1 John 1:1-10

John continued on to say that he was writing to convince his readers of the truth of his message. He told them that they should not sin, but that Jesus would forgive them if they repented and confessed their sins. John suggested that people evaluate their life and beliefs so as to be sure that they are true believers in Jesus… since nothing is more important than that one thing.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.  The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.  But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:  **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did**. 1 John 2:3-6

Certainly, according to John, we surely can doubt the salvation of many people who claim to be Christians but who live their lives as if Jesus and his commands were irrelevant. If we know Him, we will obey His Word… the Bible and its commands. John continues to show how we can know our position in Christ…

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.  For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.  The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17

John tells the reader that anyone who claims that Jesus is anyone other than God the Son, is wrong and a false teacher, a heretic. Anyone who denies Jesus and the biblical view of Jesus, denies the Father as well. To deny Jesus is to doom oneself to hell.

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.  As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him. And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. 1 John 2:26-28

John tells his readers to abide (continue) in Jesus until He returns again at His second coming. We want to be ready for that day whenever it comes. All Christians have the Holy Spirit to help them live a holy life… they just need to call on the Spirit to help them each and every day of their lives.

John also tells his readers an important piece of information that many Christians today seem to forget. He tells them how they can know whether someone is a child of God… and those who are not… even if they claim to be. Although only God can know for sure, there are certainly clues that will tell us a great deal about a person and their relationship with Jesus. John says…

**No one who lives in him keeps on sinning**. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.  Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. **He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.  He who does what is sinful is of the devil**, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.  **No one who is born of God will continue to sin**, because God's seed remains in him; **he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God**.  This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: **Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother**. 1 John 3:6-10

Those folks who claim Jesus as their Savior but then go on to lead lives showing no evidence that they are obeying Christ’s commands, are very likely only fooling themselves… I would hope that they sometime would read these words of John, take them into their heart, and evaluate if they truly are the son or daughter of the living God.

John continued to show the evidence of a true believer. He stated that a Christian will love his brother and demonstrate this love with his actions… for example, giving to the poor.

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18 Those who claim to be Christians but do not love their brothers certainly better re-evaluate themselves… John says that they cannot really be followers of Jesus. Remember Jesus’ command…

this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.  Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3:23-24

The Holy Spirit will bear witness to our spirit when we are living for Christ.

John then turns his attention to the false teachers of that day… and our day as well. The typical false teacher at that time taught that Jesus did not actually become a human being. Jesus was not a man of flesh and bone. The “intellectuals” idea of that day was that all matter was evil. Since God could not be evil, Jesus could not ever become an incarnate being. Somehow, he would have just *used* the body of a person named Jesus after his birth and before his death… but not actually “be” that person. This sounds weird… it is weird… and baloney. Most, if not all conceptions of false gods are weird when one really looks at them. The only one that passes examination is the Christian concept of God… for obvious reasons… it is true.

John spent a great deal of time in the latter paragraphs in this letter reminding his Christian readers of the utmost importance of “love”. He told them in a few different ways that they needed to love their brothers as they loved God. Why?

We love because he first loved us.  If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.  And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1 John 4:19-21

After emphasizing the need for Christian love in the true believer, John summarizers his message in the last chapter of this letter. Here is a summary of his thoughts on true Christianity:

* This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.  This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome 1 John 5:2-3
* God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.  He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11-12
* if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.  And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him. 1 John 5:14-15
* We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. 1 John 5:18
* We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 1 John 5:19

When one takes a look at these items carefully, we see that John summed up what being a Christian is all about rather nicely. This concluded his first letter to the various churches in Asia Minor. Even in those days, this letter surely circulated much beyond Asia Minor and into the farthest reaches of the Christian world of that time. It was very important as an instrument to help curtail the growing Gnostic movement that was competing with Christianity in those days. John soon sent out two other shorter letters as well.

**Conclusion:** John the apostle wrote this first epistle to counter false teachers, especially the sect called Docetists that denied the humanity of Jesus. He also wanted to remind his readers that a person was not a Christian simply because they called themselves one. Anyone who was truly a Christian would live a life that reflected Christ. God is love. We are saved by Jesus into His family. We know we are truly saved when we obey Jesus. When our lives are filled with love and good works, we can know we are truly *in Jesus*. Everyone will sin on occasion… Jesus will forgive us our sins. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9) However, anyone who continues to live a life of sin is not a Christian. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. 1 John 3:6

**2 John**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** This epistle was written by John the apostle just a short time after he wrote 1 John. He wrote this letter from Ephesus as well, sometime around A.D. 90.

**Purpose:** Johnwrote this letter to a “chosen lady and her children” to warn them of false teachers and to encourage them and commend them for their Christian walk. Some theologians believe that the “chosen lady” is code for the local church. If so, that makes the “children’ the congregation of the church. Of course, John may well be writing to a specific Christian lady and her actual children. The message is really the same whether this was meant for a few individuals in that local church or the entire Church of Jesus Christ.

**Synopsis:** John calls himself the elder to begin the letter. That he certainly was. He was about 80 years old. John continues to warn about the same evil that he wrote about in his longer first epistle… he was very concerned about the Gnostic false teachers gaining a foothold in the world at the expense of the one true gospel message. He certainly did not want the local Christian church accidentally giving them any help. After John opens by addressing the “lady and her children” he begins with a reiteration of one of his main points from 1 John (his first letter)…

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.  It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.  And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. **I ask that we love one another.  And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.** As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. 2 John 1:3-6

John then gets to his main point of the letter. He wants this lady to be more discriminating when welcoming preachers and/or teachers into her home. Some are of the devil and John strongly points out that Christians must watch out for these people and not give them a platform.

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching (i.e. the true gospel), do not take him into your house or welcome him.  Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. 2 John 1:7, 10-11

His point being plainly made, John finishes his letter by telling the lady that he hopes to visit soon. He very much looks forward to that day.

**Conclusion:** John wrote this letter to point out the importance of avoiding the teaching of the Gnostic preachers of that day as well as the necessity to avoid associating with them.

**3 John**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** This was the third letter that the apostle John wrote while living in Ephesus late in his life. He referred to himself as “The Elder”. This term conveyed to the recipient the advanced age as well as the authority of the individual writing the letter. It was written in approximately A.D. 90 – shortly after 2 John was penned.

**Purpose:** This was a very short letter to a man named Gaius, a member of one of the churches that was under John’s oversight during those years. John wrote it to address the issue of Christian hospitality.

**Synopsis:** John begins this short letter by commending Gaius for his fine Christian walk. Certain Christian brothers had reported this recently when they had stopped by to visit the apostle John. However, John did want to point out one thing…

Apparently, Gaius was so kind and considerate of others that he welcomed many a brother into his home for fellowship and a place to stay when they were in town. He did this even to itinerant preachers that he did not know. John was very impressed with this kindness to those spreading the Word of God.

However, John reprimanded another member of that church by the name of Diotrephes for doing just the opposite. Apparently, this man would have nothing to do with travelling missionaries. He even interfered with their work…

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.  So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. 3 John 1:9-10

This man, Diotrephes, had set himself up as a demagogue it would seem. He wanted to be the “man” in his local church. Everything must center around him. He apparently even denied John’s apostolic leadership.

His point being made, John closed this letter saying that he hoped to be seeing his friend Gaius very soon.

**Conclusion:** The apostle John commends one man for his hospitality and kindness to other brothers in the faith. He points out how another in the church was guilty of selfishness and pride - that man did not help or welcome other Christians in need… not even apostles.

**Jude**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** Jude was James’s brother… and the half-brother of Jesus. The letter was written sometime around A.D. 69. The exact date is not known. The city in which it was written is also not known. Jude seems to have been referenced by Paul to be a married man who travelled around Palestine preaching the gospel since the death and resurrection of Christ. This letter was written to all Jewish Christians… thus, it is referred to as a “general epistle”.

**Purpose:** This letter was written to warn believers about the increasing apostasy that was entering into the Church. Gnosticism was on the rise. More and more heresy was finding its way into the Church. Jude warns that it is of the utmost importance to reject all of these teachings.

**Synopsis:** After a brief introduction, Jude launches into his main point…

 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.  For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. Jude 1:3-4

Note what Jude is specifically talking about here. He is concerned about those false teachers who are mistaking the grace of Jesus for a license to sin! In addition to this perverse teaching, he also points out that some are denying the unique position of Jesus as God the Son and our only hope and way for salvation… (I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6)

Jude next goes on and gives examples of Old Testament Jews and even angels who foolishly and with pride rejected God and turned to immorality only to become examples of those who “suffer the punishment of eternal fire”. Jude 1:7

Jude condemns false teachers as those living immoral lives, defying proper authority and scoffing at the powers of celestial beings (even the power of Satan and of demons should not be taken lightly)

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings Jude 1:8

Jude went on to tell how even the archangel Michael called on God to defeat Satan when that was needed… even an archangel did not take the powers of darkness lightly.

These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.  They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires."  These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. Jude 1:16-19

Jude had many other things to say about these false teachers… all of them bad. After blasting these teachers of apostasy, Jude went on to give some important advice…

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.  They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires."  These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.  But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.  Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.  **To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen**. Jude 1:17-25

**Conclusion**: Jude is a short epistle that is concerned primarily with denouncing heretics in the Church. In particular, the writer is concerned with those false teachers who mistake the grace of God’s salvation through Jesus for a license to sin. There also were those heretics who did not give Jesus His proper position as God, the Son, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jude exhorts his readers to be careful not to follow these false teachers, but to stay in the Word and continue to pray and follow the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

**Author, Date, Key Facts:** The Revelation of Jesus Christ is the last book in the New Testament. It was written in approximately A.D. 95, while the apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos. He had been exiled there during the persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor, Domitian. John had been fearlessly preaching the gospel of his Lord, Jesus Christ, while leading the church at Ephesus. While there in Patmos, Jesus appeared to his old friend in a grand vision. There are some who suggest that John wrote this book during the reign of Nero in the A.D. 60’s. However, the vast majority of theologians, from the days of the early Church to this day, agree that it almost assuredly was written by John when exiled on Patmos as an old man.

**Purpose:** This book is an amazing book of prophecy. It begins, however, with a brief letter to each of seven churches in Asia Minor. These are churches with leaders and congregations that John knew fairly well. Remember, he had been a leader of the entire Christian movement for over sixty years… much of his time had been spent in Asia Minor. It was not until the reign of Domitian that the refusal to worship the Roman Emperor was made a punishable offense. John addressed the seven churches to warn them of certain threats (such as Roman persecution) and to encourage them to never forget their first love, Jesus Christ. After the messages to these churches, John launches into a description of the apocalyptic vision that Jesus had given him of the last days… in particular, the seven year tribulation period that just precedes the return of Jesus to set up His Millennial Kingdom on earth. The future glory coming to Jesus is also presented as the Lord takes back everything Satan has attempted to usurp from God. Then Jesus banishes this fallen angel to the *bottomless pit.* The conclusion is extremely uplifting as Jesus shows John what the future holds… both for those who reject Jesus and for those who trust in Jesus.

**Synopsis:** The Revelation opens with a description of what is about to happen and words of blessing to those who read and value the words of this prophecy:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw--that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.  Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Rev 1:1-3

Jesus then told John to write to seven churches in Asia Minor… churches that were not far apart from one another. This letter would then be circulated among these churches. Then, of course, it would find its way to all the churches…and eventually become a part of New Testament canon. John begins by reminding them how Jesus will be coming in all of His glory one day…

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.   
**"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."** Rev 1:7-8

Then, he continues with the reason for his specific address to each of the seven churches:

**I, John**, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, **was on the island of Patmos** because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.  On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to **Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea**." Rev 1:9-11

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.  His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.  His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.  In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.  When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.  I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Rev 1:12-18

John had just experienced an incredible vision of Jesus Christ in all of His heavenly glory. As is always the case when a mere man meets God in His heavenly glory, John dropped to the ground in worship and, frankly, fear. Jesus quickly put his good friend John at ease. No more would Jesus be seen as the “suffering servant”, a role He performed to perfection for the sake of all of His children. From now on, however, Jesus will be the all powerful, omniscient, glorious Son of God… the Messiah that the Jews had expected would come one day. Indeed He will come! Only it will be the Messiah’s second prolonged visit to earth… not His first.

In the next couple of chapters, Jesus tells John the message that He has for each of the seven churches (represented in the vision as seven lampstands). There are several ways to interpret what Jesus is saying about each church. For example, J. Vernon McGee believes that there should be a threefold interpretation as follows:

* The words are actually meant for the church named during that time in history
* The picture given for each local church represents a period of church history and the attitudes and performance of the Christian Church as a whole during each of seven future time periods
* Each message to each church has something important for all churches of all times… this is often referred to as the *composite* interpretation

The following is a very brief statement relating to what Jesus had to say to each of the churches:

**Ephesus:** Paul, Pricilla and Aquila had planted this church. Timothy had been lead pastor for many years, and John, himself, was a leader of this church (until exiled to Patmos). Jesus commends them for their hard work and their fight against false teaching. However, He reminds them to *return to their first love*, the love of Christ and the brothers and sisters of Christ. He does not want them to get bogged down in rules and regulations… but, to remember what the love of Christ is all about.

**Smyrna**: Jesus here tells the congregation that they will be suffering persecution, some to the point of death. He tells them to *hold on as He will be giving them the crown of life when they persevere to the end.*  Jesus also told them that he knew of their afflictions and poverty… yet, *He counted them rich because of their behavior – their devotion to Christ.*

**Pergamum:** Jesus rebukes this church for their immoral leanings. They still remained loyal to Christ, but *they were far too tolerant of the immorality* that was infiltrating the church.

**Thyatira**: After *commending them for their deeds, love and faith*, Jesus tells them that they must *reject a prophetess* (referred to as Jezebel) who was corrupting their congregation.

**Sardis:** Jesus, through John, tells them that He knows that they have a good reputation… but, in fact, *this church is dead!* Far too many people in that church were not Christians. However, there were still some who would “walk with Me (Jesus), dressed in white”. He hoped that many of the unredeemed would repent and join the Christians.

**Philadelphia:** Jesus *commends this church* and tells them that He will keep them from some future “hour of trial” because of their great devotion.

**Laodicea:** Jesus says that this congregation is neither hot nor cold… just *lukewarm*. They thought that they were “rich”, yet Jesus says that they are *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. He suggests that they repent so that they can be with Him in heaven someday…*

 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.  Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.  **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.** Rev 3:18-20

So these are the main points that Jesus has John relay to these seven churches. He ended his message to each church with similar words such as:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Rev 2:7

After these letters to the seven churches are given, there is no further mention of the church for the next fifteen chapters. Many commentators say that this is because the church is taken up to heaven at the rapture and all of the discussion in these next fifteen chapters relates to the Tribulation Period… a time when the church will have returned to heaven.

**The Throne in Heaven:**

AfterJohn had received the messages from Jesus to deliver to the various churches, he was told to…

"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."  At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.  And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Rev 4:1-3

Angels were worshipping God who was seated on His throne. This was described in beautiful detail as was the fact that there was a scroll that was sealed seemingly waiting to be opened…

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.  And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"  But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.  I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.  Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Rev 5:1-5

No one was worthy to open this scroll with the exception of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Jesus came forth and took the scroll from God’s right hand. At this point, the angels who had been worshipping the Father, turned and began to praise and worship the Son…

"**You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation**.  You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they will reign on the earth."** (note this… Christians will reign with Christ on earth one day)  
Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:   
"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"   
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:   
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Rev 5:9-13

These seals represent what will happen during the seven year time of Tribulation…

Then Jesus began to open the **seven seals**, one by one:

1. white horse – represents conquering without bloodshed (the Antichrist’s first method)
2. red horse – war – soon after the Antichrist comes onto the scene, war will result
3. black horse – famine – worldwide famine will come
4. pale horse – represents death and Hades
5. martyrs – related to the martyrs who had died for Christ as they wondered when they would be avenged… Christ told them the wait would be a little longer
6. a great earthquake, moon turns red, sun turns black… a lot more of God’s wrath is poured out
7. not yet discussed at this point in the vision…

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.  They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!  For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Rev 6:15-17

The “day of the Lord” now has come. The reason for this upheaval is recognized now by those who had spurned Jesus. They turn and run and try to hide.

While this is going on down on earth, the Christians who have been raptured just prior to the beginning of the tribulation plus those that accepted Jesus during the tribulation… and were martyred as many will be, are shown to be worshipping God in heaven.

Many of the people who became Christians did so because they were witnessed to by the 144,000 Jews (12,000 from each of the 12 tribes) who finally recognized exactly who Jesus Christ was and still is… the Messiah. These Jews are supernaturally protected from harm as they became great evangelists across the world and won many to Christ. Of course, being a Christian in those days was a very dangerous proposition. Many who decided to follow Jesus were soon in heaven as they were killed because of their faith.

*At this point, the* ***7th seal*** *was opened*… and there was a pause for 30 minutes…

Then, **seven angels** were ready to blow **seven trumpets**.

They began to sound their trumpets in order… with the following results:

* Hail, fire and blood hurled to the earth – one third of earth burned
* Something like a huge mountain was thrown into the sea – one third of sea creatures died
* A large star (asteroid) fell to the earth – great damage
* The sun, moon and stars were changed in some way, resulting in a change in the pattern of day and night
* Locusts are unleashed to torment those without God’s seal of salvation
* 200,000,000 horsemen are unleashed – killing 1/3 of the world’s remaining population

After this sixth trumpet, John was brought a “small scroll” by an angel. At the angels command, John ate the book. This scroll tasted sweet in his mouth, but turned sour in his stomach… as predicted by the angel. After this, John is commanded to measure the Temple of God. He also sees *two witnesses* of God.

The *two witnesses* are able to witness for God for forty-two months with supernatural protection and power. Many Bible scholars believe these men will be Elijah and Moses. Enoch, who was translated into heaven, is sometimes suggested to be a witness instead of Moses. J. Vernon McGee suggests it may be John the Baptist. Whoever they are, after their work is done, they are killed by the Antichrist. Satan cannot hurt any of God’s children unless and until God allows it. [Until a Christian’s work is done on earth, God will protect him/her from death]. After three and one half days, they will be raised from the dead and ascend into heaven. An earthquake will devastate a large portion of Jerusalem and kill 7,000 people. Then, *the seventh trumpet* sounds. Loud voices from heaven say…

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." Rev 11:15

The blowing of the seventh trumpet announces the imminent coming of Jesus to defeat Satan and set up His millennial kingdom on earth. Certain details are given about the last 3 1//2 years of the seven year tribulation.

Chapter 12 begins by telling of a woman giving birth to a child, while a dragon stood before her waiting to devour her baby. Then, the woman gave birth…

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.  The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.  And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.  But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.  The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Rev 12:5-9

The above paragraph speaks of the birth of Jesus. Earlier, the chapter notes that one third of the angels of heaven will be swept down with Satan… as they had rebelled from God as did Satan. Israel is represented by the woman. Jesus, of course, is descended from the house of David. Israel, the woman in this word picture, is persecuted by Satan during the tribulation period, but protected by God. There will be many who will turn to Christ and be strong against the persecution by Satan in those last days. Of course, some will die a martyr’s death…

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.  Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! Rev 12:11-12

A *beast*, the Antichrist, would arise “out of the sea” and Satan would empower him with great power, even to the point that he would recover from a fatal wound. This would astonish the world and result in his gaining of power. Unsaved men and women would worship this man and follow his commands.

Soon after these events, another man (*beast*) would come on the scene who would also be on the side of Satan. He would perform many miraculous signs that would gain him a big following. However, this “false prophet” would order the people to set up an image in honor of the Antichrist (the first *beast* on the world scene). This false prophet also made people take a mark in order to buy or sell…

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.  This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the **number of the beast**, for it is man's number. His number is **666**. Rev 13:16-18

The necessity of taking the “mark of the beast” to buy and sell, would make it extremely difficult for a Christian to live. Many would die, some might be able to hide for the 3 ½ years until Armageddon. It would be a very terrible place to live during those years.

John then saw another image from heaven.

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.  And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.  And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. Rev 14:1-3

At that point, John saw three angels come and proclaim the final judgment on the earth.

* First angel said, “Fear God and give Him glory for the hour of His judgment is come.”
* Second angel said, “Fallen, Fallen, is Babylon the great.”
* Third angel said, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury

Rev 14:7-10

The next section describes the bloodiest war in history, Armageddon. Seven angels poured out **seven last plagues** onto the earth. **Seven bowls of God’s wrath** were then poured out as John watched the results. These plagues resulted in the following terrible things: bodily sores (for those who had taken mark of the beast), all sea-life died, rivers turned to blood, the sun’s heat began to scorch people’s skin, darkness came over the land, the Euphrates River dried up to make way for the 200,000,000 man army to march on Israel, and a massive earthquake with giant hailstones erupted. This earthquake will be unbelievably terrible.

No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.  The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.  From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible. Rev 16:18-21

When all of these plagues come during the last half of the tribulation, they will result in no repentance but only more cursing of God.

The next topic covered, as noted in Chapter 17, introduces “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” Rev 17:5 Mystery Babylon represents the *false church* which becomes prominent in the latter days. This “church” will turn to worship the Antichrist during the first half of the tribulation. This church will help to elevate the Antichrist and false prophet to their prominent roles. All of these entities will work together toward a New World Order. When the mid-point of the seven year tribulation period is reached, the Antichrist will turn against this apostate church and destroy it. Also, at the mid-point of the tribulation, the Antichrist will stop the Jewish sacrifices in the rebuilt Temple of God. In their place, he will defile the Temple with inappropriate, sacrilegious sacrifices or worse. The final 3 ½ years will be a time of great spiritual and physical battles between the evil forces of Satan and the Holy forces of God.

As Armageddon draws near, *Babylon* will fall to the forces of God…

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.   
"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.  Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:   
"'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!' Rev 18:2,8-10

After seeing the vision of the fall of Babylon, John was shown the celebration that was beginning to break out in heaven. He heard the angels of heaven shouting, “Hallelujah!” and shouting praises to God and Jesus. One example follows…

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.  Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.  Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." Rev 19:6-8 (fine linen = righteous acts of the saints)

John was so overwhelmed with joy that he fell down and began to worship the angel who brought him the news. As always, he was quickly corrected by the angel who told him that he was just a fellow servant like John… one should only worship God.

John next saw an incredible sight…

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.  His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.  He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God (this is Jesus).  The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.  Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.  On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND Lord OF Lords. Rev 19:11-16

The final battle began. Satan and his evil forces were ready to overcome the human forces that remained on earth to fight him. Remember, most of the Christians had already been raptured to heaven seven years previously. On the other hand, imagine how these forces of evil felt to look up and see Jesus coming toward them with millions of His saints right behind their all-powerful leader. The beauty of the scene will be phenomenal… all those white horses and everyone being decked out in their glorified bodies and fine white linen! Beautiful! Jesus gives us the pleasure of joining Him as He totally crushes that miserable, hideous devil! What a slaughter Armageddon will be…indeed, the Bible states that it will be a terrible defeat for Satan.

And the fate of the Antichrist and false prophet?

The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Rev 19:20

Satan’s fate was a bit different…

He (an angel) seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.  He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. Rev 20:2-3

The last portion of The Revelation of Jesus Christ gives a few details concerning the Millennial Kingdom. Those who trusted in Jesus will help Jesus reign on earth during this thousand year period. Those people who rejected Jesus will have to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment at the conclusion of the Millennium. They will have no chance for salvation, but the specifics of their eternal life separated from God will be given. There are “levels” of Hell. The last word on Satan concerns his ultimate fate after the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.  They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.  **And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**  Rev 20:7-11

Simply put, Satan will be given one last opportunity at *freedom* at the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom. He will once again mount an offensive against the people of God, and Jesus Himself. Dumb idea.

The last sentence of chapter 20 says it all concerning the fate of non-Christians in the world to come: If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Rev 20:15

**New Jerusalem:** God concludes the New Testament with a beautiful description of the New Jerusalem. John had a chance to see the new heaven and the new earth. He also saw the Holy City of Jerusalem coming down from the heaven.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.  I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.  And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "**Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.**  **He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain**, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:1-4

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."  He said to me: "It is done. **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.** To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.  He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.  But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Rev 21:5-8

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.  It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. Rev 21:10-11

A gorgeous description of the New Jerusalem is then given in some detail. It will be big… 1,500 miles on each side. This is roughly one half the size of the continental United States. Its streets will be pure gold (with the appearance of transparent glass). God notes that the city will never need the sun or moon because God will be its light at all times. There will be no temple as God and the Lamb (Jesus) will be its Temple. Only perfect things and people (those washed in the blood of the Lamb) will ever enter. The river of the water of life will flow from the throne of God through the main city street. The tree of life will be on each side of the river.

John’s last few words of this incredible book…

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.  The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Rev 22:20-21 I certainly second that prayer!

**Conclusion:** “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” is a most amazing book in the Bible. John, the beloved apostle, was given a vision very late in his life by God. John then wrote down the contents of this vision. This became what we now know as “The Revelation”, the last book in the Bible. Only a handful of years later, John passed on into heaven to join his fellow apostle friends and his Master, Jesus Christ. He had been the last living apostle.

Given the contents of this book, it is certainly appropriate that it has been placed as the concluding book of the New Testament. It is reasonable to divide “The Revelation” into two segments: the first deals with seven churches that had been formed several decades prior to John’s vision, the second deals with prophetic insights into the end times, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

John told of the majesty of the throne room in heaven in the early chapters, as he had a vision of heaven, angels, and even of Jesus Christ. He also spoke concerning seven representative churches in the first portion of this book. Although God had good things to say about most of the churches, He gave warnings to the vast majority of them as they had shown many signs of falling away from Jesus and His commandments. God exhorted all of the churches, as He does to our churches today, to strive diligently to love and obey the Lord Jesus. Anything less is not acceptable.

The majority of John’s incredible vision relates to end time events. God gave significant insight and information concerning what the world would be like just prior to the second coming of His Son. Most of this information related to the time known as the Great Tribulation, the seven year period of time immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, God spoke of the actual coming of His Son with His saints… “The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.” Rev 19:14 It is wonderful to contemplate that glorious day in the future when each of us (assuming the reader is a Christian) will have this fantastic opportunity!

John’s vision concludes with a look at the millennial kingdom, the differing judgments of believers and non-believers, and the new heaven and the new earth (including the New Jerusalem). In the last chapter of the Holy Bible, Jesus spoke to us through John saying…

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.  I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Rev 22:12-13

I believe that these are fitting words with which to end this book on the New Testament Church. What a glorious day it will be when Jesus does indeed return in the clouds to rapture His Church into heaven to be with Him for eternity. Let us always be ready for that day.