

The Gift New Testament Commentary

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Preface

About This Commentary

The Gift New Testament Commentary is a personal opinion and analysis of The Gift New Testament by the same author. Rather than try to replace the many excellent and detailed scholarly commentaries other have done for the Bible, this one seeks to highlight often-overlooked details and contextual clues. The analysis for each New Testament book begins with a brief background and outline to aid the reader in understanding those parts of the context that are not evident from the scripture alone.

This edition differs from the original in the following ways: typographical errors were corrected, some awkward readings were improved, and some minor changes in content were done, including the addition of another section at the end of Revelation.

The Gospels

Background

The account of the Gospels is the eyewitness testimony concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is written as history and as legal evidence, not as allegory. There are those who dismiss some parts of it as allegory simply because they have decided that miracles are impossible. But consistency would demand that they dismiss the whole Bible then, since there is little point in arguing about the content if it is mixed with fables or entirely composed of them. Such an approach has no grounds by which to distinguish true from false.

Neither are the Gospels (really, the whole Bible) to be dismissed due to alleged bias on the part of the writers. This charge could easily be brought against every historian of all time. Yet it is in comparing them that we get closer to the truth, and such a comparison has always upheld the Gospel writings as quality historical accounts according to the standards of the era. And who else would have written about Jesus anyway? The Romans could not have cared less. If a biography is to be written, it should be done by those who knew the person, and Jesus' enemies never produced evidence that these accounts were in error. So it should go without saying that we would not know much about Jesus outside of the New Testament; no one else had any motive to write in such detail about him.

This is a roughly chronological commentary on all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The chronology will be based upon events rather than time of writing, though it is helpful in other ways to know this as well. The proposed ranges of dates have varied over the years, but the current general consensus seems to be that Mark was written in the late 40s A.D. to mid 50s, Luke was written around 62, Matthew was written around the mid 60s, and John was written around the 90s.

Concerning the chronology of events, we should note that the so-called synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) likely shared many sources (eyewitnesses) in collecting their information. But it is only John who begins with a statement about Jesus before his incarnation, plainly stating that Jesus is God. Mark is thought to have been written for a primarily

Roman audience, Matthew for a Hebrew audience, and Luke for a general Gentile audience (and Luke is widely considered to be a first-rate historian). John wrote more of a biography and focused on the miracles Jesus performed, and is noted for his lengthy quotation of Jesus' prayer and monologue at the Last Supper. Even so, there are times when John gives more precise chronological information than the other Gospels.

The most important thing to consider when attempting such a chronology is that we can only go by expressed statements of timing, not by where a given event appears in the text. We should also consider the fact that Jesus did a lot of traveling around the area, such that saying he went from this place to that place doesn't necessarily mean it was the only, first, or last time he went. And a statement such as "after this" by itself does not tell us *how long* after.

As noted in John 2:13, Jesus first drove the merchants out of the temple compound near the Passover. Another festival is mentioned but not named in John 5:1, but it's possible that it is the same as the Passover in John 6:4, since all that transpires between the two references is the healing at the Bethzatha pool and Jesus lecturing the Pharisees about it. A third Passover is mentioned in John 11:55–12:1. These references need to be considered in determining the duration of Jesus' public service, which some believe could have been as short as one year and as long as three, though it would seem that the great number of things Jesus did (John 21:25) would indicate more than one year. Then by aligning events in John with the other Gospel writers, we can have some idea of when they occurred during that time. Please also see the detailed chart at [The Synoptic Gospel Parallels with John's Gospel](#). (*Disclaimer: This is not an endorsement of other content at that site.*)

The teachings of Jesus are examined separately, as the timing of the teachings is not critical beyond their immediate contexts. However, care will be taken to note timing as it relates to whether a teaching was given more than once.

Outline

Genealogy of Jesus

- **Legal** Mt. 1:1–17
- **Biological** Lk. 3:23–38

Conception to Adulthood

- **John the Immerser** Lk. 1:5–25, 57–66
- **Jesus** Mt. 1:18–2:12, Lk. 1:26–38, 2:1–40

Preparation for Service

- **Immersed by John** Mt. 3:13–17, Mk. 1:9–11, Lk. 3:21–22, Jn. 1:32–34 [implied]
- **Tested by the Adversary** Mt. 4:1–11, Mk. 1:12–13, Lk. 4:1–13

Gathering Disciples as Service Begins

- **First Passover** Jn. 2:13
- **John in prison** Mt. 4:12, Mk. 1:14, Lk. 7:18–21, Jn. 3:24
- **Disciples called** Mt. 4:18–22, Mk. 1:16–20, 2:13–14, Lk. 5:1–11, 27–28

Teachings Begin and The Twelve are Chosen

- **The Sermon on the Mount** Mt. ch. 5–7
- **Naming the Twelve** Mt. 10:1–42, Mk. 3:13–19, Lk. 6:12–16

Actions and Object Lessons

- **Another festival** (second Passover?) Jn. 5:1 (6:4)
- **A question of Godhood during the Feast of Dedication** Jn. 10:22–38
- **Roman officer with great faith** Mt. 8:5–13, Lk. 7:1–10
- **Raising the dead** Mk. 5:35–43, Lk. 7:11–17, Jn. 11:1–44
- **John the Immerser needs reassurance** Mt. 11:1–10, Lk. 7:18–28
- **A rant against three cities** Mt. 11:20–24, Lk. 10:13–16
- **Seeds, sowers, and harvests** Mt. 13:1–43, Mk. 4:1–20, Lk. 8:4–15

- **Disciples sent out in pairs** Mk. 6:7–13, Lk. 9:1–6 (see also 10:1–12)
- **John the Immerser killed** Mt. 14:1–12, Mk. 6:14–29, Lk. 9:7–9
- **Feeding five thousand** Mt. 14:15–21, Mk. 6:35–44, Lk. 9:12–17, Jn. 6:1–14
- **A woman wins an argument with Jesus** Mt. 15:21–28, Mk. 7:24–30
- **Feeding four thousand** Mt. 15:32–39, Mk. 8:1–9
- **Peter’s confession and objection** Mt. 16:13–23, Mk. 8:27–30, Lk. 9:18–21
- **The transfiguration** Mt. 17:1–8, Mk. 9:1–8, Lk. 9:28–36
- **The greatest** Mt. 18:1–5, 20:20–28, Mk. 9:34–37, 10:35–45, Lk. 22:24–27
- **Divorce** Mt. 19:1–12, Mk. 10:1–12
- **Mary the disciple** Lk. 10:38–42
- **Festival of Tents (Feast of Tabernacles) but Jesus goes secretly** Jn. 7:1–11
- **Festival of Dedication/Lights (Hanukkah) in winter** Jn. 10:22

The Future

- **The destruction of the temple in the 1st century** Mt. 24:1–2, Mk. 13:1–2, Lk. 21:5–6
- **The unknown duration** Mt. 24:32–25:30, Mk. 13:28–37, Lk. 21:29–36
- **Birth pangs** Mt. 24:3–8, Mk. 13:3–8, Lk. 21:7–19
- **Persecution** Mt. 10:16–28, 24:9–14, Mk. 13:9–13, Lk. 12:11–12, 21:12–19
- **The days of Noah** Mt. 24:36–41, Lk. 17:26–37

- **False Anointed**s Mt. 24:23–28, Mk. 13:21–23, Lk. 17:23–25
- **Abomination** Mt. 24:15–20, Mk. 13:14–18, Lk. 21:20–22
- **The Great Oppression/Tribulation** Mt. 24:21–22, Mk. 13:19–23, Lk. 17:30–37, 21:20–24
- **Anointed returns** Mt. 24:29–31, Mk. 13:24–27, Lk. 21:25–28
- **Sheep and goats** Mt. 7:21–23, 25:31–46, Lk. 13:24–30

The Final Week

- **Third Passover** Jn. 11:55–12:1
- **The triumphal entry** Mt. 21:1–11, Mk. 11:1–10, Lk. 19:28–44, Jn. 12:12–19
- **Jesus is anointed for burial** Mt. 26:6–13, Mk. 14:3–9, Lk. 7:36–50 (a separate incident), Jn. 12:1–8
- **Preparing the upper room** Mt. 26:17–19, Mk. 14:12–16, Lk. 22:7–13
- **The last supper** Mt. 26:20–35, Mk. 14:17–31, Lk. 22:14–38, Jn. 13:1–17:26
- **Jesus' discourse and prayer** Jn. 13:31–17:26
- **Gethsemane** Mt. 26:36–56, Mk. 14:32–52, Lk. 22:39–53, Jn. 18:1–11
- **Arrest and illegal trials** Mt. 26:57–27:10, Mk. 14:53–72, Lk. 22:54–71, Jn. 18:12–27
- **Trials by Pilate and Herod** Mt. 27:11–25, Mk. 15:1–15, Lk. 23:1–23a, Jn. 18:28–19:15
- **Jesus' execution** Mt. 27:26–56, Mk. 15:16–41, Lk. 23:23b–49, Jn. 19:16–37
- **Jesus' burial** Mt. 27:57–66, Mk. 15:42–47, Lk. 23:50–56, Jn. 19:38–42

Post-resurrection to Ascension

- **Jesus' first appearances** Mt. 28:1–15, Mk. 16:1–11, Lk. 24:1–12, Jn. 20:1–18
- **Jesus appears to the other disciples** Mt. 28:16–17, Mk. 16:12–14, Lk. 24:13–44, Jn. 20:19–21:14
- **Final instructions** Mt. 28:18–20, Mk. 16:15–18, Lk. 24:45–49, Jn. 21:15–25, Ac. 1:1–8
- **Ascension** Mk. 16:19–20, Lk. 24:50–53, Ac. 1:9–11

Genealogy of Jesus

The genealogies found in Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38 are claimed by some to be contradictory, but they are simply from two different perspectives. Matthew traces forward from Abraham to Mary's husband Joseph, while Luke traces backward from Mary¹ to Adam and finally to God. Matthew shows that Jesus is from the royal/legal line of David to establish his qualification as the Anointed and Descendant, while Luke shows the genetic/blood line to establish his qualification as the God-Man, the Divine in human flesh. Thus the two genealogies work together to establish the right of Jesus to claim fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Conception to Adulthood

The earliest details are provided in the first chapter of Luke. Like Abraham and Sarah, the parents of John the Immerser were elderly and childless. So we see a connection between "the child of promise" (Isaac) and John the forerunner of Jesus, who was to come "in the spirit and power of Elijah". One marvels that his father Zacharias would be skeptical of the Messenger Gabriel's promise of a very special child, especially since he knew very well the circumstances regarding Abraham and Sarah. So there is no surprise at Zacharias' punishment for disbelief. He was described as righteous all his life, yet he could not believe a direct message from God until he was struck with being deaf and mute.

¹Luke only actually uses the word "son" when he says "Jesus, the son, so it was thought, of Joseph". The rest of them only have "of". Consider also the fact that Luke is more focused on Mary in the early chapters.

It was not until six months later that this same Gabriel was sent to Mary. But though she questioned him, she did not doubt him; she simply did not understand how this would work, rather than disbelieving. As for her virginity, this is indisputable from the context. The Greek word is not limited to mean virginity, but Mary's question leaves no room for doubt that this was true in her case. So regardless of how anyone might render the word, it is clear that Mary would conceive without the involvement of a man. It is this lack of a human father, not whether Mary was a virgin, that is of the utmost importance regarding Jesus, as shown in the discussion of his genealogy.

But who exactly was Jesus' father? Luke says the Messenger told Mary that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" and also "the power of the Highest will envelope you". Since not only "the Father" was involved but also the Holy Spirit, all we can say for sure is that it was not Jesus himself. What we should deduce from this is that distinctions among the members of the Trinity are not as precise and definable as we might prefer. Instead, the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are likely more of a convenience for human understanding than anything else, such that deriving theological teachings from them is probably unwise.

While we are not told the reason for John's name, we are told this for Jesus. Matthew 1:20–25 tells us that Jesus means "one who saves his people from their faults", but that he would also be called Emmanuel, meaning "God is with us". Notice that it says "they" would give him this name; it does not say this was his formal, legal name. As for Joseph, he too was visited by a Messenger, who confirmed not only the name Jesus but also that Mary had indeed been faithful. Referencing the genealogy again, note that the Messenger greets Joseph as "descendant of David".

Luke goes on to elaborate on the time from conception to birth, including lengthy quotes of the joyful expressions of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary. All three, along with the reactions of others, paint a very clear picture of extraordinary circumstances, not the least of which is the strong confirmation of Jesus as much more than a prophet or human deliverer. John is described as the forerunner and prophet, while Jesus is the royal king, all before either of them had done anything.

Luke also tells us of the circumstances which led to Mary and Joseph being in Bethlehem for Jesus' birth. It was during "those days" when Augustus made everyone travel to their hometown to be registered. Whether or not this can be corroborated by secular history with cer-

tainty, we do know that census-taking was very common at the time, and that governors and other rulers often ruled more than once, or took the name of a prior ruler. Even so, the absence of such data hardly disproves the Bible, as it is a historical record in its own right, and there is no secular data to conflict with it.

Another fact given by Luke is that there was no room available for Mary and Joseph, which is understandable given the requirement for people to return to their hometowns. But they were not reduced to staying in a stable. It was common for houses of the time to take in some of their animals at night, so the presence of a feeding trough does not require the location to be a stable. Some also take the strips of cloth with which Jesus was wrapped as burial cloths, but the Greek word referred to typical baby clothing as well. So while conditions were certainly not ideal for giving birth, they were not as crude as tradition has had it. Luke also mentions shepherds, who only watched their flocks all night during breeding seasons. These were typically in the fall but might also occur in the spring, which helps to determine the time of year when Jesus was born.

We can also consider the fact that Zacharias, in the Abia priestly division, would only have served during Pentecost, which is seven weeks after First Fruits. So the time of year of the announcement about John was probably late spring. But the conception was an unknown time following this, though not likely a long time. So a reasonable estimate would be around the end of June. Nine months later (end of March) would mark the time of John's birth. And since Elizabeth was in her sixth month at the time Mary conceived, John was six months older than Jesus. Then we calculate six months after John's birth to find Jesus' birth, which would be the end of September. Thus Jesus was likely born in the fall, possibly in the spring, and certainly not in the winter or summer.

It is possible, then, that the sign of Jesus' birth was given during the Feast of Trumpets, and the birth itself was during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 1:14 says that the Word "tabernacled" [pitched a tent] among us.) As for the year, there are many theories but the majority of scholars believe it to have been between 4 and 1 B.C. And the sacrifice Mary and Joseph brought after Jesus was circumcised was that specified for the poor, yet they would not always be poor; the visitors from the east would bring very valuable gifts fit for a king.

Luke also provides for us the accounts of Simon and Anna, the latter of whom had been serving in the temple most of her life. While both had been given prophetic messages about the Anointed, we should note that Anna had a position in the temple performing divine service. So here Luke considers it important to mention a woman, and a leading spiritual woman at that.

For most of the remaining information about this period of time, we turn back to Matthew. This is the infamous matter of Herod and his paranoia about a possible rival or threat to his power. The official advisors (trad. Magi), whose business it was to know the movements of the stars, had seen a specific sign in them that led them to Jerusalem. Though speculation on the nature of that sign or star is beyond the scope of this commentary, we might at least wonder how these people knew about it and what it meant. One theory is that Daniel, who had much influence and power in Babylon, had taught people the ways of God and informed them of this prophecy.

But of course the focus here is on Herod, who tried to use the official advisors in order to track Jesus down and kill him before he could grow up. This is why he flew into a rage and killed all children two years and younger when he found out the advisors had been warned not to report back to him. This also tells us that the advisors did not arrive immediately after Jesus was born, but as much as two years later. Further, we do not know how many advisors there were, and the list of gifts they brought to Jesus is a sample, not a precise accounting. Also, we are told that they worshiped Jesus, which is yet another indication of his deity.

As for Joseph being warned to run away from there with his family, some may cite the quite ordinary circumstances of Herod's actions as proof that God had nothing to do with this. But they should consider the fact that the Anointed was predicted very far in advance, and Herod of all people certainly did *not* want Jesus to fulfill the prophecy. Not all prophecy is something directly caused by God; in fact, most of it could be classified under this "ordinary circumstances" category. So as a general principle of prophecy, it seems that its purpose is to only be fully understood after it has been fulfilled and we can look back at the prediction. This makes fulfilled prophecy all the more impressive, since anybody could predict an event that they caused.

Now we return to Luke to fill in what little detail is recorded about the years Jesus grew up. Toward the end of chapter two we are told

that the family was in the habit of attending the Passover each year, and that at the age of twelve Jesus unofficially began his career of befuddling the religious leaders. And though today we might tend to classify as rebellion his decision to leave his parents wondering where he was for three days, there was certainly no such rebellious intent on his part. As for speculation that Jesus had gone to India to learn from gurus, there is not one shred of evidence to support the claim. The people of his hometown knew that he had not been formally trained and rejected him for that reason. And as he said himself, he was sent to “the lost sheep of Israel”, not the world at large, and he had no need of gurus.

Preparation for Service

The account of the public service of Jesus, as with his birth, begins with his relative John. Luke gives the most detail about timing, citing no less than five names of rulers and the year of one of them, plus the names of two priests. Details like these show the writer’s invitation to scrutiny; that is, there is no intent to deceive, as some accuse the writers of the New Testament. Not much is said about John’s growing up, beyond the requirements of not drinking wine, not cutting his hair, and that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the start. At the time he began immersing people, he is described as living alone in the desert, wearing the crudest clothing and living on a diet of wild honey and insects.

His message was simple: essentially, people were to confess their sins and turn from them, so they would be prepared for the coming of the Anointed. The act of immersion (“baptism” is a transliteration of a word meaning to submerge or dip) was common at that time for a variety of reasons, not all of them religious or spiritual. It was a symbolic act, not a magical act, and a public declaration. And in the case of the Pharisees who came just for show, John knew this and sent them away to first do what the ritual symbolized: have a change of heart/mind. If anyone needed to change it was the Pharisees, yet John did not hesitate to offend them. Saying the words and playing the part were not to be tolerated out of a misguided sense of acceptance and love, or a fear of turning away potential converts.

We see in John’s words (Mat. 3:10–12) a contrast between the immersion he performed with water, and the immersion to be performed by Jesus with fire. Of course the water was literal, but it is just as clear that the fire was figurative, though referring to the literal Holy Spirit.

His point was that the latter would replace the former, but it would not happen suddenly or immediately. As shown in the book of Acts, there was a period of transition, a shift from an all-Hebrew community of believers to that of Gentiles as well. Customs and habits take time to change.²

When Jesus finally came to be immersed himself, John's objection in light of the fact that his immersion was different surely contributed to his being puzzled by the request. And the answer Jesus gave was basically, "Just do it, even though it makes no sense right now". So in this we see that Jesus was hardly establishing a rite or ordinance for all who would follow him, since it was already common practice for many people. And it was at this point that the voice from heaven and the Holy Spirit confirmed Jesus as the Anointed (John 1:33–34), which also shows all three members of the Trinity at once and as distinct entities. This is one of the clearest portrayals of God as a trinity rather than one God playing three roles.

Then it was Jesus' turn to live in the desert for a while, but without the food and with the Adversary himself putting him through a test. John says nothing about this and Mark says very little, so the details of this testing are found in the accounts of Matthew (4:1–11) and Luke (4:1–13). The first test was an attempt to get Jesus to prove himself, though of course the Adversary already knew who Jesus was. But with Jesus in a state of weakness due to extreme hunger, he thought he had a chance by means of something we all fall prey to: a dare to prove how spiritual or godly we are ("If you were really a Christian, you would. . .").

Another test (Mat. and Luke have this and the next one in opposite order) was an appeal to instant power, by offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshiping him. The Adversary apparently thought that he could get Jesus to take a shortcut to what would eventually be his anyway. But Jesus did not challenge his right to offer this, and it would have been a ridiculous test unless the Adversary really did have dominion over all the great cities and powers of the world. Other passages (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 6:12) support this as well.

The other test mentioned was for Jesus to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, again to prove who he was, using scripture as always. But though Jesus did always respond with scripture, the lesson for us is that we must use it all, and not fall for partial or out-of-context

²See also bethelministries.com/baptism.htm, but please note that this is not an endorsement of any other articles at that site.

arguments (see Prov. 18:17). This tactic is used continually as a trap for Christians, either by partial quotations or just poor reasoning. Logic and discernment are not the enemies of spiritual growth and truth, though the Adversary keeps using this ploy against us with great success.

Gathering Disciples as Service Begins

The gospel of John gives additional detail of what Jesus did after his testing. In fact, everything after John 1:14 probably took place after Jesus was immersed, since in vs. 32 John the Immerser speaks of that event in the past tense. The “next day” of vs. 35 is in reference to when John made that statement, not when the immersion took place. And given the following statement about “the third day”, it also must have been after Jesus was tested, since the other Gospels indicate that Jesus went “immediately” into the desert for 40 days before his testing. Notice also the use of translation by the apostle John, which indicates that he was explaining Hebrew terms to Greek readers.

On “the third day” Jesus was invited to the wedding in Cana, where his mother got him to perform a miracle before he had intended to do such things. As a side note about the wine itself, it seems obvious that the wine was alcoholic, since the master of ceremonies mentions drunkenness. This also relates to the requirement for his relative John not to drink wine. And after this, not only his disciples but also his mother and siblings were with him, just before the Passover (John 2:12). This tells us that this particular Passover was not the one when Jesus was to die, thus helping to establish the length of time of his public service.

It was during these few days that Jesus began to have disciples following him. But note that at this time they came to him first, rather than Jesus coming to them. The only one he actually called at this time was Philip (John 1:43); everyone else came by word of mouth. But there were two instances of Jesus acquiring disciples, and these help determine when John the Immerser was arrested for criticizing Herod, who had illegally taken his brother Philip’s wife (Mat. 14:1–5, Mark 6:17–18, Luke 3:18–20):

- Mat. 4:12–17 — John the Immerser arrested, then Jesus goes to Galilee, then from Nazareth to Capernaum, then the seaside where he calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John
- Mark 1:14–15 — John the Immerser arrested before Jesus calls

those four by sea of Galilee

- Luke 7:18–21 — Implies that John may have already been arrested, and it was in Luke 5:9–11 that the four were called (the sea there is called Gennesaret, which is the same sea as Galilee)
- John 3:22–24 — John the Immerser had not yet been arrested after Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, and there is no mention of the calling by the sea

Note also that neither of the two instances of Jesus acquiring disciples was the same as the third, formal calling of the Twelve in Mat. 10:1–4, Mark 3:13–19, and Luke 6:12–16. And the ease with which the four left their fishing business is best explained by the fact that this was not their first encounter with Jesus. So we can be fairly confident that whatever happened before John the Immerser was arrested also happened before the four disciples were called away from their fishing business. With that chronological marker established, we can proceed to examine everything else that took place during the time between Jesus' testing and his calling the other disciples besides Philip to follow him.

Luke chapter 4 tells us that Jesus began to travel around to the synagogues to announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark uses the term "kingdom of the heavens"). Of course, this was not the Gospel of Jesus' resurrection, since that had not yet taken place. This passage agrees with Mat. 4:12–17 that Jesus started out in Galilee, and then went to his hometown of Nazareth. This is where he read from the writings of Isaiah about things being fulfilled at the time, and where the people he grew up with took offense at him. As a result he moved away from there and settled instead in Capernaum, where unlike Nazareth, the people had enough faith to be healed of their illnesses and demonic oppressions.

John adds much more detail for this period of time. Picking up at the point where Jesus was in Capernaum with his mother and siblings (no mention of his father Joseph anymore, so we can assume he had died), John 2:13 begins the account of Jesus expelling the merchants from the temple. Though the other Gospels have such an incident occurring near the end of Jesus' public service, there is no reason it couldn't have happened twice. There is also no mention of the Pharisees vowing to kill Jesus afterwards, as is the case in the other Gospels, which would

be explained by the fact that Jesus had not yet said and done much to provoke them. And only John mentions the use of a whip in the incident.

John also tells us in chapter 3 of the meeting with Nicodemus. This is the source of the phrase “born from above”, which Nicodemus took to mean the need to be born a second time, hence the phrase “born again”. Though some controversy has raged over what Jesus meant by being born of both water and Spirit, the context seems clear enough that he was simply contrasting natural, physical birth with supernatural, spiritual birth; there is no hint of the common rite of water immersion there. His reference to the Spirit being as unpredictable as the blowing of the wind is taken by some to mean salvation is purely by the Spirit’s choice (so-called “Unconditional Election”), but again the context shows that Jesus simply used the wind to explain the invisibility of the spiritual realm. Jesus’ famous words in John 3:14–18 also establish the fact that salvation is by freely-exercised personal faith, and that condemnation is for disbelief rather than not being chosen by the Spirit.

After the encounter with Nicodemus, we read that John was still immersing people, and that the disciples of both him and Jesus began to quarrel over who was immersing the most (as the apostle John points out, Jesus never immersed anyone himself but had his disciples do it). This incident shows that even before there were “churches” as tradition has had it, people were “counting nickels and noses” in some kind of contest to prove who was following the greatest leader. And when Jesus found out about this, he left the area. Let the reader speculate on what this may imply.

Having left there, Jesus passed through Samaria on his way to Galilee, which would make the following incident likely to have taken place before the four disciples were called. The apostle John (referred to from here on out simply as John, since not much else transpires with John the Immerser until his death) gives us an account of a Samaritan woman that would make no sense to include, had he been fabricating any of this. For a Jew to speak so extensively about a woman, and without condemnation especially of a promiscuous Samaritan, is yet another indication that the writers of the Gospels were giving unbiased and faithful reports.

But perhaps even more surprising is what Jesus told her: that the time had come for people to worship God “in spirit and truth” rather than in a holy place. This, told to a Samaritan woman of all people, was nothing less than the blueprint for the coming Congregation. This

was a radical departure from the temple and priesthood, the Law and the rituals, that all faithful Jews honored, as well as from all organized religions of all time. As he would say later on (Mat. 18:20), “where two or three have gathered on my account, there I am with them”. He would also later say that he came to fulfill the purpose of the Law and the Prophets (Mat. 5:17–19) and to serve as a priest of a new order (Heb. 5:6), and “when there is a change of priesthood, there must be a change of law” (Heb. 7:12). Yet he himself still had to fulfill them and practice the law perfectly, so his being a practicing Jew does not mean that his followers of all time would also have to practice Judaism.

We should not overlook the fact that this woman, despised even among her own people, was not ignored or told to be silent. Spreading the news about the Anointed was a message not considered defiled by the person who proclaimed it. She gave a fearless testimony among people who looked down on her, and they listened and investigated her report. At the very least, this should teach us that we must not judge by appearances, nor shun the truth depending on who speaks it. Surely God is more concerned with the message than the messenger.

As Jesus was traveling around during this time, his encounters with the Pharisees became more frequent. In one incident (Luke 5:36–39) he gave the illustration of the wineskins. The immediate context was in response to the Pharisees’ demand to know why Jesus’ disciples did not fast, but it also illustrates a general principle: that Jesus came to do much more than die for sins. As he told the Samaritan woman, something radically new was coming, and here he indicates that it could not be mixed or meshed with the old ways.

Teachings Begin and The Twelve are Chosen

The calling of Simon/Peter, Andrew, James, and John was after the incident where Jesus told Peter and Andrew to put out their nets and they caught a very large amount of fish (Luke 5:4–11). The notable thing about these selections is that Jesus did not go to the synagogues, temple, or priesthood for them, but to the working world of ordinary people (and as later events would prove, not exactly the brightest people). So between this and the account of the Samaritan woman, we see that Jesus was in the habit of choosing those who, even today, would be overlooked by many Christian leaders.

After various accounts of miraculous healings, Matthew chapters 5

through 7 tells us that Jesus gave a long talk known as The Sermon on the Mount. But note that it was given to his disciples, rather than to the large crowd. And though they would form the basis for the coming Congregation, we must remember that Jesus is still speaking to Hebrews under the Law, before any concept of a new Congregation. Certainly the principles apply universally, but we must be careful not to become legalistic. Key points would include the following:

- The Beatitudes (“happy/blessed are . . .”) should not be taken as a technical list of specific rewards for specific virtues or qualities, but as the general concept that whatever is suffered in this life for good reasons will be resolved and rewarded in the next.
- Some negative points omitted by Matthew are found in Luke 6:24–26. While blessings are promised to the righteous, curses are promised to the unrighteous. As with statements such as “the first will be last” (Mat. 20:16), Jesus teaches that the tables will be turned in the next life.
- The purpose of salt and light is to spread out everywhere, not be kept in a container or neutralized. But tradition has made Christianity more of a container than a dispenser, encouraging people to bring the lost to them instead of going out to the lost. Society was to be influenced, enlightened, and savored by Christians mingling among people and bringing the Gospel with them on a daily and individual basis. The Gospel of this particular time, however, was not the future resurrection of the Anointed but the coming of the kingdom of God. This is the primary application of what Jesus says in this Sermon.
- Jesus’ famous statement in Matt. 5:17–19 about the Law and the Prophets refers to the Torah. Yet the end result of dismantling or fulfillment is the same; a fulfilled contract is no longer in force. This may be what Jesus meant when he would say on the cross that everything is accomplished, since his stated purpose here is to fulfill it all. We are told in Gal. 3:15–18 that the Law was like a “last will and testament”, and such a document is no longer in effect once its conditions are met. This does not mean that it was destroyed but that its purpose had been accomplished and it was no longer needed.

- Matt. 5:20–22 is where Jesus emphasizes the purpose of the commandment to not murder, which is to not even hate anyone enough to murder them. Some take his statements as a strict law against name-calling, but it seems that the intent here is to simply clean up the heart and the actions will follow, a core principle of the Law.
- The thrust of Matt. 5:23–26 is that someone has a case against you, not that they simply are upset with you. We cannot control other people's feelings, nor are we liable for any and every charge they may make. It is only when we know we have done wrong and the other person has a valid complaint against us that we must resolve the issue before daring to approach God.
- The statement in Matt. 5:27–30 about lust and adultery, as well as cutting off a body part that causes us to sin, is related to the one about hate and murder in that the heart is the key. Clearly Jesus is not saying anyone should literally remove such parts, since they are not the problem; one would have to cut out their heart (mind) instead. But note especially the fact that Jesus blames sin on the sinner, not the temptation. Temptation is certainly a sin all its own, and the one who tempts will be held to account (Matt. 18:7). But the sinner is also guilty and cannot pass blame; if we sin, it is our own fault, and we must accept responsibility.
- Matt. 5:31–32 is Jesus' famous statement about divorce. But as with the one bringing a gift to God who has a valid charge against them, so also there must be a valid reason for divorce. Jesus is not saying that all divorce is wrong except for adultery, but that there must be some legitimate fault on the part of the one being divorced. It was all too easy for men to send their wives away for any or no reason, leaving them destitute and shamed. Jesus will elaborate on this further when the question is put to him by the Pharisees (Mat. ch. 19, Mark ch. 10).
- As for swearing oaths (Matt. 5:33–37), this is another topic on which Jesus would elaborate at a later time (Matt. 23:16–22). But in this case there seems to be no reason to limit or qualify his prohibition (see also James 5:12). Yet at the same time, an oath imposed on us by others (such as to tell the truth in a court of law)

is something even Jesus would eventually do during the trial before his crucifixion. Paul also took an unnamed vow (Acts 18:18), but we do not know what this involved. At the very least, we can say that oaths/vows should be avoided if at all possible, since what matters is our intent and honesty.

- The well-known teaching about “turning the other cheek” in Matt. 5:38–42 is not a command to become a doormat or punching bag. The Greek words refer to taking an adversarial stance, as in trying to settle the score. Under Roman law, such reactions would only invite further trouble and justice would never be seen anyway; today we might equate it with resisting arrest. Yet again, even Paul stood up for his legal rights (Acts 16:35–37). So essentially Jesus is teaching that people should be good citizens, even when the state is evil. However, Jesus is clearly *not* teaching us to be passive victims of any violence anyone might use against us.
- The section about loving enemies in Matt. 5:43–48 means exactly that: loving them, not affirming and enabling them. This is the other side of the earlier statement about not hating others. To take this in isolation and ignore other commands that tell us to be separate from the world is to turn love into treason or unfaithfulness. After all, not even God affirms and accepts his enemies but rebukes them and will punish any who refuse to repent, even though he loves them enough to give them a chance to change their minds (see Rev. 3:19).
- In chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus warns against showing off in order to appear pious and holy. This includes prayer, which even today is often a chance for someone to display their eloquence and oratorical skill. And the model Jesus gave (“the Lord’s Prayer”), right after warning against endless repetition, is ironically repeated word-for-word in churches around the world. The idea is rather to pray as one would speak to a respected parent. As for God forgiving us, he forgives those who turn away from sin, and he will treat us the way we treated others. (See also Mat. 18:21, 31, Mark 11:24–26, and Luke 6:36–38.)
- Mat. 6:19–34 is about materialism and focusing on the eternal rather than the temporal. Jesus certainly is not advocating that we

never plan ahead, or live in houses, or work for our food. Rather, the point is not to make such things the focus of our life. Our priority is to be the eternal kingdom of God, such that the world and its worries and distractions will no longer rule our lives.

- But the controversy returns in chapter 7, beginning with the passage about judging (Mat. 7:1–5). As with other issues in this Sermon, one must not leap to absurd extremes as so many do with this matter. We certainly are to make many judgments, to discern and weigh and test. So we are not to turn “do not judge” into a free pass for sin and evil. By the context Jesus gives here, the intent is that we judge fairly and rationally; he did not say to ignore the splinter in the other person’s eye but first to make sure we are not using a double standard.
- As for not “throwing pearls to pigs” (Mat. 7:6), note that both these animals were known to “bite the hand that feeds them”, so the implication seems to be that we must not keep offering the Gospel to those who are hostile to it. We should note that Jesus never spoke kindly to the Pharisees, and that John the Immerser refused those who came without a change of heart/mind.
- Mat. 7:7–12 is yet another commonly-misused scripture. Many people think that it means God will not and cannot refuse any request we make, but that isn’t what Jesus said at all. In context, he said that since we flawed human beings know how to give, then surely our Father in heaven knows how as well. What it all boils down to, as Jesus said, is that we treat others as we hope they will treat us, with God as our model for how to be kind and merciful.
- Was Jesus saying in Mat. 7:13–14 that only a few people would ever be saved? There is no direct word for “salvation” there, but “the road to life” could be taken to mean the same thing. Yet the countless multitudes of souls in heaven as reported in the Revelation should at least make us use caution in defining “few”.
- The last topics in the Sermon (Mat. 7:15–27) are all closely related: false prophets, fake believers, and those who fail to put words into action. As our more modern saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words”. But some take this to mean that words

are irrelevant; they claim that doctrine is to be discarded in favor of deeds. Yet this can only be learned through doctrine, after all, so both are needed. Jesus did not say that we need no teachings, but that his teachings must be put into practice. But who are the ones Jesus will say he did not know, since they were doing all the right things? The key here is “what my Father wants”, which is all he’s been saying in this Sermon. More detail is given in the related passage of Mat. 25:41–46, where Jesus explains that the good deeds of the rejected were done selectively; that is, the lowly and truly needy were ignored.

In summary, the Sermon’s core message is that our motives are at least as important as our actions, and that our actions should be modeled after God’s actions.

Jesus then selected from among the disciples an inner circle who would be known as the Twelve (beginning Mat. 4:18, Mark 1:16, Luke 5:8). The word typically rendered “apostles” refers to people sent out or commissioned for a purpose. The most important factor is the one doing the sending, not the ones sent. So the reason the Twelve were significant is not *that* they were commissioned, but *by whom* they were commissioned. This is critical to our understanding of why only some apostles could write scripture and teach with authority on Jesus’ behalf. Everyone else is taught by other people, not directly by Jesus personally as were the Twelve. The lone exception was Paul of course, who was not part of the Twelve but was trained personally by Jesus (Gal. 1:11–12). [Some argue that it was supposed to be Paul rather than Matthias to replace Judas (see Acts 1:26). But the qualifications for replacing Judas included having been with Jesus during his entire earthly ministry (Acts 1:20–22) and being a witness of Jesus’ resurrection, which Paul was not.]

Actions and Object Lessons

The charge that would eventually get Jesus arrested and condemned by the religious leaders was his claim to be God. In John 10:22–38 Jesus is about to be stoned for this claim, but he disarms them by using their own scripture-twisting on them: he quotes a scripture that *legally* gets him off the hook. Yet that quotation (“Have I not said you are ‘gods’?”) is often taken out of context to argue that Jesus said everyone was a god. But clearly the Pharisees were using the claim to be God as a crime worthy of death, so Jesus simply reminded them that such a claim by

itself could not be enough for a conviction. This was actually a similar tactic to those used by the Adversary when he tempted Jesus in the desert. And one way to prevent such tactics being used on us is to know the context in every case. This one clearly does not show Jesus teaching that everyone is a god, but only that Jesus was quite capable of using the weapons and tactics of his enemies against them.

One familiar incident mentioned in Mat. 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 (John 4:46–54 is very similar but probably a separate incident) is of the Roman officer whose servant was dying, yet he of all people had enough faith to know that Jesus could heal without having to go and touch the sick person. This emphasizes the importance of both faith and the object of faith. Yet it seems that only Jesus could heal at a distance, as there are no recorded cases where any of his disciples did so.

But of course the most impressive of Jesus' miracles was raising the dead. There were at least three incidences: Luke 7:11–17 (a widow's only son), Mark 5:35–43 (Talitha), and John 11:1–44 (Lazarus). Yet the question arises as to whether these people died again. Some would cite Heb. 9:27 to say that since people only die once then they could not die again. But the scriptures also state that Jesus would be the "firstfruits" among those who rise. It seems indisputable as well that Jesus was the first to have an immortal body after rising (1 Cor. 15:42–55). So without any evidence that these other dead were given immortal bodies, we must assume that they died again of natural causes. But this does not necessarily contradict Heb. 9:27, since not everyone will even die once (Enoch, Elijah, and the living mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:50–52). In context, the Hebrews statement is being used as an illustration for explaining why Jesus would only have to die once and not repeatedly.

It is after the raising of the widow's son where Luke tells us of the question sent to Jesus by John the Immerser (Mat. 11:1–10 and Luke 7:18–28). We can only speculate as to the motivation for this question, but note that Jesus seemed to do many healings just for the purpose of showing John's disciples what had been going on. Then he proceeded to confirm to the crowd that John was indeed the prophesied forerunner. So it may well be that John was having doubts, but it may also be that Jesus said and did all of this mostly for the benefit of John's disciples.

Jesus gave two object lessons (trad. parables) using seeds and soil. One was where a farmer scattered seeds, which landed in various places. Though there is disagreement over the meaning of the story in spite of

Jesus explaining it to his disciples, the clear focus is not on the seeds or the sower but on the soil. The disagreement comes over whether Jesus is saying that salvation can be lost, but remember the context: there was as yet no Congregation since Jesus had not yet died and arisen. Jesus defines the seed as “the message of the kingdom”, which was the message he was bringing to the Hebrews; it was the kingdom they would ultimately reject. So he refers to those who were already accepting him as Anointed. It can certainly be applied to the post-resurrection Congregation as well. But since that was not the primary purpose of the illustration, we should not argue over whether it applies to salvation by faith in the risen Jesus.

The other lesson was about wheat and fake wheat (trad. wheat and tares). This one is a long-range illustration, since Jesus ended it with a reference to the harvest at the end of the age (Mat. 13:39). Though the same “kingdom” terminology is used, the eventual inclusion of the Gentiles in that kingdom is clearly taught in both Testaments. There is one kingdom of God, but it includes “provinces” such as the righteous before the Flood, from the Flood to Abraham, from Abraham to Jesus, from Jesus to the post-grace time of the final phase of Daniel’s prophecy, and during the Millennium.

The purpose of any analogy or object lesson is not to make every detail meaningful but to teach a central lesson. In both cases, the point is that there will be a separation between true and false, faithful and unfaithful, saved and lost. This depends not on the message but on the recipient; each of us decides whether we are good or poor soil, genuine or fake wheat. Giving undue attention to minor details in order to support a theological position misses the point entirely.

This principle of looking for the intended point can be applied as well when we derive lessons from what Jesus did or had his disciples do. When he sent out many of them into the various towns, giving explicit instructions about what they must do and what they must not take with them, we err if we try to apply this to all Christian living. Jesus was not teaching that every Christian would need to give up all possessions, demand free food and lodging for preaching the Gospel, and literally shake the dust from their feet if a town rejected them. As he said himself in Mat. 15:24, he was sent to “the lost sheep of Israel”. This hardly means that he would not also be the savior of the Gentiles (1 Tim 4:10), but that most of what he did was primarily for the Hebrews and not the world at large. So to apply the sending out of the seventy(two)

to Christianity would be to ignore this important aspect of context.

John the Immerser may have technically been a wild man living in the desert, but he also stood up to confront public officials on matters of morality. This is something Jesus never did and never taught anyone to do, yet there is no rebuke for this action; rather, Jesus only cautioned him, when he was imprisoned over this, to not lose faith due to the consequences of standing up to the authorities. So Jesus neither endorsed nor condemned John's involvement with political issues.

Yet when John was beheaded due to the petty hatred of Herod's wife, Jesus held him up as being greater than anyone yet born— yet nothing to be compared with even “the least in the kingdom of heaven”. But we must not jump to the conclusion that John was somehow belittled; rather, Jesus was emphasizing the great privilege and honor of being included in the kingdom of heaven.

One of the more famous miracles of Jesus was the feeding of the five (and also later four) thousand with just a few small fish and loaves of bread. It is pointless to argue over whether the Gospel writers should have counted the women and children; it is irrelevant to the central point of the incident. The point was to show that Jesus had miraculous power, and also that he had compassion for the crowds.

But there certainly is a point in noting how Jesus treated women and children. He never dismissed or belittled either group. One case in point was the foreign woman who touched the hem of his clothing to be healed. Though he objected to giving his attention to Gentiles at that time, she gave an argument in favor of an exception— and won. Just as Jesus commended the Roman officer for his great faith, so also he commended this foreign woman for her clever argument, as well as for her faith.

We have seen how he treated another foreign woman at the well in Samaria, and we will see more of how he treated women in the account of his eventual death and resurrection. But another notable woman is of course Mary, sister of Martha. Mary was doing what any student of a rabbi would do, and for a lone woman to do this was quite scandalous. It's possible that Martha was really more upset with this than with needing help in the kitchen. Even so, Jesus only rebuked Martha gently. But the fact remains that Mary was treated as any male disciple, and disciples were expected to become teachers. Some ignore the obvious lesson Jesus is giving here in order to preserve cultural norms and roles.

As for children, Jesus held them up as the epitome of pure faith in God. He also used them as an object lesson in humility for his power-tripping disciples. This is critical for our understanding of how things are to be in the kingdom of heaven: the exact opposite of earthly kingdoms. Though of course God remains King, the subjects are not to seek levels of hierarchy. By Jesus' own example he would give at the Last Supper, the mark of the spiritual leader is to be as humble as a child, as serving as a waiter or domestic, as lowly as a slave. Great ones in this kingdom are not found in positions of power, regardless of how benevolently that power may be wielded. Jesus taught by word and deed that it is the giving up of power and privilege, not the cleaning and polishing of them, that characterizes the true leader in the kingdom of heaven. So it follows that whoever seeks rank and privilege, regardless of any benevolent and altruistic intentions, is least in the kingdom of heaven.

Given this teaching about the nature of the kingdom of heaven, one marvels at the ingenuity required to turn the confession of Peter into a position of authority, power, and control over millions of Christians. Some may argue that such authority is necessary to protect people, but this is a mere excuse to nullify what Jesus clearly taught about his kingdom. And history has shown that such power is no protection at all, but frequently worse than any outside dangers. It also ignores the Holy Spirit in each believer.

Specifically, Jesus did not say that Peter himself was the foundation of the coming Congregation, but his profession of faith. And this same Peter was quickly called Adversary (Satan) for objecting to Jesus' statement about his impending death, yet those who make him the "rock" of a hierarchical "church" curiously ignore this rebuke. It is inconsistent at best to make Peter the foundation of the kingdom of heaven on earth, but not the kingdom of hell on earth.

It was during the Feast of Tents (trad. tabernacles or booths) that this same Peter blurted out that he would make booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah at the Transfiguration. But we are not told why the disciples were forbidden to report this incident until after Jesus would arise from the dead, just as we are not told why Jesus forbade the demons he exorcised to say who he was. And this is when Jesus identified John the Immerser as Elijah. However, this is not literally a reincarnation of Elijah; in Luke 1:17 the Messenger tells Zacharias that he came "in the spirit and power of Elijah".

Another important teaching deserving attention before we examine those concerning prophecy is about divorce. This question put to Jesus by the Pharisees was very specific regarding the “any cause” debate among the rabbis. Some interpreted the scriptures to allow a man to divorce his wife even if she did nothing to deserve it, while others believed the man had to prove that she had been unfaithful. So what they wanted Jesus to do was to take sides in their debate. And his answer was, essentially, that God did not recognize any invalid divorces, which is why such people would then be guilty of adultery: they were still joined before God.

This context is vital to our interpretation of what Jesus said. Many have taken it as a blanket law without limit or exception, forcing those who are already divorced in spirit to remain “unequally yoked”. As Paul would later explain in 1 Cor. 7:15, what God wants is for people to live in peace. In contrast, the legalistic “plain reading” approach has caused incalculable strife, harm, and anguish over the centuries, especially to women and children.

The Future

When asked about things to come, Jesus never gave a specific number of years as in the prophecy of Daniel.³ While he had earlier used the temple figuratively to refer to his own death and resurrection, his response to the disciples’ admiration of the literal temple was that it would be utterly ruined. And it is this statement which prompted them to inquire about the timing of that event, and signs preceding the end.

Jesus gave a list of signs to look for, beginning with the danger of deception. But we cannot say for sure how much of what he said applied to the time from then until the destruction of the physical temple, as opposed to the duration of the “church age”, or during the coming wrath of God. In hindsight we know that his followers began to suffer persecution within a short time after his ascension, and that many would stand before ruling authorities to give an account of the gospel (e.g. Paul before Festus and Agrippa). And there have certainly been plenty of false Anointed, as well as wars all over and the dividing of families

³Specifically, Dan. 9:24–27, which extends to the end of history. Just as Jesus said it would be, the temple was destroyed in 70 a.d. by Titus, a Roman who eventually became Emperor. This fulfilled Dan. 9:26 but was not the final ‘seven’. Since all of the preceding ‘sevens’ were groups of years, so also must be the last, and 70 years is ten times too long. Also, the existing temple was not destroyed right away when Jesus was “cut off”.

due to the Gospel.

But the one thing that cannot be mistaken for any time in history so far is what Daniel called “the abomination that causes desolation”, which according to him marks the midpoint of a seven-year treaty made and then broken by “the prince that shall come”. The consensus of scholars seems to be that the 3-1/2 years following this event is known as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7) and “the Great Oppression/Tribulation” (Mat. 24:21).

There is a common claim today that those who believe that Jesus will come for us before this terrible time will be fooled by the Antichrist if they are wrong. Yet Jesus tells us that there will be no mistaking one for the other, because “the official arrival of the Human will be as the lightning that flashes across the whole sky” (Mat. 24:28). As Jesus would later reveal to the apostle John, this arrival will involve Jesus bringing us from heaven and him setting foot on the earth, splitting the mountain in two, and this happens after all the wrath of God is finished. No fake will do these things.

But why would he tell this warning to his disciples, if they will not be on earth to be deceived? Remember the context; Jesus is speaking to Hebrews who had no concept of the coming age of grace. Even after Jesus ascended, there is good reason to believe they all expected this time of trouble to begin shortly, since the prophecy about him being “cut off” had been fulfilled. So Jesus was referring to future Hebrew believers, who will only come to faith after they see the Abomination.

Jesus gives many details about this, but of course not to the extent he would later reveal to John. Yet we can match up some of it, but we must be careful to note whether he seems to be giving detail and then going back to add more, rather than a strict sequence (much the way Creation Week was recorded twice, first as a sequence and then going back to add detail). We should also remember that the context is still not about the yet-unknown Congregation (“church”), so we would not expect Jesus to discuss the Rapture. Instead, he would tell his disciples about signs that preceded the wrath of God— which may overlap those of the Rapture.

In the most extensive quotation of Jesus on this topic, Matthew 24, Jesus talks about deception, then the Abomination and then Great Oppression, and then he jumps back to what he had said earlier about being on guard against deception. This resembles a typical rhetorical

device known as a *chiasm*,⁴ though Jesus is not arguing a case here. But we cannot presume that he is saying there is another time of false Anointed after the Great Oppression ends, especially since we know that the real Anointed will return at that time and Jesus told how to identify him.

But Jesus ends this topic with a curious statement: “Where the eagles gather, there is the corpse”. In this passage, Jesus does not say it in response to the disciples’ question about where some people will be taken. So this context would connect the statement to the topic of false Anointed, who will attract many followers the way a dead body attracts scavengers. The other parallel passages also have the warning about false Anointed before the Abom./Great Opp., but not after, so it seems clear that this deception is only during the time when it’s most likely to work on people.

Matthew and Luke add more detail of the time preceding the Great Oppression, describing it as “like the days of Noah”. And though there may be other implications to this, all Jesus is recorded as having said about it is that people will be unaware of impending doom. And when it hits, Jesus repeats the phrase about eagles gathering, but adds that some are taken and some left. However, the context is not about false Anointed. As stated in the footnote for Luke 17:33–37,

The familiar “taken/left” pairing is rendered here as “accepted/abandoned”, which seems more consistent with the prior examples of Noah and Lot, where the righteous are taken away and the unrighteous are left to die. But while the disciples’ question “where?” does not specify which group they are asking about, Jesus’ response seems to indicate the righteous, the ones taken.

And again, though Jesus was speaking to Hebrews who had no concept of a coming “church”, the disappearance of Christians is a sign for them to look for. It is associated with people being taken by surprise, where the righteous (Noah and family) are taken away and the unrighteous are left behind. One might challenge the notion that there is any

⁴A *chiasm* is where a main point is sandwiched between two other points, with any number of steps between them on either side of the main point. The pattern is a-b-c-X-c-b-a. Recognizing this pattern tells us that the pivot point is the main thrust of the argument.

element of surprise today, since the Rapture is a well-known teaching even among unbelievers. Yet with all the false predictions by date-setters (“crying wolf”), people are beginning to ignore them and dismiss prophecy as a load of nonsense—very likely the situation with Noah and those who paid no attention to his warnings of doom.

Another statement Jesus associated with the days of Noah is that “No one knows the day or hour”. There is much debate over what he meant: was it that no one would ever know, or they just couldn’t know at that time before the “church age”? Did it refer to the common phrase the Judeans used for the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets, since it depended on the first sighting of the new moon? Or did it only refer to non-Christians, since Paul would later say that “this day will not take you by surprise” (1 Thes. 5:1–11)? Yet even here, Jesus gave the illustration of the tree sprouting to indicate that summer was near. And he added the key phrase, “When you see *all these things*”, which seems to refer to only the days of Noah. We should also note that this “Day” of his coming seems to refer to the whole Great Oppression, such that all the signs which precede this day refer to the beginning of that time rather than its middle or end.

Then Jesus told of extreme cosmic events *after* the Great Oppression which will make it clear that it is indeed the end:

- sun and moon go dark
- stars fall from sky
- powers of heavens (skies and/or space) shaken
- extreme turbulence on earth, with oceans roaring and splashing
- the appearance of the sign of the Human in the sky
- he descends in the clouds in great power and majesty
- trumpet blast to send out Messengers to collect “the chosen” from all over “the heavens”

On the surface, the first four signs appear to match up with the 6th Seal of Revelation (Rev. 6:12–14), which is clearly not the end of the Great Oppression:

- the moon is red instead of black

- the stars fall to earth
- the sky itself “rolls up like a scroll”
- every mountain is shifted from its place.

There is at least one Old Testament reference to such things as well (Joel 2:31), and it too places them “*before* that great and terrible day of the Master”. So we see that very similar signs both precede and follow the 70th week of the prophecy of Daniel.

Another controversy surrounds the statement, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”: exactly which generation is Jesus referring to? Mat. 24:32–35, Mark 13:28–31, and Luke 21:29–33 record this statement as being said immediately after the signs indicating that the time is near, not that it is over. So it appears that Jesus is saying, “The generation that sees these signs preceding the judgments will live to seem them all”. That is, the duration of the “birth pangs” or “beginning of sorrows” will not extend past the length of the generation that sees them begin.

Yet “generation” is a controversy of its own: is it the lifespan of people born at a particular time, or is it the people of Israel, whom Jesus elsewhere called “an adulterous generation”? The immediate context would seem to favor the former, and since it relates to the end times, it would be reasonable to consider it the average lifespan of people then, not people in the first century, and certainly not a time cited in poetry such as the Psalms. Ignorance of context and a desire for more precision than Jesus gives have led to many tragic failures by date-setters.

Jesus gives one more event to take place at his return: the separation of the “sheep and goats” He was not recorded as having said much at all about the time following the Great Oppression beyond this, but it is clear from the context (“when he comes in his majesty”) that this happens just before the Millennium begins. The Christians had been taken to heaven and received their immortal bodies, so they are not the ones being judged. Rather, the judged group is identified as consisting of “the nations”, used in the Bible to refer almost exclusively to non-Hebrews. This leaves the Hebrews as “the least of these”. So after all the wrath is over and Jesus returns, he will immediately conduct a judgment of the mortals who survived the Great Oppression, based upon how they treated the people of Israel. Those judged righteous will repopulate the earth over the next

thousand years, while the unrighteous are sent directly to “the eternal fire prepared for the False Accuser and his Messengers”.

Notice that the objections of both the sheep and goats are identical, as is Jesus’ response: whatever treatment they gave or failed to give the people of Israel, they did the same to him. Yet in spite of having exhibited what most people would consider the epitome of Christian behavior—giving aid to the hungry, thirsty, naked, and imprisoned—the goats are rejected for their prejudice and selectiveness in how they performed these acts of charity. Their hatred for the people of Israel during the Great Oppression would turn out to be their undoing.

This passage also makes an important statement about whether this “eternal fire” actually means that souls will be continually tormented forever. Jesus assigns the same duration (*aionion*, an unknown length of time) to both “life” and “punishment”. That is, whatever length of time applies to life must also apply to its opposite. So since everyone agrees that life is endless, then we have no choice but to say that punishment is also endless. And though it is indeed the fire that is so described, it is also the punishment. The other references Jesus made to Gehenna cannot override (and do not contradict) the very clear meaning he gave in this passage.

Regarding the origin of the word **Gehenna** (see also [this article](#)), the word was originally used to describe the valley where followers of Molech sacrificed their children in fire. It became the refuse pit for Jerusalem and was kept burning in order to control the stench. Some also speculate that before the Flood it was the land of the Nephilim. So while Gehenna in Jesus’ day certainly was the local refuse dump, it had long been symbolic of the fate of the unrighteous in a place of eternal fire.

The Final Week

The final week of Jesus’ life as a mortal was filled with symbolism and prophetic significance. As stipulated in Ex. 12:1–19, the most flawless male lamb was to be selected on the 10th day of the first month, and observed until the 14th day. In addition, Zech. 9:9 says that their King would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. His entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey, and his being hailed by the people as their rescuer, exactly coincided with the time the people were selecting their best lambs for the Passover, and he would spend the next four days under public scrutiny in Jerusalem.

All four Gospels give the account of the woman who anointed Jesus for burial as he reclined for a meal, although the one in Luke is of a separate incident (his account is at the home of a Pharisee, while the others are at the home of Simon the Leper). John tells us that this was none other than Mary, sister of Martha. Though his own disciples tried to scold her, Jesus defended her, and even honored her by declaring that her act would be told alongside the Gospel. Here again we see that Jesus did not treat women as social inferiors but as equals in every way.

The next main event was the preparation of the upper room, which was on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Again referencing Ex. 12:1–19, we see that this was the 14th day of the first month. But the days began at sundown, and the lambs would not be sacrificed till the following daylight hours, in mid-afternoon. The Feast itself began and ended with a Sabbath, and this particular evening was the start of Preparation Day for the first one (Mat. 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54, John 19:31). So though it was not the actual main Passover meal, it was a very important part of the whole Feast. And no mention is made of them having selected and sacrificed a lamb earlier in the day, had it been the actual Passover. The disciples fully expected to eat the Passover the following evening and had to have all leaven (yeast) removed from the room the day before.⁵

As what tradition has come to call the Last Supper began that evening, Jesus was facing the full weight of what he had come to earth to accomplish. But what tradition has called “communion” or “eucharist” was, like “the Lord’s Prayer”, never meant to be a slavishly-followed rite or ordinance. Jesus stated that it was simply a remembrance; he even left the frequency of its practice up to his disciples and gave no explicit instructions on how to conduct it. Blessing the bread and drink was a very common practice whereby the blessings of God and the fellowship of brothers and sisters was celebrated. Of course, Jesus gave new symbolic meaning to the bread and wine, but it was still a remembrance and not a ritual.

He also made a very significant statement about the wine: it represented the signing, in his own blood, of a new “Will and Testament”—which is where we get the terms Old and New Testament. It is a for-

⁵See [Last Supper: Was it the Passover Meal?](#) for a detailed analysis proving that Jesus and the disciples could not have been eating the properly-sacrificed Passover lamb. (*Disclaimer: this is not an endorsement of other material at that website.*)

mal contract, and in this case, a unilateral one since there was only one signer. This brings new meaning to his earlier object lesson about the wine and wineskins; the old and new were not to be mixed, and the connection here with his shed blood is undeniable.

But his washing of the disciples' feet was no less significant. This was the duty of the household servant, the lowliest domestic. But though he had told the disciples about what makes a leader in the coming kingdom, he now acted it out in a powerful object lesson: if the Master Himself could stoop to this level and take the most humble role in society, then anyone who would claim to follow him must do the same. This is why he told Peter that failing to allow this would mean he would not be a fit disciple. Obviously Peter was being the one served there, but to have his own Master serve him was a lesson that would cut through all social norms. Tragically, it seems that the majority of disciples of all following generations would turn this lesson upside down by erecting hierarchies of rank and power among brothers and sisters, causing division. Regardless of how piously and sincerely a Christian leader may rule, it is still rule rather than the kind of service Jesus modeled.

The Gospel of John records much more of what Jesus said at that meal. One particularly meaningful passage is his promise to return using the analogy of a typical Jewish wedding. Once the couple were betrothed, the groom would go to his father's house to prepare a place for them to live. No one would know when this place would be finished, since final approval had to come from the groom's father. Meanwhile, the bride was to prepare herself and her wedding garments, always being ready to leave on very short notice. The groom would typically leave for her home at midnight, accompanied by his friends who held torches as they shouted and blew trumpets so the bride would know the time had come. He would wait for her outside of her home, and then they would all return to the newly-constructed living quarters for seven days of intimate union. Then a great feast would begin.

Though it is not expressly stated, the analogy to Jesus' future return would be well-understood by the disciples that night. And the seven days surely represent the seven years of the prophecy of Daniel yet to be fulfilled, a time whose beginning would only be known by the Father. That time will also begin, as Paul would later explain, with a shout, a trumpet blast, the arrival of the Groom in the air, our coming out of our earthly home to meet him, and our happy procession to the place

he has prepared for us, where we will be with him for seven years before returning to earth.

The long speech and prayer recorded by John also shows that Jesus clearly equated himself with the Father. But when he spoke of the Father giving him people, did he mean the people had no choice in the matter, as some allege? This does not logically follow; there is no necessary cause/effect correlation between the two. And Jesus did clearly state that he would “draw all people” to himself.

Another statement, about protecting people in this life rather than taking them out of it, is used by some to refute the concept of the Rapture. Yet the immediate context of that statement is specifically about the disciples he had chosen to train, since he states that he had lost none of them but his betrayer. Only after this does he extend his prayer to all who would become believers from their testimony, the vast majority of which would not be alive at the time of the Rapture anyway. But again, it does not logically follow that no exceptions would ever be made for these statements about being protected in this life rather than taken out of it. And clearly, as persecution proved, not everyone would be protected, at least physically.

When it comes to chronology, nothing has been more controversial than that of the day and time of Jesus’ trials and crucifixion. But there are some important clues in the text which help to clear up much of the confusion. Attention to detail is often the key to unlocking mysteries, so these will be sought out and examined closely.⁶

By the time Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, it was already **late at night** and possibly the very early hours after midnight. The Last Supper was not a quick snack and Jesus spoke at length, and then he spent hours in prayer in the garden. This is also why the mob that came to arrest him carried torches; it was dark. No trial was to be held at night, so for this and other reasons the trials by the ruling priests were illegal. Ironically, the most notorious rule-followers were quite willing to break them when it suited their purposes. They did this also with the money Judas would throw at their feet; their concern was that “blood money” could not be put back into the treasury.

The illegal trials were held by Annas and Caiaphas (John 18:13,24), who brought forth false witness after false witness to try and find some-

⁶For a more detailed study, see [From Triumphal Entry to Resurrection](#).

thing they could pin on Jesus, but this failed due to conflicting testimonies. It was not until Jesus affirmed their demand (under oath) for an answer to the question of whether he was the Anointed, which they deemed blasphemy, (another proof that Jesus did indeed claim to be God), that they had what they wanted. So finally they brought him to a meeting of the Sanhedrin, and by this time it was **dawn** (Mat. 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66), which was the “zero” hour of daylight.⁷ The well-known denials of Peter also ended at dawn as the rooster crowed, which was just before Jesus was taken to Pilate.

But they would need a secular charge in order to get the Romans to execute him, so off they went to Pilate, the governor, who determined that there was no legitimate grounds for such a charge. Then he was sent to Herod, who questioned him at length in the hope of seeing him perform some miracle. Then it was back to Pilate, who told the accusers that neither he nor Herod found any reason for charges to be filed. We should note that at this point John states it was “still the Preparation for the Passover, **about noon**”. So the Passover itself had not yet begun, and the time was “about the sixth hour”. By our reckoning, then, it was **perhaps around 11 a.m.**

In desperation to have Jesus executed, his accusers came up with a devious strategy: they would threaten Pilate with losing his status as “a Friend of Caesar”, a designation which granted certain privileges with Rome. Pilate was then faced with either acting according to law, or acting according to self-preservation, and clearly he chose the latter. Though he absolved himself of the guilt of this act (and the people tragically accepted that guilt “on us and our children”), his choice was solely his own.

Finally Pilate gave the order and Jesus was taken away, and by this time it was **noon** (Mat. 27:45). There are many articles that detail the horrible torture, not only of the crucifixion but the scourging, which left the victim’s skin and muscles shredded to ribbons. But this suffering

⁷A 24-hour day began at sundown and was divided into segments in either of two ways: “hours” or “watches” (as relates to guard duty). Each “hour” was really a three-hour span, but it was known by its beginning; that is, the “third hour” lasted from 9 o’clock to 12 o’clock, counting from either 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. Going by the position of the sun or moon in the sky made more precision very impractical. But more importantly, the expressions “the third hour” and “almost/about the sixth hour” refer to the same three-hour span, with the latter meaning it was close to the end of that span.

is not what saved us; it was his death and resurrection alone. Many righteous people have suffered greatly, so if this could pay for sins, Jesus would not have had to come. Many have also been martyred, but if sinful human blood could pay for sins, Jesus would not have had to come.

The darkness mentioned in Mat. 27:45 lasted until **3 p.m.**, and near the beginning of that span is when the two thieves crucified with Jesus had their conversation (Luke 23:32–44). Then, as the darkness lifted, the curtain in the temple was ripped in half from top to bottom— and that curtain was about four inches (10 cm) thick. Though the significance of this is not stated explicitly, the most likely reason for it is to show that, because of what Jesus was doing, there was no longer any need for a temple and priesthood on earth (see Heb. 7). Then Jesus shouted “It is finished/paid in full!” at the same time of day as the ruling priest, who was to say those same words as the lambs were sacrificed.

Regarding the wish of the Pharisees to have the victims killed quickly since the Passover would start at sundown (yet another instance of legalistic hypocrisy), it is helpful to know the reason for breaking the legs. It is believed that the victims breathing muscles were numb after having their arms stretched out for hours, so for each exhale they would have to push themselves up with their legs, an extremely painful action since their feet were nailed to a small platform on the upright portion of the cross. By breaking the victims’ legs they would bring quick death through suffocation. But Jesus had stopped his own heart, as evidenced by the report in John 19:34–37: blood and water came out separately when the soldier pierced his heart to make absolutely sure he was dead. This separation indicates that the piercing is not what killed him, as it takes some time for this to occur.

The law concerning the Passover in Ex. 12:10, 34–35 was that no lamb be left by morning; it had to be consumed that night. So in yet another instance where ritual pointed to reality, Jesus’ body was taken down and buried, placed as it were “in the belly of the earth” as the other lambs were in the bellies of the people. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared the body “according to custom” (John 19:38). This was not the hasty laying of a single sheet over the body, but layers of wrapping and aromatic spices the way people wrapped mummies. The head was covered in a separate piece of cloth, which would be pointed out later when Peter and John examined the empty tomb (John 20:6–7). The only thing done due to the shortness of time was to place the body

in a borrowed tomb.

Matthew tells us that it was during the daylight hours of the **Passover** (the following day by modern reckoning) that the Pharisees had the tomb sealed (Mat. 27:62–66). Meanwhile, the women observed the burial, and we must carefully examine the details concerning whether it was before or after the Passover Sabbath that they bought and prepared spices of their own (Luke 23:56 and Mark 16:1). But Luke does not say exactly when the spices were purchased and prepared, neither activity of which could be done on either the Passover Sabbath or the weekly Sabbath. It is clear in Luke that the women observed the burial on the Preparation Day, but highly doubtful that they would have had time to purchase and prepare the spices in the very short time from then to the start of the Passover Sabbath. So since Mark's account has the women buying and preparing spices after the Sabbath, it appears that this happened on a day between the Passover Sabbath (Wednesday evening to Thursday evening) and the weekly Sabbath (Friday evening to Saturday evening).

Final Week Timeline

The following is a list of events according to Jewish days (sundown to sundown) in the first month of their year. This was called Nisan or Abib/Aviv, when the crescent moon was first sighted at the time the barley harvest was ripe in the spring, as specified in Exodus 12.

- Nisan 9: Jesus visits Bethany (John 12:1)
- Nisan 10
 - Morning: The Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:1–10, John 12:12–19)
 - Evening: Jesus visits the temple, then returns to Bethany (Mark 11:11)
- Nisan 11: Jesus drives the merchants from the temple (Mat. 21:12, Mark 11:12–18, Luke 19:45)
- Nisan 12: Two days till Passover, which begins with Preparation Day when Jesus would be handed over to be killed (Mat. 26:1, Mark 14:1)
- Nisan 13: nothing specific for this day

- Nisan 14 (Preparation Day)
 - Sundown: the Last Supper (Mt. 26:17–35, Mark 14:12–31, Luke 22:7–38, John 13:1ff)
 - Night: Gethsemane (Mat. 26:36–56, Mark, 14:32–52, Luke 22:39–53, John 18:1–12)
 - Night: to Annas and then Caiaphas (Mat. 26:57–68, Mark 14:53–65, Luke 22:54,63–65, John 18:13,24)
 - Sunrise: to the Sanhedrin (Mat. 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66–71)
 - Morning: to Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate again (Mat. 27:2,11–14, Mark 15:1–5, Luke 23:1–23, John 18:28–19:4)
 - Late Morning: Jesus presented to the crowd (Mat. 27:15–25, Mark 15:6–14, Luke 23:24, John 19:5–15)
 - Noon: Jesus crucified (Mat. 27:26–44, Mark 15:15–32, Luke 23:25–43, John 19:16–29)
 - Noon till three: darkness (Mat. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44–45)
 - Three p.m.: Jesus dies, temple curtain ripped (Mat. 27:50–51, Mark 15:37–38, Luke 23:45–46, John 19:30) while lambs are being killed
 - Between three and six p.m.: Jesus buried (Mat. 27:57–61, Mark 15:42–47, Luke 23:50–54, John 19:31–42)
- Nisan 15 (Passover, a “special Sabbath”, night/day one): tomb is sealed (Mat. 27:62–66)
- Nisan 16 (night/day two): women buy spices for burial (Mark 16:1, Luke 23:56)
- Nisan 17 (weekly Sabbath, night/day three)
- Nisan 18 (First Fruits, third day from tomb being sealed)
 - Between three and six a.m.: Jesus arises (Mark 16:9)
 - Dawn: women go to tomb (Mat. 28:1–8, Mark 16:2–8, Luke 24:1–8, John 20:1)

- Afternoon: the two walking to Emmaus (Mark 16:12–13, Luke 24:13–35)
- Near sunset: Jesus appears in the locked upper room (Mat. 28:9, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36–49, John 20:19)

Post-resurrection to Ascension

Referencing the timeline in the previous section, we need to calculate the total span of time from when Jesus was buried to when he arose. Remember that when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, the only one he gave was “the sign of Jonah” (Mat. 12:38–40, 16:1–4, Luke 11:29–32). But exactly how many days was he to be in the grave? Mat. 12:40 has “three days and three nights”, Mat. 27:62–64 has “after three days”, and Luke 24:19–21 has “the third day”. It should be obvious that “three days and three nights” is very specific and leaves no room for doubt: it clearly indicates three periods of 24 hours (one wonders how this could be stated more precisely). The other statements are less precise: both “after three days” and “the third day” depend on the starting point as a reference. In addition, when the two walking to Emmaus say “it is the third day since all these things happened”, we are left to wonder what “all these things” include. The last thing having to do with Jesus was the sealing of the tomb on the Passover (Mat. 27:62), which would not conflict with the amount of time Jesus was in the grave.

Though most translations obscure the detail about what day it was when Jesus had arisen, the Greek of Mat. 28:1 has a curious phrase: “After the Sabbaths, when it was nearing dawn on the First of Sabbaths”. The First of Sabbaths was an expression for the first of the seven weeks leading up to Pentecost (a.k.a. the Feast of Weeks). That particular day, always the first day of the week after Passover, was when the offering of “firstfruits” was made (Lev. 23:9–21). And it was very, very early on that morning when the women went to the tomb, just as light was barely beginning to appear. But Jesus was already out before then, so his resurrection had to have taken place sometime during the dark on that day, which we must remember began at sundown on what we consider the day before. Mark 16:9 says that Jesus arose early [prOi, the last watch of the night, about 3–6 a.m.].

The first people to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection were the women who had come to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared. It’s interesting to note that though the earlier arrival of the

Messenger terrified the guards to the point that they passed out, the women did not faint at all. Then Jesus gave them the very first commission to spread the Gospel of his resurrection. But being women, the men did not believe them, and Jesus eventually rebuked them for this.

Jesus also appeared to the two walking to Emmaus. But another detail is given, whose point is often missed: Jesus was able to use the scriptures (only what we call the Old Testament at the time) to show how the Anointed had to suffer all those things, die, and then rise again. This is not so easy for us today, since our translations use the Masoretic text for the Hebrew, and this text, done several hundred years after the resurrection, obscured all such references in a deliberate attempt by the scribes and rabbis to thwart the claims of early Christians that Jesus was indeed the promised Anointed. This, plus the fact that at Jesus' birth we are told that some were indeed expecting the Anointed at that time (Luke 2:26, 38), combine to refute the claims of some that nobody then was expecting a Savior.

Between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared not only to the women and the Eleven, but to over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6) over a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). He also gave what is known as the Great Commission (Mat. 28:17–20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46–48, Acts 1:8). Technically, this was only given directly to the Eleven, but everyone agrees that this was meant for all believers. Yet if it was meant for all of us, then it isn't just certain credentialed people who are to preach and teach. And as already discussed regarding "baptism", this is the immersion of the Holy Spirit, not water, and it happens at the moment of faith (Acts 1:4–5, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:13–14).

Jesus' ascension is recorded in Mark 16:19–20, Luke 24:50–53, and Acts 1:9–11. This was witnessed by at least the Eleven but possibly more, as Luke and Acts are not specific, and Mark does not necessarily rule out the presence of others. But all accounts have Jesus rising up into the air and then being hidden in a cloud, after which a Messenger appears to tell the disciples that Jesus would return the same way he left. Again regarding the use of this as proof that there will be no Rapture, we should note that the Rapture is not his formal second coming. However, Paul states in 1 Thes.4:13–18 that we will meet Jesus in the clouds.

The Acts of the Apostles

Background

The Acts of the Apostles (a title not given in the text) is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and covers the years spanning 33 to 63 A.D. It begins with a brief discussion of the final events of Jesus' time on earth, but that will not be covered here since it was done in the combined commentary on the Gospels. As was expected for a qualified writer or historian of the time, Luke does not merely record data (accurate though it was) but also draws the reader into the accounts with great literary skill. He includes himself when applicable, showing his first-hand knowledge of many events. But while some may classify Acts as more biography than history, it nonetheless has all the required elements for historical record, including many references to verifiable people, places, and times.

Approximately the first 1/3 to 1/2 of the book covers the birth, establishment, and early growth of the Congregation. The rest revolves largely around the three missionary journeys of Paul, which helps to give more context to his letters.

Outline

1. **1:12–26** Awaiting the Holy Spirit
2. **2:1–47** The Congregation is born
3. **3:1–5:11** The Congregation is settled
4. **5:12–42** Persecution begins
5. **6:1–7** Growing pains
6. **6:8–7:60** The first martyr
7. **8:1–40** Scattering the seed enlarges the crop
8. **9:1–31** The hunter becomes the hunted
9. **9:32–10:48** Peter and Cornelius
10. **11:19–30** The scattered seeds take root and grow

11. **11:31–14:28** Mistaken for gods– but not for long
12. **15:1–35** The Jerusalem Council
13. **15:36–16:15** Paul meets Timothy and Lydia
14. **16:16–40** A python and a prison break
15. **17:1–15** Hounded from city to city
16. **17:16–34** Paul in Athens
17. **18:1–23** Priscilla and Aquila
18. **18:24–28** Apollos
19. **19:1–20** True and false
20. **19:21–41** Artemis of the Ephesians
21. **20:1–38** A farewell to the elders in Ephesus
22. **21:1–14** Philip and prophets
23. **21:15–23:11** Paul is falsely accused
24. **23:12–30** A failed ambush
25. **23:31–24:27** To Governor Felix
26. **25:1–26:32** Before Festus and Agrippa
27. **27:1–28:16** Adventures on the way to Caesar
28. **28:17–31** Final words from Paul

1:12–26 Awaiting the Holy Spirit

While the disciples waited for the Comforter promised by Jesus, Peter determined that the traitor Judas had to be replaced. Acts 1:18–19 does not conflict with the account in Mat. 27:5 concerning the death of Judas. The two accounts paint a picture of the priests buying the field after Judas apparently did a poor job of hanging himself. The key in the current passage is “in fact/indeed”, which in conjunction with the other account can be taken as “in reality” or “indirectly”. It was the priests who

called it “blood money” and then used it to buy the land as a place to bury strangers.

The criterion for Judas’ replacement was that the person had to have been with them the whole time Jesus was there, from his immersion by John to his ascension. Some say Peter acted presumptuously because Paul would be the eventual replacement, but Paul did not meet this requirement. Not all Ambassadors (apostles) were of the Twelve; we know from the Gospels that there were at least seventy. And no one, not even Paul, took issue with this decision.

2:1–47 The Congregation is born

The promised Comforter came on the day of Pentecost in a very obvious and unmistakable way: what looked like tongues of fire landed on the disciples, who then began to declare the Gospel in foreign languages they had not learned. Such signs and miracles are the divine stamp of approval on a major change of ages or conditions. They are not, however, the norm for all believers of all time; this book of Acts is the time of establishment and transition, not the norm. We must keep this in mind when we encounter later instances of such things, as they did not happen in one day.

Some actually take the accusation by part of the crowd that day, that the disciples were drunk, as justification for the modern phenomenon of being “drunk in the Spirit”. But the disciples were not stumbling around, acting like fools, or slurring their speech. The only reason they were accused of drunkenness is because they were speaking various languages, and whatever wasn’t a person’s particular language would sound like gibberish. And not only were the disciples not acting drunk, they were also not acting like animals or shaking uncontrollably, as is common among demonic phenomena in other religions and fringe groups claiming to be Christian.

This is when Peter gave his famous speech. But an often-overlooked point is that he was speaking exclusively to a crowd of people who already believed in the one, true God, but who had crucified their own Messiah. They did not need to be told who God was, yet they still needed to be saved; they needed to “repent” (to turn around and go the other way). This was not for the usual personal sins as most presume today, but for the particular sin of rejecting their Messiah. As for Peter telling them to be immersed, this was the custom of the time for anyone making a

public declaration, religious or political; even Pilate washed his hands to signify his public declaration of innocence.

But what of Peter quoting the prophet Joel? Clearly not all of the prophecy was fulfilled that day, as there were no cosmic signs “before the day of the majestic appearing of the Master”. This is another indication that the disciples expected the prophecies of the end to come immediately, but which they would later conclude was not the case. Yet it is also another partial fulfillment of prophecy, as was also the case with the Messiah having fulfilled only some of them. But the rest of it was being fulfilled: the Spirit was being poured out— and not just on males. The inclusion of the “daughters” prophesying cannot simply be brushed aside.

The new Congregation was formed from those who changed their minds about Jesus and accepted him. Though still practicing Judaism during this time of transition, they formed a unique community of people joyfully helping each other. But this was not communism, where everyone is forced by a regulating body to “share” everything. Rather, participation was strictly voluntary and motivated from within each person. All were equal spiritual infants in the kingdom of heaven, so they all heeded “the teachings of the Ambassadors”.

Some say that the reference to prayers and breaking bread necessarily means what became known as a Communion service or Eucharist. But the context seems to refer to what people did every day: share meals, as they shared everything else. Paul would later advise people on how meals of remembrance were to be conducted— not to give a liturgy or ritualistic instructions, but to keep to the general principle, “Whatever you do, honor Jesus in it”.

3:1–5:11 The Congregation is settled

As mentioned concerning ways in which God designates a change of ages or conditions, miracles were common at first, especially as performed by the Ambassadors. And just as they did with Jesus, the religious leaders opposed them, and they ordered them to stop teaching people that Jesus was the Anointed. This led to the well-known situation where Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop speaking about Jesus, and Peter told them they were not to be obeyed since they were opposed to God. This not only showed the fearlessness of the once-cowardly disciples, but also established the principle that societal authorities are

not to be obeyed in cases where human law clashes with divine law. Nothing Paul ever said contradicted this.

And as mentioned concerning the way people took care of each other, the famous incident with Ananias and Sapphira confirms voluntary wealth distribution. They tried to pass themselves off as having given the total proceeds from the sale of land to be given to the poor, but they kept some of it for themselves. As Peter explained, they were under no obligation to give the whole amount anyway. But the punishment for “lying to the Holy Spirit” (evidence of the Spirit as a Person of the Trinity) was instant death. This seems overly harsh to us today, of course. But just as miracles accompany such changes of ages, so also do punishments. The rules God had made for the nation of Israel had the purpose of purifying and separating a people from whom the Savior would come, and now also the Congregation needed to be established in purity. And that result was achieved: people feared and respected the name of Jesus.

5:12–42 Persecution begins

In another parallel with the life of Jesus, the disciples were arrested by the religious leaders, but “gently” so as to keep the crowds from rioting. Yet after the disciples were miraculously released from jail, they were re-arrested and told yet again to stop talking about Jesus. One marvels at the capacity of the religious leaders to ignore the clear hand of God and focus entirely on keeping their positions of power and privilege. And again the disciples declared their higher allegiance to God than to people. In this we also see a partial fulfillment of what Jesus predicted about being made to stand before authorities and being given the words to say by the Holy Spirit.

6:1–7 Growing pains

The earliest believers did indeed share everything, but as Israelis they were taught from their earliest youth to be separate from Gentiles. But this was not to be the case for long. In the first test showing them what Paul would later say in Gal. 3:28 about the absence of divisions in the Body of Christ, the Greek widows were being discriminated against and complained to the Ambassadors. So they set up a group of people to ensure that the sharing of food was fair and non-discriminatory. These are typically cited as the first “deacons”, but this is never referred to in any subsequent scriptures on the selection of such people. This was a

specific response to a specific problem at a specific time and in a specific location. Otherwise, we would have to have a rule that “deacons” must be seven in number, and that their job is to give food to Greek widows; one cannot choose only part of this incident as binding.

The reason the word *diaconos* was chosen at all was to compare it to what the Ambassadors were doing, which was spiritual service. Just as a literal *diaconos* waited tables, so also the Ambassadors were “waiting tables” in a spiritual and figurative sense. But people like to inject hierarchy into every appointment, so tradition quickly turned these “domestics” into bosses with spiritual authority over others. And this is not excused by the stated requirements for the job; one must have the heart and attitude of a servant of Jesus before presuming to serve his followers. We should expect to find the most spiritually-filled people at the lowest places, just as Jesus taught. In fact, one of them would be the first of Jesus’ followers to make the ultimate sacrifice.

6:8–7:60 The first martyr

Stephen was respected by the people, not only for performing signs and miracles, but also for his skill in debating critics of the faith. We need to keep this in mind when reading other scriptures which some take to mean believers (especially leaders) must not argue (see also the letter of Jude re. “contending for the faith”). We remember that Jesus did a fair amount of debate as well.

As for Stephen’s long speech when he was arrested and stood before the Sanhedrin, somehow his having the appearance of a Messenger made no difference to the religious leaders when he reached the surprise ending. In a fit of rage, they killed him by stoning, while Saul (the future Paul) watched and approved. It was this execution that gave him a taste for more and sent him on his fateful quest to rid the earth of these pesky Jesus followers.

8:1–40 Scattering the seed enlarges the crop

If the command of Jesus to “go into all the world” wasn’t enough, persecution would be. People tend to not shift places until forced to, and the young Congregation was no exception. They were still in an all-Israeli mindset of separation and needed a push to take another step away from it. This persecution was also another way in which the women in the Congregation were treated no differently than the men, as Saul hauled

off all of them to jail and death. This is corroborated by extra-Biblical writings as well; many forgotten martyrs and victims of torture were women. Surely those who suffer and die for the Anointed are qualified to lead and serve for him as well. But this plan of the enemies of the faith backfired; the scattering of the disciples caused the Gospel to be spread farther and faster than it might have otherwise.

A well-known incident involved the disciple Philip, one of whose apparent converts was a practitioner of magic arts named Simon. But when Peter arrived, he found out that people were only immersed in the name of Jesus and not the Holy Spirit. This can be puzzling in light of the fact that nowhere in scripture is it taught that a believer is not truly saved until an Ambassador places hands on them and immerses them in the Holy Spirit. One explanation is that the Ambassadors expected a dramatic sign every time, as on Pentecost. Another is that this was necessary to validate the salvation of non-Israelis such as the despised Samaritans. Still another is that this is a special immersion which must precede the other sign gifts.

That last explanation is perhaps the most likely. When Simon saw this spectacular spiritual manifestation, he wanted to purchase this apparent magical power, for which Peter sternly rebuked him. Yet the wording there is not that people were being *filled* with the Spirit in a special way, but that they *received* the Spirit. But this may fit the other explanation about the early believers thinking that these spectacular signs were required of everyone. Yet again, this was not consistent; not all are recorded as having had visible tongues of fire descend upon them, or that they spoke in unlearned languages. In this case we are not told the details. It may very well be an exclusive requirement for Israelis or proselytes to Judaism, who already believed in the one true God.

These questions and examples are why we look to “the teachings of the Ambassadors” and not just anecdotal evidence, when it comes to essentials of the faith. Of all the teachings that should be the clearest, it would be salvation itself. And in those teachings (the Letters) we see nothing at all about salvation requiring the laying on of hands, or the manifestation of sign gifts.

When Philip later met up with an Ethiopian official, he immersed him in water to signify his acceptance of the faith, though that has to be implied from the text. Yet there was no laying on of hands or mention of a sign gift being manifest by the Ethiopian. This person was likely

already a proselyte since he was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, so we might have expected such things. It is possible they happened and were simply not mentioned, but this seems unlikely since they were recorded in so many other cases. So here again there is inconsistency, which should tell us not to derive doctrine from these incidences. We can note as well that in this case the immerser was “snatched away”, teleported to another city— a very uncommon event to say the least.

9:1–31 The hunter becomes the hunted

There are several reports of the conversion of Saul. One of them, Acts 9:7, states that the others traveling with Paul heard a voice but saw no one, while Acts 22:9 states that they saw a light but did not understand the sound (there is scholarly debate on whether they did not hear any sound at all, or simply did not understand it, based on the Greek grammar). Yet none of this is contradictory; seeing a light is not the same as seeing Jesus himself, and there is no irrefutable proof that the voice was understood. The same is true for one account having more detail than the other. And had all instances been identical, one would rightly suspect a made-up story; people often add or omit detail upon later tellings of an experience.

Curiously, there is no account of Saul actually making a statement of faith, though no one doubts his salvation. Ananias, who came to place hands on Saul to restore his sight, is also not recorded as having said anything else but that Saul would receive the Holy Spirit. And it is after all this that he was immersed— without any manifestation or other sign gift. While we may be able to dismiss the lack of such information for the Ethiopian, we are hard-pressed to do the same for Saul/Paul.

No sooner had Paul been saved than he began to proclaim the Gospel, followed almost immediately by persecution. Even so, other believers had a difficult time believing that their former enemy had become one of them. This is one bit of evidence out of many which refutes the claim that Paul remained a Jesus-hating Pharisee and was a false teacher, as modern-day Judaizers claim. Though he did refer to himself as still a Pharisee on some occasions, he was clearly a radically changed man who suffered much for the name of Jesus.

9:32–10:48 Peter and Cornelius

Peter, like all the others, still saw the faith as primarily Hebrew. This is understandable since, as far as they knew, the prophecies would continue unhindered, and there was no hint in their scriptures about any other Congregation besides Israel. But then he had a vision wherein God used unclean animals as an object lesson to prepare him for a visit from Cornelius, a godly Gentile. It was not until he arrived at Cornelius' home that he finally understood that this new Congregation was inclusive of all people.

But he was interrupted in his speech by the familiar sign gift of speaking in unlearned languages, evidence of the Gentiles being immersed in the Holy Spirit. And we must note that this preceded their being immersed in water, with no mention of Peter laying hands on any of them. As Peter then explained to those who were upset with him for entering a Gentile home and sharing a meal with them, this manifestation proved beyond doubt that Gentiles were not to be excluded or kept separate.

11:19–30 The scattered seeds take root and grow

Though this section requires little comment beyond the title, there is a statement made about a collection for famine relief that many take out of context. The people were warned of an impending famine, so they set aside funds for the believers in Judea “in proportion to how each had prospered”. This is interpreted by some as an endorsement of tithing. Yet as was the case with the “deacons” of chapter six, this was a particular situation and time, and a one-off collection. As for “prospered”, this refers to profit/increase or having excess, not income from wages or salaries. The poor are not to support other poor people; this is the responsibility of the well-off. Anyone can give according to their conscience of course, and some, as Paul would later remark, do give beyond their means. But this is *giving*, a voluntary act, not a legalistic tithe.

11:31–14:28 Mistaken for gods– but not for long

It seems that Herod had the same problem as the religious leaders when it came to imprisoning disciples of Jesus. But being a despot, someone else had to pay for Peter's miraculous escape, so he had innocent guards put to death. But God finally had enough of Herod and put him to a gruesome death himself.

Once again Paul speaks boldly about the Jesus he had formerly per-

secuted, and once again the Judeans are envious and oppose him, so once again the seeds are scattered even more. When Paul miraculously healed someone in Lystra, the people decided that Paul was the god Hermes and Barnabas was Zeus. But not long after they tried to offer them sacrifices, agitators came and turned them quickly into a murderous mob. They had left Paul for dead, but he got up as if nothing had happened. Then before leaving the area, they appointed elders for the local Congregations. Elders were guardians and teachers, not bosses.

15:1–35 The Jerusalem Council

The belief of some who had been Pharisees, that even Gentile converts to Christianity must follow the laws of Moses, led to a meeting in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas reported all that God had been doing among the Gentiles, and there was a long debate. Finally Peter and James came to a decision, and what each of them said raises some important points.

Peter described the laws of Moses as “a burden neither we nor our ancestors could bear”. Some claim he meant the corrupt traditions of the Pharisees, yet Peter refers to the ancestors. While technically this could apply to the time those traditions were developed during the Babylonian captivity, it is a stretch to think Peter would refer to those ancestors and that corrupt law. Who would even think about putting Gentiles under mere traditions? And remember that the passage began with a reference to Moses, not to the Talmud. The specific law the Pharisees wanted kept was that of circumcision, which is clearly part of the laws of Moses.

Then James added a reference to prophecy and the first clear identification of the Congregation in the OT: Amos 9:11–12, which refers to a time when God would include the Gentiles and then “turn back and rebuild David’s fallen sanctuary”. Now the Congregation understands that God is turning his attention to the Gentiles, though not forever. This is also a good rebuttal to the claim of Replacement Theology, that God is finished with Israel (or that the Gentile believers must come under the laws of Moses). All James asks is that the Gentiles show some sensitivity to those who are going through a difficult time of transition. It is likely that he had penned his Letter before this meeting.

15:36–16:15 Paul meets Timothy and Lydia

After the decision of the Council, one may be surprised to read that Paul had Timothy circumcised. But the reason is given: “on account of

the Judeans in the area". As Paul would later say, "circumcision doesn't matter" (Gal. 5:6), and he wanted no more trouble than necessary. As for Lydia, she was a prominent businesswoman, and Paul did not hesitate to meet with the women for prayer. She was receptive to the Gospel, and "she and her household" were saved. This phrase, and the one following where she invites them into her (rather than her husband's) home, clearly portray Lydia as the head of her household.

16:16–40 A python and a prison break

Apollo was the twin of Artemis (we will encounter this pagan goddess again later in the book), and his earthly oracle was to be a maiden (later, a woman over 50) called the Pythia (python). After pestering Paul and Silas for too long, Paul exorcised the demon that had been giving her prophetic powers. But her handlers realized that this meant the end of their lucrative business. So they made up false charges against Paul and Silas, which resulted in a severe whipping and jail. Once again there was a miraculous escape, but not a quiet one as had been the case for Peter. As they were singing (!) there was a violent earthquake which opened all the prison doors. This is where we meet the famous jailer who asked how to be saved, and the simple reply was for him to put his trust in Master Jesus. Some stumble over the addition of "and your household", but this hardly means that the family did not have to have faith but were forced to believe as the head of the house (see related comments on Lydia). The text states that the Word of the Master was spoken to all of them.

The next day, the officials tried to get Paul and Silas released quietly, but Paul would have none of it. He demanded justice, which some believers today would think is wrong for a Christian. And he used his Roman citizenship to his advantage, though no one doubts the evil of the Roman government.

17:1–15 Hounded from city to city

The most notable incident in this section is the contrast between the people of Thessalonica and Berea. Rather than reacting with emotion upon hearing new ideas, they turned to the scriptures to cross-examine what Paul was saying, which Luke cites as an example of "noble character". This is an important lesson for us today: not only must we restrain our reactions and know the scriptures, we must also not blindly swallow what we may hear from preachers and teachers but put them under

scrutiny. This is how discernment is practiced, and it supports the use of “old books” to determine spiritual truth.

17:16–34 Paul in Athens

In the account of Paul in Athens, we are given an example of how to present the Gospel to people without knowledge of the one true God. Unlike the message of Peter to Israel on Pentecost, the message Paul brought to the Athenians was simply to appeal to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. He did not dangle sinners over the flames of hell, or demand personal confessions and repentance, but only presented this evidence as proving which God was the true one. Some mistakenly interpret this approach as Paul accepting and affirming their pantheism. But clearly he was using it as a “hook” or lead-in to present a new idea to them. Their shrine to The Unknown God was the perfect opportunity to introduce them to him.

18:1–23 Priscilla and Aquila

Paul met these two due to them all being in the tent-making trade, and they formed a business partnership. This is one example of Paul earning his own wages, and it was not until others arrived that he was able to go back to proclaiming the Gospel full-time. He was run out of town as usual, but later met up with Priscilla and Aquila, who traveled with him.

18:24–28 Apollos

In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila found the eloquent and educated Apollos proclaiming the immersion of John, so they took him aside and told him “the rest of the story”. Note that it was not just the man doing the teaching, and he is in no way portrayed as either leading or supervising the teaching of his wife. This only needs to be said due to the efforts of some today to shoehorn male oversight into every corner of scripture.

19:1–20 True and false

In Corinth there was another instance of the sign gift of speaking in unlearned languages, after which Paul spent two years debating in a public hall. Debate, like demanding justice, is another activity in which, according to some today, Christians should not engage. Yet it was these debates which caused the Gospel to spread all around that region.

But it is always the spectacular gifts that draw in the fakes and impostors. Some local exorcists took it upon themselves to mimic the

words of Paul and try them out on a demon-possessed man. But the demon said something very interesting before beating the impostors to a pulp: "I know Jesus and Paul, but who are you?" For the Christian, miracles are not performed by magic words and incantations, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and evil spirits know this. And this incident put such fear of God into the people that they publicly burned their magic books worth millions of today's dollars.

19:21–41 Artemis of the Ephesians

Where there is a good reputation there is also often a bad one, and this was to surround Paul wherever he went. In Ephesus he drew the negative attention of an influential silversmith named Demetrius, head of a trade guild making shrines for their goddess. They stirred up a mob which then spent two hours chanting mindlessly to her. But an official finally got them to calm down, and he used the threat of the Roman government charging them with rioting to convince them to disband.

20:1–38 A farewell to the elders in Ephesus

Paul gave one last long speech before leaving the area, and this is where we read the account of the young man he lulled to sleep with all that speaking. The youth fell out of the window he had fallen asleep next to and was killed, but Paul raised him back to life. Then he met with the elders of the local Congregation, and as noted before, there were several of them and not one "head elder" with "associate elders" as tradition has had it.

In his advice to the elders, Paul indicated that they were shepherds and guardians with serious responsibilities. And the danger they were to guard against was the eventual arising of "wolves" from among them, who would ravage the flock. This was bound to happen practically as soon as Paul turned his back, and history shows the tragic accuracy of that prediction. According to noted historian Philip Schaff in *History of the Christian Church, §42, Clergy and Laity*, this process of transforming the Congregation from organism to organization began in the second century a.d. Control-seeking people formed a hierarchy, turning Jesus' command for the greatest to be the least on its head.

21:1–14 Philip and prophets

One largely ignored fact about Philip is that his four unmarried daughters were prophets. This defies two popular claims: that the highest calling

of all women is marriage and motherhood, and that women cannot be prophets as men are. It also fulfills what Peter quoted from Joel on Pentecost. There is no qualifying or excusing or exception-granting here, either expressed or implied. Had they been sons instead, no one would question their gifting or sphere of service.

21:15–23:11 Paul is falsely accused

People have an uncanny ability to jump to wild conclusions, and then use those conclusions to hate and murder. They took Paul's sincere effort to keep from causing offense and turned it into a crime worthy of death. But yet again, Paul uses his Roman citizenship to demand justice for being hauled off to jail and punishment without having been given a fair trial. And when he was stood before the Sanhedrin, he used his being a Pharisee to divide the council. But this whole charade would turn out to spread the Gospel even farther, and to allow Paul to testify before kings.

23:12–30 A failed ambush

Paul's enemies, not content with law or justice, conspired to ambush Paul on his way to Governor Felix, a trip they had convinced the legion commander to arrange. But due to the bravery of a young boy who found out about the plot, all the conspirators accomplished was further trouble for themselves. They may have thought they could pull the same move as they had done to Jesus, but they did not have the same amount of leverage on Felix and the rest as they had with Pilate.

23:31–24:27 To Governor Felix

The prosecution spoke first, and then Paul spoke in his own defense. Felix, though well-versed in Judean affairs, exhibited little interest in the case beyond hoping Paul would offer him a bribe— as if this tentmaker was carrying around a lot of spare cash. This hope of bribery would also help explain why Festus allowed the case to remain open for two years, though as stated he mainly wanted to please the Judeans.

25:1–26:32 Before Festus and Agrippa

When Felix was succeeded by Festus, the Judeans tried the ambush ploy again, but Festus did not immediately grant their request to have Paul transferred. When the trial resumed, Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to face trial in Jerusalem, but Paul once again appealed to his rights under established Roman law. So he made a formal appeal to

Caesar, which Festus granted. Then it was King Agrippa's turn to hear the case, because Festus needed to specify the precise charge to justify sending the case to Caesar. And though Agrippa agreed that Paul was not guilty and should be released, the appeal to Caesar could not be withdrawn. Paul had been told in an earlier vision that he must go to Rome, and his accusers were the unwitting tools by which God brought that to pass.

27:1–28:16 Adventures on the way to Caesar

Reading the account of Paul's trip to Rome, one might speculate that malevolent spiritual forces did not want him to testify before Caesar. The most familiar part of the trip was the shipwreck at the island of Melita. The residents saw Paul shake off a deadly snake bite and suffer no ill effects, which some try to dismiss as ignorance. But this is presumptuous and merely argued from a disbelief in miracles— even by people who accept that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet Paul went on to heal the people of the island, which resulted in the ability to continue the trip in spite of the loss of everything but the passengers.

28:17–31 Final words from Paul

Considering the odds against their reaching Rome at all, we should not be surprised that Paul was given comfortable living quarters there. He expected to encounter the same opposition from the local Judeans as always, but they had heard nothing about him. He stayed there for two years, continuing to proclaim the Gospel. And at that point his story ends, without any comment about his trial before Caesar or his death. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded in Rome while Nero was Caesar, sometime in the mid-60s a.d.

To The Romans

Background

The letter to the Romans was written around 57 AD by Paul while he was on his way from Ephesus to Corinth. He gave the letter to Phoebe to take to Rome on his behalf. It is the most systematic and doctrinal of his letters, touching on a wide range of issues yet centered around salvation by faith for all people, regardless of heritage.

Outline

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2. **–B 1:7b–16** Prayers and blessings
3. **—C 1:17** Theme: Salvation by faith
4. **——D 1:18–8:11** Theology of theme
 - (a) **Da 1:18–32** Non-Jews
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 - (a) **X1a 9:1–5** Anguish over Israel
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 - (c) **— X1x 9:10–26** Choice and calling
 - (d) **–X1b' 9:27–33** Faith and promise

- (e) **X1a' 10:1–4** Anguish over Israel
- (f) **X2 10:5–17** How all can believe
- 7. (a) **X3a 10:18–21** Provoking to jealousy
- (b) —**X3x 11:1–12** Rejection and blindness
- (c) **X3a' 11:13–15** Provoking to jealousy
- (d) **X4 11:16–36** Analogies and timing
- 8. —**E' 12:1–2** Obedience to God
- 9. —**D' 12:3–15:7** Practice of theme
- 10. —**C' 15:8–12** Theme summary
- 11. —**B' 15:13–16** Prayers and Blessings
- 12. **A' 15:17–16:27** Greetings

A 1:1–7a Greetings

Paul begins with his usual greeting, but goes a step farther in calling himself a slave of Jesus— not just a servant, but one who completely and permanently belongs to another. He includes the fact that the Gospel he is preaching was promised through the Old Testament prophets. They pointed to Jesus the Messiah, who was proven to be God by his resurrection from the dead. Paul, though a Jew, had been given the task of bringing this Gospel to the Gentiles.

B 1:7b–16 Prayers and Blessings

After thanking God for the believers at Rome, Paul expresses his great desire to see them in person, since he had been prevented from doing so several times. This Gospel came first to the Jews and then to everyone else (Gentiles or “Greeks”).

C 1:17 Theme: Salvation by faith

The overarching theme of the letter is that “the just will live by faith.” It began with faith, both on the part of Eve when she expressed belief in the coming Savior (Gen. 4: “I acquired a man with YHWH”, and YHWH literally means “the Coming One”), and on the part of Abraham (Gen. 15:6). And with the coming of the Messiah Jesus, it ends with faith. As Paul will develop in detail, the important thing in God’s eyes is not ancestry, social standing, or any other division, but only faith.

D 1:18–8:11 Theology of theme

This long section is where Paul meticulously constructs the theology to back up his theme. It begins with a very familiar passage about sin and judgment. We have to be careful here because there is much theological baggage applied to this passage, which is not necessarily warranted by the context.

Da 1:18–32 Non-Jews

First Paul talks about those who deliberately suppress the truth. They know there is a creator God just by looking around at nature. Someone had to make it all, since it's impossible for anything to make itself. Who has the power to create the "heavens and the earth" but God? We never observe animals arising from plants, or people from animals, but that all things reproduce "after their kind". But especially in the last century, people start with the assumption that God cannot exist, then find alternative stories to explain what we see. People are without excuse for this, since they know the truth but try to bury it and also keep others from seeing it. Because of this deliberate rejection of God, they became stupid! They traded the almighty Creator for idols of mere animals or people.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, we see the repeated phrase "Because of this, God gave them over...". Note carefully the order of events here: First people reject the God they know exists, and then God "gives them over" to the evil and darkness they love. Some will ignore the cause of the effect, saying God gave them over to evil without their first having known the truth.

Db 2:1–3:8 Jews

But Paul suddenly turns on the self-righteous, who all this time were undoubtedly patting themselves on the back as he listed the deeds of the irreverent. Many people ignore the context and stop at the fragment "in judging others you condemn yourself", arguing that there is never to be any judging. But Paul gives the reason: "because you practice the same things". He is condemning a double standard, not teaching that Christians should never judge.

The Jews especially had relied upon their being the Chosen People to think themselves automatically righteous. But Paul shows them that they who know better are actually worse off than the non-Jews who

naturally do what the law requires. He explains that God's goodness is intended to lead them to a change of heart, not a license to sin. Just because God is patient and withholds judgment for a time shouldn't be an excuse to indulge the flesh, because God's patience will not hold out forever. And this is not any kind of anti-Semitism; Paul and Jesus were both Jews after all. But in this age of grace, we're all treated the same. God is not finished with his Chosen People yet, but for the time being, there is no favoritism.

Note that Paul is not teaching salvation by works here, but simply stating that those who seek righteousness will find it, and those who reject God will not. Actions are the result of what's in the heart. When we see words like "actions" or "deeds" and "rewards", this is "works" language; it refers to what we earn or deserve. Salvation on the other hand, as is very clear from other scriptures, is strictly by faith. So we can tell what the subject is by looking for those words. Deeds are the result of salvation, not the cause. And scripture makes it clear that the two are mutually exclusive: it's either faith or works, not both at the same time.

In 3:1 Paul turns to the logical question in the reader's mind by this point: has he been saying that being a Jew is now worthless? Not at all. God had given his written laws exclusively to them, and through them the Savior of the World had come. Their unfaithfulness could not nullify the promises of God, even if most of them rejected him. There has always been a "remnant", a small group of the faithful, and God certainly will never forget them.

Dc 3:9–26 Both Groups

But this does not negate God's justice, and in that sense there is no privileged class; the Jews have no legal loophole when it comes to personal sin. God is gracious, but this does not negate his holiness. Jews are no less sinful than Gentiles, and Paul quotes their own Psalms to emphasize the point; the psalm was not written only about Gentiles!

Now Paul discusses the purpose of law (3:20): to expose sin and make us conscious of it. It was never meant to save anyone, but to make them aware of their need to be saved. Salvation is "apart from the law" and is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. All have sinned, and all who are saved were saved by faith in Jesus' "ransom payment". Note that this happened "at the right time". We must remember that timing is an

important factor in God's view, such that we should be careful not to take what God prescribes for one period of history and try to make it fit another, without clear reasons to do so. Also note that there is no need to use law to expose any alleged "original sin"; this is all about those personal sins we commit.

Dd 3:27–5:5 Faith and law

Paul points out, after all that about the lack of favoritism toward the Jews in regard to sin, that God is God over all, not just them. So the basis for his judgment will be the same for all: faith. The law has one purpose, but faith has another. Per the example of Abraham (4:1), Paul shows that he was declared righteous long before the Mosaic law had been given. Had Abraham worked for this declaration he would have earned a wage owed to him. But instead, having done nothing but believe God, we can see that this declaration was not a payment of wages owed but a gift. And not only did this happen before the Law, it happened even before the rite of circumcision. So that rite was not the cause or guarantee of righteousness, but only a sign that such righteousness had already existed. So while the physical descendants of the Promise were marked by circumcision, the spiritual descendants would be known by their faith. And just as Abraham's faith was in the promise of God, our faith must be in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (4:23).

De 5:6–6:2 Sin and Redemption

Now we will take a careful look at how sin entered the world and the implications of that. This will further enhance our understanding of exactly what Jesus did. Paul begins by pointing out that God did not wait for us to turn to him, but that he took the initiative at the time he deemed optimal. His love for all people is proved by his payment for our sins while we (the world) still wallowed in them. This was God's offer of reconciliation. One party cannot force another to reconcile, but only make the offer. So when Paul says that we were reconciled through the death of Jesus, he also points out that we were still the enemies of God. So he then added that we will be saved "through his life", meaning we must put our faith in his resurrection.

Sin entered the world through one person, and death entered the world through sin. There was no death before sin, an important point to remember on the subject of origins and Genesis. What kind of death

is this referring to? We look at Genesis 3 and see that it's clearly about mortality— which means being able to die physically. If it meant any other kind of death, then we have to say that plants, who were cursed because of Adam, have spirits. We could also look at it as the broken relationship that it was; Adam became “dead” to God in the sense of being no longer in fellowship with him.

Notice the order and wording: since we observe that everyone sins, we know that death passed to all people. That is, sin is the evidence of death; we sin because we are in mortal bodies that crave and decay. And “death was in charge from Adam to Moses, even over those whose failure was not like that of Adam.” How did Adam sin, as opposed to how Eve sinned? He rebelled against God to his face, blaming him for giving him Eve. That's why sin is attributed to him alone; both Adam and Eve ate the fruit and died as a result, but only Adam blamed God and added a second sin. God never said there would be any additional penalties besides “death” for eating the fruit, so the cursing of the ground and Adam's being driven out of the garden were for his unique second sin of open rebellion. We see this same blatant rebellion in Cain. So physical mortality is what we all inherit from Adam, but rebellion is what Jesus came to die for, along with the promise of a new immortal body. Innocent babies sometimes die, and it's obvious they never had the capacity to rebel against God. Animals die as well, and are incapable of such rebellion. We all suffer the consequences of Adam's rebellion, which is physical decay and death and suffering.

Df 6:3–11 A Death and Resurrection Like Jesus'

It is important to emphasize what Paul is saying in this passage. Our death is compared to Jesus' death, so it must be physical, or else we have to say Jesus died spiritually. And what kind of resurrection did Jesus have, physical or spiritual? Then our resurrection will be physical, like Jesus'. And Paul expressly states that it is the **body** of sin that we put to death; we are dead to sin. Jesus died to sin “once for all” so that we could be alive to God with him. And being dead to sin means we cannot keep going on as though we are still alive to it.

Dg 6:12–23 Living Accordingly

In 6:18 Paul summarizes his point: Adam's sin gave us spiritual separation and physical death, but Jesus' death and resurrection gives us spiritual

union and physical immortality. Once again he points out that the law he was talking about earlier only highlighted our rebellion, making the need for God's grace even more obvious. And in case anyone would conclude that sinning is ultimately going to make God look better, Paul strongly retorts that this grace of God is not a license to sin. Instead, we are immersed into the same kind of death and life as Jesus, who knew no sin.

Dh 7:1–8:7 The Purpose and Limitation of Law

Here Paul takes another angle regarding law: Death puts an end to a person's obligation to law, so since we died to sin we are no longer under its laws. But those believers who were under the Mosaic law also died to that law, as Paul said, "in order to belong to Another". This is a strong rebuttal to the idea that believers in Jesus are somehow under that old law, "married" to it and obligated under it. But that is impossible; we died to law and now belong to Jesus, to the new Law that gives life as opposed to the old one that brought only condemnation.

So does this mean the old law was evil? Not at all; it was the "glass" through which we could see what sin is. It illuminated sin, making us aware of it. And you know how people are: if we are told not to do something, we feel compelled to do it. Without being told that, we would have had no desire to do it. This is what the Law does: it brings sin to our attention. But it is really our own sin that draws us to do that which the Law forbids.

Di 8:8–11 Duality

We cannot blame the Law for our own weakness. Yet we still live in our mortal bodies; we have not yet received our full inheritance. And it is this "flesh" that continually battles with our spirit. In fact, Paul expressly states that "the body is a rotting corpse because of failure, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness." We died to the law and will get a new body that is not under the influence of sin, but for the time being we must struggle with it.

E 8:12–39 Obedience to God

Because of what Jesus accomplished for us, and if we put our faith in him, we can confidently approach God— no longer as slaves to a master but as children to a father. Yet if we are truly children, we will seek to please our Father and not disobey him. We must keep in mind that we

have a new life, a new relationship, a new law, and we must keep in step with that instead of the old ways. But we are not in this struggle alone; we have the Spirit not only as a Deposit but also as a “helper”. The Spirit is our link, the bridge between our spirits and God. He continually intercedes for us, even when we just don’t know what to pray.

In what Paul says about God’s foreknowledge (8:29), remember the context. He is discussing our adoption as children and our help from the Holy Spirit. The people God foreknew (not fore-chose) are the ones he then predestined— not to be saved but to “be conformed to the image of his Son”. In other words, God decided that whoever would be saved would then be like Jesus, and be God’s own children. It is these who are also “called”, “justified”, and “glorified”. Notice also the past tense here: these things are guaranteed and considered finished in all who are saved. We don’t have to work for them, so we cannot lose them.

Using legal terminology again, Paul speaks of Jesus as our Advocate in the courtroom, defending us against all charges. And in spite of our present trials, we are conquerors in the eyes of God. Even though we have not yet won all the battles, we are guaranteed the victory; we will certainly receive our promised eternal life with God in heaven.

X 9:1–11:36 Unity in God

Here we arrive at the centerpiece of Paul’s dissertation: the unity of all people groups in faith.

X1a 9:1–5 Anguish over Israel

Paul begins by expressing his anguish over his own people, the Jews. He points out that the blindness they suffer in regards to their own Messiah is not a failure on God’s part. Instead he reminds us that God’s promises were to the faithful, not just to the physical descendants of Abraham. Many people take this to mean God has no more purpose for Israel, but this is not the case at all. This idea is formally known as Replacement Theology, where the Congregation (or possibly some other group) takes Israel’s place. Yet these people only accept Israel’s blessings and not her curses. What Paul is comparing is two types of Jews, and the descendants of Isaac rather than those of Ishmael; he is not talking about Gentiles here.

X1b 9:6–9 Faith and promise

Some take the account of God's choosing Isaac over Ishmael as proof of his forcing people to be saved, but look at the context. God is simply choosing a physical race; this is not about individual salvation at all. As also with Jacob over Esau and many other examples, God has the right to choose whoever he wills to be the ancestors of the Messiah. It has nothing at all to do with individual salvation.

X1x 9:10–26 Choice and calling

But is God unjust to choose people for an ethnic group? Hardly. But again, the statement that God says "I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy" is twisted to mean the predestination of individuals for salvation. Yet the theme is still about God choosing a race of people through whom the Messiah would come. God didn't choose Israel for its good qualities or numbers, but just the opposite, so his Name would be glorified instead of the people (Deut. 7:7–8).

Objects designed for either destruction or honor (9:22–26) refer to God's responses to hearts that are either dead-set against him or made righteous by faith. And this is in the middle of a context about nations, as well as individuals who are chosen for various kinds of service based upon the condition of their hearts. That nations are in view is further supported by the following statements about Hosea and Isaiah. We learn of those God calls "his people", and of the remnant, the few who have faith in God.

We can also take the objection of 9:19 as the Jews being indignant that God would include Gentiles in the plan of salvation. They were actually angry with God for doing this, but Paul responds with an equal degree of indignation at their conceit. And if predestination were true then we could rebut that as well: if we were mere puppets that God operates, we couldn't be blamed for our sin. The concept of God blaming people he predestines to hell for their sin actually makes God the author of sin. So God's choices are not for who will be saved and who will not, but for who is used to perform his will in this life (9:22–26). Those "designed for destruction" are the ones who were "given over" to their choices (see section D). And since the people he chose rejected him, God included Gentiles in order to make the Jews jealous— which is exactly what we see here in the Jews' objection to God's including them in salvation.

X1b' 9:27–33 Faith and promise

God's promise will stand, regardless of the number. Though only a small number of physical Jews will be saved, because salvation is by faith, it is only by God's grace that there would be any saved at all. Faith inherits the promise, whether held by Jew or Gentile.

X1a' 10:1–4 Anguish over Israel

As with what began in 9:1, Paul ends this small section by expressing his heartfelt desire for the salvation of his people, the Jews. But they still try to make their own righteousness by works, in ignorance of the fact that Jesus already fulfilled all the obligations of the law.

X2 10:5–17 How all can believe

Paul now focuses on Moses, to whom the Jews look. But instead of supporting them, Moses condemns them: "The one who does all these things will live by them". The Jews had to know that they were not perfectly obeying Moses, yet the law demands perfection. Only Jesus achieved that.

In vs. 9 and 10 we see the Gospel message in its most concise form: Jesus is Master and God raised him from the dead. With your heart/mind you believe that Jesus reconciled the world to God, and with your mouth you confess that he is God. This is not at all a requirement to speak the magical words "Jesus is Master", but simply an explanation of how we relate to both God and man. Man cannot know the heart/mind as God does, so we have to speak up.

What exactly does it mean to call Jesus "Master"? It does not mean you prove by works that you are perfectly obeying him. Instead, it means that you believe him to be The Master, The I Am. In other words, it's not "Jesus is **my** Master" but "Jesus is **The** Master". Of course you will be expected to treat him like your Master after being saved, but not in order to get saved. So you confess that Jesus is God, and you have a conviction that God raised him from the dead. His death reconciled us; his life saves us. So these verses give the two most basic elements of saving faith: the right Savior and his resurrection.

Another important point is the order of events: you believe, and then you speak. It's very much like the order of events in Peter's address to the crowd on Pentecost: repent and be baptized. You repent (change your mind to belief), and so you are baptized. Confession, like water baptism,

is a result and acknowledgment of a change of heart (the meaning of 'repent'). It clearly isn't the speaking or the dunking that gets you saved, it's the heart's conviction. As with the circumcision of Abraham, the faith comes first and the outward signs second.

And above all, this all applies equally to both Jew and Gentile (10:12). All need to hear the Gospel in order to know where their faith is to be placed. And if anyone is assured of having heard, it is the Jews (10:18). But again, God used the salvation of Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy, since they heard the Gospel but rejected it.

X3a 10:18–21 Provoking to jealousy

Another blow against predetermined salvation of individuals is found in the remaining verses of chapter 10. God woos Israel, he longs for them, he waits for them. This is not the forced dragging against our will of predestination but the pleading of a rejected Father who loves even his enemies. Surely God does not hold out his arms to people whose fate he decreed in eternity past, and surely this does not make him weak and helpless. Allowing people to have free will is not a weakness at all; it is the weak who deny it out of fear.

X3x 11:1–12 Rejection and blindness

In chapter 11 Paul soundly defeats the idea of Replacement Theology. He appeals not only to his own heritage but the fact that God always preserves a remnant. And if it is by God's choosing, then it can't depend upon Israel being faithful. Many claim that since Israel disobeyed God that they must be rejected. But here again we see that this is not so. It's all about God, about his unilateral promises, about bringing him glory. That God is faithful in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness is a tribute to his trustworthiness, rather than a rejection of Israel as his chosen people. Because of their continual rejection of him, God (as we've seen repeatedly in this letter), "gave them over" to blindness and deafness to the Gospel. Yet individuals can still be saved. And how much more clearly can Paul put it than he does in verse 11? Israel did not fall beyond recovery.

X3a' 11:13–15 Provoking to jealousy

It is their very hardness towards God that allowed the Messiah to be sacrificed for us all. It was to bring them to jealousy that God allowed this. Yet Paul cautions the Gentiles to not become proud. After all,

if God would punish his chosen race, and if the Jews cannot escape responsibility for sin by their privileged position, then the Gentiles have even less reason to be overconfident.

X4 11:16–36 Analogies and timing

Paul uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate the relationship of all, Jew and Gentile alike, to the Vine. All draw their life from the Vine. The broken-off branches represent the unfaithful of a chosen group. This is in keeping with Paul's discussion of the remnant. Just as with the Jews, the Gentiles have been "grafted in" as a group, but individuals stand or fall on the basis of faith.

The analogy of the olive tree serves the same purpose, but be careful not to attach unwarranted meaning to it. Some say that the olive tree must always represent Israel, but that cannot be the case here. Otherwise we'd have the nonsensical situation of the branches being made equal to the trunk. Put another way, if Israel is the trunk then it cannot also be the natural branches. But in context, the trunk must represent the same thing as the vine: Jesus. The Jews are "natural" branches and the Gentiles "wild", but they're all branches nonetheless.

An important implication of this is that it shows that the Congregation has not been absorbed into Israel, nor Israel into the Congregation. the Congregation is composed of both wild and natural branches. The context here tells us that the wild branches must therefore represent **Gentiles**, not Christians. Another implication is that Jews and Gentiles are still separate entities, branches of two types, but they all are grafted into the Trunk. So the natural cannot look down on the wild, and the wild cannot look down on the natural. The two groups are equal and distinct.

All that being the case, then, there is no support for Conditional Security (opposite of Eternal Security). To be grafted into either the Vine or the Trunk illustrates not individual salvation but God's inclusion of Gentiles alongside Jews in the plan of salvation. Individuals can be cut off on the basis of lacking saving faith. Notice that these branches are first given a chance, and only after they produce no fruit are they removed. God is patient, and reluctant to cut anyone off. But if they persist, God will finally "give them over" to the flames.

In 11:25–32 Paul continues to warn people about not getting overconfident, and gives us a hint about prophecy: there is a certain number

of Gentiles that are to be grafted in, not necessarily a certain point in time. But somehow he manages yet again to create another controversy: "All Israel will be saved". What can this mean? Let's remember all we've been reading in this letter. The theme is faith, not ethnic privilege or works. Who are true Israel? Who are the children of Abraham? The ones with faith. So here Paul is referring to the saved Jews, the faithful ones. The time will come when all the fruitless branches are cut off, and all that is left are the saved. To put it another way, someday Israel will be composed of only the saved. It does not mean that all the physical children of Abraham will be saved. Although Israel's "hardening" was necessary to enable the Gospel to be brought to the Gentiles, they are still God's chosen race, and he has not forgotten his promises to their ancestors. These were irrevocable promises.

Wrapping up this pivotal point in his letter, Paul breaks out in praise to God in 11:33-36.

E' 12:1–2 Obedience to God

Now there is a distinct shift in Paul's letter and he begins to work back in reverse order, with his focus here on obedience. In light of all that's been said, he appeals to how reasonable it is to live in accordance with what pleases God. This is all about living like Christians, not how to be saved. We are to please God, and worship him out of understanding instead of ignorance. Otherwise there would have been no point to Paul's long dissertation. If Christianity is just another blind, experience-oriented religion, then what's the point of arguing over doctrine?

In contrast to the empty, powerless experience religions, Christians are to be "transformed by renewing your minds" instead of being pressed into the world's mold. This is the exact opposite of the meditation of the world, which seeks to empty the mind and push it aside. Instead, we are to renew and fill our minds, for the purpose of knowing the will of God, a will that is pleasing and perfect. Even our bodies are to be presented to God as a kind of sacrifice. They are meant for neither self-indulgence nor self-destruction, but to please God.

D' 12:3–15:7 Practice of theme

Moving back to the topic of the family of God, Paul puts added emphasis on ethics. A warning against self-centeredness is found in 12:3–8. We are to neither over- nor under-value ourselves, but be realistic. Sometimes

we mistake extreme self-depreciation as humility, but it is just as bad as the other extreme. To say of oneself either “I am better than you” or “I am nothing” are both wrong. One presumes what God has not given, and the other insults his empowerment, so both are self-centered. To illustrate this point, Paul gives the analogy of the human body, as a figure of the Congregation being the Anointed’s “body”. All parts are necessary and all are equally important. Some are more prominent while others are kept hidden. Yet they all compose one body; with any part missing, the body would not exist. So one part cannot be considered either superior or inferior to another. This principle has important implications on the topics of a clergy/laity class distinction and discrimination on the basis of race, social class, or gender.

Now to some general exhortations to all believers (12:9–13:14). Clearly we are to be more than bench-warmers, more than spectators. Instead of lifeless appendages, we are to be busy with the work God has given us to do. Evil is overcome by active resistance to it, not by running away from it. And we must be model citizens wherever we are. After urging people to give what they owe and not be in debt, Paul again mentions law, but that it is fulfilled by love for others; this one command encompasses all the rest.

In chapter 14 Paul turns from how believers relate to society, to how believers relate to each other. The immediate context is about “to eat, or not to eat” in regards to meat, but the general principle is to keep everything in perspective relative to the Gospel and the Body of the Anointed. Someone whose faith is “strong” and has no qualms about this or that food must not despise someone whose faith is “weak” and whose conscience is bothered over certain controversial things. But it goes the other way too; the “weak” must not despise the “strong”. So instead of rubbing our personal convictions in each other’s faces, we are to keep to ourselves those things we know will bother others, in the name of peace. But don’t make the mistake of treating important doctrines as something we should keep to ourselves. This passage is about the disputable, the controversial, the matters of personal conviction over things God has not commanded us about.

We are all parts of one Body, but those parts are not identical. We each have different functions and levels of faith. Many today think we should all be interchangeable parts and demand that others see every detail exactly as we do. But we all answer to God, not to each other

(14:10–13). And who is any of us to boss the others? We each will have to answer for how we treated other believers. Does this equate to no judging at all? Hardly. We are commanded to judge, to discern, to seek out the truth. But in this context, the judging we're not supposed to do is to make ourselves authorities over others. The eye cannot demand that the foot answer to it instead of to the Head, nor can the right hand control the left.

In 14:21–15:7 Paul gives his personal opinion on meat eating, but leaves the whole matter to individual conscience. He tells us to be sensitive to others, whether they have more or less faith than we have. Food should never be a reason to part fellowship; it's a trivial matter in the kingdom of God. But this is not to be taken as forcing people to violate their own consciences. The idea here is not to make everyone think the same over these secondary issues, but to keep peace by voluntary restriction, keeping things to ourselves if necessary. Our example is Jesus, who set aside his divine privileges to become one of us. In fact, all of what was written in the OT was recorded for our benefit. We can look at the heroes of old for inspiration. He again speaks of the Gentiles' inclusion with the Jews in God's plans, and that all of us who believe are to praise God because of this.

C' 15:8–12 Theme summary

Paul is now back to his focus on faith. Jesus came not only to die for sin, but also to fulfill the promises, resulting in salvation also to the Gentiles. The promise began by faith, and it ended when fulfilled by Jesus.

B' 15:13–16 Prayers and Blessings

As he approaches the end of his letter, Paul expresses his usual prayers and blessings. Though he credits the people with what they already know, he still feels the need to remind them of many things.

A' 15:17–16:27 Greetings

Final greetings are given now. Paul has been living the example they should follow and spreading the Gospel everywhere. His driving ambition has been to take it to places it had never yet been, and his work has been accompanied by demonstrations of God's power. This, he explains, is why he has been unable to visit them in person, but he hopes to do so soon, since he has completed his mission in that part of the world. But first he has business to attend to in Jerusalem and he appeals to them

for prayer support in this.

In his final list of names (beginning in 16:1), Paul starts off with a woman named Phoebe. She is called a “servant” just as any man in the Letters; the Greek word is the masculine form typically transliterated “deacon” or translated “minister”. She was, as the Greek states clearly, “a presiding officer over many, including me”. This was no mere assistant or courier, but an important official to the believers in a large city. She was deemed worthy to take Paul’s letter to Rome, and the people there were to treat her as they would Paul.

Next is the married couple Priska and Aquila. Note that the female is listed first, which is outrageous by the standards of the time, and especially so since Paul had formerly been a Pharisee. He praises them both equally for risking their lives for him.

Another female noted is Mary. She was a co-worker, not simply a likeable person; she was on the same level as any male Paul named a co-worker.

Now to Junia. In an effort to explain away the obvious, those who believe in male preeminence have three ways to interpret this:

1. Junia is really a man, Junias (no textual attestation exists for this before the Middle Ages)
2. She is not an apostle herself but known to them
3. She is not an “authoritative” apostle

Junia is in fact a woman, numbered among the apostles and counted as outstanding, and has the same authority as any male apostle.⁸ And there is no hint in scripture of a non-authoritative apostle. Only with a prior commitment to male preeminence can any of the three objections above be supported, and it is quite disturbing to know that those entrusted with the accuracy of the Greek text were willing to deliberately alter it. But Paul matter-of-factly lists these prominent women as co-workers, as equals. Added to the list are women such as Tryphena and Tryphosa, and several unnamed others.

In contrast to the people he listed as being commended, Paul follows with a warning to note the other extreme, the ones causing disputes and

⁸E. J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, October 01, 2005.

tripping people up in the faith (16:17–19). Such people are to be shut out. We are to be wise about the good, and innocent about evil. God will soon crush Satan under our feet.

More greetings, and then a final blessing. Paul has been given “the secret” to reveal, the Gospel itself and the relationship and security we have as believers. Through Jesus the Messiah we can all be saved, Jew and Gentile alike, by faith alone.

To The Corinthians 1

Background

The first letter to the Corinthians was written around 55 AD by Paul while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary trip. There were possibly four letters: the “previous” letter (see 1 Cor. 5:9), 1 Corinthians, the “severe” letter (see 2 Cor. 2:4 and 7:8–9), and 2 Corinthians. But it is also possible that the two we have include the other two.

Outline

1. 1:1–9 Greetings
2. Divisions
 - (a) **1:10–13a** Misconceptions about leaders
 - (b) **1:13b–2:16** Misconceptions about salvation
 - (c) **3:1–4** Immaturity and worldliness
 - (d) **3:5–23** The temple of God
 - (e) **4:1–21** The servants of God
3. Christian Living
 - (a) **5:1–13** Purity and discipline
 - (b) **6:1–8** Legal disputes among believers
 - (c) **6:9–20** No license to sin
4. Domestic Issues
 - (a) **7:1–9** Marriage decisions and rights
 - (b) **7:10–16** Divorce
 - (c) **7:17–24** The relative unimportance of social constructs
 - (d) **7:25–40** The unmarried
5. Freedom, rights, and consideration
 - (a) **A 8:1–3** Love vs. knowledge and rights
 - (b) **–B 8:4–8** Food and sacrifices

- (c) — **C 8:9–13** Stumbling blocks
 - (d) — **X 9:1–27** Deferring rights out of love
 - i. **Xa 9:1–18** Paul's self-defense as an apostle
 - ii. **Xb 9:19–27** Evangelistic strategies
 - (e) — **C' 10:1–14** Stumbling blocks
 - (f) – **B' 10:15–22** Food and sacrifices
 - (g) **A' 10:23–11:1** Love vs. knowledge and rights
6. Symbolism and propriety in the Congregation
- (a) **A 11:2** Keeping the right traditions
 - (b) – **B 11:3** Origins
 - (c) — **X 11:4–10** Head coverings
 - (d) – **B' 11:11–15** Origins
 - (e) **A' 11:16** Not keeping the wrong traditions
7. The Community of Believers
- (a) **11:17–34** Meeting and eating
 - (b) **12:1–31** The Holy Spirit and the Body
 - (c) **13:1–13** The greatest quality
 - (d) **14:1–25** The greatest gift
 - (e) **14:26–40** Order in the meetings
8. The Gospel
- (a) **15:1–10** Evidence for the Gospel
 - (b) **15:11–49** Implications of the Gospel
 - i. **15:11–19** Resurrection
 - ii. **15:20–28** Death and life
 - iii. **15:29–34** Immersion (baptism)
 - iv. **15:35–49** Old and new bodies
 - (c) **15:50–58** Our ultimate hope
9. **16:1–9** Believers helping each other
10. **16:10–18** Personal recommendations
11. **16:19–24** Greetings

1:1–9 Greetings

In spite of the criticisms to follow, Paul begins with the positive. This letter is to the saved, which is an important thing to keep in mind. In spite of their faults, the Corinthian believers were considered holy by simple virtue of their belonging to the Anointed. Our holiness does not depend on us at all, but on the finished work of Jesus. Once we are saved, there is no argument to be made about dividing believers into “holy” and “not holy”. Mature and immature perhaps, but not sanctified and unsanctified.

Notice also that these people eagerly wait for Jesus to be revealed. A person who has been made holy by faith in Jesus will look forward to seeing him face to face. Yet some today seem indifferent, or even doubt that Jesus will actually return at all. Sidetracked and backslidden as the Corinthians may have been, they at least believed that Jesus would someday return for them. And our guarantee of salvation is found in Jesus, not in us.

1:10–4:21 Divisions

The community of believers in Corinth was splintered into many factions. Paul is apparently responding to a report from the followers of Chloe, who is listed as a leader just as Paul, Apollos, and Peter (Cephas) are. There is nothing expressed or implied about any “household”⁹ or that she was merely the hostess. And had she been a man, no one would question whether she was a leader of the church meeting there. Paul will now deal with the causes of these divisions and explain why they are wrong.

1:10–13a Misconceptions about leaders

Just as the ancient Israelis demanded a human king to follow, the people here were lining up behind various leaders. They were treating leaders like the world does and forming cliques, apparently around the ritual of water immersion. But Paul will now remind them of what the Gospel is and how each person relates to others.

⁹It appears that many translators presume a woman could only be in charge of her own family, so “household” is added arbitrarily. But this would mean that Paul was accepting a report from her under-age children. (See [this search result](#) for how various translations render the verse. Neither do any of the listed commentaries justify this presumption or explain how the Greek for “of Chloe” is different from the Greek for the listed male leaders. And if the messengers were her adult male slaves, this begs the question of how a woman could have authority over a man.)

1:13b–2:16 Misconceptions about salvation

Immersion in water is downplayed and separated from the Gospel. Paul says the Anointed did not send him to immerse, while in the Great Commission Jesus commanded his disciples to do exactly that. But the Great Commission, although after the Cross, was before Pentecost, and thus before the church age, and also before the revealing of “the secret” to Paul (Colossians 1:26). So it is technically possible that Jesus’ command is for the Jews only. Paul did immerse the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), who was not a Jew. But water immersion was a common practice in many parts of the world at that time, and signified a person’s complete reversal of belief or affiliation with a particular group. So it would seem that Paul neither ordered nor condemned it; though Paul was himself a Jew, he was not sent to immerse. It does not appear to have been a central or primary issue.

Next Paul states that the worldly “wisdom” which rejects the simple Gospel is made to look foolish. It is “this ridiculous proclamation”¹⁰ that God chose to save us, not high philosophy. Such emphasis on what makes sense to carnal minds takes away the power of the cross and gives glory to people instead of to God. Yet this problem has always plagued the community of believers. Paul further develops this point in appealing to what the Corinthians had formerly been. They were not saved by high-sounding arguments but by the power of the simple Gospel. Educated as Paul was, he did not use his human credentials to win people over. Yet wisdom is used for those who have already been saved and who have shown a desire to grow spiritually.

Paul defines the wisdom he’s been talking about as not philosophy but the “secret” of the Gospel revealed. He explains that God hid the plan of salvation from everyone so that Jesus would be crucified for our sins, to fulfill prophecy and seal our redemption. This is the secret, the wisdom of God, which Paul was given to reveal. He then points out that it is God’s Spirit that reveals mysteries and wisdom. This is most definitely not, as some teach, saying that lost people cannot understand the Gospel message. They teach that God has to “regenerate” them first and use this passage as a proof text. But the context supports no such

¹⁰The Greek says “the foolishness of **the** proclamation”, not “the foolishness of proclaiming”. Paul is saying that it is the Gospel itself, not the method of spreading it, that is foolish to the world.

thing. It only says that the “soulish” (Gk. *psukikos*) cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. There is no justification for interpreting “soulish” as necessarily “unsaved”, especially given the context. Instead, Paul is referring to maturity in the faith, per verse 6. This will be further supported in the following section.

3:1–4 Immaturity and worldliness

After defining spiritual maturity, Paul points out the Corinthians’ lack of it. They, although definitely saved, have not grown to maturity but remain as infants. They are the ones who cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are worldly, acting like the unsaved. The same wording (soulish and spiritual) is used for them as was used for the preceding discussion of the mature and immature in general.

3:5–23 The temple of God

Then Paul dismantles the pedestals the people had erected for various leaders. The people were trying to do what the vast majority of “churchians” have done since the apostles died: construct a hierarchy, a class distinction between clergy and laity. Yes, these leaders were their foundation and source, but that is all. They were simply doing their jobs. Though Paul laid the foundation, he himself was not that foundation, but Jesus. In other words, he presented the Gospel to them. Now, the people were to build on that foundational truth.

But Paul cautions them on the care with which they must build. Using the illustration of a building set on fire, he tells them that what they do with this Gospel will be tested for its worth and strength and quality. These, Paul explains in vs. 13, are people’s works or deeds. Vs. 14 tells us of the “pay” the builders will receive as a result of the testing. Clearly, this all is indicative of earned wages, not received gifts. A sharp distinction must be made between the two. Notice again that Paul is talking to and about saved people, as shown in vs. 15. To experience loss is not the loss of salvation, but the loss of wages or rewards.

Referring back to his earlier discussion of worldly wisdom, Paul relates it to the Corinthians’ worldliness and rebukes them again for their immaturity. They, like us, needed to keep things in proper order between God and people, and not to put people between others and God. Having exposed the root of the problems the Corinthian church was experiencing, Paul is now ready to deal with specific “branches”.

4:1–21 The servants of God

After reminding the Corinthians not to put people on pedestals, Paul gets to the matter of judgmentalism and the presumptuous false apostles. He begins by addressing the problem of their jumping to conclusions before knowing both sides of the dispute.

But then Paul goes into a sarcastic rant about their self-sufficiency and superiority to him. He then holds up as proof of his authority and sincerity the price he and Apollos have paid for being true apostles, and how they have stood up in the face of persecution and hardship. Yet Paul's motive is not to embarrass them, but to warn them. He appeals to them as a father to his wayward children, and urges them to follow in his footsteps.

The Corinthians had become arrogant, and Paul challenges them to back up their words with actions. He would soon come to them personally and face his accusers, to see if they can repeat their charges to his face. But he wants to do more than talk; he will see whether these people have any real spiritual power. He gives them a choice in the meantime: clean up your act or prepare for the consequences.

5:1–6:20 Christian Living

Now Paul turns to deal with specific moral lapses, some of which were even worse than what the lost would tolerate.

5:1–13 Purity and discipline

In their worldliness and arrogance, the Corinthians had sunk lower than the surrounding heathen. There was incest in the Congregation, and the people were proud. Paul instructs them to hand the man over to Satan, "for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved". Notice that this was apparently a monogamous, heterosexual, loving couple. The modern argument that love, commitment, and faithfulness can excuse sin is thus refuted (e.g., no one can argue that a homosexual couple should not be expelled if they are loving and faithful). And the backslidden, immature character of the ones throwing out such a person refutes the modern argument that no one can ever be disfellowshipped since we are all sinners.

But what does it mean to expel someone for the purpose of "punishing the flesh"? Many translations render the Greek word *sarkos* (flesh) as "the sinful nature", but this presumes that "flesh" is a metaphor for an old,

dead, spiritual nature believers still retain. Yet the immediate context is clear that the sin being dealt with is very much about the physical body. Elsewhere Paul speaks of sexual sin as “against your own body” (6:18) and many passages relate other sins to the body as well (Rom. 6:6,12, 8:10,13). No one disputes the fact that the saved are continually battling sin; Paul lamented extensively about this very thing in Romans 7, describing it as a battle against “this **body** of death”. Yet none of this proves that “flesh” means we have two spirits within us, not counting the Holy Spirit. Instead, it simply refers to the cravings of our mortal bodies, and as sentient beings we choose daily whether or not to indulge those cravings.

But this is certainly not Gnosticism, such that the body should be treated with either extreme physical deprivation or extreme indulgence, depending on the sect. Some of them say that because the flesh is inherently evil, we should punish it and treat it harshly, while others of them say we should not care what we do with it. Either way, they seem to agree that Jesus could not have come “in the flesh” because of it, which is heresy. Yet mortal though the flesh is, with its continual cravings and pull toward sin, Jesus never gave in to it. He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Satan appealed to Jesus’ physical hunger among other things, a need of the flesh. So while physical bodies pull us toward sin, we are not obligated to let them rule over us (Rom. 6:12).

So what Paul intends is for this separation to motivate the sinner to take control of his flesh and stop allowing it to rule. This will “save” his spirit. Is this to be understood as salvation in the sense of the man being “born again” – again? No, and the context tells us why. Not all instances of saving have to do with being saved from hell. Didn’t Paul just finish illustrating how our deeds will be judged? And this sinner was to be put out of the fellowship, not put out of the Body. Sin among believers can be contagious, so Paul has the man quarantined to protect the other believers. We’ll see in his next letter further evidence that the man was not lost but separated, and eventually restored to fellowship.

So the key difference between the Gnostic view of the flesh and the Biblical view is what we do about it. The Gnostics erroneously thought to try either harsh treatment of the body (Col. 2:23) or indulgence in evil, but we are commanded to resist sin and not let our flesh have its way with us. Only Jesus ever succeeded, but we are obligated to try.

This struggle gives us strength and is one way in which we are forged and purified by God.

Paul also distinguishes between how we deal with believers and unbelievers. Avoiding sin is simply not possible in the world; how else would we permeate the culture as “salt and light”? Instead, Paul clarifies that to not associate with immoral people only refers to within the fellowship of believers. The key here is if they claim to be fellow believers yet indulge in sin. We are not to associate with them in any way. It is inside the fellowship that we must judge, even to the point of throwing people out.

6:1–8 Legal disputes among believers

Now Paul turns to the matter of internal disputes. The Corinthians were suing each other. Paul reminds them that as people who in the coming age would judge the world and also judge angels, they should surely be able to settle trivial matters among themselves. Instead, they were going to secular courts and thereby bringing shame on the fellowship. And the root of the problem was the same as the one behind their bickering about leaders: they were worldly and immature. It would be better to just take being wronged than to go to unbelievers for judgments.

6:9–20 No license to sin

Speaking of doing wrong, Paul reminds them that people who practice such things as a way of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. But does this refer to salvation of the soul or to loss of rewards? The immediate context is not decisive, but we can get some help from Colossians 2:20 which says “Since you died with the Anointed to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules...?” In other words, the Corinthians were saved but were acting like they weren’t, like they did before being saved.

So Paul is not warning them they could lose their salvation, but reprimanding them for acting like unbelievers. Notice he points out that “that is what some of you were”. They were backsliding into their former lifestyles. But Paul reminds them that they had been “washed... sanctified... justified in the name of Master Jesus the Anointed”. And notice that homosexuality is listed as being something “some of you were, but...” Here we have Biblical proof that it is not an inherited trait but a sinful lifestyle, and one that the blood of Jesus can make clean. People can no more justify homosexuality for Christians

than they can justify greed or drunkenness or slander or swindling. By the same token, the swindlers and greedy cannot look down their noses at homosexuals.

Evidently the Corinthians were flaunting their rights and freedoms, not just backsliding. They were proud of their sin and wanted everyone to know. The wording in vs. 13 hints at the Gnostic indulgence idea discussed earlier, but Paul counters with how God views the body as opposed to the Gnostic view. He goes further to reveal that our bodies are “members of the Anointed himself”, and that “you are not your own; you were bought at a steep price”.

We see in this section the word “flesh” again, and this time in reference to Genesis. Many today have the distorted notion that marriage unites people’s spirits, but it doesn’t say that. It says “the two become one **flesh**”. And it is this principle that Paul appeals to as the reason for sexual purity and faithfulness to one’s spouse. Our spirits unite with God, but our bodies unite with each one we are intimate with. This effectively throws the Corinthians’ indulgence theory into the trash.

Notice also that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit”. We have no need of external constructed buildings or shrines or holy places. Jesus said that “where two or three come together on my account, there I am with them” (Mt. 18:20). This means meeting with other believers just because we are believers, for spiritual purposes. Paul has more to say about such meetings elsewhere.

7:1–40 Domestic Issues

Marriage and divorce have always been controversial topics, but we must be careful to understand the context. For example, when Jesus was asked about divorce (Mt. 19:3), there was much more to the question than meets the eye. About the time of Jesus’ birth, a new type of divorce called the Any Cause divorce was invented.¹¹ The phrase in Deuteronomy originally only meant unfaithfulness, but a legal loophole was created by dividing it up into two separate grounds for divorce: unfaithfulness and “a cause”.

A rabbi called Hillel argued: why did God use the phrase “cause of sexual immorality” when he could merely have said “sexual immorality”? The word “cause” must refer to another separate ground for divorce he

¹¹D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, IVP Books, November 30, 2006

decided meant “Any Cause”. But the disciples of Shammai disagreed with this reasoning and said the whole phrase “a cause of sexual immorality” meant exactly what it said: “Sexual Immorality”. (And of course, if God had meant “any cause”, then the other stipulations were redundant too.)

So what Jesus was being asked was very specific: was the Any Cause divorce interpretation legitimate? His answer was clearly No. But at the same time, neither was Jesus making a statement that meant divorce had no legitimate grounds except for marital unfaithfulness. If we study the entirety of the Law, we see that it also included various forms of neglect as well. But remember that this all pertains to Israel; Paul will give more details about this for Christians.

7:1–9 Marriage decisions and rights

Paul now tries to clarify statements he had made earlier which the Corinthians had apparently misunderstood. They had the notion that Paul considered all sex bad. So he explains that what he meant was that marriage puts extra burdens on people that distract them from spiritual things. Yet at the same time, most people cannot accept singleness as Paul could, a condition he called a “gift”. He explains that both husbands and wives must be considerate of each other’s needs and not force abstinence on each other.

7:10–16 Divorce

Paul is not using the singular here as we might today, such as in saying, “A child is not an adult until the age of 21.” Remember that he prefaced this section with the statement that he is addressing questions the Corinthians had asked (7:1), and there are other instances in Paul’s writings where he suddenly switches from the plural to the singular which indicates specific individuals. Here, Paul’s instructions seem too specific to be taken generically; they include no general statements or cover any of the possible situations that can cause marital discord. Note the statements in the preceding sentence about those who “cannot control themselves”, and the preceding paragraph, which talks about “each man” and “each woman”; there is no such grammar for this married couple. And the next paragraph is directed “to the rest”, giving additional weight to his not having addressed all married couples here.

The statement “and this is not from me but from the Master” does not indicate whether what Paul is about to say is divinely inspired or not;

it simply means he had a direct command from Jesus about it. No one would insist that all the rest of the Bible was dictated verbatim by God, but would agree that the Holy Spirit prompted His words to be written through the writer's own personality. So when Paul says he is giving a command from the Master, he was given that command expressly. Otherwise, he simply wrote as he was inspired.

Look closely at vs. 15: there is an important principle given here, which Paul offers as a kind of catch-all for the gray areas. The most important thing in marriage is to live in peace. People tend to take Paul's meaning here backwards. He's not saying "Stick with it in the hope you will save your spouse"; but "Don't keep beating a dead horse". In other words, the emphasis is on the fact that we *don't* know whether the spouse will ever be saved; we can't make it happen. He wants people to show mercy to unbelievers who want to leave, and not live in discord just in case the spouse might someday be saved.

7:17–24 The relative unimportance of social constructs

Believers shouldn't be overly concerned about their past or present situation in life, unless it clearly violates the Christian principles listed earlier ("that is what some of you were"). God never commanded Christians to live in deprivation or isolation from the world. How else would we be "salt and light"?

7:25–40 The unmarried

Some take Paul's statements in vs. 25–35 as being about specific and strict rules on marriage— in spite of what he just finished saying. They also try to use it to justify the custom of parents choosing spouses for their children, as if it were an eternal command. Remember that these letters weren't written in a vacuum. Paul is writing to a particular group of people in a particular cultural setting, a fact that will be even more significant later on the topic of women in the church. This section is simply an elaboration on the earlier statements about the pressures married people face and is really very simple. Paul repeats that people should carefully consider whether to get married, and if they decide to do so, they should follow his guidelines, as he says in vs. 35.

In vs. 36–40 Paul appears to be addressing specific situations there in Corinth, the first being a man who isn't sure whether he should marry, and the second being a woman whose husband is apparently near death.

She needed to know what she should do in that case, especially if she were Jewish and would otherwise be obligated to marry a brother of her husband in order to produce heirs. Paul says that Christian women are not obligated to honor this law, especially if it would mean having to marry an unbeliever.

8:1–11:1 Freedom, rights, and consideration

At this point Paul presents his defense concerning his rights as an apostle. He will build up from a question about food offered to idols to the broader question of how and when Christians should exercise their rights, then back to the original question in light of his argument.

A 8:1–3 Love vs. knowledge and rights

To preface what he is about to say, Paul gives the overarching principle that the humility of love is superior to the conceit of knowledge. What he tells them about meat offered to idols is to be understood in that light.

B 8:4–8 Food and sacrifices

Although everything really comes from God, and what we eat is irrelevant to our spirits, many people said to have a “weak conscience” still think of certain foods being off limits. In spite of our right as believers to eat anything we choose, we need to be considerate of those with a weak conscience when it comes to matters like this that have no bearing on spiritual things. This same principle on how to handle “disputable matters” is covered in more detail in Romans 14.

C 8:9–13 Stumbling blocks

The principle of love will prevent us from hurting others in exercising our rights. Though the “strong” may know that there is nothing wrong with eating such meat, it becomes wrong when flaunted in front of those who might be emboldened to violate their consciences. So the strong must defer to the weak in these cases. Paul has established this principle not only to answer a question put to him, but also in support of the defense he is about to make concerning his being an apostle.

X 9:1–27 Deferring rights out of love**Xa 9:1–18 Paul’s self-defense as an apostle**

Now arriving at the crux of his presentation, Paul expresses his indignation against the false apostles who are criticizing him and his authority. He demands to know why he and Apollos are not allowed the same rights as other believers, such as bringing their spouses along or being financially supported in their journeys. Regarding pay, he appeals to the Law and to his being the Corinthians’ spiritual “father”. Yet although he proves his right to support and respect, he has laid those aside just to keep the people from being burdened.

Xb 9:19–27 Evangelistic strategies

Paul’s point is all about lack of obligation. He is not constrained by any situation, leaving him free to take any needed angle for the purpose of convincing people to accept the Gospel of salvation. It is important to point this out because many take his words to be an acceptance of all religions, known as ecumenism. But nothing could be farther from the truth; Paul was very clear on the need to be intolerant of any compromise of the Gospel. It is Paul who is winning them over to salvation, not them winning him over to their religions.

But even in this, we must not forget basic principles of salvation. This “prize” Paul is referring to is not salvation but reward, as indicated by his reference to qualification. Since salvation is a gift it cannot be earned and we cannot qualify for it. So since Paul is talking about something to qualify for, it must be something other than salvation. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to do more than sit on their salvation, but to strain for the goal by deferring when possible, by being considerate, and by looking for the good of others.

C’ 10:1–14 Stumbling blocks

The first five verses are a backdrop to the point Paul will make next. He just finished discussing the need to “run to win” and the problem of false apostles. Now he is about to issue a warning from history. But note that while it is said that “all of them were immersed into Moses”, they were never literally dunked in water. In fact, God made a point of not allowing it! They were kept dry crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River. So any attempt to tie this passage into some requirement for being immersed in water (baptized) is erroneous. The Israelis were

fully immersed into all this because they experienced it, and it also had spiritual symbolic meaning.

Now Paul plainly states that what happened to Israel in the past was to serve as a warning, and then he lists specific sins including testing the Anointed or even grumbling against him. We must be careful not to get overconfident in our spirituality or standing among other believers. We are always being tempted, but if we just keep our eyes open for the way of escape God provides, we can avoid making the same mistakes as the Israelis.

B' 10:15–22 Food and sacrifices

Back in chapter 8 Paul brought up the matter of food offered to idols, and he pointed out the need for being considerate of those with a weaker conscience. But now he approaches the same subject from another angle: that it is not only individuals we need to consider, but also society. For the sake of their reputation among the lost, Paul recommends that all the believers stay clear of anything that might give society the impression that they have anything to do with idols. He contrasts the food offered to them with the bread and wine used to remember the Master.

It's important to note that this is not an establishing of the ritual known as "communion" either, or calling this ritual a "sacrifice" per the Roman Catholic definition. Paul is simply wanting to make a distinction between idol worship and the Christian gatherings, and he's saying it to the Corinthian believers. He already made it clear that this is all a matter of conscience, and he will go over it again in the following verses.

Some say Paul is contradicting himself here. Before, he said that idols are nothing (repeated here also), such that eating food that had been offered to them in sacrifice is not wrong in itself. But now he says "You cannot eat at the table of the Master and of demons". Note first of all that Paul just finished talking about "partnership" (the accurate meaning of *koinonia*, typically translated "communion"), that is, immersion. So if the eating of food offered to idols is done as part of a ceremony or ritual, that would make it wrong. In other words, to eat such meat along with those who are considering it a sacrifice is wrong, but to eat it when simply sold to anyone in the marketplace is not.

A' 10:23–11:1 Love vs. knowledge and rights

We see it all tied together in 10:31: whatever you do, do it to glorify God. The goal is to get people saved and spiritually matured, not to flaunt our freedom or wave our strong faith in the faces of the weak. This is the point we need to keep in mind as we read all of this. Those who scour these verses for black-and-white rules search in vain. Those who would use these verses as clubs with which to beat down other believers completely miss the intent of the writings.

Just as it would be wrong for an individual to eat meat sacrificed to idols if the person serving it warned them, it would also be wrong for the Christian community to appear to participate in the worship of idols in the eyes of society. We must be considerate of their weak consciences and remember the greater goal of winning them to the Gospel. So in both cases (chapters 8 and 10), Paul is saying that we should not go out of our way to find out where the meat came from, but if anyone has a problem with our eating it, we must abstain. This principle would be the same no matter what the topic or time of history, but we can use this as a guideline. Glorify God instead of self. This has been Paul's example, and the the Christian community would do well to follow it.

11:2–16 Symbolism and propriety in the Congregation

This was an important issue to discuss because of what a head covering symbolized at the time. A Jewish man was to cover his head as a sign of guilt before God, but Jesus took that guilt away for his followers. So for a Christian man to cover his head in worship would be insulting to the sacrifice of Jesus. But for a Christian woman to uncover her head would be a sign of loose morals. What should she do then, especially if her husband were an unbeliever? If she covers she shames Jesus but if she doesn't she shames her husband. This is the backdrop to what Paul will advise.

A 11:2 Keeping the right traditions

Paul begins with the positive: the Corinthians had been following traditions he had given them. But they had a question about head coverings that needed to be clarified.

B 11:3 Origins

The Greek word for “head”, *kephale*, is translated as “head” if it clearly refers to a literal physical head, but as “source” or “head” in quotation marks if the context seems to indicate metaphorical use. In the culture of Paul’s day, it was believed that the body grew out of the head, and thus that the head was the source or origin of the body. They never used “head” as a representation of rule or authority.¹² Notice also the order: source of man, source of woman, source of Anointed. Adam was created first, then Eve, and then the Savior came through her “seed”. More weight is given to this interpretation when Paul writes, “Yet at the same time, the woman represents the dignity of man, because she came from man and was made for him”. If hierarchy had been intended, then certainly the order would be God, then the Anointed, then people.

Paul is known for using plays on words, and we have a prime example here which really doesn’t translate well. If we use “head” people read into it the meaning “boss” but we can get the play on words; if we use “source” people get the proper meaning of “head” but we lose the play on words. The play on words is shown by Paul’s use of head to preface the discussion of head coverings for the Christian women.

X 11:4–10 Head coverings

Although it is uncertain, I believe Paul quotes the Corinthians in vs. 4–6. They are presenting the problem the Christian women were facing, concerning the impossible position this put them in, as already mentioned. To uncover was to indicate loose morals, so they needed to know how to handle this.

Paul responds first by agreeing that men should not cover, which of course would not cause any social problem. But then he reminds them of the reason men should not cover: they represent the dignity (glory) of God. And if one who represents the dignity of another must not cover, then as the dignity of man, women must not cover either. Paul also points out the reason that woman represents man’s dignity: she came from him and was made for him. Note that he makes the statement in the context of dignity— *not* of authority or hierarchy. She was not made for him to be an inferior assistant, but as the Hebrew indicates in Gen. 2:18, a “strong one facing him” (Heb. *ezer kenegdo*, an equal coming

¹²S. Bedale, *The Meaning of kephale in the Pauline Epistles*, Journal of Theological Studies, 5, 1951

to one's aid). (And neither is she somehow not made in God's image as men; representing the dignity of man does not negate her being in the image of God.)

So as the equal of man, being of the same flesh, woman is not to cover her head. For that reason she has the authority (Gk. *exousion*) to decide for herself what to do. This is the first time Paul mentions authority or power or rank, and the woman has it for herself. Neither a man nor the community of believers is to tell her what to do, especially since she is the one who may suffer reprisal over this. Yet Paul also gives a second reason: "because of the Messengers" (the Greek word *angelos* means messenger). What does this mean?

Various theories have been proposed, such as that the angels would be moved to lust at the sight of a woman without a head covering. This is preposterous; such angels would only be moved to lust in a worship setting? And since both men and women can grow long hair (next section), why would this lead to lust? Would the good angels attending such a worship service be moved to lust at all? Clearly this proposal makes no sense at all. Instead, there are two very good possibilities.

One is that Paul mentioned believers judging angels in 1 Cor. 6:3, so he is saying that since women are not excluded from this, then surely they can be trusted to judge on the matter of whether or not to cover their own heads. Another is that it could refer to the practice at the time whereby Rome would send spies or "messengers" into various gatherings in order to report whether rebellion was being taught. Women uncovering their heads in worship would have been seen as subversive. So Paul could be saying, "The women should cover their heads anyway, just for the sake of not getting us accused of sedition." Yet if this were the reason for covering, then surely Paul would have commanded it instead of leaving it up to the women.

B' 11:11-15 Origins

Now back to origins or sources. After talking about dignity and chronological order, Paul reminds the people that everyone comes from God. We are not independent as believers; we are one Body with one Head. If origins or chronology were important, Paul would not have had to point out that ever since Eve, all men have come from women. He is strongly putting the notion of chronology-based hierarchy to rest.

Paul again reprimands the Corinthians for their inability to judge

trivial matters, and what he says here about it is almost always translated backwards. It does **not** say that nature tells us long hair is bad for men but good for women. It says, "Look at nature; both men and women can grow long hair. Nature teaches only that they are the same when it comes to head coverings."

A' 11:16 Not keeping the wrong traditions

Finally, Paul tells them that none of the Assemblies has any such custom about the significance of head coverings. It is clearly not one of Paul's traditions.

11:17–14:40 The Community of Believers

Now Paul turns to matters of concern only among believers, especially questions about spiritual gifts.

11:17–34 Meeting and eating

In contrast to his positive statement about their following his traditions, here Paul reprimands them for something they're doing very badly: meeting together. He begins by addressing their common meals.

Apparently "the Master's supper" was a full meal which included using the wine and bread as a simple way to remember Jesus' sacrifice for them. But the people were turning it into an act of gluttony, ignoring the poor and getting drunk. (Note that this wine was indeed alcoholic.) Instead of honoring the Master, they were shaming him. Paul reminds them of the point of sharing bread and wine. This is not, as the churches have always practiced it, a prescription for ritualistic repeating of Paul's words. There is no command for us to repeat these verses when remembering Jesus. The whole point is all about the heart, about remembrance, about honoring Jesus. Its purpose is to "proclaim the Master's death until he comes".

This is the meaning behind vs. 27 where it talks about people eating and drinking disrespectfully. Note that people are to examine themselves, not face an inquisition from church leaders. God dealt with those who made a mockery of the sacrifice of his Son. Some were sick and others were killed because of this flippant attitude toward God and mistreatment of the poor among them. Remember that Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) were killed for lying to the Holy Spirit. Instead, the people were to avoid God's judgment by judging themselves, and they were to all eat together to make sure nobody went home hungry.

12:1–31 The Holy Spirit and the Body

Paul begins by stating that at the very least we can discern the spirit behind a teaching by how it views Jesus. No one who would curse Jesus could possibly be of God, and no one can honestly call Jesus The Master without having the Holy Spirit. This is more than just saying the words “Jesus is Master”, but instead indicates one’s personal conviction.

It seems most unlikely that Paul intended for these lists of spiritual gifts to be all-encompassing or technical. He seems to be picking out random, off-the-cuff ministries that can be active in the body of believers. This is indicated by his opening statement that it all comes from one Spirit, one source. More importantly, Paul gives the purpose of these spiritual gifts: to build up other believers and serve them. And we are not to say that the Spirit can only give this gift or that, to one person or another, as he will explain next.

Paul gives the analogy of the human body as a means of understanding how the various spiritual gifts fit together. He first emphasizes the fact that it is one Body, one organism, one unit. All the parts are made of the same substance and get their life from one Head. The head is of the same substance as the body though, and cannot live without it. Conversely, the body cannot live without the head. If a part is missing, the body is crippled and not whole. One part cannot say to another, “I don’t need you!”.

It all seems so obvious— until we apply it to what goes on in the typical “church”. One part does indeed say to another, “I don’t need you!”. Believers with one gift will ignore or despise those with other gifts. People will assume that only one “part” has a particular gift. The “pastor” is held up as the only one with discernment and prophecy and vision, ignoring others who may also have these gifts. Surely the Body is hopping on one leg and has one hand tied behind its back!

Paul then points out that our ideas of importance are not God’s. The parts we deem weak or unnecessary may be the most vital, and the ones we think are most important are nothing special. Paul tells us that God did this deliberately, so that no part of the Body would feel superior to another part. We are individual parts of one Body, not identical spokes in a wheel or interchangeable machine components. All parts have equal access to the Head; all are directly a part of the Body and not secondary or inferior parts. Then Paul specifically mentions some

parts that apparently the Corinthians held up as special or prominent. He reminds them that the body of believers is more than its eyes, more than its hands. In fact, he will downplay those gifts assumed to be superior and show them what parts are really the most vital, the “weak” parts.

13:1–13 The greatest quality

This, the “love” chapter, is undoubtedly one of the more familiar passages of scripture in the New Testament. Paul gives a definition of real spiritual love before showing its place in the Body. It is the foundation of all the gifts. But believers seem to forget this, especially when it comes to dealing with each other. Many clamor for having their own way, for making others follow their particular “vision” or goal. But if they truly love others they will not “demand their own way”.

Ignoring the context, many take Paul’s statements about gifts that cease as some kind of doctrinal thesis. He is not saying which (if any) spiritual gifts would cease with the death of the apostles (cessationism). They argue that “that which is complete” means speaking in “tongues” is a thing of the past, by making the New Testament “that which is complete”. But this begs the question; the context simply doesn’t go anywhere near the idea of putting restrictions or time constraints on the Spirit, or identifying exactly what is meant by “that which is complete”. All he seems to be saying is that the gifts are for this life and not heaven.

He has mentioned the problem of immaturity before, and here he seems to present the spiritual gifts as things which are needed until we reach maturity. With that in mind, Paul will now get to the matter of “speaking in tongues” as compared to prophecy.

14:1–25 The greatest gift

With love as both the basis and the ultimate goal, Paul gives the purpose of the gifts: to build up the Body. This lengthy chapter begins with a discussion of “speaking in tongues”. There is disagreement among scholars over whether these “tongues” or languages are real human languages that the speaker has not learned, or the languages of angels, or possibly a “Holy Spirit” language. Whatever they are, they are of supernatural origin.

In this section, Paul stresses the importance of mental understanding as opposed to only an experience. The purpose of all the spiritual gifts is to build up the church, not to just be absorbed by individuals. Without

interpretation there is no understanding, and without understanding there is no building up of the church. Self-improvement is fine but it must include other-improvement as well.

With another quick reference to the Corinthians' lack of maturity, Paul explains that these languages are a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy is for believers. What sign is this? Possibly just to indicate to unbelievers the presence of God among the believers. It's possible that miraculous signs of any kind are more prevalent when there is either little access to the written scriptures or when the unbelievers are spiritually blinded to the point that the words alone cannot get through. Jesus had said that "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!" (Mt. 12:39), giving further weight to this. In general, miracles seem to accompany times when God is about to do something new, a change in the way he deals with mankind, or to signify an important event. So Paul is telling them that sign gifts are not of primary importance in the church, and in fact are relatively useless. Many churches today would do well to realize this.

14:26–40 Order in the meetings

In all the New Testament, very little is said about how, when, and where believers should assemble together. Along with Jesus' statement that "you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23), we have to conclude that the practices of churches throughout history have born little resemblance to anything found in the NT. Conspicuous by their absence are the ideas of special buildings, pulpits, altars, or a clergy class ruling over a passive laity in a perpetual parent/child relationship. Neither do we see any hint of a human or mystical "covering", which actually usurps the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer.

In contrast, as we see here, the Christian gatherings were meetings where everyone participated and used their various spiritual gifts. The spiritually mature were to guide and teach the less mature, and prophets would give revelations from God. But Paul is not actually praising them here for their participation in the meetings; he is reprimanding them for the chaotic manner in which they did so. There is to be order in the meetings, but not an order born of ritual or liturgy. Both stilted ritualism and chaos are harmful extremes.

Is every pastor a prophet? Yet we treat them as though they are, frequently saying “Let us hear what message the Master has laid on the pastor’s heart for us today”. That’s prophecy. Yet these alleged prophetic messages from God are really the act of teaching and expounding the scriptures, the result of hours of preparation and research. There’s nothing wrong with that at all, but we cannot call it prophecy or assume that every sermon is a revelation from God. And where do we get the idea of sermons anyway? Historically, they have more in common with the ancient Greek and Roman orators than with anything in the Bible. “Pastor” is a spiritual gift, not an office, and no one is ever designated as a perpetual speaker in the Christian gatherings.

Notice that the prophets were to take turns. (There is some question about who exactly is discerning or weighing what the prophets say. Are they other prophets only, or all the people, or any spiritually-mature person? Most translations don’t specify it, but some lean toward the others being prophets.) This assumes that there were several in the Congregation, and that their speaking was impromptu as opposed to the typical Sunday sermon with its alliterated 3-point outline. Speaking of which, there is nothing in the New Testament to specify a particular day for these meetings. Nothing is ever said about a certain day of worship being a prescribed practice for believers of all time regarding their gatherings. There is also no mention of a formal membership list, committees, trustees, etc. Those have more to do with corporations than families.

Remembering the immediate context of order in the meetings, we come to a very controversial passage beginning in vs. 34. But first note that this discussion of order is repeated at the end (vs. 39–40); the intervening discussion could be lifted out without breaking the flow. In fact, because of this, some scholars believe it was either added by later scribes or belongs at the end of chapter 14 instead of where it is. But it will be treated here as a legitimate part of Paul’s letter, and in the place it appears.

There are no quote marks in Greek, but quoted material is often ended with the word *He* and is typically translated as “or”, if it is translated at all. We see this word twice in verse 36, and we can tell by the preceding content that Paul is quoting someone else. As just stated, the passage starting in verse 34 and ending with 38 is clearly out of the flow of the discussion about order in the meetings. So we have good

indications of both the beginning and ending of the quoted material.

Verses 34 and 35 are the words Paul is quoting. We see “the law” mentioned, yet there is no such statement about women being silent in any of the Old Testament laws; it is in fact seen in the Jewish Talmud.¹³ Even if there had been such a law in the Torah, this is the same Paul who wrote passionately against believers staying under the law in his letter to the Galatians. It also contradicts what Paul wrote elsewhere about women being allowed to prophesy in the meetings. Remember that Paul put forth a lot of effort fighting against the Jews who wanted Christians to submit to circumcision and other requirements of the old law, so it is highly unlikely that he would turn around and appeal to it here.

Paul strongly opposed the silencing of women in the churches. This view is also consistent with his other statements about the prophesying of women in the congregation. Some interpret Paul’s rebuttal as being aimed at an *anticipated objection* instead of a quote from the Corinthians. But there is nothing in the rebuttal to indicate this, no such words as “someone will object”; see 15:35 for example.

15:1–15:58 The Gospel

Paul is about to address the Corinthians’ question concerning the resurrection of the dead, but he prefaces it with a definition of the Gospel.

15:1–10 Evidence for the Gospel

He begins with a statement that some take as meaning salvation can be lost. But it can easily be understood as referring to a misplaced faith, one that was never genuine to begin with. That is why Paul repeats what he had told them earlier, the Gospel itself. Had someone already been genuinely saved, they would already know the Gospel. (And if we take Heb. 6 as saying it can be lost once but never regained, then there would be no point in repeating the Gospel for that reason either.)

Notice four critical components of the Gospel: (1) Jesus died for our sins as prophesied, (2) Jesus was buried, (3) Jesus rose again the third day as prophesied, and (4) there were credible witnesses to these things. Our faith is based upon prophecy and eye-witness account, in the death and resurrection of Jesus who paid for all sin, once and for all (Heb. 7:27). Paul himself was a witness to the risen Jesus, and in a very unique way. So the fact of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is well-established, and

¹³Berachot, *Basics of Tznius*

now Paul will build upon that foundation.

15:11–49 Implications of the Gospel

The Corinthians seemed to have forgotten their beginnings, their reasons for meeting together. Yet resurrection from the dead is absolutely critical to the faith.

15:11–19 Resurrection

Without there being a resurrection of the dead, not even Jesus was raised, and our faith is useless and without purpose. And all who preach the Gospel are then labeled as false witnesses. If our faith is only for this life, then Christians are to be pitied for following a false hope. These are the logical conclusions to disbelief in resurrection. So if the Corinthians had truly believed in the risen Jesus, then they had to also believe in the resurrection of the dead.

15:20–28 Death and life

Now Paul explains why we die at all: sin. It came through one person, Adam (note that Eve is never mentioned here at all). We all die because of him, and Jesus is held up as the direct opposite, the One who would bring life. That the death spoken of here must be physical is based upon the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection were physical, or we'd have to attribute spiritual death to him, which is impossible. Yet Jesus' immortal resurrected body is the "firstfruit", the beginning. The rest of us do not yet have our new immortal bodies but we will surely get them at the right time. And then Death itself will finally be defeated. Again, this must be physical death, because the spiritually dead will remain so forever once this life is over.

15:29–34 Immersion (baptism)

The controversial statements here are in the context of Paul's argument for physical resurrection and how the Corinthians were not being consistent with their faith in Jesus. So it seems that Paul is addressing yet another one of those inconsistencies. Beyond that is pure speculation, and certainly not an endorsement of rituals for the dead. Paul then expresses his frustration with the Corinthians by saying, "If there's no resurrection, then who cares about anything? Just enjoy yourselves"—followed by a rebuke and warning for them to wake up.

15:35–49 Old and new bodies

We can almost see Paul putting his head in his hands and weeping as he ponders their ignorant question, “What kind of body will the raised have?” After telling them what a stupid question this is, Paul patiently teaches them to look around at the obvious. The “planted” body is completely unlike the “raised” body, as anyone should know. Seeds are not at all what they will grow into once planted. But they must be planted in order to change; they must “die” before they can “live” again.

Paul describes the raised human body as a “spiritual body” that bears the image of Jesus (vs. 49). This new body cannot see corruption as the physical one does, and it will not have “flesh and blood”. And just as we have all shared in the corrupt flesh of Adam, so also we who believe will all share in the immortal body of Jesus.

15:50–58 Our ultimate hope

Then Paul introduces a new “secret”: not everyone will have to experience physical death! In an instant, we will be changed from the mortal to the immortal. First the bodies of the dead will be raised in immortal form, and then we who are still alive will be changed. Paul will have more to say about the timing of this glorious event in his letters to the Thessalonians. All he says here is that it will be “at the last trumpet”, but there is great controversy over exactly what that means. Whenever that happens, then the scripture will be fulfilled that the “sting of death” will be no more.

16:1–9 Believers helping each other

The Corinthians had asked Paul questions about a collection for “the Master’s people”, and he responds that they should follow what the Galatians did and set aside funds on “the first of Sabbaths”, according to how they have prospered. Many take this to be an endorsement of the Christian “tithing” and Sunday worship, but does the context support that?

No. First of all, we see that this was a specific collection for the believers in Jerusalem, not something that was practiced continually for all believers. “First of Sabbaths” refers to the day of the wave offering, which is the first day of the week after Passover and the start of marking off 7 weeks until Pentecost (see verse 8). Second, it was to be freely given, not a kind of legalistic tax. In addition, it was to be done in proportion to one’s prosperity or increase. As long as your expenses

meet or exceed your income, you are not increasing. This was not a way to make some believers comfortable at others' expense (2 Cor. 8:13). And there is no indication in the text to support Sunday worship. Nothing is said about corporate worship at all; it only speaks of individuals ("each one of you"), and no mention is made of an "offering plate" or official place to bring these gifts as they were being collected. There is no mention of any group or individual or place that could be considered the equivalent of the Old Testament "storehouse" or altar.

16:10–18 Personal recommendations

Paul orders the Corinthians to respect his emissary Timothy, who we can surmise may not have otherwise received such respect due to his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Others are to be respected as well, and again the foundational quality of love is emphasized.

16:19–24 Greetings

Finally, Paul sends along greetings from others, especially the group meeting in the home of Prisca and Aquila. And to guard against the threat of forgery, Paul makes sure to include a greeting in his own handwriting. Note the curse upon foes of Jesus, whom Paul hopes will return soon. We can be assured that these whom Paul would curse are those who have hardened their hearts against the Gospel.

To The Corinthians 2

Background

The second letter to the Corinthians was written by Paul the same year as the first, around 55 AD. We know from 2 Cor. 2:13 and 7:5 that it was written from Macedonia. The main topic is about Paul establishing his credentials as having authority from Jesus, against accusers among the Corinthians. Paul will state clearly that his authority is not to command but to build up. That is, no one could claim better or closer faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus.

Outline

1. **1:1–14** Greetings
2. **1:15–2:3** Defense of Paul's change of itinerary
3. **2:4–11** Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship
4. **2:12–17** Missionaries and motivation
5. **3:1–6** Establishing credentials
6. **3:7–18** The veil covering Jewish minds
7. **4:1–5:4** Perseverance, boldness, and hope
8. **5:5–10** Faith, sight, and courage
9. **5:11–13** Defending credentials
10. **5:14–6:2** Reconciliation
11. **6:3–10** Added credentials
12. **6:11–7:4a** Purity and reconciliation
 - (a) **A 6:11–13** Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
 - (b) **–X 6:14–18** Unequally joined
 - (c) **A' 7:1–4a** Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
13. **7:4b–16** Godly sorrow and comfort

14. **8:1–15** Following an example of generosity
15. **8:16–24** Trustworthiness
16. **9:1–15** Living up to a good reputation
17. **10:1–12:13** False missionaries
 - (a) **10:1–11** A warning to Paul's opponents
 - (b) **10:12–11:30** A challenge to Paul's opponents
 - (c) **11:31–12:10** Only Jesus is worthy of boasting
 - (d) **12:11–13** A comparison to Paul's opponents
18. **12:14–13:4** Three witnesses
19. **13:5–10** Test yourselves
20. **13:11–14** Greetings and final warnings

1:1–14 Greetings

As with his first letter, Paul begins with the positive. He explains that the things we suffer are partially to make us sympathetic with others who suffer and to show them how we get through it. This is good to remember whenever we start thinking Christians aren't supposed to suffer, or that being saved means a life of ease. Paul uses his own experiences as an example of this principle. The Corinthians had been generous with both monetary gifts and prayers.

1:15–2:3 Defense of Paul's change of itinerary

Then Paul explains that he had intended to visit them previously but was unable. For this "crime" he was accused of not being reliable or honest. He appeals to their memory of his original presentation of the Gospel to them, which he did clearly and without confusion. This should dispel any accusations about his intentions.

The "how" and "why" of the security of the believer is stated in 1:22. We have been sealed and given the Holy Spirit as a down payment on what is to come. Both of these are legal terms: a seal is an official stamp of authenticity, and a down payment is a guarantee of the eventual completion of a transaction. So every true believer is stamped with the Seal of God, and has a Deposit to guarantee our inheritance, which is

eternal life in heaven. Neither of these things depend upon us or have any kind of escape clause. We are not at liberty to revoke either. Remember that Paul had earlier spoken of how we will have our deeds tested, and here he gives further assurance that our deeds have nothing to do with our salvation, but only our rewards.

Paul says that he and other leaders did not consider themselves masters but co-workers. Many think that authority among believers is all about domination and control, but instead it is about people of varying gifts serving each other. He then explains that he had sent the earlier harsh letter for the purpose of showing how much he cared about them, and that he had no pleasure in having to write such a letter.

2:4–11 Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship

When Paul uses the singular (someone, a person, a woman) he means a specific individual. There is good support for this also in light of the fact that when Paul discusses a false teacher he names names, but a deceived or ignorant person doesn't get named. This section seems to be addressing the situation of the man practicing incest that Paul had written about before. He is telling the Corinthians to now restore this repentant man publicly, since he had paid the due penalty for his sin and turned away from it. The devil would have loved nothing more than for this healing believer to be crushed and defeated, and for the others to be hard and proud.

2:12–17 Missionaries and motivation

After briefly mentioning his short visit to Troas, Paul gives an analogy of the believers' effect on the world which parallels that of Jesus' "salt and light" analogy. We are described as "smelling like God". To those who are open to the Gospel we are a sweet aroma of life, but to those who are not we are the stench of death. This is good to remember when we witness, since by their reaction to this "smell" we have some idea of whether the lost person is open or not to hearing the Gospel. Further, he points out that we are to be sincere in our witnessing, not following the worldly model of marketing.

The idea of marketing the Gospel is a great blight on the churches today. Everything is packaged to sell to the masses and appeal to the emotions. The emphasis is on the experience, on the here and now, instead of on Jesus and his sacrifice for us. We have lost our "scent",

our saltiness, our light. People are no longer able to “smell God” in us, so they don’t react with revulsion even if they are not open to the true Gospel.

3:1–6 Establishing credentials

Apparently some at Corinth were demanding that Paul produce some credentials to prove his teaching authority. But he reminds them that they themselves are his “letter of recommendation”, one written by God. Everything comes from him, not any human, and the old ways are gone. We are under a new contract or Testament that brings life, as opposed to the old Law that brought death. Yet if even the old Law was to be honored, then the honor due the New Testament must be far greater. Paul is trying to express how much superior the new ways are to the old, and he uses it to explain his boldness in speech.

3:7–18 The veil covering Jewish minds

Paul makes the statement that the minds of people are still veiled whenever Moses is read, and some take that to mean they are incapable of accepting the Gospel message. But that notion is demolished in the very next statement: when someone turns to the Master, the veil is removed. Fatalism¹⁴ would say it exactly backwards: when the veil is removed, someone turns to the Master.

4:1–5:4 Perseverance, boldness, and hope

Paul again testifies to his motives and innocence in declaring the truth to them. But then he refers again to “veiling” and talks about unbelievers being blinded by “the god of this age”. Some would take this to mean that the devil overrides a person’s will so they cannot respond to the Gospel. But if this were true, Paul would be contradicting himself. The key is found in Romans 1, where we see that God only “gave them over” to depravity after they suppressed the truth (vs. 18). These people had known God but rejected him (vs. 21). Clearly, the Paul that wrote those words would not tell a different story to the Corinthians.

He again points out that it is not he or his fellow workers but Jesus that is being preached. The same One who said “Let there be light” was shedding light in their minds. Yet this amazing light is held in common pottery so to speak, mere mortals. As such, we are under constant

¹⁴Fatalism: the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable; Calvinism is a form of fatalism in Christianity.

pressure but we must endure it and be found faithful. But of course our strength comes only from God, not ourselves.

As further encouragement, Paul tells them that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us up too. Outwardly we appear to be wasting away, but inwardly we keep getting renewed. We keep our eyes fixed on the goal, on things we cannot yet see, which are the only things that last. We live in this “earthly house” temporarily, to be replaced by an “everlasting house”; we groan in our mortal bodies as we wait for our spiritual ones.

5:5–10 Faith, sight, and courage

Paul makes the comment he has made elsewhere: we have the Spirit as a down payment for our immortal bodies; it is guaranteed. This gives us confidence, the assurance of our hope in the Master. But of course this hope is no license to sin; Paul has made that very clear in his writings. Yet neither is it right to constantly doubt our salvation, as this would be a lack of faith in the power of God to keep us safe (see 1 Peter 1:5).

Another point in this passage is that to be away from the body is to be at home with the Master. This contradicts the idea of “soul sleep”, which argues that when a believer dies they enter into an unconscious state until resurrected. There is no hint of any time gap between the two events (death and heaven), seeing that they are even written in the same sentence. Who looks forward to eons of sleep? There is no comfort in being in the Master’s presence if we are unaware of it.

5:11–13 Defending credentials

Once again, Paul has to defend his motives and actions against the false teachers. He appeals to the Corinthians’ personal experience with him and the fact that his motives should be obvious. What matters is what is in the heart.

5:14–6:2 Reconciliation

Paul writes once more against any idea of a license to sin, that we should no longer live for ourselves. We are a new creation that seeks to please the One who died for us. An important statement about what exactly Jesus did for us is brought out here: that he reconciled (restored to friendship) the world to God. This is the Gospel message we are to be spreading. We are ambassadors on Jesus’ behalf. He reconciled the world, so that all anyone has to do to be saved is accept Jesus and what

he did.

But this is not Universalism,¹⁵ which doesn't distinguish between reconciliation and salvation. What Jesus did was to reverse the separation between God and man that Adam caused, making salvation by faith possible (and "legal" concerning God's holiness). The difference between a person's spending eternity in either heaven or hell is based solely on faith in the risen Jesus, not on our deeds. So "judgment day" is not about salvation, but about payment for wages earned. John 3:18 says, "Whoever *believes* in him is *not condemned*, but whoever *does not believe* stands *condemned already* because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

So the whole world was reconciled with God by Jesus' sacrifice, and now we are to spread this Gospel to everyone, showing them that they can have salvation just by trusting in the Jesus who died for them and rose again. Reconciliation involves two parties, so even though God did his part in this, we still have to accept it to make the reconciliation complete. Those who are not reconciled to God have only themselves to blame. After explaining the Gospel message, Paul once again implores the believers to not receive God's favor in vain but to "walk the walk", to live like salvation matters.

6:3–10 Added credentials

Again Paul gives his credentials, listing the ways in which he and others have given themselves to the spreading of the Gospel. He shows by personal example the proper Christian life, and the perseverance required in the face of opposition. He contrasts appearances and outward treatment with the inner strength and purity of those who are truly disciples.

6:11–7:4a Purity and reconciliation

A 6:11–13 Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him

He appeals to the Corinthians to observe his openness and honesty. Any problems between them and him are laid at their feet, so he challenges them to return his openness.

¹⁵Universalism: the belief that all who ever lived will eventually be allowed into heaven.

X 6:14–18 Unequally joined

Next is the famous passage about being in partnership with unbelievers (trad. “unequally yoked”). This is not between spouses of varying ethnicity or skin color, as has been popularly supposed, but between believers and unbelievers. Marriage isn’t even in view here. The language Paul uses is clearly about good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan. He appeals to their knowledge of the old Law for the need to be separate from all evil.

A’ 7:1–4a Paul’s plea for them to reconcile with him

Paul continues to implore the Corinthians to open up to him and stop the false accusations. He has done nothing to deserve their suspicion of his motives, since he has in fact bragged about them to others.

7:4b–16 Godly sorrow and comfort

Paul regrets having had to grieve them over various issues, but at the same time he is convinced it was necessary. It fulfilled its purpose of changing the people’s minds about their wrong attitudes.

8:1–15 Following an example of generosity

Paul abruptly changes to the subject of charity among believers of differing locations. He stresses that such giving cannot be coerced, demanded, or forced, but must be free and voluntary. Verses 8-9 make it even clearer that this is not any kind of divine command.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians is that they must follow through on their prior actions when it comes to giving; they must not only talk about it but do what they said they’d do. Notice that this is not to be a case of “giving beyond your means” as the popular saying goes, but from what we can afford. Many preachers like to insist that a Christian can’t really give until they have first “tithed”, and they lay a burden of guilt on any who disagree. But this flies in the face of what the Bible actually says to believers. God looks on the heart, not the bank account.

Further emphasis on the nature of true giving is spelled out for us: Giving is not so others will have relief while you will have hardship, but to produce equality. We give to those who are in need until they are back on their feet, and then if the tables are later turned, those who are then in need can expect help from others.

Notice also that there is no mention here of giving to “the Master’s

work” or buying a building or paying salaries or anything else tradition has invented. This is about people with means helping people without means, and it only goes one way until the situation is remedied. It is not a perpetual, planned, legalistic obligation at all. When preachers try to shame people into “giving”, they remove any possibility of it being done Biblically, since paying out of fear or guilt is the wrong motivation.

8:16–24 Trustworthiness

Brief mention is made of Titus, whom Paul recommends to them and encourages them to respect. There is speculation that the unnamed believer traveling with him may be Onesimus who is mentioned in Philemon, but we really don’t know. But above all, Paul wants everything to be done with the utmost integrity, especially concerning the handling of money.

9:1–15 Living up to a good reputation

Paul continues with strongly encouraging the Corinthians to follow through on their intention to give generously, recommending that they don’t wait till the last minute to collect the money. Paul has stuck his neck out in boasting about them, so he doesn’t want to look like a liar if they don’t put their words into action.

Again, he makes it clear that any real giving is a matter of personal conscience, because “God loves a cheerful giver”. We can’t give cheerfully when we have fear or guilt. It is God, not any preacher, who will prompt the people’s hearts to give as he wills. Then as further incentive he reminds them of the Gift of Life they received.

10:1–12:13 False missionaries

Now we come to a lengthy passage in which Paul expresses his exasperation with the Corinthians regarding his standing as an Ambassador or missionary (trad. apostle, a transliteration of the Greek word for someone sent out on a mission).

10:1–11 A warning to Paul’s opponents

Paul would much prefer to be gentle with the Corinthians, but he warns them that if he has to he will be more than the “paper tiger” he is accused of being. Of course he was meek in person, not wanting to draw attention to himself but to Jesus. But now, since they’ve been asking for it, he intends to take the gloves off at his next visit.

Some take Paul's military analogy here as a sanction for the occult practice of ritual exorcism, all based on the phrase "pull down strongholds". Specifically, they think we actually have to go to a "demonic" area and pray and do certain things to drive the demons away, and they go from city to city performing rituals. Yet nobody ever seems to notice that nothing changes; evil marches on. And there is no Biblical precedent for this. Instead, the context indicates an internal struggle, the one even Paul expressed frustration with in Romans 7.

10:12–11:30 A challenge to Paul's opponents

If the Corinthians thought they belonged to Jesus, then certainly Paul could more easily make that claim. Yet the false teachers were apparently not only challenging his authority, but his very salvation. But he tells them where the line is drawn when it comes to boasting. And it is not their approval but the Master's that really matters.

Now Paul launches a long rant about the Corinthians' amazingly easy acceptance of any teacher that comes along while at the same time rejecting Paul and the others. They are easy prey for smooth talkers. With much sarcasm he tells them he was not like that, being humble and honest, but maybe he should have been harsh and domineering like these "super apostles". And this is where we see the well-known statement that Satan pretends to be a "messenger of light". The churches have pretty much forgotten this, following any and all who tickle their ears. Then Paul reluctantly lists the things he has suffered for the Gospel, and dares the false teachers to match his dedication in the face of hardship. If these things are seen as a weakness, then Paul is glad, because it honors the Master.

11:31–12:10 Only Jesus is worthy of boasting

Here Paul gives his account of having been taken up to heaven to receive visions and revelations from the Master. Although he speaks of this in the third person, it seems obvious that he is really speaking about himself. He and the apostle John are the only two mentioned in the NT as having either gone into heaven or having seen a vision of heaven. But unlike John, and unlike many today who claim to have made multiple visits to heaven, Paul was not permitted to tell what he heard or saw there. It's possible, but of course not known for sure, that this is when he was given the "secret" of the community of believers, which is salvation by faith

alone as the hallmark of what we call the “church age”.

Next he tells of his “burr in the flesh”, another controversy. But the main point is that the purpose of this was to keep him humble after his visions (another hint that he was speaking of himself). There is debate about the nature of this irritation or suffering, over whether this was an actual physical infirmity or a spiritual harassment. Support for the spiritual view is from Paul calling it a “messenger of the Enemy”, while support for it being physical is by virtue of the word “flesh” and also his statement in Gal. 4:15 about them being willing to give their own eyes to him. Another possibility is that Paul is referring to the pagan practice of spitting three times to ward off a spell cast by “the evil eye”, making his reference to the Galatians’ willingness to “gouge out their own eyes” a play on words. Yet on the other hand, we remember that during his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind for three days, so it could also refer to a literal eye problem.

12:11-13 A comparison to Paul’s opponents

Paul sarcastically asks the Corinthians’ forgiveness for not being a burden to them like the false teachers, and for doing all those miraculous signs among them. In spite of miracles they still listened to those who challenged his right to speak with authority.

12:14–13:4 Three witnesses

Twice in this passage Paul establishes the testimony of three witnesses in his lengthy defense. The Corinthians had accused Paul of treachery and deceit, yet he assures them that he will not change the way he relates to them, but will continue to live the example of a faithful servant of God. He wants to build them up, not tear them down, in spite of how they have treated him. Yet if he must, he will not come in humility the next time, but in boldness. He will give them the proof they demand that Jesus does indeed speak through him.

13:5–10 Test yourselves

Paul warns them to test themselves before he comes, so he won’t have to make himself treat them harshly after all. He challenges them to make sure first of all that they are really saved.

13:11–14 Greetings and final warnings

And as was his custom, Paul ends the letter with a final plea for them to mend their ways, and a blessing.

To The Galatians

Background

The letter to the Galatians was written by Paul around 48 AD. It is the first letter he wrote, soon after returning from the areas noted in Acts 13 and 14. The central theme is salvation by faith alone, nothing added nor removed. He writes also in defense of his authority to combat the legalists.

Outline

1. **A 1:1–5** Greetings
2. **–B 1:6–9** A different Gospel
3. **—C 1:10–12** Paul's motives
4. **——D** Reminders
 - (a) **1:13–2:10** Paul's actions and history
 - (b) **2:11–14** Paul confronts Peter
5. **———E 2:15–2:21** Justified by faith alone
6. **————F 3:1–5** What happened to you?
7. **—————G** Law
 - (a) **3:6–14** Abraham, faith, and law
 - (b) **3:15–18** Examples from law
 - (c) **3:19–4:7** The purpose of law
8. **—————X** True or false
 - (a) **4:8–11** Turning back to fake gods
 - (b) **4:12–16** The crime of telling the truth
9. **—————G'** Law
 - (a) **4:17–20** Ulterior motives of the legalists
 - (b) **4:21–5:1** An allegory about slavery to law

(c) **5:2–6** The limits of law10. ———**F' 5:7–12** What happened to you?11. ———**E' 5:13–26** Freedom vs. license12. ———**D'** Reminders(a) **6:1–6** Individual and collective responsibility(b) **6:7–10** Harvesting what we plant13. ———**C' 6:11–13** The critics' motives14. ———**B' 6:14–17** The true Gospel15. **A' 6:18** Greetings**A 1:1–5 Greetings**

Paul begins by giving some of his credentials as a hand-picked Ambassador of Jesus. He also includes greetings from others with him and praises God for the sacrifice Jesus made to rescue us all from “this evil age”.

B 1:6–9 A different Gospel

No sooner is the greeting given than he confronts the Galatians over their amazingly quick abandonment of the true Gospel of grace for a different “Gospel”, one which would again enslave them to a religion of salvation by good deeds. He strongly condemns any who preach such a distorted Gospel and rob believers of their freedom.

C 1:10–12 Paul's motives

Paul is apparently responding to charges that he was only after people's approval, but he reminds them of the fact that he got the Gospel directly by revelation from Jesus Himself, not from anyone else, not even the other Ambassadors before him. And of course he would not be persecuted if he were only acting on human impulse.

D 1:13–2:14 Reminders**1:13–2:10 Paul's actions and history**

He relates how formerly he had been Christianity's bitterest enemy, hounding and persecuting the believers, even having some put to death, thinking he was just being a good Jew (actually, an outstanding Jew, as he

had surpassed his peers among the Pharisees). He was stopped cold by Jesus, after which he went away alone for three years. Only then did he meet with the others in Jerusalem, where he was acknowledged by the church leaders as having received a commission from God. He presents this as his sworn testimony and not just idle talk. This approval by the leaders refutes the claim some make today that Paul was subverting the faith; some even go so far as to say Paul was the Antichrist warned of by John, since he fought against putting Christians under the Law. Yet not one of the acknowledged disciples trained directly by Jesus ever named Paul as a fake or deceiver.

A mere fourteen years later, the church was already being infiltrated by “false believers” who were trying to enslave the true believers with laws and rules. He went to Jerusalem very cautiously, to test the openness of the current leaders to what Jesus had commissioned him to do. Their reputations, even as hand-picked disciples of Jesus, were of no concern to Paul. No one was to be judged on the basis of credentials but only on the Gospel alone. He cites James, Peter, and John as the top leaders, who then accepted Paul as having the same authority as they had to speak for Jesus.

2:11–14 Paul confronts Peter

By this time Paul’s authority had been recognized by all the believers, as shown in the confrontation with Peter over this issue. Peter had allowed the pressure of the false teachers to cause him to slide back into Jewish legalism, and Paul had to *publicly* rebuke him. This is significant on two levels: Paul had the authority to rebuke an Ambassador that had been with Jesus during his time as a human, and the rebuke was public, something that is not tolerated in churches today.

E 2:15–2:21 Justified by faith alone

The Law could never justify anyone but only condemn them. It told them what sin was and that they were not perfect in the sight of God. So salvation can only come by faith, and that faith must be in Jesus. The fact that we still struggle with sin, however, in no way condones sin or associates it with salvation. The Jewish Christians had died to the law; their relationship with it was broken. Therefore they, and all of us, died to the ways of sin and to offending God. Our lives are wrapped up in his, so that we must turn from the old kingdom to the new. Besides, if

law could save people, then there would have been no purpose for Jesus to come and die for us.

Of course, Paul is not saying we lose our identity or personality and become “absorbed” into Jesus, as some religions teach, but that we are to walk in step with Jesus and his will.

F 3:1–5 What happened to you?

Paul cannot fathom why people would prefer to try and earn that which is available for free. He asks them rhetorically how they were saved in the first place, and how they received the Holy Spirit. Law had nothing whatsoever to do with it.

G 3:6–4:7 Law

3:6–14 Abraham, faith, and law

The Gospel is all about faith, not works. Abraham was not credited with righteousness by anything he did, but only by his faith in God’s promise to him. And it is this same faith by which all nations would be blessed in Abraham.

In contrast, as he continues his grilling of the Galatians over their desire to work for that which is freely offered, Paul goes on to explain that if anyone wants to keep the law they have to keep *all* of it. But many Christians say, “You don’t have to make animal sacrifices, but you must keep the Sabbath (and whatever else I personally feel everyone should do)”. This attempt to mix the old and the new is exactly what Jesus said was impossible, with the illustration of the wineskins (see Luke 5:33–39). He redeemed the Jews from the Law, and Gentiles were never under it at all.

3:15–18 Examples from law

Illustrations are a good way to explain principles, and here Paul uses their knowledge of ordinary laws, especially a Last Will and Testament. God had made a unilateral promise to Abraham, specifically to a particular Descendant of his, the Anointed. It could not be affected by any other contracts. So the law that came 430 years later was not at all related to that promise, and it therefore did not nullify or replace it; inheritance can only come by a Will or promise.

3:19–4:7 The purpose of law

So if the law does not save, what good is it? Paul explains that it served as a guide, to bring people to the point where they could inherit the estate. It was a contract between two parties, not a will made by one; there is no need of any mediator for a Will. Therefore a sharp line is drawn between law and promise.

It is in this particular context about the divide between law and promise that Paul writes the statement, “There is no Judean or Greek, no slave or free, not even male and female, for you are all one, united with Anointed Jesus.” To be united with Jesus is to be united in his death to the law; the testator has died and the guidance of the old law is no longer in effect. That would be the only way out of the old contract. Otherwise they’d still be under it, even though they have the Promise, because the Promise could never affect the contract. So that is why Jesus had to die, and why only those who are united with him have also died to the old law. And only those with faith in him and his resurrected life are thereby part of the Descendant and thus heirs of the Promise.

Yet some people want echoes of the law to persist: hierarchy, clergy, altars, sacrifices, and rituals. They want to impose the Jewish tithe, to call the church building or organization “the storehouse”, to put us into bondage. That is the whole reason Paul is writing to the Galatians: to put all such nonsense away. We are now one in Jesus (3:28) and there is no more hierarchy, no more privilege, no more of the old ways.

For Paul who was a Pharisee, his choice of words in 3:28 is most forceful. There was a rabbinical prayer, “Thank God that I was not born a gentile, a slave, or a woman!”¹⁶ He dismisses each and every one of those boasts in order, as well as showing that the law does not apply to those who are united with Jesus. Sadly, while Christianity quickly accepted the equality of Jew and Gentile, and reluctantly conceded that there should also be no slavery, it still clings to a hierarchy between male and female, along with one between an imaginary clergy and laity. Our unity is in Jesus, not in society or biology.

Verse 28 is *not* about how people are to be saved. Through verse 25 Paul has been discussing salvation as freedom from the old law, and in verse 26 he begins to explain the condition of people who are already “children of God”. This is repeated in 4:6 as well. The whole passage is for

¹⁶Menahoth, *Mishpocha*

the purpose of building a case against those who had already accepted the Gospel turning back to the law, not instructing people how to be saved.

So by faith we are all heirs of the promise made to Abraham, a promise outside of law and thus unaffected by it. We are not minors under a guide. Jesus died “at the time set by his Father” to make believing Jews all dead to the law and inheritors of the estate. Slaves do not call their owner “father” but only “master”, so the fact that we can call God our Father is another indication of our having inherited eternal life, and of Jews having been freed from the law. And such a condition is irreversible; Jesus cannot repeatedly die in order to repeatedly free us, which also would require that the old contract is repeatedly reinstated. Salvation is all about adoption and inheritance, not legal performance regarding a contract that is no longer in effect for the Jews.

X 4:8–16 True or false

This is the crux of the whole letter: the Galatians’ turning away from the Gospel and back toward fake gods and old laws. Paul has built up to this point from the basics of salvation and examples of how laws and contracts and unilateral promises work.

4:8–11 Turning back to fake gods

Paul asks the Galatians how they can want to turn from this freedom he’s been talking about back to “those weak and poor fundamental principles” associated with false gods. Some take that unusual phrase to refer to the ancient Babylonian practice of astrology with its supernatural “elements” and principles. These things had enslaved them before, yet now they wanted to return to this slavery! They were beginning to once again observe the calendar, perhaps even the zodiac (equally possible, the requirements of the old Law).

Ironically, churches today do many of the same things and adopt the same beliefs, which have been repackaged in Christian or harmless-sounding terms: Twelve Step programs, breath prayer, “the silence”, chanting, territorial spirits, prosperity by shamanistic practices such as sacred objects, etc. They combine these with Jewish law: tithing, observing the Sabbath, and many others, as if sacrifice is the *only* thing Jesus did. Paul’s words here to the Galatians are very much needed for today’s believers as well.

4:12–16 The crime of telling the truth

Paul now expresses the great emotional pain he is in because of the Galatians' turning back to the worthless old practices. He had come to them originally in poor health, evidently a condition that was repulsive, yet they had welcomed him as they would Jesus Himself. How could they now do such a thing as to believe Paul was insincere or seeking popularity or faking authority to speak for God? They had turned against him even though he had told them the truth.

As noted in the text, there are two ways to take Paul's words here regarding eyes: either he had an eye problem or he was making a play on words regarding the "evil eye" of false religion.

Now that he has built up his case and confronted the Galatians over their abandonment of the Gospel and betrayal of him personally, Paul will begin to go back over the evidence and turn their accusations around.

G' 4:17–5:6 Law

4:17–20 Ulterior motives of the legalists

Paul now discusses the motivation of the false teachers: to gather a following without the persecution that goes with faithfulness to the Gospel of freedom. He knows that the Galatians did not just wake up one morning and decide to turn from the truth; they were swayed by people with sinister and/or selfish motives. It is they who were the fakes, the liars, the enemies. They were driving a wedge between the people and Paul so they could take over and be esteemed as leaders. Paul could be very crude at times, and here he uses the words "cut off" to describe what the legalizers are trying to do to him. He is making a veiled reference to circumcision, the favorite rule of the Judaizers, and he will continue to reference this analogy as he goes along.

But he also describes his consternation with the Galatians in terms of labor and childbirth. By saying he is "writhing in the pains of childbirth with you until the Anointed is formed in you" he is of course not talking about salvation. Salvation is a single event in time, at the moment of faith, when we die to the old ways and are assured the inheritance of eternal life by virtue of our being united with Jesus. So he uses labor and childbirth as a description of the process of spiritual growth and maturity. (See also 1 Tim. 2:15 for another of Paul's references to childbearing.)

People can be confused by this terminology since Jesus called our salvation being “born again”. Context is the key: Jesus was talking to a Pharisee about salvation, and Paul is talking to the saved about how they are being tricked into a return to old religious practices. Remember that this letter was addressed to “brothers and sisters”, that is, fellow believers. After all Paul has said about law, promise, and inheritance, how can we think this can be reversed? Would he say two opposite things in the same letter?

4:21–5:1 An allegory about slavery to law

The Galatians had forgotten that Abraham had two lines of descendants: slave (Ishmael) and free (Isaac). These two literal children represented the Law and the Promise. (Note Paul’s use of the analogy: he is using Hagar’s child to represent those under the Law, that is, earthly Jerusalem, while those who have Abraham’s faith are of the heavenly Jerusalem.) Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the unbelieving Jews were persecuting those who became Christians. So Paul is telling the Galatians that they must “send away the slave woman”, that they must not go back into slavery to law.

5:2–6 The limits of law

In addition, the people were not thinking through the implications of going back under the law. To be under law is to not be under grace; to be under contract is to not be under promise. Paul turns again to the rite of circumcision as a symbol of all that is wrong with legalism, going so far as to equate the legalizers with that which is “cut off” and discarded. In stark contrast is the only way for anyone to be justified: faith empowered by love. Referring back to the previous pairings, Paul now expresses the Jew/Gentile pairing as “no circumcision or uncircumcision” in Jesus.

F’ 5:7–12 What happened to you?

Turning back to the people after aiming at the legalizers, Paul tells them that they had been running a good race but the legalizers cut in front of them. Though he is confident that they will eventually get back on track, he has no kind words for what is apparently a particular individual who is causing all the trouble. He appeals to reason: if he (Paul) were just going along with the circumcision, why would they be persecuting him? As a final insult to the legalizers, Paul adds deep sarcasm to crudity by suggesting that those who are so fond of cutting should just keep going!

E' 5:13–26 Freedom vs. license

But after all this effort at driving home the point that we are free, Paul puts it in balance by reminding the Galatians that freedom is not license, as he also wrote to the Romans. Our freedom is *from* sin, not *to* sin. We are free from the prison of legalism, but should we then spit in the face of the One that bought our freedom? That's what Paul is saying about the new "law" of love in the Anointed; we are now free, but we are also indebted to the blood of Jesus that bought us. We no longer desire those things that would grieve the One we claim to love.

Does Paul once again apparently suggest we have a salvation that can be lost, by saying "those who commit such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"? No, he's just mentioning that the outward acts of "the flesh" are opposite the outward acts of the spirit. The lost are known for self-indulgence, and such will certainly not inherit the Kingdom. Only children get an inheritance, and they are not disowned every time they stray.

D' 6:1–10 Reminders

The case has been made and the closing arguments given. Now Paul begins to wind down with some general instructions.

6:1–6 Individual and collective responsibility

We are a Body, a community of believers. As such we must help each other when we stumble. This is a preventive measure that Paul is prescribing for the Galatians, to keep them from stumbling again. Instead of comparing ourselves with others we must always look to Jesus, our true "role model". And those who teach such truths are to be honored and also helped materially if needed.

6:7–10 Harvesting what we plant

There are consequences to actions and beliefs. God will not be fooled or bribed or dishonored; He will certainly pay us back in proportion to how we lived. So the wise will live in such a way as to please God, and that includes striving for the good of others. And we should put fellow believers first, as Paul also wrote in 1 Tim. 5:8.

C' 6:11–13 The critics' motives

Many assume that Paul's reference to writing in large letters must be proof of his having eye problems, but notice where he writes it: just

before making one last jab at the legalizers. He is emphasizing their sinister motives, and writing large so they don't miss it. They are the ones whose motives are to be questioned.

B' 6:14–17 The true Gospel

There is only one Gospel, one Way, Truth, and Life. We all are “cut off” from the world, not by a physical act but by faith in Jesus alone. We are new creations and can no longer keep living as though we belong to the world. Paul reminds them that he has been “branded” with Jesus’ seal of ownership, his physical sufferings for the faith. His detractors could make no such claim.

A' 6:18 Greetings

In spite of all the intense emotion and harsh criticisms, these are still believers and still precious ones for whom Jesus died. Paul signs off with what the Galatians should know by now is a genuine blessing.

To The Ephesians

Background

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul around the late 50s AD. It addresses general topics and appears to have been intended for circulation among the various Congregations. Jesus is exalted throughout, with gentle appeals for righteous living.

Outline

1. **1:1** Greetings
2. **1:2–14** Love, purity, and adoption
3. **1:15–23** Glory, power, and unity
4. **2:1–5** Dead to sin
5. **2:6–10** Our inheritance
6. **2:11–22** Reconciled
7. **3:1–12** The secret and grace given to Paul
8. **3:13–21** Encouragement through adversity
9. **4:1–6** Unity and humility
10. **4:7–14** Spiritual gifts
11. **4:15–16** The head and body
12. **4:17–5:2** A new attitude
13. **5:3–5:17** A higher standard
14. **5:18–6:9** Be filled with the Spirit
15. **6:10–17** The armor of God
16. **6:18–20** Prayer requests
17. **6:21–22** Personal business
18. **6:23–24** Blessings

1:1 Greetings

As in all his letters, Paul begins with greetings to fellow believers. He identifies himself as one sent out by God.

1:2–14 Love, purity, and adoption

We always need to remember the tremendous blessings we have received as a gift, one given out of love. But what are we to conclude from the statement “he chose us for himself before the foundation of the world”? Note first of all that the purpose of the choice was for us to be holy and flawless; it does not say the purpose was for us to be saved by force. Salvation is well-established in all Paul’s writings as being solely by faith, a faith we exercise by free will. So what God chose for us who believe is that we will be made holy. God also decided that we would be more than servants; we would be children.

Grace is the favor bestowed upon the lesser by the greater, and this is what God did in offering Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. This was a legal matter in that the charges against us were dropped as a result. In addition, God revealed that this salvation by faith for all was the goal to which the progression of history was aimed. But it should be pointed out that this offering of Jesus was a *self*-sacrifice, not a *human* sacrifice, as the skeptics allege. As Paul states in Col. 1:19, Jesus embodies the entirety of God.

Once again we see something about destiny, and once again we note that it is not salvation that was chosen for us, but that those who were the first believers would glorify God. And everyone who would believe would be given something unique in all of history: the “down payment that guarantees our inheritance”, that is, the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. No other group outside of “the church age” would be blessed in this way. No righteous person before Pentecost was said to have this lifelong indwelling or this guarantee.

1:15–23 Glory, power, and unity

Paul was overjoyed that the Ephesians had placed their faith in Jesus, and he promised continued prayer for their spiritual growth and maturity. As their understanding of their riches in Jesus increases, so too will their gratitude. And we are promised the power to grow, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him above all other authorities and powers. All power comes from him, and it enables his Body, the

believers, to grow to completeness.

2:1–5 Dead to sin

Paul describes our current condition as being dead to sin. The majority of translations say “you **were** dead **in** sin”, but that is not in the Greek. It is the present tense, and the implied article there is never translated as “in”. But the concept of death in that culture and time had the primary meaning of separation, not inability. To be dead to God is to have a broken relationship with him, and to be dead to sin is to have a broken relationship with it. It doesn’t mean we can no longer sin, but only that we are no longer in agreement with it.

Then Paul goes on to contrast how we are in our new relationship compared to the old. We obeyed the flesh and the devil and thus deserved the wrath of God. But in spite of that, God showed us all mercy by buying us with the blood of Jesus and restoring our broken relationship with God. And it was all on God’s initiative; we didn’t ask him to do this. But of course we need to accept the free gift God offers because of what Jesus did, and we do this by trusting in him. Then we will be dead to sin and alive to God.

2:6–10 Our inheritance

It is by God’s favor and initiative that we can be saved by faith, not by our own works or plans. We didn’t ask Jesus to sacrifice himself for sin. But knowing this, nobody can boast about themselves.

Some teach that vs. 8-9 say our faith itself is a gift from God, but it doesn’t say that at all. It is the whole thing— salvation by grace through faith— that is the object of “not of yourselves”. This is an issue of Greek grammar and syntax and does not come through clearly in English. But from the totality of New Testament teachings we know that this gift is the whole plan of God: salvation through faith because of Jesus. So God does not have to give us faith before we can be saved; rather, he gives us the choice, the opportunity, to be saved if we just put our faith in Jesus.

Those who believe are held up as a prize, a masterpiece made by Jesus Himself. We are the crowning achievement of his suffering, death, and resurrection, and a sign of defeat to Satan. We must not forget that we are the work of Another and become proud of ourselves instead of Jesus. We are to honor him by doing the good things he has planned for us. Again, there is no hint of being forced to do these things; the

Letters are filled with pleas for us to choose to do right. God has plans for us, but we are not forced to carry them out. Our future rewards are based upon how well we chose God's path instead of our own.

2:11–22 Reconciled

Before Jesus came, the Gentiles were without hope of salvation. Yet we know that individuals could convert to Judaism and be considered righteous in God's sight. So Paul is not saying no Gentile could be saved before, but that the Gentile nations had not been "chosen people" of God. They were outside of both the Promise and the Law— as people groups, but not as individuals. God may choose groups for his purposes without violating individual free will (see Romans for a more detailed discussion).

Now, through Jesus, there is to be no more dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. All are "chosen" on the basis of faith alone. The old Law was voided by virtue of Jesus' death, and our adoption by faith was made possible by virtue of Jesus' resurrection. All can come to God on the same basis and be reconciled. This new entity or "house" is built upon one foundation, the Ambassadors (trad. "apostles"), whose cornerstone is Jesus. Such a building is more than a house; it is a temple holy to God.

Note that Jesus is the cornerstone. A cornerstone is laid at the foundation, not put up on top of the roof. This is his function as a human, and the example he gave for us all to follow. As illustrated in Phil. 2:5–11, Jesus demonstrated what we are to follow: laying aside privilege and power in order to get under others and lift them up. Jesus expressly taught this in his rebuke to the disciples for wanting positions of importance in the coming kingdom (see Mt. 20:20–28 and Mk. 10:35–45). In his humanity Jesus both showed and taught the attitude and actions his followers must have.

3:1–12 The secret and grace given to Paul

The reason Paul is a prisoner at this time is because of the very thing he's been writing about: the Gospel is for everyone, including Gentiles. God had entrusted Paul with making known his plans for this age, plans that God had revealed directly to him personally. It was something that had never been revealed before.

In spite of this, Paul considered himself the very lowest of the Am-

bassadors. Yet this served the purpose of making it all the more obvious that this was of God and not Paul. God was now revealing his ultimate plan of salvation via the community of believers, an entity nobody saw coming. This sent a message to all the “rulers and authorities in the heavenlies” that God is supreme and cannot be out-witted. Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection was the very epitome of all God’s plans through the ages.

3:13–21 Encouragement through adversity

For all of these reasons, Paul asks the people not to be discouraged by what he is currently suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Instead they should be proud of this suffering, because it will strengthen them and help them grow, giving them ever-increasing appreciation for the gift of God.

4:1–6 Unity and humility

Now he implores the people to live and act according to their understanding of the great things God has done for them. We are all of one Spirit, forming one Body, through one Gift. We have one Master, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father. But we should remember that our unity comes from this, and not from a false peace imposed externally.

4:7–14 Spiritual gifts

Paul begins to talk about spiritual gifts but introduces the topic with references to Jesus’ accomplishments. What does it mean that Jesus “captured captivity”? There is much speculation because the context doesn’t give us much to go on. Likewise, what does it mean that he also “descended into the lower parts of the earth”? Certainly we’d all agree that Jesus came to the earth, which could be considered “lower parts” as compared to having “ascended”. Some claim it must mean he went into the realm of the dead, but differ over exactly where and why. Certainly it would be ridiculous to think that Jesus was tortured by Satan but escaped, as some speculate. But a case can be made for saying Jesus went to the place of the dead and took out of there all the righteous people who had died before him. They could only now be taken to heaven since the Sacrifice had finally been made.

Whatever those statements mean, they had to happen in order for Jesus to dispense gifts. We cannot assert that any of the lists of such gifts are meant to be exhaustive; that is, that these are the only gifts

there are. Paul seems to be mentioning a few of them to give some idea of what the Spirit does within the body of believers. Does the order of gifts signify importance or a hierarchy? This context says nothing about that, but Paul did say that he and the other Ambassadors were laying the foundation (see 1 Cor. 3). Yet again we must remember that the foundation supports and lifts up the rest of the building from beneath it, not from the rooftop. If there is any hierarchy in Christianity, it is upside-down to the worldly model.

These are gifts, not “offices” or positions of domination, or any kind of clergy class (which implies that they are special or privileged) over the common people. These people are gifted to nurture, not to oppress, dominate, rule over, or boss. They build up, not tear down. While it is obviously wise to listen to the spiritually mature and gifted, it is their example that is most important. They lead by being what the others should aspire to, not by decree or command. That is exactly how Jesus led while on the earth.

4:15–16 The head and body

Here Paul seems to refer to the common Greek belief at the time, that the body grew out of the head. Thus the head was the source or originator of the body. Yet the head and body are one unit, of the same substance. This is how Paul illustrates our relationship to Jesus. He is both our source of eternal life and our own “flesh and bone”. No other body part is also a source of eternal life. Each believer reports to God, not to each other, just as each body part only reports to the brain and not the other parts. And just as the head provides nourishment to the body, the body provides support to the head.

Shepherds guard and protect those who cannot protect themselves. When people are first saved, they are vulnerable and dependent. But if the shepherds do their jobs properly, these infants grow to adulthood, to the point where they can eventually become shepherds themselves. They are not to remain children perpetually. These tender ones are the people who must be treated tenderly and protected from falsehood. Two important implications arise from this:

1. There is no excuse for people to think they can shirk personal responsibility by deliberately remaining children. Many people have always been content to stay in the shadow of a preacher, as if they are exempt from all Paul has been talking about. We have

the ridiculous situation of senior citizens being “taught” by young, inexperienced people who simply regurgitate the contents of the approved “quarterly”; we have masses of people sitting passively in pews while a public orator with the right worldly credentials lectures them “authoritatively”. Instead, the elderly should be teaching the young, and the experienced should be teaching the newly born. And this is spiritually determined, not by diplomas or seminaries.

2. To speak the truth in love is not a club that, ironically, can be used to beat people who dare to express some righteous indignation when confronted by unbelievers or heretics. Paul is talking to shepherds guarding tender lambs. But when a wolf comes along, that same gentle shepherd is obligated to get nasty and use whatever means are necessary to remove the threat. It’s a two-sided coin: protect the vulnerable, but repel the hostile. This is what good shepherds do. But we see the “sheeple” biting the ankles of the few remaining good shepherds every time a voice is raised or an alarm sounded.

4:17–5:2 A new attitude

Paul now implores the people to get busy and stop acting like unbelievers. Continuing to live in such a hard-hearted way will result in their falling prey to sin and vice. The more we push in the wrong direction, the easier it gets to keep sliding downward. Instead, the whole idea of repentance is to change direction and go God’s way. We must throw away all that drags us down and be renewed in truth and holiness. No more deceiving each other or losing control. We must stop nursing grudges and get over ourselves. Otherwise we “give the Slanderer an advantage”.

We must also stop being lazy, which can be applied to growing spiritually as well as to providing for physical needs. And we must not think that only certain words are considered by God to be “foul”. In any given church, one may hear few curse words but much backbiting, slandering, tearing down, and improper judging. This is in stark contrast to building up. Yet again, remember that we’re talking about how believers are to treat each other. If someone teaches heresy or an unbeliever attacks, those are legitimate times for harsh words and judgment.

5:3–5:17 A higher standard

Jesus is our example to follow; he sacrificed himself out of love for all people. But does verse 5 mean we can lose our salvation if we persist in these things? Not at all; what Paul has written teaches the opposite. As before, he is contrasting the actions and attitudes of the saved and the lost. We should stay so far from such things that people have no reason to even suspect us of doing them.

We are warned to also stay away from smooth talkers, people who are out to deceive and undermine our faith. We are of the Light and must not wallow in darkness anymore. Some, who believe that all evangelism must begin with establishing friendship with unbelievers, frequently go to the point of listening to their arguments. They are not well-grounded enough in the Bible to give a strong defense or to see the errors in the unbeliever's thinking. So error creeps in, and apostasy follows. Instead of leading the unbeliever to the truth, these immature believers follow the unbelievers into falsehood.

Here we see a command to expose error. Many today think this is wrong, but to see evil and not report it is every bit as sinful as any other form of disobedience. God told Ezekiel (ch. 33) that a faithful guardian must warn of danger. If they fail to do so, they are guilty of treason. Or as James put it, "So, if you know what's best but don't do it, you fail" (James 4:17). All of this requires effort on our part to practice discernment. We need to pay attention and keep our eyes open, walking the narrow path and not turning aside. We need the Spirit's power to accomplish this.

5:18–6:9 Be filled with the Spirit

In beginning his long description of Spirit-filled living, Paul commands mutual respect among all believers. This is the complete opposite of domination or assuming authority over others, as already pointed out. He will now list ways in which we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

He begins by contrasting this filling with that of alcohol. Notice that the scripture here does not say "never touch alcohol", but simply that we must not let it overcome us. The Spirit cannot work through people who fill themselves with mind-numbing substances. If there is any void in us, we must let the Spirit fill it instead. We can also keep a song in our hearts in praise to God, and share these with others. And no particular form of music or method of producing it is either condemned

or commanded. Whatever comes from a pure heart in praise of God is the point. The entire Bible never singles out any music or art form as being intrinsically evil. And above all, we must be thankful.

The last item in this list of ways to be filled with the Spirit begins a sub-list of its own about ways to support each other. Each item in this list points back to that thought. Most translations cut into the middle of “being supportive of each other because you fear the Anointed (wives, to your own husbands, as to the Master)” to break the part about wives and husbands from the statement about mutual support, making it an entirely new topic. The wives-to-husbands part is a fragment that has no verb of its own; it is dependent upon “supporting one another”. And it means that whatever this support is, that which is for women is identical to that which is for all believers; what is true of one is true of the other since they share the same verb.

Here again Paul speaks of the head as the source of the body, not its ruler or commander. They are one unit, one flesh and one spirit. Paul clearly presents this union of husband and wife as a depiction of the union between Jesus and the community of believers. Jesus is God, of course, but Paul is not stressing divinity here, only unity. Yet why does he call the man the source of the woman? It can be seen as a reference to Eve being made from Adam, but in this context it seems to refer to his being the support and protector, since he is both physically stronger and socially more powerful. There is another element of context to consider, but first we must address what Paul says to husbands.

Notice that it is the **love** of Jesus that the husband is to model—*not* his divinity, salvation, or purification. Paul says “love your wives **in the same way**” and “so **this is how men must love** their wives”. What he says about Jesus’ other qualities and accomplishments are *reasons to love*, not mandates to copy. We must not confuse the divinity of Jesus with his humanity, nor to assign one aspect to men but the other only to women. And since we all are the Body of Jesus, and he does not abuse us nor squash our personalities, so also a husband must not abuse his wife nor deny her personhood. The two are of one flesh.

Another important point is that the man leaves his parents to join to his wife. This illustrates the fact that Jesus left his Father to join to his Bride, and then he went back to his Father’s house to prepare a place for us. When Jesus returns for his Bride there will be a wedding feast as well. It is Jesus who joined to us, not we to him, and it is the husband

who leaves home to join to his wife, not she to him. This again is how Jesus modeled humility and service, a model for *all* believers to follow, not just women.

Now for another element to all this, the Roman law called “the marriage without hand”.¹⁷ Since wife abuse was a common practice, in the first century a.d. the Roman emperor Augustus decreed that a woman and her dowry remained under the control of her father and his family. He could take her back from an abusive husband and give her to another man. The intent of the law was to reduce the divorce rate, but instead it only made it worse. The only lasting relationship a woman had was with her birth family, rather than her husband.

The preceding historical note makes the most sense of why Paul only told husbands to love and wives to support: because he told wives to identify with their husbands instead of their fathers. He needed to say the former because he said the latter. The whole message was, “Since you wives are not to go back to your fathers, you husbands must be careful to love your wives and not beat them.” So in contrast to the views of patriarchal society, Paul commands husbands to love and protect their wives. They must follow Jesus’ example of self-sacrifice for the people’s purity by treating their wives at least as well as they treat their own bodies. This means providing and caring for them, recognizing that the two of them are “one flesh”.

In the first century, a woman was considered property. She always belonged to one man or another and had few if any rights. So what need was there for Paul to tell wives to submit to husbands, as many translations put it? He could not have been referring to what society already imposed upon them against their will; they had no choice in the matter. So Paul was saying something quite radical for the time: wives had a choice! They could now choose to defy the Roman household codes and defer willingly to their husbands (and expect deference in return as well), identifying with them instead of their fathers.

Another consideration is the fact that Christians had to be careful about how they worded things. Rome had spies everywhere, and anyone could easily be accused of sedition. That would explain why some things had to be stated delicately or indirectly. And there may have been shared experiences that did not require everything to be spelled out. So the clear

¹⁷O. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul*, Scholars Press, 1985.

passages must take priority over the less clear.

Other groups who needed to “support one another” were parents and children, masters and slaves. Note that Paul is not seeking to instantly overturn all social norms, and to boldly oppose slavery would certainly have brought charges of sedition upon him. Instead, just as God had slowly unveiled his plan for the ages, our freedom in Jesus in some cases had to happen gradually. So in the mean time slaves and masters who were believers had to know how to act. And of course this principle applies also to women; we no longer have a societal taboo against women in leadership, in the workplace, or as full equal partners in a marriage, and women have the ability to earn their own income. There is no more reason to continue first century norms for women than there is for slavery or class distinction.

6:10–17 The armor of God

Our power to do all these things must come from God. The analogy Paul uses here of military armor indicates that our defenses come from God and not our own strength. We must not go out to battle unarmed or unprotected. "Putting on the armor" is not something to be taken lightly or done hastily.

We hear the Truth, the Gospel, which gives us the righteousness of Jesus and not our own. But the shoes we must put on by means of study and learning. This is our preparation, and we dare not leave these shoes off or fail to tie them. And we require a shield, which is firm trust in God. Last but not least is the Sword, an offensive weapon which is meant to be used effectively. A soldier untrained in how to use a sword is as useless as one who is trained but keeps the sword in its sheath.

We need to stop briefly here to clear up a misunderstanding. The Greek word endings indicate that it is the Spirit that is the sword, not the pronouncement (a different Greek word than the one translated “word”) of God. The Spirit is the source of all that God decrees, whether spoken or written. That is our source of power, our strength, our guide. Of course the written Word is part of that, and no less so than when God would speak audibly. It is the One who originates the message that matters, not the means of conveyance. But since we know that God never contradicts himself, then we can use what is written as an anchor, to which all that is spoken must agree.

We are to stand firm then, not run and hide at the first sign of

opposition. Most believers seem to avoid any and all conflict, but what kind of soldiers are those? And what kind of shepherds run away from the wolves? (A subtle hint is found in John 10:13!) We must not be cowards but faithful soldiers who keep training for battle.

6:18–20 Prayer requests

Prayer is constantly needed in all of this. Paul asks for prayer support in his own battles, for boldness and fearlessness in spreading the Gospel. He had many enemies and needed support as much as anyone.

6:21–22 Personal business

He intends to send Tychikos to Ephesus to keep them up on his affairs and put their minds at ease about him. This shows Paul's tender care for the people.

6:23–24 Blessings

With a final blessing, Paul prays for peace over all the believers.

To The Philippians

Background

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60–61 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome. This city of Philippi was where he witnessed to the jailer, and the synagogue outside the city was where he met Lydia (Acts 16). It is a letter of gratitude, encouragement, praise, and prayer.

Outline

1. **1:1–6** Greetings
2. **1:7–11** Prayer partners
3. **1:12–17** Turning adversity into opportunity
4. **1:18–26** Torn between two worlds
5. **1:27–2:11** Rewards for suffering
6. **2:12–18** Perseverance in holiness
7. **2:19–30** Recommended emissaries
8. **3:1–11** Warnings against legalists
9. **3:12–14** Straining toward the goal
10. **3:15–4:1** Unity in faith
11. **4:2–3** Unity in leadership
12. **4:4–9** The peace of God, the God of peace
13. **4:10–19** Consistent generosity
14. **4:20–23** Greetings

1:1–6 Greetings

In this greeting Paul mentions “guardians and attendants”. These two words are typically translated “overseers/bishops and deacons/ministers”. But our word “overseer” tends to lean more toward the idea of ruler and less of protector, while “deacon” is not a translation at all but a *transliteration*, which means to write a word as it sounds in the target language. *Diakonois* means one who serves or waits tables, just as “minister” meant originally. But it had no connotation such as a paid speaker or CEO, as in most churches throughout history. There is some evidence that these attendants were benefactors who had the means to help the believers in matters of law or finance.

Paul is very grateful to the Philippian believers for their continued partnership with him in spreading the Gospel. Because of this, he is confident that God will keep supplying them with increasing spiritual blessings. Note that it is God, not the people, who both began this work and will complete it.

1:7–11 Prayer partners

The people have continually prayed for Paul and worked by his side. So one of the things he prays for on their behalf is spiritual discernment. They are to test everything, not swallow everything blindly.

1:12–17 Turning adversity into opportunity

Rather than hindering Paul’s efforts, his imprisonments have actually helped. The guards and many others became aware of the reason for his arrest, and as a result the Gospel was made known to them. And it makes others bold, seeing that not even imprisonment can shackle the Gospel. To Paul, nothing mattered more than getting the truth out. Even if some people sought to use it to draw disciples away from him and to themselves, Paul is happy, as long as it’s the truth that’s being preached. God will deal with improper motivation in his good time.

1:18–26 Torn between two worlds

Paul expresses his being torn between being dead and in heaven with Jesus, and here on earth to continue his work. But for the sake of others, he is happy to still be here to help the believers grow. And there is no hint here of “soul sleep” or delay between physical death and being conscious in the presence of God.

1:27–2:11 Rewards for suffering

Now his attention turns to the people's behavior, so that the Gospel will not be maligned. There is to be no fear of opposition from people who are still under God's condemnation. Suffering is part and parcel of salvation, so it should not be seen as something unexpected. But Paul does not stop there. He holds up Jesus as the example to which all believers must look, as one who has suffered for the sake of a greater good. It must be understood that the suffering we are to endure has two qualities: it is for the sake of Christ, and it is at the hands of unbelievers. Never is "suffering for Christ" to come at the hands of fellow believers. No one claiming to belong to Jesus can use "suffering for Christ" as an excuse to keep abusing other believers and demanding that their victims remain silent and passive.

Chapter 2 vs. 5–11 is one of the most powerful and compelling passages of the entire New Testament, and it is full of deep theology. Although this is one of Paul's most positive and uplifting letters, we have controversy here because it reveals very basic truths about Jesus' deity and humanity, as well as a lesson in how those with privileges are to view them.

It tells us first of all that Jesus was "in the form of God" in the very beginning. He didn't start out as a man and work his way up, as the cults declare. Neither did he eternally exist as any kind of sub-level of God, as the "eternal sonship" teaching asserts. He was not a mere angel (see Hebrews) or any other lesser being. Yet in spite of divine power and privilege, Jesus did not cling to it and refuse to stoop down to our level.

Voluntarily he set aside his divine privilege and made himself like one of us lowly creatures. It was not forced upon him or decreed by the Father over him, but was something he chose to do. It was in this humble situation that he took on the position of slavery, humbling himself and perfectly obeying the Father, even to the point of a tortuous and humiliating death. And if we truly follow his example, we too must be willing to lay down any privileges to which we may feel entitled. As Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9), he did not cling to his right to be paid for his work, in spite of it being justified by scripture. This has serious implications regarding the debate over the sphere of women in the church. Even if one could support privilege in the church and home by sole virtue of biological gender, such privileges are to be given up.

Yet this was not the end; God raised him back to glory and gave him the most exalted Name. Jesus did not permanently remain lower than the Father, but was restored to full equality as before. And because of what he did, Jesus will ultimately be acknowledged, willingly or not, by all sentient beings as the Master, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus spoke in prayer of his being one with the Father, and that they would again share the glory they had in eternity past.

We must remember that though Jesus was always divine and always will be, he did not become human until that point in history. Otherwise the statement about taking on the form of a human would mean nothing. Yet he will always remain human as well. In his divinity he is still fully equal with all three Persons of the Trinity, but at the same time, in his humanity he will always be the Son, and we will always be his adopted siblings.

2:12–18 Perseverance in holiness

This is all for our motivation, as an example to follow. Because of all Jesus did, we are then to carry our salvation to its ultimate conclusion. Yet many stop there and conclude that we have to work for our salvation. But they ignore the very next statement: “For it is **God** who is empowering you”. Salvation is God’s work; obedience is ours. Salvation is still a gift, still fully of God, and still not a reward. Instead, the context is all about following the One who is already our Master and Savior, the One we already belong to. It is this growth and new life we carry out (not “work for”).

Further, we are to stop whining about this following and suffering. We must hold on tight to the Word of Life and not to our own righteousness. Paul’s statements cannot be used as another attempt to throw out our security as believers, but simply as he writes here: that we stop relying on ourselves and thus make all Paul’s earlier teachings on how to grow as having been a waste of time.

2:19–30 Recommended emissaries

Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians soon so he can relay news about them. Paul doesn’t call Timothy an actual physical son here, but uses the term to describe his close relationship with him. For this reason he wants the people to treat Timothy with great respect. He had earlier sent Epaphroditus to them, a “co-worker and comrade-

in-arms". The people had worried about his (Epaphroditus') health, but Paul is happy to report that God had mercy and healed him. Now he can visit them again, and they were to hold him in the same esteem as Paul and Timothy, since he had also risked his life for them.

3:1–11 Warnings against legalists

Now Paul turns to words of advice and warning. There are people who want to control and micromanage, to rule and enslave. He had the legalistic "Judaizers" in mind especially, those who kept trying to force circumcision on all believers. Paul himself was a Jew with the highest legalistic credentials, but as great as his accomplishments had been, he counted them all as utterly worthless, even as "a pile of manure". All the greatest accomplishments, the highest credentials, the most flawless performance was now considered unworthy to be compared with knowing Jesus the Anointed, God in the flesh. He had lost it all, but gained much more.

In light of that, how can anyone today insist that we must do this or that to get or remain saved? This works-salvation is known as Lordship Salvation, but it really isn't about the Master at all. It's all about us, our performance, our own righteousness. Look at Paul, and the radical change in him after salvation. Yet in all his letters he keeps pointing away from himself and towards Jesus. Salvation is still by faith alone. Those works could never save Paul, and they won't save us today. Instead, he resolved to only know Jesus and the power of his resurrection— not his own power. But remember that this is no license to sin, as Paul made very clear in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians. We behave out of love and respect for God; we die to sin *because* we are saved, not to *become* saved.

3:12–14 Straining toward the goal

We have not attained our own resurrection or even reached full maturity, but we continue to pursue it nonetheless; Jesus has already taken possession of that which we reach for. We strive then, not to acquire what is already guaranteed to us, but what will result in our maturity and reward. We are not to sit on our inheritance, but to invest it, remembering Who it really belongs to. Yet at the same time, we are responsible for that investment. So we chase after that goal, straining toward the time when our faith becomes sight. A "prize" awaits all who run the race. Again,

this is works/rewards language and therefore cannot refer to salvation itself.

3:15–4:1 Unity in faith

Paul encourages the people to all run in the same direction and follow his example. They should note the contrast between his life and the lives of those who are really enemies of Jesus, who live only for the world. We are no longer citizens of this world but of the kingdom of God, and we should live like such citizens. Paul views the people as his medal of honor, his trophy, and he wants them to stand firm.

4:2–3 Unity in leadership

Now Paul starts to name names. Two women named Euodia and Syntyche have contended at Paul's and Clement's side, and he asks someone named Syzugos to be of assistance to them. They are called Paul's co-workers, which should not be glossed over. Many people brush off these women as mere assistants instead of being on a par with Paul and the others. Had they been men, nobody would even think twice about this. Yet Paul even tells this Syzugos to assist them, showing their importance and worthiness of respect as leaders.

4:4–9 The peace of God, the God of peace

Now some general instructions on practical Christian living: Be happy, don't worry, depend on God and speak to him often. This will result in inner peace, something the world tries to work for but Christians can have for nothing. This in turn will serve to guard our thoughts from that which would bring us down. Paul speaks of both the peace of God and the God of peace. If we keep our focus on the good and pure, we are walking with the God of Peace, who will never leave us.

4:10–19 Consistent generosity

While the Philippians had been inconsistent in the past with their giving to others, now they were showing maturity in this area. To assure them that he isn't hinting that they should give him something, Paul tells the people about his contentment in every situation. And he commends them for sticking with him in spite of their own suffering. They were the only Congregation of believers to do so and went beyond expectation to help him. Yet whatever they did for him resulted in credits to their account spiritually.

4:20–23 Greetings

As was his custom, Paul signs off with blessings and praise to God, along with greetings from other believers.

To The Colossians

Background

The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome. It is a rebuttal to an undefined false teaching or collection of teachings, after first presenting the true teachings.

Outline

1. **1:1–14** Greetings, prayer and praise
2. **1:15–20** Jesus' divinity, humanity, and supremacy
3. **1:21–23** Reconciliation and persistent faith
4. **1:24–2:3** Paul's mission
5. **2:4–8** Warnings about crafty arguments
6. **2:9–15** Spiritual relationships and truths
7. **2:16–23** Standing firm against falsehood
8. **3:1–17** The believer's proper focus and behavior
9. **3:18–4:1** Treating each other properly
10. **4:2–18** General instructions and final greetings

1:1–14 Greetings, prayer and praise

The Colossians were known for their faith and love for all believers, and for their spiritual growth. Paul prays that even more will be added to them: good behavior, pleasing God, success, knowledge of God, and the power to endure. As he has mentioned more than once in other letters, all believers have a guaranteed inheritance. Notice the past tense: we have been rescued from darkness; we have had our sins cancelled.

1:15–20 Jesus’ divinity, humanity, and supremacy

This passage is an excellent one for answering all who claim Jesus is something less than God. Jesus is clearly shown here to be the Creator God, the source of everything, and the sustaining power of all that exists. Yet some stumble over the phrases, “firstborn of all creation” and “firstborn from the dead”, as if he were a mere creation. His being “born” here, as the context shows, is not his coming into existence, but his taking on human form (see Phil. 2:5-11) and then having that form rise from the dead in a new and immortal condition. He was the first to do that. Others rose from the dead before him, but still in their old, mortal bodies. His full deity is further enforced by the clear statement that in him lives the entirety of God, not just a part. This is the so-called “hypostatic union”. He was not part this and part that, but all of both.

Note the head/body metaphor that Paul is fond of using. The Greek indicates head **of**, not **over**, and stresses the unity of head and body as well as the Greek understanding that the body grew out of the head. Since it immediately precedes the statement about reconciliation between God and people, and since the context here is about not only divine power but “holding everything together”, we cannot arbitrarily assign the modern meaning “boss” to the word “head”. We will see more references to this throughout the letter. And our inability to fully grasp this hypostatic union is no excuse to ignore it or misapply it.

1:21–23 Reconciliation and persistent faith

Now Paul moves from how Jesus reconciled God and people to the purpose of that reconciliation: that we could be presented to God as flawless. This is something Jesus does for us, not something we do for ourselves. Yet what does Paul mean by saying he trusts that they persist in the faith and are not removed from the hope of the Gospel?

At first glance this may appear to support Conditional Security, that is, that salvation itself can be lost. But context is the key, and it keeps speaking of our salvation being based upon faith in what Jesus already did. Paul sees this as the foundation that was laid, and it must be stable. A wavering foundation is one that was not properly laid. So Paul is addressing initial salvation and not the possibility of lost faith. If the right foundation was laid, we will naturally continue to follow it.

So just as the foundation determines how the building progresses, our salvation determines our actions. If it is true and firm we will continue

in it, but if not, we will waver. So our continuing in the faith is proof of the right foundation having been laid, not that the foundation can be taken away. He is telling the people to look at the solidness of their faith to determine if they had been saved in the first place. It is the difference between “If you are saved you will continue in the faith”, and “To remain saved you must continue in the faith”.

1:24–2:3 Paul’s mission

Now Paul briefly shares how God continues to refine him through physical hardship, and that this is for the believers’ benefit. He relates that he became a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) to them by God’s command, and that God had revealed to him the “secret” that had been kept hidden until now. What is this secret? That everyone, Jew and Gentile, can have the Holy Spirit in them due to faith in the risen Jesus, and through that we have hope, the assurance of “things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

He had been working hard among all the believers to spread the gospel and then encourage new believers to grow and mature. He endeavors to guard them against deceptive teachings, and he is happy to see some strength and conviction forming in them. Now he urges them to keep on going and live out the teachings.

2:4–8 Warnings about crafty arguments

Specifically, Paul warns them against subtle and cunning worldly wisdom. This can come in the form of appeals to human tradition and the “elements of the world”. This letter, and in fact the entire New Testament, gives examples of such arguments, such as putting experience over sound doctrine, thinking that love is a license to sin, or concluding that since everyone is a sinner then no sinner can ever be confronted. Most people are not trained to recognize bad logic, or to ask hard questions about some new or pious-sounding teaching. Many in churches today follow even the most outrageous and demonic teachings, as long as they come with a Christian-sounding veneer. Churches often look to secular psychology for what are really spiritual problems, and few would be able to discern the difference. Thinking and standing against error are difficult and demanding tasks, but they are vital for the health of the Christian community.

2:9–15 Spiritual relationships and truths

Once again Paul stresses that Jesus is the embodiment of the entirety of God. When we are united with Jesus we are complete. And again we see the Greek word *kephale* meaning “head” (see 1:15–20), but this time the topic is not the head’s unity with the body but its being the source of life, hence the translation here as “source”.

And being united with Jesus means we share in his immersion (trad. “baptism”), death, and resurrection; we are alive to God but dead to sin. But what Jesus accomplished for us is more than new life; it is also declaring us “cleared of all charges” by canceling the legal code that stood against us. He nailed this list of charges to the cross as a formal declaration of innocence. Because of that, all legalism and condemnation is “made prisoner” instead. The law that put Jesus on the cross is now nailed there in our place, and we are free.

2:16–23 Standing firm against falsehood

In light of our being declared innocent, by virtue of what Jesus did for us and our acceptance of it by faith, we must not let anyone judge us on the basis of what we eat or drink, what days we observe, or any such external legalism. Notice that even “Sabbaths” are among the things we are not obligated to observe. They were part of the old legalistic system that had brought condemnation, but they were only a shadow, a temporary darkness. Our union with Jesus is all that matters now; it is reality as opposed to shadow.

So we must guard against legalists who try to set themselves over us and put us under slavery. They fake humility instead of being part of the reality of our Source, Jesus. Paul refers specifically to those who participated in the conjuring of angels to do their bidding, and because of the visions they had they were conceited. As such they were like headless bodies (yet another head/body reference), cut off from the Source of Life.

Since we “died” to those things, why do we try to go back under their authority as if they still have power over us, making us “do this but don’t do that”? This question Paul asks should still be asked today, since there is still a lot of legalistic control being taught in the churches.

3:1–17 The believer’s proper focus and behavior

Here again we see our salvation referred to in the past tense. And because this is so, we must keep looking up and stop focusing on this world or

on what used to be. We died to this world, and we are hidden or kept absolutely safe in Jesus. And when he is finally revealed to the world, we will finally be given the remainder of our inheritance.

As a result, we must treat all the “dead” things of this world as exactly that. We are new people, being continually changed into the image of Jesus. And this new image does not distinguish between ethnic groups, social ranks, or any other such divisions. We are to replace all that with new “clothing” that is the opposite of the old. And this new clothing can be summed up as Love. If we have that, the rest will follow. Everything must be done with the goal of glorifying God.

3:18–4:1 Treating each other properly

Now Paul focuses on interrelationships among believers. He begins with the principle of mutual submission, mutual teaching, mutual concern. We are all equals and must treat each other as such, in gratitude to God and in the Name of Jesus. There is no favoritism here, no superiority, no bossing or ruling.

Keeping that in mind and considering the context, we see some specific areas in which people might question how this mutual submission works out in practice. Wives support husbands because we all are connected to the Master. Husbands love wives for the very same reason, and remember that “love does no harm to its neighbor” (Rom. 13:10). Children obey parents and parents don’t aggravate children. Slaves obey masters sincerely, and masters treat slaves fairly and kindly, as they are treated by their Master.

What this section does *not* say is anything about domination. Support and identification cannot be twisted into a domination/submission relationship. Women of the time were presumed to be inferior and expected to obey their husbands, so what would be the point of telling them to obey? Instead, Paul recognizes society as it is but gently institutes a revolutionary change: the equality of all believers. We all serve the Master; nobody is closer to him than anyone else.

4:2–18 General instructions and final greetings

Now Paul gives instructions about praying and acting wisely. We need to keep our eyes open for opportunities to spread the gospel, and to be careful how we act in front of the world. He tells of people he will send to the Colossians, along with greetings from those staying with him in

prison. He also gives personal recommendations for them.

A woman named Nympha is mentioned as one who has a Congregation of believers meeting in her house. We must not assume she is merely being hospitable, just because she's a woman. Had this been a man, nobody would think twice about his being a leader or being worthy of respect. That the believers meet in her house is an indication of her leadership and respectability.

Lastly, Paul instructs the Colossians to read this letter also to the believers at Laodicea, who in turn were to give their letter from Paul to the Colossians. The letter to the Laodiceans was not preserved for us, but God certainly had his reasons. Paul makes sure this letter is known to be authentic by adding a greeting in his own handwriting, possibly due to the problem of forgeries referenced in 2 Thes. 2:2.

To The Thessalonians 1

Background

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy about 50 AD, soon after Paul arrived in Corinth. The primary motivation seems to have been Paul's need to defend himself against slander. He touches briefly on the matter of prophecy as well, which he will focus on more in his second letter.

Outline

1. **1:1–5** Greetings and praise
2. **1:6–2:1** Imitating Paul
3. **2:2–13** Paul appeals to their knowledge of him
4. **2:14–16** Imitating many believers
5. **2:17–3:13** Longing to see them again
6. **4:1–12** A charge to continue in holiness
7. **4:13–5:3** Concerning death, resurrection, and the Master's return
8. **5:4–11** Proper response to the Master's return
9. **5:12–22** General instructions
10. **5:23–28** Final blessing and greetings

1:1–5 Greetings and praise

The people are commended for their faithful work and enduring hope. Their salvation was evident by the power of the Holy Spirit among them after they heard the Word. Paul reminds them that he too displayed this same power when he was among them.

1:6–2:1 Imitating Paul

They began to imitate Paul and the others and welcomed their teaching, even in the face of persecution. They have become renown for their faith and their having turned completely from idols to God, and they eagerly wait for Jesus' return for them. All of this is proof of the power in which Paul had come to them.

2:2–13 Paul appeals to their knowledge of him

The gospel had been brought to these people after Paul and the others had experienced insulting treatment at Philippi, yet they were bold anyway. They came not with deception and cunning but the truth of the gospel, not being concerned with popularity but with pleasing God. They used no flattery and were not greedy, did not seek praise and did not "throw their weight around" over the people. Instead, Paul and the others were like parents tenderly soothing their children. They were kind and gentle and encouraging through it all.

2:14–16 Imitating many believers

As a result, the people received the gospel gladly. But like the Jewish believers who were being persecuted by their own people, these believers too were being persecuted by theirs. Paul relates how his own people keep trying to forbid the Gentiles from hearing the gospel.

2:17–3:13 Longing to see them again

Paul expresses his desire to visit them again in person, in spite of the obstacles Satan has been throwing in front of him. He had decided to stay in Athens and send his co-worker Timothy to strengthen and encourage them. Paul had told them before about the persecution that is promised to believers, which he and others had experienced. It was persecution that was keeping him from visiting them, so he sent Timothy to check up on them and put his mind at ease.

But Timothy had returned and the news was good. This gave Paul great encouragement in his trials. He praises God for them and is all the more eager to see them again, wishing them continued growth and strength.

4:1–12 A charge to continue in holiness

Paul reminds them of instructions he gave earlier about proper Christian behavior, and to continue in them and strive for maturity. This extends

to how they do business in the world, not just among themselves. Many in the churches throughout history have ignored this teaching, treating “church” as a box to keep their religion in, while being just like the heathen out in the world. But at least the believers here were treating each other with love, something that isn’t always the case in many churches.

4:13–5:3 Concerning death, resurrection, and the Master’s return

Now the focus turns to questions the people had about what happens when believers die. Instead of being exceedingly sad like the lost, they were to be comforted by the fact that we will see departed believers again in heaven. After all, if we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, there is no reason to doubt that his followers will rise too. Here we have a firm picture of not only our hope for resurrection, but an event commonly referred to as the Rapture. The Greek word means “to snatch away” or plunder, which was translated into Latin and then anglicized into “rapture”. Even in its modern sense, to be enraptured is to be “caught up” with our emotions. But context determines what is being “caught up” and why.

This particular context is about the righteous dead and the hope we have. Paul just told them that he is giving them a reason to hope, to not mourn like the heathen. We who are alive at the Coming of the Master (**not** the *Day of the Master*) will be “snatched away” immediately after the righteous dead. This is when the Master Himself comes down from heaven with a shout from the ruling Messenger and the trumpet of God. But the Master doesn’t come down to the earth, only “in the clouds”, to which we all are raised. So it really is a meeting in the clouds; first the dead and then we who are still living.

This, again, is all given to us as a reason to hope, something to encourage us. Many in the churches today mock this hope, saying that the Rapture is only escapism for people who are afraid of suffering or think themselves “holier than thou”, but those are false charges. People are to find great comfort and hope and encouragement in knowing it and in continuing to watch and wait for the Master’s return.

There is also a parallel with Jewish wedding customs, one found frequently throughout the New Testament. The groom-to-be would prepare a room in his father’s house, then come at an unpredictable time for his bride, with his friends shouting and blowing trumpets. He would take her to his father’s house for a feast, which would last seven days, and

then they would begin their life together. In the same way, Jesus said that in his Father's house were many rooms and that he was going there to prepare a place for us, his Bride. At the right time, unannounced and unknown to the Bride, he will return for us and take us to heaven to the "wedding banquet". There will be seven years of celebration there, while the earth experiences seven years of God's wrath against all who refused his invitation and despised his Son, the Groom.

Paul also addresses the timing of the end. He had already told them about this, but briefly summarizes. "The Day of the Master" will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief during the night. People will be caught off-guard, thinking they have finally achieved peace and security, but doom and destruction rain down upon them instead. It is likened to when a pregnant woman's time comes to give birth; we never know when the hour will come, but when it does, there is no doubt, and no stopping it.

5:4–11 Proper response to the Master's return

In contrast, believers are not to be taken by surprise. We are "in the light" and people of the day, and have no excuse for falling asleep. In fact, we are to remain dressed for battle. Paul uses some of the same symbolism here as he did in writing to the Ephesians about "the whole armor of God". We are to keep watch and be alert. We are mocked today for watching, for pointing out the lateness of the hour, for looking for clues about the nearness of the Master's return. But faithful soldiers and brides remain true to the end.

Notice the words Paul uses: "they" will be taken by surprise, but "you" will not. There is a clear difference between how Paul refers to the Master's coming for believers, and how he refers to "the day of the Master" for unbelievers. Two different events for two different groups. And we are told that the "coming" precedes the "day".

We are not destined to suffer this impending wrath of God, but instead are to be taken out ahead of it by Jesus. Some would brush this off as the general hope of salvation, but look at the context. It's all about our hope in a specific "coming", in which we will be snatched away to heaven while still alive. It is something Paul uses to encourage the people who have been wondering about "times and seasons". People don't ask about those things in regards to general salvation.

5:12–22 General instructions

The focus turns again, this time to watching their own Congregation for faithful workers and for guardians. These serve by warning others of spiritual danger. Yet in a world filled with heresy and falsehood, guardians have a lot of negative things to warn about, and we would naturally expect this to intensify as we near the end. This we observe, yet most guardians are shouted down and told to be silent.

Paul instructs them not to scorn prophecies, and he says this right after telling them not to squelch the Spirit. Prophecy is from God and we dare not ignore it. Yet this must be balanced with discernment; we are to test everything. We are to sift through it and keep what is good and from God, while discarding all that is not.

5:23–28 Final blessing and greetings

Paul now gives his customary farewell, with blessings and challenges.

To The Thessalonians 2

Background

The second letter to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first. Its main focus is prophecy, specifically in response to a forgery (2:1–5). Paul is correcting misunderstandings and undoing the damage caused by the fake letters.

Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings and praise
2. **1:8–12** God's revenge
3. **2:1–12** Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy
4. **2:13–15** Standing firm in the truth
5. **2:16–3:5** Prayer and praise
6. **3:6–12** Warnings and examples
7. **3:13–15** Perseverance
8. **3:16–18** Final blessing and greetings

1:1–7 Greetings and praise

As with the first letter, this one begins with encouragement in the midst of hardship. Persecution continues, presumably from their own people around them as before. But relief will come one way or another, in this life or the next.

1:8–12 God's revenge

God will eventually inflict vengeance upon those who deserve it. Some argue that a loving God would never do such a thing, and they oppose all who speak of judgment. But scripture clearly equates judgment with justice, with revenge, and with retribution for sin. This is to God's honor due to his being holy. Holiness is frequently ignored in favor of love, but both are true of God.

So Paul implores the believers to keep on in the faith and keep pursuing maturity. God will bring us safely to our inheritance, but we have deeds to do in the meantime that will earn eternal rewards.

2:1–12 Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy

As with the first letter, this one also addresses questions the people had about “the Coming of the Master”. Some people had brought false reports or prophecies or letters allegedly from Paul, claiming that “the Day of the Master” had already happened or was imminent. This would mean, considering the content of the first letter, that the Coming must therefore have happened already, and they had missed it somehow and were now in the Day. While we aren’t told precisely, it would appear that the Coming and the Day are not the same event. First, Jesus will come for us and meet us in the sky to take us to heaven, and then the seven-year Day of the Master arrives and ends with Jesus coming down to the earth with all of us behind him.

But Paul assures them that no such thing has happened, and that no such messages had come from him. He also explains how they can be sure it hasn’t happened, in a passage that gives us more detail about the sequence of these events.

First in line will be “the Departure”. Almost all translations and commentators transliterate the word (“the apostasy”) instead of actually translating it. The Greek phrase *a apostasia* literally means “the departure” and does not specify what is being departed from, so context must be checked to find out what that is. And the context here is all about the last days but nothing about false teachings. All English Bibles rendered it as Departure until the KJV.¹⁸

Recalling the first letter, this Departure can be nothing else but what we call The Rapture, the “snatching away” of the righteous dead and living which happens before the Day of the Master. The people were being told that they had missed this great hope that Paul had told them about in the first letter. This continues today, with many claiming that we are already in the Tribulation, or that we will certainly go through it. Such people are described by Paul as deceivers, those who try to throw believers into despair and confusion.

The second event is the appearance of the Lawless One. This person

¹⁸Wycliffe (1384), Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1535), Cranmer (1539), Breeches (1576), Beza (1583), Geneva (1608).

will exalt himself as above all “gods” and will even seat himself in the temple of God, claiming to be God. Of course, there must be a Temple for this to happen, and it most likely refers to the Jewish Temple. People mock this idea as well, claiming all references to another Temple must certainly be allegorical, a popular escape clause in itself. But Paul is not giving any vision or parable here. He is speaking plainly to dispel a rumor, and laying out concrete events the people could look for. And nothing like this happened when the Temple was destroyed by Titus in 70 a.d.

Another factor is introduced here: the restraining force that holds back the Lawless One (LO). First Paul points out that the evil associated with the LO is already at work but is currently restrained. Many try to say that since there is evil in the world then the Bible doesn't say there will be a certain evil person but only a general evil characteristic of the age. But Paul mentions both here, the LO and the general evil of the world, so they cannot be the same. This is yet another attempt to brush aside Bible prophecy as being not literal or future.

So who or what is this Restrainer? There are two ways to approach this. One way is to base our interpretation on the grammatical gender of the nouns and pronouns. The Spirit takes the neuter pronoun (it), as also does the Restrainer in vs. 6, but the Restrainer takes the masculine pronoun (he) in vs. 7. If the *ekklesia* were in view then the feminine pronoun would be used. The only entity in that context taking the masculine would be the Master, so we can deduce that “what is restraining” (vs. 6) might be the Spirit, but the coming of the Master Jesus for us is what allows the LO to be revealed.

But grammatical gender is not a decisive factor beyond matching words together in a sentence. For example, the Holy Spirit takes the neuter grammatical gender (it) in all cases, yet when described as the Comforter in John 14:17, the masculine grammatical gender (he) is used. So the pronouns depend not on some intrinsic quality of the Holy Spirit, but strictly on the arbitrary (non-biological) gender of the nouns used to refer to the Spirit. Likewise, though the *ekklesia* is portrayed in scripture as feminine (a bride), that same Greek word is also used to describe an angry mob in Acts 19:32. So we can see that the grammatical gender of a word has nothing to do with the literal or figurative gender of a person or group.

If grammatical gender does not help identify the Restrainer, then it

could be just about anyone or anything. However, it must be an entity that has been restraining the Lawless One, so it would not be either an evil or merely human entity. Thus we can narrow the possibilities to a supernatural benevolent entity. And since we have scriptural descriptions of Messengers of God being apparently equal in strength to those of Satan (e.g. Dan. 10:13), this narrows the possibilities further to being God or the only other entity filled with the Holy Spirit: the *ekklesia*. Certainly the Holy Spirit will be active after the Lawless One is revealed, since many come to faith and are martyred for it. But the *ekklesia* has been a restraining force in the world throughout its existence, albeit not as powerfully as it was meant to be.

This LO's appearing will come with Satanic power: miracles, deceptive wonders, and great deceit. Those who have loved darkness will be completely fooled. And because they loved darkness and deception, God will "give them over" (see Romans) to the extreme and make them go in "the wrong direction". Like The Departure, this is a deliberate, divinely-given misdirection (not "strong delusion"), not a general condition of the time. People speculate on what this could be, but context hints that it has to do with the LO pretending to be God. It could also refer to a fake alien invasion to cover the mass disappearance of Christians.

2:13–15 Standing firm in the truth

Turning back to the people at present, Paul praises God for "choosing them from the beginning". Choosing them how, and for what? To be saved by means of the Gospel through the work of the Spirit. God chose the work of the Spirit to be the means by which people are regenerated upon hearing and accepting the Gospel. As commented elsewhere, there is no choosing of people for either heaven or hell by some alleged eternal decree of God that ignores human free will. But there is God's choosing the method by which we become saved. Paul expressly states that this is all by means of the Gospel. As with the account in Acts 11:18, God has chosen not only Jews but also Gentiles for this salvation.

From another angle: If it is said that God chooses these people at Thessalonica, does it imply he has chosen no other? Not at all; that is poor logic. Of course God chose the Thessalonians— since they came to him in faith. There would be no point in praising the people for their spiritual growth or encouraging them to strive for more, unless these things were matters of free will.

2:16–3:5 Prayer and praise

Paul asks for continued prayer and assures the people that the Master will strengthen and guard them from the evil one. Along with that, they are to watch out for any believer who gets out of line. They should instead follow Paul's example in integrity that he showed among them.

3:6–12 Warnings and examples

Specifically, Paul commanded that if anyone won't work, they should not eat. Today things are complicated by government handouts, but this does not absolve the churches of holding to Paul's command. If anyone is a believer and is truly in need, the church should be taking care of them. Had the churches consistently practiced this, no believer would ever have to go on government welfare. Instead, many today believe that government handouts to those unwilling to work is an act of love.

3:13–15 Perseverance

Finally, Paul tells them not to lose heart. Even the simplest encouragement can lift a person up, so we would do well to keep an eye out for the discouraged and help them. But for those who refuse to listen to sound instruction, Paul commands us not to associate with them. We cannot look the other way and pretend all is well; we must face problems and deal with them.

3:16–18 Final blessing and greetings

Paul signs off with his own handwriting, as a stamp of authenticity. This was especially important in this case, seeing that the whole purpose of the letter was to prove that it came from him.

To Timothy 1

Background

The first letter from Paul to Timothy was written somewhere between 61 and 64 AD. Timothy's mother was a Jew who became a Christian, and his father was a Greek. Paul had left Timothy to look after the community of believers in Ephesus, but while this letter has traditionally been referred to as a "pastoral epistle", it should be noted that Timothy is never addressed with any title or is said to have that particular gift. He had traveled extensively with Paul (see references in Acts and Paul's letters) and is mentioned in Heb. 13:23, likely after Paul's death.

The cultural backdrop of this letter is well-established and must be considered in order to accurately interpret Paul's teachings.¹⁹ Timothy was in Ephesus, a large and prosperous city (one of the ancient wonders of the world) dedicated to the **fertility goddess Artemis** (Greek; the Roman name was Diana). Women were especially drawn to this goddess because she was believed to **protect them through childbirth**, which carried a high mortality rate for mothers of the time. They also taught that **woman was superior to man and possessed secret knowledge**. And since the **worship rituals involved sex** for the purpose of imparting this knowledge to men, naturally the men approved as well. It was also believed that the **priestesses** were the descendants of the Amazons, who enslaved men to build the city for them. This is why they **kept genealogies** to prove their ancestry. And as Christianity spread there some mixing of teachings arose. One such teaching was that **Eve, the superior, must have preceded Adam**, to whom she imparted wisdom and made fully human, thus **being his "savior"**.

It should be noted that the letter to the congregation in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20) rebukes a woman referred to as "Jezebel" for what appears to be the same kind of practice as that of a priestess of Artemis. The city was known for its trade guilds and worship of Apollo, and the fellowship meals of these guilds included offering food to idols followed by orgies. **Apollo was the twin of Artemis**, and his earthly oracle was to be a maiden (later, a woman over 50) called the Pythia (python); see also

¹⁹Ref. **Kroeger: Against Ancient Heresies**

Acts 16:16 where the slave girl is called a *puthOna*.

We also need to be aware of two rare words that Paul uses in 1 Tim. 2:12-15. The first is *authentain*. It is used in a context of murder or other forms of **violence**, and the early “church father” Chrysostom (who was active in the destruction of places of heathen worship such as the temple of Artemis) used it in the context of **sexual license**. It was never used to mean legitimate authority; in fact, it had no good connotations at all, and it appears only here in the entire NT. The second is *teknogonias* and literally means “**the childbirth**”, in reference to both the act of birth and the raising of the child; see the verb form in 1 Tim. 5:14.

Outline

1. **1:1–2** Greetings and praise
2. **1:3–11** Timothy is to stop false teachers
3. **1:12–17** Paul as a true teacher
4. **1:18–20** How Timothy is to stop false teachers
5. **2:1–7** Praying to keep government from meddling with the community of believers
6. **2:8–10** General criticisms
7. **2:11–3:1** Specific criticisms
8. **3:1–7** How to select guardians
9. **3:8–13** How to select attendants
10. **3:14–15** Timothy’s own behavior
11. **3:16–4:5** Warnings about the future
12. **4:6–16** Timothy as a role model
13. **5:1–16** General instructions
14. **5:17–18** Qualifications for appointed elders
15. **5:19–22** Disciplining wayward elders
16. **5:23–25** Personal medical advice

17. **6:1–2** Masters and slaves
18. **6:2–5** More about false teachers
19. **6:6–10** Selling the Gospel for profit
20. **6:11–16** Running from temptation
21. **6:17–21** Final blessings and warnings

1:1–2 Greetings and Praise

Paul opens the letter with the usual greetings, identifying himself as an Ambassador sent directly by Jesus.

1:3–11 Timothy is to stop false teachers

Timothy is to tell people to **stop teaching falsehood**. They are obsessed with **myths and genealogies** which distract them from the work of God, the purpose of which is to change the heart and produce a faith that is not obsessed with these other things. Some have deviated from this and are passing themselves off as **teachers** of the law, though **they have no idea what they are talking about**. And laws are not for the righteous anyway, but for the unrighteous:

- lawbreakers and rebels
- the irreverent and errant
- the profane and slanderous
- murderers, especially those that murder their own parents
- the promiscuous
- homosexuals— The Greek word *arsenokoitais* is one coined here by Paul but derived from Lev. 18:22–23 and 20:13 in the LXX. The contexts in both references clearly indicate the sin of a man “sharing the bed” with another man; see also Rom. 1:24–27, 13:13, and Heb. 13:4. And though Paul didn’t mention women here, he did so in Rom. 1:24–27, and the wording there leaves no room for claiming the “unnatural” behavior involved anything but humans. That is, Paul is clearly talking about humans doing unnatural things with humans, not humans with fallen angels or animals. Of course those

things are condemned as well, but the point here is that we cannot exempt homosexuality or define the Greek word as not including perversion between humans. And note that this item is only one in a list that would condemn many others as well, along with the fact that these are all what we consider “big” sins that hurt others as well as defy God.

- kidnappers, liars, perjurers, etc.

1:12–17 Paul as a true teacher

Paul is a qualified teacher, chosen by God, in spite of what he once was. He had been the best of the Pharisees (Phil. 3:4–6), yet in God’s eyes he was vile and sinful. And there are two important points to note: not only did he have to **give up his former ways** when he was saved, but he also had to **give up his former status as a teacher** until he had been properly informed, as he states clearly in Gal. 1:12–13. And his example is a prototype of many who would come to faith after him, such that we should never say someone is too bad to be saved.

1:18–20 How Timothy is to stop false teachers

Paul is **delegating** this teaching charge to Timothy for the Ephesian believers. But Timothy must be careful to be unbiased in the discharge of this duty; none are exempt from the discipline that is needed. Paul holds up two men as examples of some who have “shoved off” and “shipwrecked” concerning the faith. The Greek reads “concerning the faith”, not that these two have ruined the faith of others; that is, it’s *the* faith not *their* faith. They have turned away knowingly, given that “they shipwrecked” is in the active voice and “shoved off” is in the middle (they did it to themselves). Above all, they were a bad influence and thus had to be removed from the fellowship.

Note also that these two are handed over to Satan to be taught a lesson. This would not be done at all to unbelievers (see 1 Cor. 5:12–13), who would simply be thrown out as fakes. The fact that Paul adds the purpose is what makes the difference. And we should note that Paul named these false teachers, while another he will mention later is not named. The reason for the difference is not stated by Paul, but if someone is expelled from fellowship for the danger they posed to the faith, it would be reasonable to presume that they should be named so that other congregations could identify them and refuse them fellowship.

2:1–7 Praying to keep government from meddling with the community of believers

Timothy is to tell them to pray for a peaceful life by praying for others, but especially for the secular leaders so that they would not harass the believers. This is especially important given the preceding discussion, which Paul cites as the reason ("therefore"). It is inaccurate to take this to mean we should pray for anything and everything a government might do. Then they must demonstrate the Christian life in every way as a witness to society, because God wants everyone to be saved; Jesus died for all, not just some. And if anyone knows the truth it is Paul, who was sent to the non-Jews.

2:8–10 General criticisms

Timothy is to tell them to be sensible and self-controlled. The men need to calm down and live clean lives, and the women need to stop flaunting wealth and start acting with dignity like that of **Judaism professors**,²⁰ not as priestesses of Artemis who would flaunt their status. Paul is addressing the particular problems there in Ephesus, not establishing some timeless principle that all men are unruly and all women flaunt wealth and engage in fertility rites. This is about sensible and godly decorum in contrast to the surrounding culture.

This is a good place at which to point out an important logical principle: a command for some people to stop doing something is not also the granting of permission for other people to start. For example, suppose children are playing in a playground, supervised by teachers. They are free to play as they choose but within guidelines, such as no hitting or shoving, no cutting in line, etc. Then suppose one child hits another and is given a reprimand. Does this mean the other children are now permitted to hit? Of course not. So when Paul tells a group of people to stop teaching falsehood, he is not at the same time giving permission to teach falsehood to those not in the group. Likewise, men are not allowed to flaunt wealth, and women are not allowed to pray with "unclean hands". This principle may seem obvious here, but it will come up again in more controversial passages, such as whenever he talks about

²⁰The Greek words are now known to refer to women in Judaism who were paid teachers (professors) of Jewish converts, not simply "women who profess to worship God"; see *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, Cambridge Philological Society Supp. Vol. 12, 1987, p. 50.

husbands and wives.

2:11–3:1a Specific criticisms

One of those women needs to **go back to square one and be a humble student first**; she cannot keep the status and practices of a priestess of Artemis but must learn before she can teach again. This parallels Paul's earlier experience as noted in 1:12–17. And the grammar (present active indicative) does not allow the interpretation of a timeless command for **all** women, but one that is limited to the present time for **a** woman. In addition, not only has Paul switched abruptly from plural to singular ("women must. . . I am not allowing a woman"), he has also gone from instructions for women who are already teaching to a woman who must stop for a time. We must also remember that Paul is addressing believers; instructions and commands to unbelievers would be nonsensical. This will prove critical in the last verse of the passage.

"I am not even. . . much less" can also be rendered "neither/nor", but the former seems a better fit in the context of the Artemis cult. While some argue that the phrase means "teach that she is the originator of the man" per the Gnostic creation order, the grammar does not allow it since *authenthein* is not a noun but a verb. That is, it is not "she is the *authenthein*" but "she **must not authenthein**". If the former were true, we would also expect the wording to be along the lines of "I do not permit her to teach that **a woman** was the source of a man. . ." Referencing the principle established in the discussion on 2:8–10, Paul is not saying that men can *authenthein* anyone either, or that men can teach falsehood.

The purpose of Paul's reference to creation order is of course very much debated, but at the very least this is an obvious rebuttal to the Gnostic teachings. Paul has not discussed hierarchy here and it is not even implied in Genesis; to say otherwise is to beg the question. The topic throughout has been false teaching, and Paul ties the matter of a deceived woman (Eve) to a woman who **is presently in a state of deception**, as the grammar indicates. It denotes the continuing results of a past event, and it is singular. This means it cannot be interpreted as Eve's past sin having results on all subsequent women, which would require a word that is both singular and plural (**she** sinned but **they** are still in it), an impossibility. Such an interpretation would also amount to arguing that while Adam's sin affected both males and females, Eve's somehow only affected females. Notice also that while Paul names Adam

and Eve, he abruptly switches to the generic: **Adam** made first, then **Eve**, **Adam** not deceived, yet **the woman**. As we will also see with v. 15, Paul has “switched horses in midstream” for some reason, a reason we cannot lightly dismiss.

Verse 15 reads “But **she** will be saved. . . if **they** continue in faithfulness. . .”. We must not gloss over these pronouns. People might say “If any **man** steals, **he** will go to jail” and we understand that this applies to all men (and, logically, to all women as well, in spite of the masculine terminology). Or people might say “If **men** steal, **they** will go to jail.” But what nobody says is “If a **man** steals **they** will go to jail” (unless we impose the much later English generic singular, which those who vehemently oppose such usage cannot allow for this one case, just to make sense of the passage). But Paul says “she will. . . if they”, and we have no choice but to take it as it is without accusing Paul of the poorest grammar, and only at this spot in all of his writings. Both this and the unique use of the generic singular would be special pleading.

Who is “she”? It cannot be Eve or all women because, as already noted, this is singular and she is still in sin. So since the only woman being referenced here is the one teaching error it must be that woman. But who are “they”? We look for an antecedent (the earlier noun it could refer to) but find nothing obvious. What we do know is that they are not new believers, since they are to **continue** in faith etc., not enter into it for the first time. And they cannot be Adam and Eve, or all Christian women, because this woman’s being “saved” is conditioned upon what “they” do. We could speculate that “they” are the woman and the man, or maybe the women who are teaching accurately and faithfully, but that’s as far as the passage will take us. In any case, whether “she” will be “saved” depends upon what “they” do.

As for the word “saved”, note that its semantic range includes not only salvation in the eternal sense but also **restoration**. To argue that Paul always means the former begs the question; we can only know the range of meanings if we can clearly define it from every context. But in this case the context does not indicate the former, since as already noted it refers to what others continue to do. But if we insist that it is within the bounds of “saved” to mean that she will be saved by the continued faithful witness of others, then even more difficulty is introduced into the passage.

Why would Paul refer to eternal salvation as “the childbirth” only

here? No other passage in the NT ever points to Jesus' birth as what saves, but always to his death and resurrection, and the emphasis here is not on the **product** of that birth but the **process**. And why point it out only for this woman (or all women)? Women are saved the same way as men, so Paul's unusual and roundabout expression here would make no sense. And it cannot refer to "role playing" whereby a woman is shown to be saved by her behavior since, again, men would be required to play their roles too, and salvation is only by faith. And how would Paul know that she will be saved by "their" example? And then what will we do when Paul tells Timothy that he can "save" both himself and those who hear him? In contrast, the meaning "restored" or "preserved" fits easily and simply in the context of this Christian woman sitting down to learn so she can be turned from her deception and restored to her teaching ministry.

So why did Paul use this expression? He seems to be engaging in one of his many plays on words to talk about restoration while putting down Artemis. This woman has to be humbled from teacher to student, and the purpose is to remove the false teachings. This is, in a spiritual sense, much like child-rearing. If we say she was not yet saved then we must wonder why the congregation would ever have let her teach in the first place, and why she is allowed (really, commanded) to learn (grow) if she had not yet been spiritually reborn. In other words, Paul's attention to this issue makes no sense at all if the woman in question isn't even a believer. So this "childbirth" is rendered as the "mentoring" that "they" will provide.

Above all, what we cannot do with this passage is elevate only one interpretation as "what God plainly says". There is nothing plain or simple about it, long held to be one of the most challenging in the NT. Scholars differ widely on practically every part of it, and charges of "agendas" or bias can be thrown in all directions. It is wise to always interpret the disputable by that which is not; the overarching principles of our faith take precedence. Whatever interpretation one chooses, it must conform to what Jesus taught and demonstrated, and to the apostles' teachings for all believers.

3:1b–3:7 How to select guardians

Timothy is to select **guardians** based upon their **already having achieved spiritual maturity** and **demonstrated the ideal Christian life**. The

guardian is not an authority, just as guards on the city walls were not the rulers of the city. Rather, this is one who protects the perimeter, who warns of danger and is prepared to fend it off if it comes near. The clear emphasis is on character and practical criteria by which to judge anyone (the Greek is non-gender specific) who aspires to this service. Undue emphasis has been placed upon “husband of one wife” and not nearly enough on the other qualities. Given that the culture expected men to have many courtesans, and that women were not afforded the same privilege, there is no reason for Paul to admonish women to only have one man. This quality of marital faithfulness is then followed by calmness and self-control, as well as responsibility and reliability. This does not describe the worldly “alpha male” but the “good shepherd”. Neither is this on-the-job training but the recognition of a life already dedicated to God.

Recalling the logical principle mentioned earlier, another instance is illustrated here. If “husband of one wife” means the guardian must be male, then it also means much more: he must be married, he must have children, and those children must be well-behaved. It is the fallacy of “special pleading” to pick only one item from the list as binding while making the others optional, since all are said in the same sentence and given the same weight. Also, one might remember the discussion of “a woman” and presume Paul is once again referring to an individual, but there is a key difference: it says “anyone” instead of “a man” or “a woman”. And of course we see nothing close to “he/they”.

3:8–3:13 How to select attendants

Timothy is to select **attendants** based upon the same criteria as that for guardians. While scripture never gives details about the function or responsibilities of these attendants, we notice that Paul directs that they not be “profiteers”. This may be a clue that these were people who raised donations for the believers in need, but we can only speculate. Notice that Paul does not (nor does anyone else) connect these attendants to the seven chosen in Acts 6:1–7. And the logical principle for guardians applies here as well: if attendants must be male, then there must always be seven of them and they must care for Greek widows. The “high rank” mentioned here is not earthly authority but spiritual reward, the crown of every believer living to please and serve God.

3:14–3:15 Timothy's own behavior

Paul pauses here to finish up the instructions, almost as if he had originally planned to end the letter at this point. But even in this we need to correct a misunderstanding. He is not giving instructions on how worshipers are to behave in a church building or sanctuary, but how Timothy (or possibly anyone) should conduct himself in the carrying out of these directives. The *ekklesia* is not a building made of stone but the people, those whose very bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

3:16–4:5 Warnings about the future

Verse 16 seems a bit out of place, but only until we see that v. 17 is the contrast to it. First Paul recites what sounds like a common Christian saying about the essentials of the faith, but note the reference to a “secret”. This is not a “mystery” that has to be figured out, but something that had been hidden and was now being made plain. The Spirit was then “openly” proclaiming that in the course of time many professing believers would wander off to follow the **teachings of demons**, and these teachings would be notable for their excessive **micromanagement**, of which Paul gives two examples: forbidding marriage and the eating of certain foods. We could add many more from our own experiences in the institutional church: rest on Sunday, no meat on Friday, no dancing or drinking, fashion rules, chains of command, attend “church” on Sunday and “holidays”, etc. This has been the norm for most of the Christian era and is only getting worse, adding such things as forbidding to speak “negatively” or to criticize “pastors”.

4:6–4:16 Timothy as a role model

Paul has been telling Timothy what to teach others, but now his attention turns to Timothy himself, reminding him that he serves Jesus and not just the people. Again he alludes to the myths of Gnosticism in vs. 7, referring to them as silly old **fables**, and urges Timothy to approach his duties as an athlete in training for a contest. But what does Paul mean by “the savior of all people, especially the faithful” (vs. 10)? We can deduce from all the other writings of Paul that only those who accept God’s offer of reconciliation through Jesus are saved, so this statement is just another way to say the same thing. There are no other references that would permit the understanding that some people are more “saved” than others.

Timothy is to be a role model, in spite of his youthfulness. He was evidently given a gift through prophecies made when he was dedicated for his service, and such a thing is not to be taken lightly. But what does Paul mean by use of the word “preserve” in vs. 16, typically translated “saved”? It should be obvious that since Timothy was among those who would be “saved” by his own teachings, it cannot mean salvation from eternal wrath, but preservation from the falsehoods Paul has been writing about all this time.

5:1–5:16 General instructions

Having established the importance of Timothy’s own character and example, Paul now turns to more personal directions for various groups of people in the congregation: older men, younger men, older women, younger women, and widows. There was no need to address widowers since they could support themselves, while widows were at the mercy of relatives or charity. The principle Paul is establishing is first of all that families take care of their own, so that the congregation is not burdened and can better serve those who have no one. But even the truly needy were not to be supported by the congregation if they were of low character or young enough to remarry (and there is no reason to think Paul’s specification that she be at least 60 applies in all cultures and times). Paul gives the reason for such rules: to protect the reputation of the faith. And he adds that anyone who fails to care for their own family (and this is certainly not limited to men, given Paul’s specific rules for women with widowed relatives) is worse than an unbeliever.

Does “worse than an unbeliever” mean those who fail to provide for their families lose their salvation? No, because it would be nonsensical to say that an unbeliever is worse than an unbeliever. What the context seems to indicate is that they are *behaving* worse than unbelievers, living according to a lower standard, and must be reprimanded. As with the situation Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 5, a believer (and with the church’s approval!) can sink very low and still be restored when they repent, and one does not receive discipline if one is not a child of the family (Heb. 12:6–8).

Another faith question is raised in the statement about young widows who “have broken the pledge” (lit. “left the first faith”). Yet if it referred to salvation, it would not be designated as “first”, and we would be adding significant meaning to the text to say it means “the faith they

had at first". The phrase as a whole seems to refer to a possible pledge to remain single. Yet it is followed by mention of some who have turned back to the Adversary, but look at the statement just before it about not giving critics a foothold. These critics (lit. "those opposing") are not identified as Satan (Adversary) and could be anyone; the same goes also for "some". So it would appear that Paul is once again warning against giving such a bad witness that observers turn away from the faith as a result; that is, the "some" does not point to these women but to outsiders. It would also be quite inconsistent for Paul to make failure to remarry a salvation issue (ref. 1 Cor. 7, esp. vs. 9). And remember that we are still in this letter concerning false teachings and women in a culture of Artemis worship.

The gentleness of the Christian is to be the norm, especially when dealing with fellow believers, and even more so if they are in need of help. Paul showed through his treatment of the woman teaching falsehood that though she was in error, she was to be kindly but firmly corrected. Yet when we encounter hostile unbelievers, such gentleness can, and often does, lead to compromise and failure to clearly speak the truth. This is not to say we mock and revile the lost, especially if they are not hostile, but on the other hand we must not fail to stand firm for the truth, even if we are labeled as hateful or narrow. But keep in mind that one person's definition of "nice" is not necessarily another's, and neither are on a par with God's. Look in the Gospels and the Letters, and see what Jesus and the apostles did, both gentle and harsh, and when they did which.

In vs. 14 we see the Greek word for "childbearing" or "childrearing", and it's in a list of common activities for women of that time and culture. But Paul gives the reason for this, and it is not to codify the limits of a woman's sphere but to once again guard the reputation of the faith. Further, note the wording Paul uses to describe her status in the home: she is the "house despot". If anyone is designated by Paul as the "head of the house", it is the woman; it could not be stated any more plainly than it is here.

5:17–5:18 Qualifications for appointed elders

Now Paul turns his attention to elders who "stand before", as opposed to simply the "older" men and women mentioned earlier. This "stand before", *proistemi*, is the same word Paul used in Rom. 12:8 as one of the spiritual gifts, and refers to one who is a leader, patron, supervisor,

and director. He also used it in 1 Tim. 3:4 regarding the qualifications for guardians. One might see a contradiction between what Paul just said about a woman being the “house despot” and what he said about the others, but that would only be the case if the guardian and “standing elder” are seen as rulers. So since Paul would not contradict himself, we must conclude that guardians and “standing elders” are not ruling authorities.

5:19–22 Disciplining wayward elders

Paul specifies “double honor” for these elders, especially for the ones who teach scripture, and cites a principle from the old Law as the rationale. But while most interpret this as a figurative appeal for a literal paid position, the context here suggests that Paul is only drawing an analogy. One factor is the complete absence of any specific monetary value, which seems a glaring omission when we remember his specification for the age of an eligible widow. Another is the complete absence of any mention of salary for other alleged positions; that is, who is to be paid “single honor”, and how much is that? And of course Paul only uses the word “wages” for the OT reference, but “honor” for this one. Can we dismiss the literal meaning so easily? In other words, had Paul wanted to talk about honor, could he have said it differently or more clearly?

The primary point of this “double honor” is revealed in vs. 19 and is the counter-balance to it: “double shame”. While it would take more than a casual accusation against such an elder for it to even be considered, the elder who is found guilty of wrongdoing is to be rebuked publicly as an example and warning to the other elders. This is a serious matter that Paul emphasizes by charging Timothy to carry it out without bias or favoritism. Additional weight is given to this matter when Paul warns Timothy not to designate anyone an elder too quickly, or he (Timothy) would share in whatever error they commit. The modern habit of putting “pastors” above scrutiny or criticism stands in stark contrast to, and obvious violation of, this directive; much favoritism is shown to the entitled and their sins are covered over with excuses no one else can use. All of Paul’s teachings concerning leaders put them on a higher standard of morality, not a lower one. And the churches have long ignored the warning against the hasty appointment of elders.

5:23–25 Personal medical advice

Paul pauses here before moving on to the next topic. He tells Timothy to drink some wine for his ailment, which we know was not stomach problems but frequent urination, due to the unhealthy water there in Ephesus.²¹ Wine would not only cut down on water consumption but also supply some medicinal value, as it is now known to be healthy in small amounts. Then Paul informs Timothy about both hidden sins and hidden good deeds. We can only speculate as to why he interjected these things at this point, but it is likely that Paul did not write the whole letter in one sitting, and he has already said that he intended to see Timothy soon anyway.

6:1–2a Masters and slaves

Now the topic is masters and slaves, and once again the emphasis is on protecting the reputation of the faith, not dictating a list of duties or condoning the institution of slavery. It was a fact of life and the believers needed to know how to behave under it. Paul was not so much interested in correcting society's ills as he was in correcting the believing community, which in turn would transform society. He cautions slaves to treat believing owners with respect as their spiritual equals.

6:2b–5 More about false teachers

Paul contrasts the teaching he has been giving to Timothy with that of those he calls conceited and ignorant, and describes them with similar terminology to that of the false teachers he mentioned in chapter one. Note that Paul does not hold back from derogatory terms for such teachers, a habit that would surely earn him a strong rebuke from those who wish to impose their own definition of niceness on everyone.

6:6–10 Selling the Gospel for profit

Paul expounds on the last characteristic of these people when it comes to the love of money, since they thought the faith was just another way to make it; they were "selling" the gospel for profit. But it is no different today, as anyone can see not only by watching TV but also by observing the typical church organization. While the majority of preachers may be sincere and godly, even they use the terminology of employment and

²¹Ref. Hipp., Aer.286. The Greek word for "stomach" is not *stomakhon* as in this passage, but *gaster*.

career when speaking of their activities concerning the faith. They apply to churches as anyone would apply for a job, they are given a compensation package and staff, they have an office and supplies, they preside at business meetings, and they usually get a pension as well. Is this not the meaning of “they have received their reward”, as Jesus said in Mt. 6?

And who can deny that when one receives a salary, one is tempted to compromise on matters of the faith? If nothing else, “children supporting their parents” (2 Cor. 12:14) obligates the “parents” to please them. Or in the other extreme, some “shepherds” demand that the “sheep” care for them and obey them without question, berating them for not continually increasing their financial support. Clearly, even if a “pastor” may not consciously “love money”, the system’s very design gives Satan a foothold, and the demands of the “position” tend to crowd out time spent only on spiritual matters. We would do well to heed the advice of Peter and “not neglect the Word of God in order to wait tables” (Acts 6:2).

So Paul’s warning to the rich in vs. 9 is not just a general one but applies to teachers as well. As it says in Prov. 13:8, the poor hear no threats; they are not the targets of thieves or swindlers or political enemies. This is not to say that wealth itself is evil, but only that it poses a great danger. Those who have it need to keep a close eye on its effect on them.

In verse 10 yet another faith question is raised, and again we must ask who “they” are. Paul has been discussing people who sell the gospel for a profit, and the description does not sound as though these are believers. They have been lured away in the same manner as the seeds being choked by weeds in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mt. 13:22), and there is disagreement over whether the seeds being choked or scorched by the sun refers to believers. Another factor in the parable is that Jesus was still speaking before the Holy Spirit had come.

6:11–16 Running from temptation

At this point we are hardly surprised to see Paul tell Timothy to run away from such temptations. Some may think it spiritual or a test of faith to “play with fire”, but the “fire” of temptation is deadly and powerful, and we dare not think ourselves impervious to its attacks. Evil is something to be resisted, not challenged (James 4:7). This is a spiritual war, one that requires “contention”, and Paul solemnly charges Timothy with a

mandate to keep these instructions to the very best of his ability.

6:17–21 Final blessings and warnings

After ending the previous section with praise to God, Paul gives additional warnings to the rich. Then he turns back to Timothy, once again urging his faithfulness to this assignment, and once again emphasizing the need to keep away from the distractions of the ignorant teachers. The reference to “what is falsely called knowledge” is a clear and direct jab at Gnosticism, the over-arching theme of the letter.

To Timothy 2

Background

The second letter from Paul to Timothy was written around 64 AD, which is partly determined from the content, where Paul speaks of finishing his race and being poured out like an offering. Thus the overall tone of the letter is a last-minute pep talk, an encouragement and final charge for Timothy to do his duty and carry on the work.

Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings and praise
2. **1:7–12** A warning against fear and inaction
3. **1:13–18** Encouragement to stay the course
4. **2:1–13** Teaching others to teach
5. **2:14–19** Focusing on what matters
6. **2:20–26** Choosing to be useful
7. **3:1–13** What signs mark the end of the age
8. **3:14–17** Sifting true from false
9. **4:1–8** Staying at one's post until the very end
10. **4:9–22** Final blessings and hope

1:1–7a Greetings and praise

As usual, Paul identifies himself as an Ambassador of Jesus, and he speaks of Timothy as a dear child. He remembers him often, especially his “non-pedantic” faith. The Greek word refers to micromanagement, to an obsession with details and control. That kind of faith is harmful and counterproductive, while Timothy’s is genuine. This pure faith has been passed to Timothy like a family heirloom on his mother’s side. It should be noted that since his father was Greek, the responsibility for keeping faith was clearly on his mother and grandmother, whose qualifications for the job were proved in Timothy. It is this heritage which he is to

fan into flame, empowered by the spiritual gift he received from Paul's dedication of him.

This teaching by the women in Timothy's family makes an important point: that women are qualified teachers. It stretches credulity to think that such women lose this wisdom and ability if a male student is beyond a certain age, such that she who was once wise and instructive is now to be considered deceiving and seducing. Even if this were true, it makes no sense whatsoever to have the deceivable teach the vulnerable. To think that such women could raise a Timothy only until he reached a certain (and arbitrary) biological age, at which point they were to keep silence, is to abandon all logic and sense.

1:7b–12 A warning against fear and inaction

Paul's warning against cowardice may indicate that Timothy was hesitant to take on his responsibilities, possibly because of his youth, but also undoubtedly because it would involve suffering. To shrink back would mean to be ashamed of Jesus. But Paul's loyalty and fearlessness were rooted in knowing his Savior and trusting him to guard his reward till the day Jesus returns for us.

1:13–18 Encouragement to stay the course

Paul continues to remind Timothy of all he has learned from him, whether by word or deed. He seems to hold up some bad examples as further motivation for Timothy to keep to the course, followed by some good examples to keep him motivated.

2:1–13 Teaching others to teach

Once again Timothy is charged with passing the teachings on, but not to just anyone: they have to be trustworthy and qualified people. Character is always the focus in any such admonitions of Paul. These people would also have to be willing to endure hardship, just as Timothy would. The rewards come to those who earn them, which is only one of many instances in the New Testament that put responsibility on us for using the power God makes available to us. God will not cause spiritual growth without our cooperation, or there'd be no need for any of these warnings and encouragements. And of course the ultimate example is Jesus, whose endurance of suffering is our model. But even if we falter, he will never disown us, a promise we need to remember when we doubt our own faith.

2:14–19 Focusing on what matters

Paul's warnings against needless squabbling echo those of the first letter. Timothy must discipline himself to focus on the only words that matter, and to recognize the great responsibility of understanding and teaching them properly. As before, Paul names dangerous teachers so others can take warning. But note the nature of the false teaching here: that the Resurrection had already happened. It should be obvious that this does not refer to Jesus' resurrection, since that fact is what every saved person believes. Instead it must refer to another Resurrection, one that all his followers will experience.

So the question is whether this Resurrection refers only to the final one of all human history, or to the one known as the Rapture. We are given a clue in the fact that these two false teachers were frightening people by telling them this event had already happened and they had missed it. Who would believe they had missed the apocalyptic end of human history? Or even the Great Tribulation? Only the Rapture would explain how people could be fooled into thinking they missed the Resurrection. And Paul reinforces the impossibility of something like that happening without our knowledge by reminding Timothy that Jesus knows who are his, and he will not forget them or abandon them.

2:20–26 Choosing to be useful

Now Paul uses the illustration of common household containers to teach Timothy that our usefulness to God depends upon our attitude. If we purge ourselves from the unsavory aspects of life and fill ourselves with good qualities, we will do great things for God. Once again this is our responsibility; God does not determine which kind of container we are, but uses us according to what we make available to him. It is our choice but his power. We are to discipline ourselves like soldiers or athletes who are dedicated to their causes. At the same time, Timothy must remember that this is not something he can dictate to people, but like Paul he must lead by example.

3:1–13 Signs marking the end of the age

This familiar description of conditions in the last days has often been cited as applicable to our time. No one would dispute the fact that life in the time of Paul was hardly a bed of roses, especially after all he had said about his sufferings. So for him to put the last days in a class of

their own is a clear indication that the intensity and pervasiveness of these evils would be much worse. Paul gave these things as a sign for us, and we need to pay attention.

Of particular importance is his statement about fake believers. We tend to forget that evil does not knock on the front door and hold up an ID card for us; it pretends to be one of us. It slowly introduces teachings that on the surface appear to be harmless or even beneficial. But one step leads to another, and one by one the false teachings replace true ones. Those without discernment will follow such teachers without question, and they accuse anyone criticizing the false teachers of being hateful and negative, or even thwarting the work of God. But the goal they and their teachers pursue will never be reached, and their faith will be ruined. We need to take Paul's warnings seriously, and all the more as the end approaches.

3:14–17 Sifting true from false

Shifting back to Timothy again, Paul urges him to keep a tight grip on that which has been a part of his life from earliest childhood. The sacred writings are not dead letters or fables, but the living, breathing Word of God. They are meant to be used for our spiritual growth, whether by encouraging the good or discouraging the bad. It's our spiritual Owner's Manual.

4:1–8 Staying at one's post until the very end

As if all of this hasn't been enough, now Paul challenges Timothy with a solemn charge before God to stay at his post. This isn't optional or secondary; this is what the Christian leader is called to. Timothy is not to be a "weekend warrior" but to see this as a continual and lifetime commitment. This charge is for every Christian leader, because as Paul warned, a time would come when there would be no tolerance for such teachings— a time that many would agree we have now reached. And keep in mind that these people who won't listen to the truth are found within the community of believers; these instructions have all been about how Timothy is to instruct the Congregation.

4:9–22 Final blessings and hope

Paul goes back to the example of his own life to motivate Timothy to stay the course. Again he mentions the last days with reference to Jesus' sudden appearance, which the faithful will live in great hope of seeing.

This is described as a hope that will earn a reward, one that Paul himself expected to have. How many believers today live in the daily hope of Jesus' sudden return? Sadly, there are many who not only have lost this hope but who are hostile to those who still have it. Yet if Paul believed Jesus could return in his lifetime, it must be an event without prior notice, like a thief in the night.

Now Paul nears the end of the letter with typical personal business and the joy of knowing that his sufferings have not been in vain. But notice his attitude toward someone who opposed his message and did him much harm: he is confident that the Master will give the man what he deserves. Yet today, any believer who voices any such "negativity" is called hateful and un-Christlike. Clearly there is a place for righteous indignation and wishing for the enemies of the Gospel to get what's coming to them. Can we accuse Paul of contradicting his earlier injunctions for Timothy to be gentle? Instead, we must conclude that gentleness is for those who simply disagree on disputable matters, while harshness is in order for those who oppose the gospel itself and do harm to the faith.

To Titus

Background

The letter from Paul to Titus was written around 63 AD before Paul's final imprisonment. These are specific instructions on how Titus should set up the community of believers on the island of Crete, the converts Paul had made earlier.

Outline

1. **1:1–5** Greetings and purpose
2. **1:6–9** Qualifications for Elders
3. **1:10–16** Identifying false Elders
4. **2:1–8** Male and female Elders
5. **2:9–14** Slaves
6. **2:15–3:8a** General instructions and God's compassion
7. **3:8b–11** Reminders for Titus
8. **3:12–14** Personal business
9. **3:15** Final greetings

1:1–5 Greetings

Paul begins with a reference to himself as a lowly slave of God, whose job is to be an Ambassador. In spite of his credentials and honored commission, he is not boastful or high-minded. Our hope is in eternal life through Jesus, who in his mercy chose Paul as one through whom this Gospel would be spread. Like Timothy, Titus is also called a "child" by Paul.

1:6–9 Qualifications for Elders

He had left Titus in Crete to "appoint Elders in every city". Notice that there was to be more than one Elder (spiritually mature, tested and found faithful and qualified) per city. Some people might claim that each of those Elders ran an individual Congregation, but the context doesn't give

us that. In the first century there was only one Congregation per town, though they met in various homes. It's probable that each small group had an Elder, but it's also just as likely that there was more than one per group. At any rate, there is no firm backing for the traditional concept of the "head Pastor" as a kind of CEO or president.

Paul gives a brief list of qualifications for Elders. Again, as explained in the comments elsewhere,²² these lists do not specify that only males can be Elders, or that they must be married and have children. The point is that they are upstanding members of society and the community of believers. Notice that they were to be gentle and encouraging to some, while also being able to refute any who contradict sound instruction. This is a principle Paul has discussed in other letters, that of being a good shepherd. The good shepherd is gentle to the sheep but harsh to the wolves.

Note that Paul equates the Guardian (*episkopon*) with the Elder (*presbuterous*); he makes no distinction between them. Elder thus refers to the quality of the person but Guardian refers also to the person's duties, and for that Paul uses a term that essentially means a manager or steward for God. Just as he has stipulated the spiritual qualifications of these people, he now adds a description of their responsibilities: to know the true teachings in order to expose the false. So these people had to not only be of the highest quality in how they lived, but also be so well-versed in the truth that they could be trusted to confront and expose falsehood. Of course, this means the person must be able and willing to confront others.

Another important thing to note is that these are **appointments**. Age is not something that anyone can be appointed to. So here we have a clear precedent for two possible meanings of *presbuterous*, the other being a simple reference to the aged. But the context of this whole short letter is that of appointment, and thus not about the elderly.

Servants (*diakonos*) are not mentioned in this letter at all. One would expect to see them mentioned here if Paul is laying down the framework of an organization, with Guardians on top and Deacons below them, and the common people on the bottom. What the people of Crete needed was not an institution but protection and nurturing while they were immature and in training.

²²1 Tim. 3:1b–7 Qualifications for a Guardian

1:10–16 Identifying false Elders

After berating the Cretans, Paul turns to the example Titus must give to them. He is pointedly charged not only with setting an example of holiness in a debauched society, but also with teaching the believers the basics of the faith and making sure they learn the lesson well. He is told to contain and oppose any who dispute the truths of the faith, especially the Jews who were pushing circumcision for the sake of profit. Paul even quotes a local proverb about how bad the Cretans' reputation was, as being an incentive for Titus to expose them decisively. This is a common theme in Paul's letters, to stand and oppose falsehood, not to sweep it under the rug as is practiced today. And as a popular saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." All the "God talk" in the world cannot cover up a life of sin forever.

2:1–8 Male and female Elders

Paul repeats the qualifications for Elders, both male and female. The Greek word here is the very same root word as in chapter one: "presbyters" were to be appointed in every town. So when many translations use "older men" and "older women" here, they are ignoring the overall context. These are the appointees of chapter one, not all elderly people. Similarly, the Greek word typically rendered "young" is one from which we get the prefix "neo" meaning "new", not necessarily "young". So Paul is saying that male and female Elders are to train new believers in appropriate doctrine and behavior.

This section is written as a chiasm²³ as follows:

1. **A** 2:1 Be the example
2. – **B** 2:2 Male Elders
3. — **X** 2:3–5 Female Elders
4. – **B'** 2:6 Male Elders
5. **A'** 2:7–8 Be the example

²³A chiasm (pronounced "key'-azm") is an intersection or crossing of two tracts in the form of the letter "X" or the Greek letter chi. An argument is built up to a central point (X) in any number of steps, then retraced in reverse order. The entire letter to the Romans is a chiasm, with many smaller ones included.

Titus, like all appointed Elders, is to live out these instructions, to be an example and not just a teacher in word alone. He is to live up to the highest standard so that critics (in this case it seems to be a particular individual) will be exposed as false accusers. This is the “wrapper” in which the instructions he is to give to others is contained.

Male Elders are to aspire to Titus’ example in every way, with an emphasis on wisdom. But the most detail is given to female Elders. In addition to the qualities they must share with the males (“the same goes for” or “likewise”), these women had the added task of raising the social behavioral bar for the women of Crete, who were not used to such things in their society. The women needed extra training in wisdom, in raising children, in mastering their homes, and in being supportive of their husbands. As discussed in detail in the commentary under 1 Tim. 2:1–10 (General instructions about prayer), this is being said about the women of Crete because they were lacking in this area, not because men are not to be taught to support their wives.

Women in Crete were being irresponsible, neglecting their homes, husbands, and children. Paul will tolerate none of that in the community of believers. Titus is to see to it that the female Elders train the female new believers in what it means to be a Christian woman. Their standards are not to be lowered, either because of their being women or simply being Cretans. The stakes are high because there must be a sharp distinction between the hedonistic culture and the ways of God. Note Paul’s play on words between “old” and “new” here; the women who are the opposite of Elders must be novices. Elders were charged with training the new believers, and such training for the women of Crete needed to include the social skills taken for granted by polite society in other places, since they had no proper role models otherwise.

When Paul addresses his instructions to female Elders, he even specifies that they are to act in accordance with the dignity of this **appointment**. The Greek word here shares the same root as in chapter 1 where Paul commands Titus to “appoint Elders”; the only difference is that the earlier reference is a verb (command) while this one is a noun. So the female Elders must, like Titus, be examples to the women they train.

2:9–14 Slaves

Paul now adds instructions similar to those he’s given elsewhere concerning slaves and masters. Of course all believers are to turn their backs

on evil and live holy lives, as well as to wait for the expected, glorious, sudden return of Jesus. But there is certainly good reason to emphasize to slaves that they too must live up to the same standards and not give the faith a bad name.

2:15–3:8a General instructions and God’s compassion

Titus is to teach all this with confidence and strength, not being intimidated or failing to confront false teachers. He is to remind the people of their duty to be good citizens, to keep away from slander, and to be as peaceful as possible. Though we may have been the opposite of all that while unbelievers, we have received God’s kindness and mercy through his “bathing us in the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit”. Our good deeds had nothing to do with our cleansing, but only faith resulting in receiving the Spirit.

3:8b–11 Reminders for Titus

Believers should be living examples of all good behavior. We must not indulge in endless unresolvable debates or legalism. Anyone who does so is to be warned twice, and then expelled from the group if they still won’t listen.

3:12–14 Personal business

Paul will send replacements to relieve Titus soon, and then Titus is to come back to visit Paul if possible. And he is to send out two men with provisions, as one of the examples he is to set for the people. Those who give up everything to spread the Gospel must not be sent out empty-handed.

3:15 Final greetings

Paul does not name individuals here, but only gives a general farewell.

To Philemon

Background

The letter from Paul to Philemon was written around 59–61 AD while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Philemon was the master of the slave Onesimus. Paul met Onesimus after he had run away from his master, and Onesimus had subsequently become a Christian. Now he is willing to return to his master, and Paul very tactfully asks Philemon to receive him as a brother. By Roman law he could have had the runaway slave put to death.

Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings
2. **1:8–16** Explaining the situation
3. **1:17–22** An appeal for mercy
4. **1:23–25** Greetings

1:1–7 Greetings

Paul, writing from prison, identifies himself as being the prisoner of the Anointed. He includes Timothy as co-author, and writes not only to Philemon but also to a woman named Apphia, to another co-worker named Archippus, and to all the believers. Though the content of the letter is primarily to and about Philemon, the others are to read it and learn from it.

1:8–16 Explaining the situation

Onesimus was one of Paul's converts to Christianity. Paul could have pulled rank on Philemon but instead appeals to him out of love, to accept the former escaped slave back as a brother. Notice that Paul also uses a little leverage by mentioning his being old, as if to say, "Do this favor for an old man, will you?"

The name Onesimus means "useful", and Paul uses a play on words in saying that although he was formerly useless, he was now living up to his name. Paul wanted to return him to his owner instead of just keeping him as a helper without first having Philemon's consent.

1:17–22 An appeal for mercy

Paul offers, in strict legal terms, to reimburse Philemon for any hardship he may have suffered due to the temporary loss of Onesimus' services. But he adds yet more leverage: Philemon owed him his life! Paul is cashing in on any favor he could in order to motivate Philemon to do the honorable thing as a Christian. And on top of that he informs Philemon to prepare a room for his impending visit, so he can be there in person to see what Philemon chooses to do.

1:23–25 Greetings

Paul gives the usual greetings, from himself and others with him.

To The Hebrews

Background

The letter to the Hebrews (a presumptive title based on the content, but never explicitly stated) was written between 49–70 AD, and probably toward the end of that range. Since the Levitical system was still in place, being referred to in the present tense throughout the letter, it must have been completed before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

It is the only Letter that mentions Timothy in prison (13:23), which could weigh toward its having been written after the death of Paul. But there is at least one other reason to reject Pauline authorship: Heb. 2:3 states that the author(s) (5:11, 6:9, 8:1 etc. use the pronoun “we”, yet 11:32 uses “I”) had not heard Jesus personally. In addition, Paul always signed his letters, at least partially to guard against forgeries. He had no reason to hide his identity, and it would have been very much out of character for him to do so.

Though it has the most sophisticated Greek of all the Letters, its author remains a mystery. In fact, there seems to have been a deliberate hiding of the author(s)’ identity. Luther suggested Apollos, and later research has suggested Apollos’ teacher, Priscilla (a.k.a. Priska) or possibly her along with her husband Aquilla. Priscilla had been mentioned by Paul as a co-worker. And female authorship would explain the omission of the author’s name, as it would not only have gone against social norms of the time, but also could result in the woman’s torture and death at the hands of the Roman government. She, her husband, and Timothy had all worked together with Paul.

There is only one spot in the entire letter that is cited as proof that the author must have been a male. In 11:32 the pronoun “me” goes with the verb “to relate”, and that verb is in the grammatical masculine. Yet not only is this a great stretch upon which to base male authorship of the whole letter, it ignores the use of what is called the “authorial masculine”, and that this is the only occurrence of this form in the entire New Testament (Strong’s Concordance no. 1334).²⁴ All other forms of the

²⁴The references to all forms of the base verb are Acts 8:33, 9:27, 12:16; Mark 5:16, 9:9; Luke 8:39, 9:10; Heb. 11:32.

word have no grammatical gender associated with them. There is little doubt that if this occurrence of the word had the feminine grammatical gender, no scholar would cite it by itself as proof of a female author.

(Lest anyone make the accusation that this is all some modern feminist invention, note that the first scholarly argument for Priscilla's possible authorship was done by the German scholar Adolf von Harnack in 1900.)²⁵

Another candidate is Barnabas, who was a Levite (Acts 4:36, and the content of Hebrews is of course heavily Levitical), yet like Paul, there would have been no reason to hide his identity. Other names offered include Clement of Rome and Luke.

The letter's theme is the absolute supremacy and uniqueness of Jesus. Much time is spent on explaining the purpose and symbolism of the Levitical system and its fulfillment and annulment in Jesus. It is loaded with theological meat, making it an excellent one-stop resource for defending the faith against all sorts of false teachings.

Outline

1. **1:1–3:6** Jesus, the Focal Point of History
 - (a) **1:1–4** Introducing Jesus
 - (b) **1:5–2:18** The superiority of Jesus above Messengers
 - i. **1:5–2:4** By virtue of his divinity
 - ii. **2:5–18** By virtue of his humanity
 - (c) **3:1–6** The superiority of Jesus as Ruling Priest above Moses
2. **3:7–11** Warnings from history
3. **3:12–15** Encouraging each other while there is time
4. **3:16–4:11** Entering God's "rest"
5. **4:12–5:10** Jesus as Ruling Priest in a new Order
6. **5:11–6:19** Diversion to discuss maturity
7. **6:20–10:36** More about Jesus as one like Melchizedek

²⁵A. von Harnack, *Probabilia uber die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebraerbriefes*, Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 1900

- (a) **6:20–7:10** A new order
 - (b) **7:11–17** A new priesthood
 - (c) **7:18–28** A new law
 - (d) **8:1–13** A new offering
 - (e) **9:1–11** A new temple
 - (f) **9:12–10:18** A new contract
 - (g) **10:19–36** A new relationship
8. **10:37–11:40** By faith
 9. **12:1–2** Our examples to follow
 10. **12:3–11** Children of God
 11. **12:12–13:7** Our response
 12. **13:8–15** Warnings to stay sharp
 13. **13:16–19** The wisdom of following the examples of proven leaders
 14. **13:20–25** Final blessings and greetings

1:1–3:6 Jesus, the Focal Point of History

1:1–4 Introducing Jesus

This letter begins, not with a greeting or other pleasantries, but with a simple statement of fact. But it says two important things about how God speaks to us that many ignore: little by little, and in many ways. God has not chosen to dump everything out at once, but to gradually tell us more and more, in order to bring us to Jesus at just the right time in history. And he does not always speak in the same way, but he does always speak through approved prophets, attested by their perfect accuracy (see Deut. 18:22). In light of that, we must not make the mistake of uncritically applying principles or rules for one epoch onto another. God's character never changes, but his dealings with us certainly do.

There is a tone of finality when it says, "but in these last days he has spoken". Jesus was the culmination of history, the point to which all the "little by little" was aimed. Since God "has spoken" we can deduce that he speaks no more through the prophets to reveal things we need

to know. He has given us all we need. This is not to say anything about the spiritual gifts, but simply to close the canon of scripture. Yes, the Letters were written afterwards, but they all point to Jesus and record for later generations what would surely have been lost to them. They were the eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus, commissioned by him to speak on his behalf.

Jesus is said to have “made the ages”. Other translations put it as something like his having made the universe. Certainly that’s true (Col. 1:15-20), but the context here is about God’s having revealed his will gradually through the ages. The Greek word is where we get our word “eon”; if the universe were the intended meaning here, the Greek word would have been our “cosmos”. So Jesus is the One who made the gradually unfolding revelations which were designed to present him to us at just the right time in history.

Jesus is further described as “the radiance of God’s majesty and the exact likeness of his core being”. That being the case, how can anyone argue that Jesus is eternally subordinated to the Father, as is becoming popular among many Christian writers today? They look only at the following statement about his having sat down at the right side of the Majesty. But even there, we see that Jesus is both separate from and equal with the Father. Note also that Jesus is the radiance of God, not only of the Father; those are two different words in the Greek (*theos* and *pater*). We must not mentally substitute the meaning Father when we read the word God. (And technically, both the Father and the Spirit “fathered” the humanity of Jesus; see Luke 1:35.) Adding the statement about Jesus “holding everything up”, we understand him to be the Agent of creation.

And of course this all has its ultimate purpose in Jesus’ sacrifice for sins. But having accomplished that, he rose again and was returned (not taken for the first time) to his former glory as God (see also Phil. 2:5–11). Jesus, since his incarnation, has had both his eternal divine nature and his human nature, the so-called “hypostatic union”. This causes us confusion because we don’t always see which aspects of his relationship to the Father and Spirit are representative of his divinity and which are of his humanity. There is no hierarchy within the divine Trinity, but there is regarding Jesus’ humanity. We simply cannot grasp how the two are joined. But it is this joining that makes it possible for us to be adopted as children of God. That is why Jesus is the only Way to the Father,

such that only if we are united with Jesus can we be considered righteous in God's eyes.

1:5–2:18 The superiority of Jesus above Messengers

When we read that Jesus **became** above the Messengers, we must remember that this only applies to his humanity, not his divinity.

1:5–2:4 By virtue of his divinity

Now the writer goes into the many ways in which Jesus is not, and never was, a mere Messenger. And how much more clearly can his eternal divinity be stated than this? “**God**, your throne is eternal, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom. . . and for that reason **your God** anointed you. . .” Jesus was always God but also became human at a point in time. And again, Jesus is said to be the one that “laid down the foundations of the earth in the beginning.” In contrast, Messengers are described as servants that minister to believers. And someday we will be their judges (1 Cor. 6:3).

Although Messengers are our servants, we must remember that we are presently not as powerful as they. The writer warns that to disobey what God delivered through a Messenger was severely punished. Yet the point here is mainly that since such punishment was associated with Messengers, then how much greater punishment will be associated with rejecting the good message brought by and through Jesus, who is so much greater than they?

2:5–18 By virtue of his humanity

Continuing the theme of contrasting Messengers with God or humans, it is pointed out that humans, not Messengers, were the very reason God created everything. And here again, Jesus is shown to have only temporarily been made lower than the Messengers, then exalted back to glory.

The reason Jesus was made lower was to share in our humanity and to experience physical death on behalf of everyone. This opened the door for everyone who accepted him to be saved. As a result, all of us who have believed in him are one family, to the point where we are exalted above the Messengers, being children instead of servants. Jesus shared in our humanity, which is not true of Messengers.

Now we see in vs. 16 that he did all this for “the descendants of Abraham”. Calvinism claims this as proof of Limited Atonement, or the

theory that Jesus only died for “the elect” and not the whole world, but that takes it out of context. The contrast here is primarily between people and Messengers, within the larger context of the Hebrews. And we cannot simply discard all the other scriptures that clearly show Jesus having died for the whole world. Logically, to say Jesus did this for a particular group is **not** to say he did so for **only** that group. Yes, it was for Abraham’s descendants— and everyone else as well.

3:1–6 The superiority of Jesus as Ruling Priest above Moses

Since Jesus is greater than any Messengers, it follows also that he is greater than Moses. Moses was a favored servant, but Jesus became God’s Son; therefore all who trust in Jesus, not Moses, are members of God’s household. So the Holy Spirit pleads with all people to not follow the example of rebellious Israel, but to hear God’s voice.

3:7–11 Warnings from history

A warning is given here to do more than listen to true teachings, but also to put them into practice. The nation of Israel is held up as an example of people who had known the ways of God but turned against him. They had seen his great miracles and enjoyed his deliverance, yet they threw it all away and were then considered unworthy of their inheritance, in much the same way that Esau sold his birthright (Gen. 25:34, Heb. 12:16).

Notice the phrase “do not harden your hearts.” It is people who choose to harden their own hearts, not God who imposes it upon them to keep them from being saved. The people of Israel had done it themselves, or else the writer of Hebrews would not be warning their readers against doing the same thing. The implications of “today” and “enter my rest” will be discussed under “Entering God’s rest”.

3:12–15 Encouraging each other while there is time

It’s all well and good to heed a warning, but it helps a lot to have people reminding each other about it. We believers need to be in the continual habit of encouraging each other so that we do not “harden our hearts” as Israel did. Note the primary cause of their punishment: unbelief. It was not Jewish ancestry that would save the readers of this letter who might still be in unbelief, but only faith in God.

3:16–4:11 Entering God’s “rest”

Not all of the Israelis rebelled, but God punished those who did. It was the unfaithful, the rebellious, who would be kept out of God’s “rest”. God will not wait forever for people to change their minds, so it is imperative that we don’t put it off.

There are two erroneous teachings derived from this passage: (1) since Today is still continuing then the days of creation week must have been long ages, and (2) Israel’s having escaped from Egypt yet later being denied entrance to God’s “rest” must indicate possible lost salvation (Conditional Security).

The first error claims that if the seventh day is the day God rested from creative work, and if God still speaks of people entering his rest, then this must still be the seventh day. But that would mean all people, not just the righteous, have entered God’s rest. And it is clearly stated that a “Sabbath” **still remains**, meaning it hasn’t started yet. This passage clearly states that only the righteous can enter it, along with all other scriptures regarding salvation. So the rest spoken of in this context cannot be equated with that of the seventh day of creation. “Today” here is held in contrast to ancient Israel, not to creation week. Notice also that “God specified **another day called Today.**” Not all the “Todays” are the same.

Reference is made to creation week, and it specifically portrays the seventh day as symbolizing God’s rest. But note the direction of the symbolism: the literal seventh solar day is a symbol of God’s rest; God’s rest is not a symbol of the seventh day. And God’s rest will never end; the writer has repeatedly pointed out that the opportunity to enter God’s rest (Today) is temporary, but the rest itself is eternal.

The fact that Today is associated with God’s “rest” and is entered into by faith means it cannot be related to legalistic performance; it is God’s “rest”, *not* God’s “work”. Ch. 4 begins with an explicit statement to that effect: to enter rest is to stop doing one’s own work. To work for entrance into that rest (or to remain in it) is to lack faith.

The second error claims that since the history of Israel is to be an example and warning for us (see 1 Cor. 10), then the failure of many of them to enter the Promised Land must be teaching us that salvation can be lost. But one thing to remember is that the physical nation of Israel has always been a special class of people to God. They have enjoyed

a relationship to him that no other ethnic group has had. Yes, they all “drank the same spiritual drink...and that Rock was the Anointed” (1 Cor. 10:4), but they did not have the Spirit indwelling them as believers do in this age, after Jesus came.

Salvation was never guaranteed to anyone either before or after the current age, the so-called Church Age (generally held to have begun at Pentecost). They had to persist in obedience or they could be lost. Not so with us who have the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:14). So they had to keep “drinking”, but we do not.

The writer is speaking to believers (3:12), but also to Jews. In that group there were likely some who were still really only trusting in their heritage, in Moses. That seems to be the point in spending so much time on ancient Israel. They are being asked to examine themselves, to be sure they had truly accepted the Gospel message, rather than relying on their being Jews to save them.

4:12–5:10 Jesus as Ruling Priest in a new Order

There is an abrupt end to the subject of God’s rest here, changing now to a discussion of the Word of God. This phrase or title “Word of God” has been taken to refer to the Bible, but it also clearly refers to Jesus personally (John 1:1, Heb. 1:2). So the phrase encompasses all that God has communicated to us, whether spoken by God’s own voice, through the prophets, in and by Jesus, or through his recorded teachings. The important thing is not the medium but the message; it is all “of God.” And because God has given us his Word, there are no more excuses, no more mysteries, no more hidden plans (1 Cor. 2). We must take a firm grasp of the Gospel, not keep it at a distance and only stay near it or take it lightly.

There is a controversy here over the statement that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. Could he have sinned? Some say no, it was impossible for Jesus to sin. But what it says here indicates otherwise. Jesus is being portrayed as one who is like us, who can sympathize with our struggles against sin. This would not be the case if Jesus had no capacity to sin. He is held up as the One who resisted it, which would be pointless if tempting him had been a waste of time. And because Jesus withstood temptation, we have absolute confidence in approaching God. This confidence is in him, not in us, and he will never fail. Our salvation

is assured, because we have a perfect, sinless, and sympathetic Ruling Priest.

The theme of Jesus as our Ruling Priest is now introduced but will be developed more fully later. Notice first of all that a priest represents people to God, not God to people (that would be what prophets do). Jesus is thus shown to be our representative in his humanity. And in spite of being God, as a human he did not appoint himself priest, just as the Israeli priests could only be selected by God. But unlike a human priest, Jesus had none of his own sins to atone for. In addition, he was not a priest in the order of Aaron or Levi, but in a new order: Melchizedek.

6:20–10:36 Continuing on Jesus' new priestly Order

Now we begin a long discussion of the new priestly order of Melchizedek.

6:20–7:10 The Order of Melchizedek

The Old Testament account of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14. Not much is said about him other than being a priest and king of Salem (an older name for Jerusalem). Although Genesis is filled with genealogical records, Melchizedek appears suddenly and then is never mentioned again in Genesis. Psalm 110, which Jesus applied to himself, is the only other OT mention of him, and it only refers to the order of that priesthood. It's possible that he was a pre-incarnation of Jesus, but we simply don't know.

Many preachers make a big deal out of the fact that Abraham paid this priest one tenth (a "tithe") of the spoils of a battle. But there is no record of Abraham tithing on any other occasion, or that he had a regular practice of tithing to anyone else. And it was not based upon his regular income but on one war's captured goods. The whole reason the writer brings this up is to say that Levi, who only ever collected tithes from the Israelis, could be technically credited with paying a tithe to the superior priesthood of Melchizedek by virtue of being a descendent of Abraham.

But the words in Greek, *os epos eipein*, literally "as say to say", mean "so to speak" (translated here as "you could even say"); it is not a statement of a literal fact, that somehow Levi existed as a person at that time. A person does not exist until an egg is fertilized, or else we'd have to consider all the sperm and eggs throughout human history as separate people. (What happens when they join together?) And if

it were true that Levi was not required to pay the tithe since he was literally in Abraham when he paid it, then none of the other descendants of Abraham would have to pay it either.

So beware of stretching this “credit through genetics” analogy. If we are all supposed to have sinned because we all descend from Adam and were “in him” at his creation, then we could also claim to be righteous since we all descend from Noah and his family, or even our own parents if they were saved. Yet this is obviously not the case as the scriptures clearly state, so neither can we be credited or blamed for sin just because we descend from Adam. (More detail about that is discussed in the commentary on Romans.)

7:11–17 A new priesthood

“So then” or “Therefore” refers to the argument just completed about the Melchizedek priesthood being superior to the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical one had been adequate to deal with sin, then there would have been no need for another priesthood.

But what is often overlooked is the fact that when the priesthood changes, so does the Law. They are inseparable; where one goes, there goes the other. Moses only gave the tribe of Levi access to the priesthood, but not the tribe of Judah from which Jesus came. And unlike the Levitical priesthood, the Melchizedek one is permanent; Jesus holds the office of Ruling Priest forever. (Incidentally, this is an excellent rebuttal to Mormonism’s dual priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek. They cannot coexist, and no Mormon can claim to be of the tribe of either Levi or Judah.)

So since the priesthood we are under is that of Melchizedek and not Levi, we are not in any way obligated to observe any law associated with Levi. This has obvious implications for the matter of legalism for believers. Most believers think we must still obey the Ten Commandments, but they were only given to Israel under the priesthood of Aaron/Levi. And Gentiles should remember that they were *never* under the old Law at all.

7:18–28 A new law

The old law could not save or perfect anyone, and note that it has been annulled (see ch. 9 for discussion on how Jesus’ death accomplished this annulment of an “eternal” law). But God sealed this new priesthood

with an oath: that Jesus would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever. There is no other priesthood to come, since this one alone can bring people to perfection. Unlike the old system where sacrifices had to be repeated, Jesus only needed one sacrifice of his own blood, once and for all. It is a great insult to God to claim Jesus didn't do enough.

8:1–13 A new offering

Jesus, our Ruling Priest, serves in the heavenly sanctuary made by God. The earthly temple of Israel was a type or shadow of the real one in heaven, which is why it had to be made to such precise specifications. But it should be obvious that the heavenly temple, Ruling Priest, and sacrifice are infinitely superior to the earthly ones. And because of that, the New Testament (contract or covenant) is greatly superior to the Old. And as the writer already pointed out, there would have been no need for a greater contract unless the old one was imperfect and defective.

And again we see that the old law is fading away. At the time of the writing the Jews were still in a contractual relationship with God, but he would soon disperse them for unbelief. So the law, though officially annulled, was still fading out and not completely gone. Technically, though, the Israelis had broken it long ago and effectively annulled it then, but a contract is between two parties. So Jesus had to die to end God's obligation to it.

Many people think we should still be held to the Ten Commandments and cite Mt. 5:17-18 for support. But not only do they ignore the clear statement here, they miss the meaning of the passage in Matthew. Jesus was saying that he had come to fulfill every single prophecy, as well as to fulfill the law. Thus people are no longer able or obligated to fulfill either.²⁶

Jesus did not come to perpetuate the Law which is tied to the old Levitical priesthood, but to replace it with a superior one. What he fulfilled was prophecy. Of course, to be the spotless sacrificial Lamb he had to perfectly obey the old Laws, which he did. But that means only those who are united with Jesus really keep it, not by their own efforts, but by virtue of Jesus having kept it. And just as re-sacrificing Jesus is a slap in His face, so also is trying to keep the Law that Jesus already kept.

²⁶G. Miller, *Christian Thinktank*

9:1–11 A new temple

Here we see details about the Temple, and the point of it all is to impress upon us the lengths to which God went to symbolize the superior one in heaven. The curtain symbolized that the Holiest Place was not to be seen until Jesus came with the sacrifice of his own blood. This gives added significance to the tearing of that curtain in the earthly Temple when Jesus died. It was the end of all sacrifice.

9:12–10:18 A new contract

Given the fact that Jesus' blood was far superior to that of mere animals, we can rest assured that it cleansed us completely from sin. He is the one and only Mediator of this New Testament, one which is between God and all people, not just one nation. His death paid the ransom for all mankind and canceled the charges against us.

Now we are given a perspective on all this from ordinary civil law. A Will (or "Testament") is not in effect until the one who made it dies. That is the reason for blood being required in the old sacrifices. Only death can put an end to sin; without this bloodshed there is no cleansing, no cancellation of the laws against us. (The Roman Catholic Church calls the Eucharist an "unbloody sacrifice", which this verse shows to be ineffective.)

But just as the earthly sanctuary had to be cleansed with blood, so also did the heavenly one. And no animal's blood could be good enough for that, but only the blood of God in the flesh, Jesus. Yet unlike the earthly sanctuary, the heavenly one only needed one cleansing. And just as people are only able to die once and then face judgment (a good thing to remember when dealing with the concept of karma or reincarnation), so too Jesus only needed to die once to take away all sin. He will appear again, but not for taking away sin. Instead it will be to bring us our promised deliverance. (See the section *By Faith* for discussion of the number of times a person can die.)

Again it is emphasized that the old Law was a shadow of better things to come, namely the new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood once for all. That old Law could never perfect anyone, as proven by the fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated. All the repeated sacrifices did was remind the people of their sins. But God was preparing them for the ultimate Sacrifice that would only be needed once. And again, we see that "he takes away the first in order to establish the second." This is also what

Jesus referred to in his illustration of the wineskins (Mark 2, Luke 5); the old and the new cannot be mixed.

To further emphasize the fact that Jesus completed our redemption, we see that he sat down at God's right hand and is waiting until all his enemies are humbled before him; he is not still sacrificing. And yet again we see this point which cannot be over-emphasized: "By one offering he **has finally completed** the holy ones." It's a finished work and it cannot ever be undone by anyone.

10:19–36 A new relationship

Here is another "therefore", and it is the consequence of all the previous teachings: we are free to boldly go into the "Holy of Holies", the inner sanctuary, to the very presence of God. This is now possible because of the blood of our new Ruling Priest, which was "sprinkled on our hearts" when we believed. We need not waver in our confidence in him since he is perfectly trustworthy.

Verses 24 and 25 are perhaps the most famous verses in Hebrews, with the possible exception of the "faith chapter" to follow. Yet they are not without controversy, because many take it to sanction mandatory "church" attendance.

While it's true that believers are always encouraged to work together as a body (see also 3:12–15), many in the churches use these two verses as a club to beat people over the head for not attending services regularly. But typically, such services are not real Biblical fellowship at all. People can attend for many years without even being saved, and the churches admit this. And many more only go to worship God, never really getting to know the people.

Showing up in appointed places at appointed times to perform appointed rituals is not what the writer is talking about here at all. Instead, it's about not only staying close to sound teaching but also interacting in the daily lives of other believers for the purpose of both serving and being served. The churches should first clean their own houses and check up on the regular attendees before hunting down the "members" who are at least being honest. And they need to ask themselves why people drift away in such large numbers.

Instead, what is stated here is that we are to motivate each other toward love and good deeds; that is the purpose of meeting together. Notice that worship of God is not even mentioned here, but only interac-

tions between people, to encourage each other and to band together as we see the End approaching. And as we recall the discussion on chapter six, we see in this passage the antidote for the temptation to return to the old law. By sticking together and remembering the impossibility of keeping the old and new contracts at the same time, these people can be assured of keeping the rewards they have earned.

After defining the new relationship believers have with God due to Jesus' sacrifice and our faith in him, verse 26 begins more discussion about the finality of all that. As before, the writer is not promoting the idea that the saved can be lost, but that those who hear the Gospel are not saved unless they accept it. To turn away from it and keep on sinning even after we've known the truth is to condemn ourselves. Notice the warning against failure to appreciate the blood of the new contract. We have already discussed the error of trying to make additional sacrifices, and that's what this refers to. God will surely take revenge against all who treat Jesus' sacrifice as inadequate.

After all that theology about the meaning and effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice, the writer adds an appeal to the people's own experiences. When they were first saved they were persecuted but stood firm through it all. They must not throw all that away, but endure and receive their rewards.

10:37–11:40 By faith

We are not to be fearful and defeated, but to be faithful and overcome. And it is plainly stated that "we have faith for the security of our souls." Security, not insecurity. Guarantees and security are neither guaranteed nor secure if they can be lost.

The famous "faith chapter" (eleven) begins with a definition: faith is a sure hope, a conviction about what is not seen. It is confident trust in the Person who will never fail us, even when we are overwhelmed with doubt or hardship or oppression. It is impossible to please God without trusting him, and to do that we must first of all believe that he exists. God makes himself known to all who seek him out in faith. This is no blind, baseless wish, but absolute assurance of something or someone due to that which we can examine. God made sure there were eyewitnesses to Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Gospels were written for the precise purpose of giving testimony, and the evidence is appealed to repeatedly throughout the New Testament as the basis of our faith.

There is no need to repeat the details of the passage, but only to touch on a few highlights. One of them is the account of Cain and Abel. When people read the Genesis account they often wonder why Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable to God. Being a worker of the field and not raising animals as his brother did, we can speculate that he did not bring the required blood sacrifice. But here we see another factor: faith. Abel had a better sacrifice because he had faith.

Another very interesting point is the mention of Enoch, who did not die but was taken directly to heaven. The only other person ever to have this happen was the prophet Elijah. Why were these two taken without dying, while people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were not? We can speculate that the others were just not pure enough, but God may have another purpose in future prophecy. It is possible that these will be the two "witnesses" of Revelation who will be murdered and then raised to life after three days.

However, there is nothing in scripture to require everyone to have died at least once. Heb. 9:27 simply states the norm, which is that people don't die or face judgment more than once. Also, the phrase in 9:27 is "for people to die once," not "once people die." Some try to change the meaning to support the teaching of karma, but "one time" is a completely different meaning from "as soon as." Likewise, some who were raised from the dead before Jesus did also died again, since no one but Jesus has yet received an immortal body. In addition, some Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will never have died at all (John 11:26, 1 Thes. 4:15,17).

We also see a contrast in this chapter. Some of these giants of faith received some rewards in this life, and others did not. Some were honored, but others were hunted like animals and brutally murdered. Yet they did not rail against God and say "Why didn't he protect me?" as many do today. People seem to expect God to be like Santa Claus, who exists to only give them good things.

12:1–2 Our examples to follow

Considering the caliber of people who went before us, we should therefore stand strong and stop being content with spiritual infancy or worrying about whether or not we'll get to heaven. And we do this not by focusing on self, as is popular in the churches today, but on Jesus. It is he who will bring us to completion, not us. He gave up the comforts and respect

of his heavenly throne for people who were still against him. He, above all the others listed in the previous chapter, is our greatest inspiration and example.

Notice that it is not “our” faith of which Jesus is the Originator and Completer, but “the” faith (the article is implied in the Greek). He does not have to create faith in us as held by the fatalistic view; our faith is a choice we make. And the “race” we run to eventual reward is a matter of something we do; it must therefore be the opposite of a gift to be received, and thus not having to do with salvation from eternal wrath.

12:3–11 Children of God

Some take verse 4 as referring to Jesus sweating “great drops of blood” in the Garden of Gethsemane, but no such connection is made by scripture (and the Gospels never say it was blood but only that his sweat was as profuse as blood dripping). All it says is that the people being addressed in this letter have not yet had to lay down their lives for the Gospel. But they have forgotten that they are adopted children of God, and as such, they will be disciplined as any good parent would discipline their own children. Parents aren’t responsible for other people’s children, so if God didn’t discipline us, it would mean we don’t belong to him. We must not abandon God for letting us suffer, any more than as children we would all run away from our parents for punishing us when we needed it.

12:12–13:7 Our response

With all that in mind, we should “work out” to get ourselves in shape, instead of being spectators that never make an effort to grow strong. We should do our best to get along with others, yet be vigilant to stand against error which could lead people astray.

Unlike ancient Israel, we have not come face-to-face with a consuming fire, darkness and gloom, a whirlwind, and a loud trumpet accompanying the voice of God. They were afraid to have him speak to them any more, and even Moses was afraid. Instead, we can come to God without any fear, as beloved children. So we have no excuses at all to stay away from God. On the other hand, if the first covenant carried the death penalty for any who failed to meet its requirements, how bad will it be for those who reject the second? All the more reason to come close to God instead of running away from him.

Chapter 13 begins with a curious statement: people have sometimes

unknowingly given hospitality to Messengers. We must keep that in mind when we encounter strangers, as it could be a test from God of our true attitude toward others. But our motive should not be just to avoid being caught doing wrong; it should be that we genuinely care for people. We should also show our concern for those who have been imprisoned or suffered hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

There is a brief statement about marriage here. Apparently some had asked whether it's okay for believers to marry, and the answer here is the same as that to similar questions to Paul from the Corinthians: Yes, believers can marry, and of course unfaithfulness is not permitted. Interestingly, the Bible never specifies what makes a couple officially married beyond physical union. There are no prescribed ceremonies, oaths, or official documents or sanctions by society. In God's eyes then, they are married by the physical union.

Then the people are given general statements that should be obvious: Be content with what you have, take courage, respect those spiritually mature ones who have been watching out for you, and take their example of life and faith to heart. There are no such words as obey, follow, or submit in that statement about leaders. It literally reads, "Remember the ones-leading you who speak to-you the word of-the God of-whom contemplating the sequel of-the behavior imitate the faith." And in the context the emphasis is clearly on following examples. We are to be like them, but of course not to excuse poor behavior or blindly follow the orders of a despot. This will be emphasized again shortly.

13:8–15 Warnings to stay sharp

Jesus is again presented as One to be trusted. He will never waver or change. And just as Paul wrote, this writer warns the people not to waste time arguing about the old laws or strange new teachings that didn't come from God. Again the writer refers to the old sacrificial system as being inadequate, so that we must not go back to it but instead go "outside the camp" to Jesus.

13:16–19 The wisdom of following the examples of proven leaders

The only kind of "sacrifices" we can add are those of pure words of praise and of being the **community** of believers we were meant to be. And again, in vs. 17, the writer mentions leaders, who are guarding them from error. As stated before, this is not a command to obey every whim

of a boss, but an appeal to the wisdom of staying close to those who are stronger in the faith than we are. The responsibility Elders have for the other believers is not to dominate or rule but to serve and protect. It is simply a smart move to listen to them.

The Greek here literally reads, “be-persuaded to-the ones-leading-of-you and defer they for are-being-vigilant over the souls of-you as saying having-to-render that with joy this they-may-do...” Again, there is no mention of authority, rule, obedience, or punishment for failing to obey.

13:20–25 Final blessings and greetings

As the letter winds down with the typical farewells of the day, we see a commonly mistranslated statement. Most render it “a short letter”, which this obviously isn’t. Instead, the Greek clearly indicates that it was written in bits: “bear-with the word of-the entreaty and for through bits I-wrote-the-letter to-you.” This would explain some of the topic shifting as well. The letter was evidently not all written in one sitting, but here and there as time allowed.

5:11–6:19 Diversion to discuss maturity

The writer now interrupts the issue of Jesus as priest to stop and address a problem with the people being written to, and it begins a passage of scripture that has been hotly debated for centuries.

The writer has a lot to tell them but is hampered by the people’s lack of maturity. They should have reached the level of teachers by this time, but instead they were stuck in spiritual infancy. They were still going over and over the basics of salvation; they had made no effort to dig deeply into the words of God, preferring instead the easy “milk”. Another factor was that Jews were under much pressure to stay in familiar territory (ref. Egypt) instead of stepping out in faith (ref. the Promised Land). The writer has spent a lot of effort up to this point, making illustrations from Israel’s history that should spur the people on to confident trust in Jesus. But they are tiptoeing, crawling slowly, barely grasping what salvation means and possibly becoming “homesick” for the old familiar ways.

Now to the meat of the controversy. Much hinges on details of grammar that are often overlooked. But from a careful study of the grammar we know this is not a hypothetical scenario (“if salvation could be lost it would be impossible to regain”) since no word such as “if” is in the Greek text here. And we know it isn’t about those who were never

saved because it would be difficult to use language clearer than the four phrases to describe real believers. Further, we know it is about salvation and not only rewards, again because of those four phrases.

The Greek grammar for “re-crucifying” and “holding up to public mockery” is the present active participle, which indicates a presently-continuing action, not a past action. So the passage is saying that as long as people remain in rebellion against that which they once knew to be true, they are symbolically nullifying the sacrifice of Jesus. Conversely, if they discontinue this rebellion, they can change their minds again. This may seem illogical (they cannot change their minds until they change their minds), but we see this same issue in 2 Cor. 3:16 (their minds are covered, but the cover is removed if they change their minds). See also Gal. 3:1-5 and 4:9.

In other words, it does *not* teach that if a person renounces a once-genuine faith then they can never repent. Instead, like the other passages cited, it means that as long as people practice legalism and salvation by good deeds, they are saying that Jesus’ sacrifice meant nothing. But if such people repent, they can move on to deeper spiritual things.

This issue is very important regarding the popular practice of Christians turning to all things Hebraic. While there is value in understanding the practices and feasts in regards to how we understand the New Testament, we must be on our guard against considering these things mandatory or indicative of spiritual superiority. Things that give us feelings of spirituality, such as rites and feast days, can be very subtle traps since they substitute faith and knowledge with feelings and experiences.

After all this, the writer assures the people that they are not among those who re-crucify the Anointed and then turn back again to the importance of growing to maturity. They use the illustration of good soil that produces a crop. Note that what is burned here is not the ground itself, but the crop. Remember that in 1 Cor. 3 Paul speaks of our works being like a building that God will test by setting it on fire. We ourselves are saved but any works that were of poor quality will be burned up. So it is useless works that are cursed and burned, not people or souls.

But the writer is confident that such poor crops will not be produced if the people grow up. Already they have a few good deeds to their credit, and God will not overlook them. They long for them to produce a good crop in full measure, to receive their full inheritance. Once again, the inheritance itself is stated as being obtained by faith, not works (5:12).

Works are the crop the soil produces; good deeds and outward actions are what we expect to see from the saved. (This concept is developed in more detail in the commentary on the Letter of James.)

To show them that our salvation itself is not in danger of being lost, Abraham is held up as an example. God made unilateral promises to him, promises that depended completely upon God alone, that he would surely bless Abraham no matter what. Likewise, our inheritance is sure and guaranteed by the blood of Jesus who sealed the contract. It is this guarantee that is our hope, so any teaching that robs believers of this hope and chips away at their confidence in the promises and guarantees of God can only produce a life of fear and legalistic performance. (See commentary on Romans for discussion on the “license to sin” accusation.)

The Letter of James

Background

The letter from James is probably the earliest of the Letters, written no later than 50 AD (since it does not mention the Jerusalem meeting of around 47 AD). This is believed to be the James that was Jesus' earthly brother and not one of the original disciples. The content is relatively simple and practical, appealing to common sense.

Outline

1. **1:1** Greeting
2. **1:2–4** Perseverance
3. **1:5–8** Wisdom and doubting
4. **1:9–11** Rich and poor
5. **1:12–16** Temptation
6. **1:17–18** God, the source of all goodness
7. **1:19–27** Purity and actions
8. **2:1–8** Prejudice
9. **2:9–13** The law
10. **2:14–26** Faith and actions
11. **3:1–12** Teaching and taming the tongue
12. **3:13–18** Wisdom
13. **4:1–6** The battle within
14. **4:7–12** Come near to God, away from evil
15. **4:13–17** Boasting
16. **5:1–6** The rich
17. **5:7–11** Patience

18. **5:12** Oaths
19. **5:13–18** Sickness and faith
20. **5:19–20** Saving others from deception

1:1 Greeting

James only describes himself as a slave of God, just as Paul often did, in spite of being the half-brother of Jesus. But notice that the letter is directed at the twelve tribes of Israel, scattered among the nations. Many people advocate the theory of “lost tribes”, the remnant from when Israel and Judah were conquered. But that was long before this letter was written, and yet here is James writing to all twelve tribes. Not one hint is made about any of them being lost. However, some could take the expression as poetic license, just a way to refer to Jewish believers not living in Jerusalem. Even so, it should be noted that not one hint of any lost tribes is mentioned in the Bible. In addition, we have all twelve tribes listed in the book of Revelation concerning the distant future compared to the first century, as well as Paul’s assertion of his being able to trace his Hebrew lineage (Phil. 3 for example).

1:2–4 Perseverance

James begins by advising the people on the proper reaction to hardship. Its purpose is to refine and mold us, to make us strong and mature. That message has largely been lost today. Most believers think God only wants them to be happy and comfortable. And note the reference to “brothers and sisters”; even though this letter is addressed to “the twelve tribes” of Israel, these are also believers in Jesus.

1:5–8 Wisdom and doubting

Another issue that seems to have been forgotten today is that of asking God for wisdom. Instead we try to work for everything, but we never seem to reach the goal because we’re using our own power instead of God’s. We ask God for many things in prayer but really don’t expect an answer, and James makes it clear that such an attitude will not get us anything from God.

1:9–11 Rich and poor

In this passage and again later, James targets the issue of how we view riches and social standing. The rich should be humbled by the fleeting

nature of wealth, and the poor should boast of their true and eternal riches. Many of our values in this life will be reversed in the coming kingdom.

1:12–16 Temptation

We must be careful not to take the term “award of life” as meaning salvation, or we’d have to say James is teaching salvation by works (we’ll look at that more in the next chapter). But God never tempts anyone to sin, which is an important point to remember on the topic of the sin of Adam, because some claim God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden to get him to sin. And Satan is not mentioned here at all, but only our own desires, along with a warning about deception.

Today it is becoming increasingly popular to blame this or that “spirit” of something for every evil thing we do or experience, such as “the spirit of lust” or even “the spirit of poverty.” Such notions come from superstition, not God. We do get tempted by the world around us, and certainly demons are involved in much of that, but the blame for falling lies solely with us. Instead of slamming the door when sin comes along, we invite it in and allow it to stay. Then it “grows up” and takes over.

1:17–18 God, the source of all goodness

In contrast to the notion that temptation comes from God, James tells us that only what is good comes from God. God never wavers or changes, which is very much in contrast to the gods of other religions such as Islam.

1:19–27 Purity and actions

We would do well to heed James’ advice here to be slow to take offense. We live in a world where everyone feels entitled to be free of offense. Even many Christians expect others to tiptoe around them and never hurt their feelings. The slightest disagreement is taken as offense and hostility. We are to be sensitive and considerate, but that does not mean the hypersensitive can demand never to be challenged.

James advises people to be self-controlled and patient. And we must go beyond merely hearing the Word to also practice it. We must choose daily to keep focused on Jesus and the truth of the gospel, and the sound teachings of the Bible. A good sign that we are practicing the teachings is how well we control our tongues, a topic James will elaborate on later.

A religion that is clean and pure is of no credit to us without standing the test: staying clean in spite of our contacts with the world. There is no reward for being clean if we never venture out into the world. A monastic life is largely an untested and concealed life; it is of much more value to be found clean if one is out where there is dirt.

2:1–8 Prejudice

James appeals to the people's own experience to question why they would fawn over the rich and despise the poor. He states in no uncertain terms that it is a crime to favor the very class of people that do the most harm to the faith; it favors the enemy and disgraces the name of Jesus and his people, who are often found among the poor.

In spite of this passage being familiar to most believers, it is rarely followed. Favoritism is alive and well in the churches. The unbiblical clergy class is favored over the so-called laity, men are favored over women, and the rich are courted for their financial support, even though it is these people who do the church the most damage. Favoritism is a violation of the "royal law" to love your neighbor as yourself.

2:9–13 The law

If one part of the law is violated, the whole thing is violated. So nobody can claim to be better than anyone else since everyone violates the law. And when it comes to judgment, God will judge us with the same standard we used on others. If we want God to go easy on us, then we'd better do the same for other people in this life (see also Mt. 7:2).

2:14–26 Faith and actions

Now to the "faith and works" passage, one which has vexed Bible students for ages. Many believe it to be at odds with the teachings of Paul, who said in Romans 4 that Abraham was made righteous (or "just") by faith alone, in contrast to the earning of a wage.

First of all, remember that this letter was written before Paul's letters (with the remotely possible exception of Galatians), which contain a much more developed theology. Second, James is speaking of a dead faith, not a non-existent one. If a person dies, does it mean they never existed? Of course not, and neither is a person without works necessarily one who was never born again spiritually. Third, this whole letter is about practical, everyday Christianity. Just as James was amazed that people were fawning over the rich who were exploiting them, he is also

amazed at people who claim salvation but never show it.

In vs. 14–20 James is talking about the uselessness of a faith no one can see in action, not that such inaction proves a complete absence of faith. He asks how anyone can know you have such faith if they can't see it. People are not like God who sees the heart; we have nothing else to go on but actions and words. So James is building a case against those who have made the claim but never displayed the faith, to ask them why anyone should believe them.

But what about Abraham? James says that Abraham was declared righteous by offering Isaac on an altar, doesn't he? But note the pivotal phrase, "And that **fulfilled the scripture** that says 'Abraham believed God. . .'" In other words, what Abraham would later do was determined beforehand by his faith. The scripture about when Abraham was declared righteous by God is the belief, and the offering of Isaac is the result of the test. So James is not contradicting Paul at all. But the thrust of his argument is that Abraham was declared righteous for us to see when his faith took action. Otherwise James would not only be contradicting Paul but also himself, because he said "Abraham believed. . . and was credited with righteousness" and that a person is justified by actions. Which is it?

The answer of course is that God sees our faith, but we can only see actions. After all, God really didn't need to see Abraham's actions in order to know if Abraham had faith, yet "the Angel of the Master" said "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (Gen. 22:12b)

There is a popular phrase, "Faith without works is alone, but faith that works is never alone." Those who say this demand proof by works that a person has faith, or they call them unbelievers. But that's something only God can know; it is not anyone else's place to judge. We can only see actions, and there are times that actions force us to expel someone from our fellowship. But we dare not call them lost without asking first what they believe.

Again, James is imploring people to put their faith into practice, not writing a thesis on salvation. And those who insist on works for salvation cannot agree where the line is drawn. Exactly what and how many works are required, and where does the Bible say this? Instead, we see the same line of reasoning Paul used about the difference between spiritual infants and mature adults, between the spiritually immature and true disciples.

A dead person exists but is useless; likewise, a dead faith exists but is useless. We are not to be content with just being born, but to be useful to God and the other believers.

3:1–12 Teaching and taming the tongue

Now to the subject of Bible teachers. Anyone who is in a position of teaching is held to a higher standard since they are responsible for the spiritual nurturing and protection of others. If all Sunday School teachers and preachers would take this seriously, how many would be left? Did God ever intend for any warm body who can read a “teacher’s guide” to be given a teaching position? As Paul wrote, the standards for teachers and Elders are very high, and God will hold them responsible.

I don’t think there is necessarily a break to a different subject in verse two, which begins the passage on the tongue. James just wrote about teachers and how careful they have to be in what they say. Like the rudder of a ship, the tongue can control “the whole body”, which can refer to the Body of believers. Great damage can be done by false or inept teachers. Of course the section can apply to every individual believer as well, but there is a strong possibility that James may have had teachers in mind when he wrote this part.

3:13–18 Wisdom

Back again to general Christian behavior, about putting our faith in action. If we do this we won’t have the squabbles and conflicts typical of churches throughout history. The hierarchal structure of “churchianity” fosters the jealousy and selfish ambition James writes about here. And if it was a problem in James’ time, before this structure set in, then we can understand why it is so much greater a problem now.

4:1–6 The battle within

What causes those battles and struggles? The same “self” that James wrote about earlier, that tempts us to sin. We crave a lot of things, and even try to fool ourselves that some of them are not desires but needs that God owes us. We are allowed to enjoy the fruit of our labor, but we must not forget the poor. How often do we ask for the means to help them? And we must remember how God views human pride. Just as he will speak of a different kind of resistance on our part, James first speaks of God’s resistance to the arrogant. They may succeed in this life, but God will be their judge in the next.

4:7–12 Come near to God, away from evil

This time James offers a strategy for standing firm: resist! Most of our sin is simply due to our not even putting up a fight. But if we stand against the Tempter he will run away in fear. But does this conflict with James' earlier statement that temptation comes from within? No, because he never said *all* temptation was from ourselves. We do have an external Enemy, but one that cannot prevail against a strong defense. The pride of self is no match for him, but if we humble ourselves to God instead of being self-sufficient and arrogant, we can't lose.

Bringing down the idol of Self can be painful, but it must be done if we are to conquer sin and stand against temptation. We must also stop watching others like a hawk to see if they fall so we can "shoot our wounded." People gossip and backstab and cut each other down continually, or they go to the other extreme and pretend not to see error or sin or heresy.

Here is an instance of "do not judge", and like the others, it's typically taken out of context. James has been talking about people tearing each other down, and it is this kind of judging that is wrong. And the people doing this, instead of judging themselves compared to God's standards, judge themselves by their own standards. They are very much like the Pharisees.

4:13–17 Boasting

Pride is the root of boasting. From our own limited perspective we think that our lives are long and important. But we are in fact mere vapors, fleeting moments in time. As Paul has said, anyone who brags should only brag about the Master. To know all of these things, and ignore them or fail to act, is every bit as much a sin against God as the commission of evil acts.

5:1–6 The rich

Do you get the impression that James was a little upset with the rich? Like many employers today, they were exploiting workers— and he's addressing believers. Many employers have gone to church each Sunday but lived like the devil all week, saying "Business is business." And again, these were the types of people who gave the believers most of their trouble.

5:7–11 Patience

Abruptly James shifts focus to the exploited now, asking them to be patient. We hold out the hope of the Master's return as our power to endure. Sadly, just when we need it most, this hope has been all but abandoned by the churches today. They have decided that prophecies are just stories about good and evil, and they mock those who still believe the Master will return for us. After another quick jab at the judgmental ones, James gives examples of patience from the past, the hated and persecuted prophets of old.

5:12 Oaths

Next is a statement that we must be careful not to misunderstand: do not take oaths. But like the same issue when Jesus was speaking about the Pharisees (Mt. 5), who were using legal loopholes to get out of keeping their oaths, James is only saying we should be people of our word. We should not be trying to see what we can get away with but how holy and faithful we can be.

5:13–18 Sickness and faith

This passage is not a magic formula whereby we can practically order God to heal someone. There is nothing magical about oil used to anoint anyone. But notice whose faith it is that can heal the sick person: the Elders who are praying over them. Most so-called faith healers blame the sick person for not having enough faith to get better, but the Bible clearly lays the blame at the feet of the ones doing the praying and anointing. The prayers of the proud and fake cannot heal, but those of the righteous can.

There are some commentators who believe that James has a specific kind of sickness in mind here, meaning the sickness was caused by sin. But we don't have enough in the context to say for sure.

5:19–20 Saving others from deception

James ends the letter with an encouraging note: that it is a great honor and blessing to bring people back from sin and deception. This of course stands in stark contrast to the "shooting our wounded" we usually see.

The Letter of Peter 1

Background

The first letter from Peter was written in the early 60s AD while he was in Babylon. Its overall theme is Christian behavior in a world that was becoming increasingly hostile to the faith.

Outline

1. **1:1–2** Greeting
2. **1:3–5** Our living hope
3. **1:6–9** Faith that passes the test
4. **1:10–12** The mystery of salvation
5. **1:13–19** Holiness and strength
6. **1:20–22** The mystery revealed
7. **1:23–2:3** A new immortal life
8. **2:4–10** The living stone
9. **2:11–3:12** A new citizenship
10. **3:13–18a** Suffering for righteousness
11. **3:18b–4:7a** Jesus' suffering and example
12. **4:7b–11** Prayer, love, and service
13. **4:12–19** The season of trial
14. **5:1–4** Elders' responsibility
15. **5:5–7** Learners' responsibility
16. **5:8–9** Stay sharp
17. **5:10–11** Praise
18. **5:12–14** Final greetings

1:1–2 Greeting

Peter was considered the “chief” of the Ambassadors, until Paul began his ministry. Even afterwards he was known as the Ambassador to the Jews, in contrast to Paul being sent to the Gentiles. Many have portrayed him as impetuous and brash, but we need to be careful not to read too much between the lines.

He is writing here to believers in various locations, and refers to them as those who were chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. Note that it is *foreknowledge*, not *destiny*; God knew they would choose to accept Jesus.

1:3–5 Our living hope

It is our faith in Jesus’ resurrection that results in God giving us this new birth and the inheritance that goes with it. As Paul also wrote, this promise of eternal life is being guarded in heaven for us; it does not depend upon us in any way to keep it.

Further, we are guarded by God’s power right up to the moment of deliverance. We have no need or right to worry about losing it. It is this guarantee that gives us the hope of endurance, the power to keep going through many trials. We love and trust in God even without having seen him.

1:6–9 Faith that passes the test

Peter describes the suffering the people were under as being exalted. The trial of faith in this life is painful, but it will prove whether our faith was genuine or not. And the completion of the test is that we spread the gospel.

1:10–12 The mystery of salvation

God had given hints in Old Testament prophecies about this age of grace we live in, but nobody could figure it out beforehand. And yet what was written was ultimately for our benefit. Even the Messengers are very much interested in these things.

1:13–19 Holiness and strength

Because of all that, we should be motivated to be self-controlled and prepared for anything. Our focus should remain on Jesus and not self, on holiness and not indulgence. God will judge us impartially, and we must therefore be impartial in our dealings with others, as James discussed

in more detail. Peter defines maturity as relying on the grace of God through Jesus. When we reach this maturity we leave the old ways and become holy, meaning set apart for a higher purpose.

Our redemption was not obtained by tradition or material wealth, but by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb. Many today nonetheless put tradition or status over the cross and the Word, thinking that the Word is less trustworthy.

1:20–22 The mystery revealed

Although chosen from long ago, Jesus was only revealed to us when he came as a man and was raised from the dead. This is where our faith lies, and what has given us birth into a new family.

1:23–2:3 A new immortal life

In light of the nature of our redemption, we must behave as those who are grateful. We should not only give up that which is worthless but also crave that which is good.

2:4–10 The living stone

Striving for maturity will result in our being used as “living stones” in a spiritual building. We serve as priests, and we must see to it that we serve faithfully, bringing God the spiritual sacrifices of true disciples. Notice that all believers are seen this way, not just an imagined clergy class or just males; we are all equally holy to God.

Jesus, as the cornerstone, is the foundation upon which all of us are to rest. In becoming human, the Master took the lowest position. How can any of us mere “bricks” think that because he did this in order to lift us up, that we are more important? Yet many today believe that a “minister” (which means “servant”) is to rise above the rest and be in charge, but we are to follow Jesus’ example and serve as He did: by getting lower than the rest and serving them to lift them up. If Jesus could do this for us, then we must do this for others.

Before Jesus came the Gentiles (non-Jews) were “not a people” and not shown mercy, but now God’s mercy is for all, and all who come to him in faith are his people.

2:11–3:12 A new citizenship

So because we are described in this way, we are urged to think of ourselves as only temporary residents of this world. We should live in such a way

that all charges brought against us will always be false. We do this in part by being good citizens as much as possible. Freedom is not license; instead, we are to value everyone and remember that we are lowly slaves of God. Now Peter will detail the practical outworking of this fact.

Peter specifies three main groups: servants, wives, and husbands. Notice first of all that he does not present these as pairings of master/slave and husband/wife; he addresses servants without addressing masters. The word servant is *oiketes* which means house servant or “domestic”, and the word for their masters is *despotes* which means owners or employers when contrasted with domestics. These domestics are to *hupotasso* their employers. This word is not about subservience to an overmaster but support and identification with a person in some leading capacity.²⁷

As for the word translated “respect” or “fear”, the Greek word is *phobos*. Like our English word “fear”, it can have a range of nuances: abject terror, a mild sense of foreboding, or a realistic caution. Which one of those it means depends of course on the context. And since Peter speaks of both kind and unkind employers, the nuance will change depending on which kind the domestic is dealing with. We might well ask what kind of fear an employee would have for a good and kind employer, but anyone who has ever held a job understands this kind. At the very least, we fear losing our jobs if we fail to satisfy the directives of the boss. So while one would certainly respect their employer, there is a separate element of fear as well, however mild it may be.

This may all seem very clear and simple, but the plot thickens when we look at the instructions to wives. But before we do, we must know that as in just about every language except English, Greek has what is called “grammatical gender”. It is the assigning of male or female pronouns or word affixes which are completely unrelated to biology. For example, in Hebrew the pronoun for the Spirit of God is feminine (she), and in Greek it is neuter (it). So the way we can tell which parts of a Greek sentence go together is by looking at the grammatical gender. This will prove critical to our understanding of what Peter says to Christian women.

1 Pet. 3:1 begins with “likewise”, so there is similarity (witness by behavior) between what Peter said to employees and what he will say

²⁷God's Word to Women

to wives. As noted in the commentary on Ephesians under “Be filled with the Spirit”, there was a Roman law at the time called “the marriage without hand” wherein a woman’s allegiance was to her father for life, not to any husband. Her father could take her back at any time and give her to another man. So the instruction, both from Paul and Peter, is for Christian women to identify with their husbands instead.

But Peter adds the purpose for this instruction: to win over unbelieving husbands; remember the larger context of minding our behavior for the world to see. The phrase in Greek, “if any are-being-stubborn [*apeitheo*] to-the word” is always used in a context of rejecting the gospel message; it is not used in any context where the topic is backslidden believers. It literally means to not be persuaded and is held in opposition to faith, not obedience.²⁸ So it clearly refers to unbelievers and not backslidden or immature believers.

So rather than a general instruction to all Christian wives, Peter specifies here that his instructions are to Christian wives of non-Christian husbands. Theirs was a most difficult position to be in, since they could be divorced or killed by their husbands if they tried to convert them. They had little opportunity to speak to their husbands about religious or spiritual matters. That is why Peter leans so heavily here on behavior and depth of character, qualities the culture did not believe women possessed. Christian husbands, in contrast, had no right to silence their wives and no need to be converted. If they were sinning, they needed to repent, and their wives had every right in Christ to say so.

Continuing in verse 2, Peter shows exactly how this behavior will be a witness to the gospel. Here is the literal English rendering:

observing of-the in fear pure behavior of-you

The blue words are grammatically masculine, and the red words are grammatically feminine. So we can easily see that it is not the women but the unbelieving men who will “fear”. This ties in with the phrase about being “*apeitheo* to-the word”, because the “fear” of God is what such people lack. And it is these unbelieving husbands who will “observe” the pure (not “chaste”, which denotes sexual purity whereas this word refers to the inner person) behavior of their Christian wives and thus “fear” this wordless gospel message.

²⁸Study on Rom. 27:8

Peter goes on to emphasize the inner strength of character a Christian woman must develop. But we encounter another debatable passage in vs. 5 and 6. Verse five is in the present tense, not the past as it is typically translated. And again we see the word *hupotasso* in conjunction with “their own husbands”. It is only verse 6 which has to be in the past tense because it refers to people who were long dead, Sarah and Abraham. But instead of *hupotasso* we have Sarah rendering *hupakouo* to Abraham, which means “to attend to” (same word as when a servant “answered” the door for Peter after his miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12:13).

But what of Sarah calling Abraham ‘master’? And what does it have to do with women not being afraid or dismayed? The only recorded instance we have of Sarah calling Abraham ‘master’ is in Gen. 18:12 when she laughed to herself at the prospect of becoming pregnant by her very old husband. The times we see her doing what Abraham said are when he twice passed her off as his sister in order to save his own skin (Gen. 12:13, 26:9), and she also stood up to him regarding the slave woman Hagar (Gen. 21:10). Is it not this strong, fearless Sarah that Peter is telling Christian women to be like? Peter does **not** say they are like her if they call their husbands ‘master’, but if they do not fear and are not dismayed.

Now we can see why taking the traditional rendering of vs. 2 creates a contradiction: first Peter tells women to fear, and then he tells them not to fear. Rather, he tells them to bring the fear of God to their unbelieving husbands through character and quality, then tells them to fear nothing nor be dismayed.

The last point to cover is vs. 7, which also begins with “likewise”, continuing the list of ways to live the Christian witness. The Christian husband is to “make a home together with” his wife, not build a castle with her as his maid. And Peter appeals to the men’s “realization” that women have “the less stable income”. This is typically translated more literally as “weaker vessel” even though there is apparently no firm consensus on what it means. But it is likely an idiom, and in classical literature it did refer to being at an economic disadvantage. Peter says this along with calling women “joint heirs”, so he is drawing an analogy between social inheritance and spiritual inheritance.

Regarding the matter of how the husband treats his wife, Peter does not merely say that if he fails to honor her then God will not answer his prayers, but that God will block them and refuse to hear them. The

Greek word is *egkopto* and is much stronger than the idea of merely ignoring something. God will actively oppose and hinder the prayers of a Christian man who fails to honor his wife.

Note also that Peter is addressing husbands, not all men, so the weakness their wives have is because they are wives, not just women. Just as slaves were not disadvantaged because of something intrinsic to them as people but because of their position in that society, so also wives were not “the weaker vessel” due to their being women but to their position in that society.

Let’s summarize the list now:

- Employees, support your employers whether they’re nice or not.
- Wives, place your loyalty with your husbands instead of your fathers, so that you can witness without words to them. Though they are hostile to the gospel, your purity and depth of character will cause them to fear God. Do not be fearful or intimidated, but instead be like Sarah.
- Husbands, treat your wives as the joint-heirs they are, building up the home together with them and remembering their social disadvantage, or God will thwart your prayers.

After focusing on husbands and wives, Peter extends the command of mutual submission to all believers. Our unity comes not from everyone being forced to follow a domineering leader, but from being saturated in the Word.

3:13–18a Suffering for righteousness

Again Peter deals with the problem of suffering, and he encourages the people to be brave. If we do that, we will always be ready to answer any who want to know why we believe as we do. Some take this as a blanket condemnation of all passion and challenge when we are confronted by unbelievers, but notice that Peter is talking about being asked what we believe— not about being harassed, villified, thrown in jail, slandered, or any other openly hostile attack. The gentle and respectful treatment Peter commands here is for those who are honestly asking us why we believe. It is not to be used as a gag on us when we encounter a hostile opponent who is attacking our faith. To ignore this is to ignore the examples of Jesus and the Ambassadors. Good shepherds are only kind to sheep, not wolves. A “potential sheep” will not come with hostility.

3:18b–4:7a Jesus' suffering and example

Like Paul, Peter manages to stir some controversy. He writes of Jesus preaching to "the spirits in prison", who long ago were disobedient while God waited patiently before flooding the earth. We can only guess what this means, but it appears to say that Jesus had a message for those people while he was physically dead but of course still spiritually alive. Some take it to mean he preached the gospel to them and gave them a second chance, but scripture does not say so. Peter will, however, give us a small hint in the next section.

Then he points out that the Flood symbolized the immersion that saves us now. First, note the direction of the symbolism: the Flood was symbolic of immersion, not immersion symbolic of the Flood. Second, this immersion is not the washing of our bodies with water (water baptism), but "a matter of a good conscience." This contradicts the claim that we must be baptized in water to be saved, or even just to be obedient. Faith in Jesus' resurrection immerses us in God via the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Such people have symbolically died to the flesh, so they should live for God.

Those who insist upon being pampered and always comforted are the first to turn from God in the face of suffering, because they have not developed endurance. The world is guaranteed to heap insults on all who follow Jesus, so we should expect it instead of demanding that God explain why he has apparently abandoned us.

Now Peter gives a clue about what Jesus said to the people who died in the Flood: "The Gospel was also brought to the dead so they could be judged." Not as specific as we'd like, but a clue all the same. What we can say is that God judges fairly and would not send someone to hell on a technicality. If the world of the Flood was so vile as to need mass destruction, it is all the more significant that Jesus should go and speak to them.

And in spite of the fact that almost 2000 years have passed since this letter was written, the time has always been short. Jesus can return at any time, and we must be found faithful in the use of the spiritual gifts we've received. We never know how long we have to use them.

4:7b–11 Prayer, love, and service

Love is the underlying motivation, and hospitality is one of its results. Another is the sharing of our spiritual gifts among ourselves. Gifts are

meant to be used for the betterment of others, and exercised to the best of our ability. This brings honor to God instead of to ourselves. And of course if we love others we will pray for them.

4:12–19 The season of trial

Suffering is normal for us, not something to be terribly upset about. This life is a test, and nobody enjoys taking tests. But there is great reward awaiting all who remain true through persecution. Putting up with suffering we deserve is of no credit to us, but it is a great honor to suffer for being a Christian. As legitimate children of God, testing and refinement and judgment begin with us. But if God will punish his own children, how will he treat people who are not of his family? A sobering thought for the lost.

However, let us not sin against our sisters and brothers by calling domestic violence “suffering for Christ”. The suffering scripture describes is that which comes from those who are hostile to the faith, not from fellow believers. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus, yet who abuses or mistreats a fellow believer, is living in denial of the basic tenets of the faith. This applies equally to Christian leaders who browbeat or oppress those who follow them. Tolerance or denial of abuse is one of the ways in which Christians give a very bad witness to the world, which seems at times to have a better sense of love and compassion than Christians.

5:1–4 Elders’ responsibility

Peter now turns to the Elders in the churches and appeals to them as an eyewitness of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: be good shepherds. It should not be viewed as a job or a chore, but as grateful and humble service to God. This is not a position of prestige or profit or domination, but the tender nurturing of those who have not yet matured. To act as masters (trad. lording over), even if done benevolently or gently, is a direct violation of scripture.

5:5–7 Learners’ responsibility

Likewise, the new and inexperienced should respect the mature and wise, but everyone must remain humble. Arrogance has no place in the Congregation.

5:8–9 Stay sharp

All believers need to stay alert for attacks from the evil one, who roams around like a roaring lion searching for prey. We are commanded to stand strong against him, to be stubborn in our faith.

5:10–11 Praise

We cannot stand strong without the proper armor and weapons, which only come from God. Such weapons and power are to be used for his glory alone.

5:12–14 Final greetings

In closing, Peter mentions that he had dictated the letter to Silas, a faithful believer who had also been with Paul (Acts 15-18, 1 and 2 Thesalonians). He also mentions “she in Babylon who was chosen along with you(pl.)” who sends greetings, along with that of “my son Mark”. Some believe the “she” is a literal woman, while others take it as a reference to the Congregation there. Scholars are also divided over whether Babylon is literal or figurative. As for Mark, most commentators seem to think he was not the literal son of Peter but his spiritual son, one he had led to salvation, who was with him at this time.

The Letter of Peter 2

Background

The second letter from Peter was written shortly before his death in about 64 AD. While the focus of the first letter was persecution from outside, this one deals more with false teachers among the believers.

Outline

1. **A 1:1–4** Greetings and praise
2. – **B 1:5–11** Our response to the gift of Jesus
3. — **C 1:12–19** Reminder: the first days
4. — **X 1:20–2:22** False prophets
 - (a) — **Xa 1:20–2:9** Their practices and judgment
 - (b) — **Xb 2:10–14a** Their self-destruction
 - (c) — **Xc 2:14b–19** Their doom
 - (d) — **Xd 2:20–22** Their true colors
5. — **C' 3:1–10** Reminder: the last days
6. – **B' 3:11–16** Our response to what is coming
7. **A' 3:17–18** Final warning and farewell

A 1:1–4 Greetings and praise

Peter begins with encouraging remarks about the power of God to give us everything we need for living holy lives. So we should not be content to remain newborns, but to grow in maturity and knowledge. This will result in endurance, holiness, and a tender heart for other believers.

B 1:5–11 Our response to the gift of Jesus

This is the “fruit” of the Christian disciple; it validates to the others that we are saved and faithful. This is a public confirmation of salvation, not a means of attaining it. Some mistake it to suggest that we have to produce this outward evidence in order to stay saved, but that is not

what the text says. Others would do well to be concerned about us if we have no works, but the Bible clearly says we are saved solely by faith, plus nothing.

C 1:12–19 Reminder: the first days

We all need refresher courses sometimes, even in subjects we know well. Likewise, Peter sees value in reminding them of what they already know. He is all the more eager to do so because he has the impression that he will not be on the earth much longer.

He relates his personal witness of Jesus having been raised from the dead by God's power; it was not a clever fable or second-hand story. He also personally witnessed Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration (Mark 9), and he heard the voice of God. Certainly, at the end of his life, if Peter had been deceived or lying he would have confessed by this time, but he sticks to his story even knowing he will be executed for it. This is but one of many powerful evidences for the truth of the gospel.

X 1:20–2:22 False prophets

This is the crux or central point of the letter. Peter introduces the topic with a statement about true prophets.

X 1:20–2:9 Their practices and judgment

First we see a frequently misunderstood statement taken out of context, typically translated as “no prophecy is of private interpretation.” Some take it to mean that individuals, “ordinary” believers, cannot interpret the scriptures for themselves but instead must bow to some “infallible interpreter” such as the Catholic Magisterium or some other governing authority. These verses ripped out of context are used as a means of suppressing dissent, which is an insult to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers. Instead, the obvious meaning in context is that Peter is validating the testimony of the prophets. They, like he, did not invent prophecies but got them straight from God via the Holy Spirit.

Most translations give the idea that the phrase about the Holy Spirit means the Spirit “carried them along”, but the Greek shows two parallels of the verb for “carried”: by the prophets, and then by the Spirit. It points to the subject of the phrase in each case: not carried on by people, and carried on by the Spirit. That is, the prophets were not doing their own work but that of the Spirit. It is the message that's being performed or “carried on”, not the prophets that are being carried.

After making a point about true prophets, Peter warns that there were also false prophets who did make up their own stories. And such would soon invade the churches. They would introduce wrong thinking and bold heresies, and draw away many after themselves. History has borne this out, and it continues to this day. But God will surely judge them, all in his good time.

Not even Messengers who sinned could escape judgment. Here Peter mentions the same ones as that of Jude 1:6, and identifies the place of their prison as Tartarus. As proven also with Noah's Flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, God will only wait so long before paying everyone back for their wickedness. But notice that he spared Noah by keeping him safe in the midst of the deluge, and Lot by snatching him out of harm's way at the last minute. These are types or pictures of how God will keep the believing Jews safe for the final three and one half years, and also how he will take his Congregation out of the world before the his wrath is poured out. God knows how to rescue his own and not let them suffer his judgment.

X 2:10–14a Their self-destruction

God reserves justice for a future time, when he will finally deal with those who despise him and only think about this life. They speak abusively against beings much more powerful than themselves, yet even the Messengers do not presume to say such things. They are like brute beasts, born to be caught and killed.

X 2:14b–19 Their doom

Those false teachers are doomed and cursed, consumed by greed. Deep darkness is the eternal fate they have chosen for themselves, victims of their own traps.

X 2:20–22 Their true colors

Now we come across a controversial statement related to the issue of whether a believer can be lost. Who is Peter describing here, true believers or fake believers? He just talked about the latter at great length, but were these people ever saved? Look at verse 22 for the answer: they never changed; they were always "dogs and pigs" who were merely bathed and dressed up, but their nature had never changed. But why does Peter say they had turned their backs on the "holy precept"? Peter is telling us that these people heard the gospel but never accepted it.

They knew the way but did not follow it; they chose a different path and were trying to bring believers with them.

C' 3:1–10 Reminder: the last days

Now Peter returns to reminding the people about the true prophets and Ambassadors, whose teachings came through Jesus. Just as the early believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the Ambassadors (Acts 2:42), we can still do that by diligently following their written words.

Next Peter adds some prophecy about the end. “The last days” are described as a time of deception and mocking. Many today are literally saying, “So where’s this return you keep talking about? Everything has stayed the same for all time; nothing has changed.” But God made the world out of water, then used some of it to produce the Flood. Is this not a characteristic of our time? Even the churches have bought into the lie that Genesis and Revelation are just moral lessons rather than history or prophecy. It is surely a sign of the end, and instead of water, this time God will destroy it all with fire.

The statement about a thousand years is another scripture that is frequently taken out of context. Is Peter giving us a formula for predicting the time of the end? Some say yes, and even use it to argue that the days of creation were really periods of time ranging anywhere from a thousand to a gazillion years (take your pick). But there is no reference here to creation week, only to the Flood. The topic is the *last* days, not the *first* days. Others take it as a blueprint for the total length of history, where seven days means seven thousand years from creation. But Peter does not give the formula, “one day is equal to one thousand years”, but only that one day is “like” a thousand years, and vice versa.

All Peter is saying is that we must not become discouraged by these mockers who have deluded themselves into thinking that if nothing has apparently changed, then nothing ever will. God is not constrained by time as we are, so it’s immaterial whether he waits one or a thousand years to do something he promised. He is not late or slow as we count time, but is being patient. And the reason he is patient is because he doesn’t enjoy destroying people; he wants everyone to be saved. This refutes the Calvinistic notion that God hates most people and sends them to hell “for his good pleasure.”

B' 3:11–16 Our response to what is coming

That Day will surely come, and afterwards the earth will be no more. The universe will be replaced with a new heavens and earth. Knowing all this, we should be all the more diligent in our Christian lives to be faithful servants. The way we can hasten the time when we'll be given our inheritance is by spreading the Gospel and living holy lives that honor God. This is the mark of the true Christian disciple: to spread the Gospel while eagerly hoping for the Master's return.

God's patience is for man's benefit, just as Paul had written. Speaking of Paul, Peter not only acknowledges his wisdom but also that his letters can be hard to understand. What an understatement! But it's no excuse for people twisting his writings, which Peter equates with "the other scriptures." Here we have an eyewitness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection calling Paul's letters "scripture", which is a pretty good rebuttal against the claims of some today that Paul was a false teacher.

A' 3:17–18 Final warning and farewell

At the end of his letter, Peter gives a last warning about these false teachers and wishes increased wisdom and knowledge for the people.

The Letter of John 1

Background

The first letter from John was written around the time between 85–95 AD. This is the same John who was Jesus' "beloved disciple", who also wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation. The letter has two main themes: combating false teaching (most likely early Gnosticism), and assurance of salvation.

Outline

1. **1:1–4** Introduction
2. **1:5–2:11** Matching words and actions
 - (a) **1:5–10** Light and darkness
 - (b) **2:1–6** Sin and redemption
 - (c) **2:7–11** An old/new command
3. **2:12–17** Advice from a "father" to his "children"
4. **2:18–3:12** Deceivers
 - (a) **2:18–25** Antichrists
 - (b) **2:26–3:12** How children of God stand against them
5. **3:13–15** Hatred and murder
6. **3:16–5:5** True love
 - (a) **3:16–19a** Love in action
 - (b) **3:19b–24a** Confidence before God
 - (c) **3:24b–4:6** Test the spirits
 - (d) **4:7–11** To love God is to love people
 - (e) **4:12–18** Perfect love
 - (f) **4:19–5:5** Fake love
7. **5:6–12** Three witnesses

8. **5:13–15** Assurance of salvation
9. **5:16–18** Praying for other believers
10. **5:19–21** The True One versus false ones

1:1–4 Introduction

John has a different way of expressing himself than most of the other New Testament writers. He seems to be more abstract, philosophical, and poetic. This is evident in the very first verse, where he describes Jesus as “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen and touched”. This is evidence from personal testimony. Although he is writing to believers, there is no harm in continually giving reasons for our faith. Further, Jesus is described as having come “from the Father”—not beneath him or apart from him. And the purpose of testimony and evidence (apologetics) is to convince people that Jesus is God who died for our sins and rose again.

1:5–2:11 Matching words and actions

Now John focuses on practicing what we preach.

1:5–10 Light and darkness

Since God is light, then to live in darkness yet claim to be saved is a lie. And to say we don't sin is another lie. On the surface this seems contradictory: how can anyone claim to be saved since we all sin? The answer is that there is a difference between living in sin and occasional lapses.

2:1–6 Sin and redemption

The purpose of writing encouraging letters to believers is not to keep them saved, but to keep them from falling into sin. But even if we fall, Jesus is there to pick us up. He is our Defense Attorney against Satan, and he never loses.

Notice who it is that Jesus takes sin away from: the whole world. Is John teaching Universalism, that everyone will go to heaven? Absolutely not. Jesus removed the barrier between God and man, which was put up due to Adam's rebellion, making salvation by faith possible. One person cannot force reconciliation with another, but they can offer it, and this is what God did through Jesus. So though God took the sin barrier away, each person must decide whether or not to accept the offer to reconcile.

Thus our destiny in either heaven or hell is not determined by sin, but by faith. Sin has to do with wages earned (Rom. 6:23), but salvation has to do with faith, which is not a work (Rom. 4:5, 5:6-7, 11:6, Eph. 2:8-9).

So when John says Jesus takes away our sin, he is referring to it on two levels: the sin barrier of all mankind which Jesus removed, and the individual sins believers commit that cause us to lose rewards. These rewards can be regained through repentance, but we must be more motivated by restoring our closeness with God than with rewards. It's all about the Relationship.

Is John advocating salvation by works, as James has been accused also? Not at all. John is not telling us to judge each other's salvation, but to judge our own. He is telling us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we can justify wallowing in any sin while claiming to be saved. This is yet another good reason for him to keep talking about salvation, since not all who think they are saved are truly saved. Instead, as we see in vs. 5-6, works are a visible indication of maturity. A disciple is supposed to act like their master.

2:7–11 An old/new command

Our behavior is summed up in a command which John describes as both old and new: love your neighbor. We cannot both love and hate a person, so if we despise anyone, we do not have the love of God in us, and we should therefore take a good look at our spiritual condition. Again, this is not a weapon with which we should beat other believers over the head, but a mirror.

2:12–17 Advice from a “father” to his “children”

Here we see John wax poetic about the reasons for this letter. Some people try to extract doctrine out of this passage, as if only young men are strong and can overcome the evil one. It's just poetry.

Not loving the world doesn't mean not ever enjoying anything, but simply not giving it priority over our relationship with Jesus or our real home in heaven. This is especially important as we near the Master's return.

2:18–3:12 Deceivers**2:18–25 Antichrists**

Some take this passage to mean that there is no person we can call The Antichrist, since John mentions many antichrists. But the fact that an individual is mentioned means there are both. The Greek from which we get “antichrist” means not only one who opposes Christ but who also impersonates him. He will be a fake Christ. In the meantime, there are many fake Christs with limited followings, which is itself one of the signs of the end. But from other scriptures we can be sure that there will be an ultimate and final Antichrist.

Such impostors can't remain for long among believers who are mature disciples. John makes it clear that these people were never saved. Some add “as if” to the verse, changing it to “the fact that they left makes it just as if they were never saved.” John does not say “as if”, but states as a fact that those who leave were never saved in the first place. And remember the context of false teachers; it is these who are called “antichrists”.

Notice that John says he's not writing to get the people saved but to remind them to practice what they preach: anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah is “the antichrist”. Again, as John had just said, “just as you heard that an impostor Anointed is coming, now also many such fakes have come”. There is one Antichrist to come, but in the meantime there are many, and a given Antichrist can be identified by whether they deny that Jesus is the Messiah.

To have the Son is to also have the Father; they are one. Later John will elaborate on this, adding that whoever doesn't have the Son also doesn't have the Father. Many cults try to only keep one or the other, but John makes it clear that we must have both. And this also includes Jews. Some say they need not be evangelized because they worship the One True God, but remember what Peter said on Pentecost (Acts 2): the Jews had to accept their Messiah. That is where the line is drawn now, for all people.

Again John tells us that he is writing all this to keep us aware of false teachers. Jesus can return suddenly at any time, and we need to be sure we're saved and growing to maturity, so that we will not be embarrassed when he comes.

2:26–3:12 How children of God stand against them

All who are saved are born as God's children. Not servants or enemies, but children. Because of this, we will someday be made like him and see him as he really is. We are to set our hope on him, not on us, and we must not give up this hope. Keeping it helps to purify us.

To sin is to break God's law. This of course is not the Old Testament law, but the law John wrote about earlier: love your neighbor. Since love does no harm to its neighbor (Rom. 13:10) and sin does, then sin breaks this law. If we continue to live in sin then we have never known Jesus.

Satan has done nothing but sin, but Jesus destroyed his work. In light of that, it should be clear that to continue following in Satan's footsteps indicates one who is not saved. Since we can't see the heart as God does, outward behavior is all we have to go on.

Does this violate scriptures about people being saved but having no works? Not at all. There is a vast difference between doing nothing and living in sin. Yes, it's a sin to fail to do right (James 4:17), but such people are not committing evil acts like murder. Satan doesn't sit around and do nothing! But instead of seeing how little good we can do, we should see how much good we can do, out of love for God and people.

3:13–15 Hatred and murder

We can expect the world to hate us for Whose we are, but not other believers. So again, anyone claiming Jesus must not hate people. Instead, love for people is expressed in Jesus' laying down his life for us. Although most of us will never be required to do that, there is much we will be expected to do, such as sharing our material goods and showing compassion.

3:16–5:5 True love**3:16–19a Love in action**

It's better to never say "I love you" and do loving acts than to say the words but never back them up with action.

3:19b–24a Confidence before God

The conscience is not terribly reliable among lost people, but among believers it should help us stay the course. We are to keep believing and keep loving, and our conscience will be clear. But it is God's power and the indwelling Holy Spirit that keep our faith for us (1 Peter 1:3-5); he

gives us the ability to obey this command to keep believing.

3:24b–4:6 Test the spirits

This is one of the most important but most ignored verses in scripture: test the spirits. One test is to see if a teaching agrees that Jesus the Messiah came from God in human form. The Gnostics were teaching against this in John's day, and they're still teaching it today. Other religions such as Islam deny that Jesus was God and that he was crucified for our sins. So those who are trying to say we worship the same God as Islam are speaking blasphemy. Many Christians are so afraid of rejecting what comes from God as did the Pharisees, that they refuse to question anyone claiming to be of God and speaking the name of Jesus. But we are not to be gullible, since it is as wrong to accept the fake as it is to reject the genuine.

We must test the spirits, and we must know how to tell true from false. So discernment is like an open window with a screen: it lets in the fresh air but keeps out the bugs.

We believers are said to have had the victory over false teachers. It's in the past tense, and it's all because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. To say that we are capable of being lost is to say the Spirit in us is powerless against Satan. Instead, this Spirit is "the spirit of truth" which guards us against "the spirit of deception". All we have to do is listen carefully.

4:7–11 To love God is to love people

Again John emphasizes the need for believers to put love into practice. Perhaps it was a problem to the people he was writing to. He appeals to the love God showed to us in sending Jesus to save us. He loved us first, while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Jesus referred to this when he said "If you only love those who love you, what credit is that to you? After all, the deviant only love those who love them." (Luke 6:32). But God loved humanity while we were still his enemies, so we too must try to express love to people.

But note that love is not always gentle and nurturing. God says that he rebukes and disciplines those he loves (Rev. 3:19). And it's certainly not loving toward the victim if we do nothing to oppose the criminal. Love "always protects" (1 Cor. 13), and sometimes this requires strong opposition to evildoers.

4:12–18 Perfect love

Even though we haven't actually seen God, his love lives in us if we show it to others. God's love is not anything to be feared, since he will never throw us away. But he will discipline us if we stray, so it's only sensible to strive to practice love.

4:19–5:5 Fake love

As if to give us a hint that this is important, John repeats his statements about the impossibility of loving God yet hating people. After all, if we can't love people we can see, then how can we love God whom we can't see? Faith in God is our only means of victory over the sinful world, specifically faith in Jesus as the Anointed.

5:6–12 Three witnesses

What's all this about "water and blood"? One theory is that John is combating a Gnostic heresy that Jesus was only divine when the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism, and that it left him before his death. They believed this because they could not accept God in the flesh. Jesus was a mere man to them, who only had the divine presence for a limited time. So when John says "water and blood" he refers to the fact that Jesus was not only divine at his baptism, but all the way through his death.

Another view is that water refers to Jesus' physical birth (as in the context of his conversation with Nicodemus) while blood refers to his physical death. That would make John's meaning to be that Jesus was physically born and physically died. He further bolsters this testimony with that of the Holy Spirit for a third witness. This view makes better sense in light of the more general Gnostic teaching that Jesus was never human at all, but only appeared to be. And this follows his statement about the saved being those who believe this.

So we have God's own testimony that Jesus is his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life. That again supports the statement that it is our faith in Jesus that saves us, not repentance from sin or doing good works.

5:13–15 Assurance of salvation

In verse 13 John says that he writes these things "to you so you can understand that you have eternal life, you who put your trust in the

Name of the God-Man.” Believers can rest assured that eternal life is already ours. John is giving this assurance to people who are already saved. So if someone is not sure they’re saved, we can’t declare them lost, but instead should reassure them that if they have believed that Jesus is God in the flesh who died for our sins and rose again, they already have possession of eternal life.

Some may object, “This teaches a license to sin and gives people a false sense of security.” But that’s not true; liberty is not license, and our confidence is not false. Instead it is sure because it is in Jesus, not in ourselves. We should make every effort to silence those who falsely teach that salvation can be lost and rob believers of their confidence. As Paul taught, we have died to sin. And if we are truly reconciled with God, we will naturally want to please him.

Is the statement about asking anything of God a “blank check” that any Christian can cash? Hardly. John is just saying that if we ask anything **according to God’s will**, we’ll get it. How do we know what things are according to God’s will? By whether or not he grants them. One might then wonder what the purpose is of praying, but there may be things God would have granted had we asked for them.

5:16–18 Praying for other believers

What is the “sin that leads to death”? In Paul’s writings, and also in the account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), we see that God will go so far as to punish his own people with premature death for continued disobedience or for lying to the Holy Spirit. It’s possible that this lying to the Spirit is the particular sin John is talking about. But notice that we are told not to pray about it. There are apparently some things God doesn’t want us to try to change his mind about.

5:19–21 The True One versus false ones

At the end, John repeats some points, then makes a quick warning against idols. It seems somewhat out of place but really isn’t. John has been warning against false teachings and teachers who were leading people astray. Such turning away from the one true God toward other so-called gods is idolatry. John spent a great deal of effort to divide light from darkness, truth from error, Christ from Antichrist, so his last statement is simply a command to stay alert.

The Letter of John 2

Background

The second letter from John was written around the same time as the first, between 85–95 AD. This is a more personal letter and just briefly touches on the topic of Gnosticism, which taught that God could never indwell human flesh.

Outline

1. **1:1** Greeting
2. **1:2–6** Praise, and a new command revisited
3. **1:7–11** Watch out for deceivers
4. **1:12–13** Final greetings

1:1 Greeting

John introduces himself as “the Elder” (Gk. *presbuteros*), and writes to “the chosen master”. The Greek word typically translated as “lady” and sometimes transliterated as a proper name, is *kuria*. According to the Strong’s listing, it comes from the base word *kurion* which carries the following meanings and forms:

- 2959 *Kuria* koo-ree'-ah feminine of *kurioV* - *kurios* 2962; *Cyria*, a Christian woman: – lady
- 2960 *kuriakos* koo-ree-ak-os' from *kurioV* - *kurios* 2962; belonging to the Lord (Jehovah or Jesus): – Master's
- 2961 *kurieuo* ko-ree-yoo'-o from *kurioV* – *kurios* 2962; to rule: –have dominion over, lord, be lord of, exercise lordship over
- 2962 *kurios* koo'-ree-os from *kuros* (supremacy); supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication, Master (as a respectful): – God, Lord, master, Sir
- 2963 *kuriotes* koo-ree-ot'-ace from *kurioV* - *kurios* 2962; mastery, i.e. (concretely and collectively) rulers: – dominion, government

- 2964 kuroo koo-ro'-o from the same as kurioV - kurios 2962; to make authoritative, i.e. ratify: – confirm

Notice that all forms of the word are given the same range of meanings—lord, master, ruler, authority— but the feminine form alone is not assigned any of those terms. The only places the feminine form is found are here in this letter, vs. 1 and 5. The usual commentaries seem split on this, and they argue against each other's position. There is also one that argues against John's likelihood of addressing anyone as "master" by virtue of Jesus being called "the Master", but the logic in that is very weak. After all, believers are called "holy ones" and so is Jesus, and some believers are called "masters" (e.g. Eph. 6:1).

We turn to Ockham's Razor²⁹ in the midst of many theories, and the simplest interpretation is that John is addressing a woman who has leadership of a community of believers ("children"). Most translations agree that this concerns a community of believers in some way. If John is just writing to a family he knows, why did he not address it to the man? And why was this letter considered holy scripture and preserved with all the other scriptures? The simplest view would be that since the early believers considered it holy scripture, then it must concern the community of believers at large, making this woman the leader of that group.

Linguistically and historically, there is no reason to treat the feminine form here any differently than the masculine form. Prejudice is the only explanation.

1:2–6 Praise, and a new command revisited

John is happy that at least some of the people are living a life of truth, and he repeats his "old/new" law from the first letter: love your neighbor. Again he points out the need for action and not just words.

1:7–11 Watch out for deceivers

False teaching was a big problem even in the young church, and John again takes aim at the Gnostics, who deny that Jesus came in the flesh. He encourages the people not to lose their hard-earned rewards by backsliding.

²⁹Ockham's Razor refers to a rule made by 14th-century English logician and Franciscan friar, William of Ockham. The principle states that all else being equal, choose the simplest solution.

Now we see a rule putting restrictions on hospitality and who we allow into our meetings: anyone who doesn't bring the teachings of the apostles is not to be welcomed. If we welcome them anyway, we are held accountable for participating in their false teachings. Churches today ignore this warning, letting in anybody teaching anything, "because they might get saved." But the community of believers is to go out into the world, not let the world in among us.

1:12–13 Final greetings

We probably wish John had written more on these matters instead of talking with the people only in person. But if God had wanted those words preserved, they would have been. John then signs off with greetings from the "chosen sister" he is fellowshipping with at the time he wrote the letter.

The Letter of John 3

Background

The third letter from John was written around the same time as the other two, between 85–95 AD. It is another personal letter, but this time the topic is a particular false teacher.

Outline

1. **1:1–4** Greeting and Praise
2. **1:5–8** Instructions about helping others
3. **1:9–10** Proud Diotrephes
4. **1:11–12** Good Demetrius
5. **1:13–14** Final greetings

1:1–4 Greeting and Praise

As with the second letter, John introduces himself as “the Elder”, but this time he writes to an individual named Gaius. He has a good reputation of being honest and faithful among people he doesn’t even know well.

1:5–8 Instructions about helping others

John instructs Gaius to support the people and share in their work. He tells him to send out some believers for an unnamed purpose. As with Paul, we understand this to refer to making provision for them, that is, not sending them out empty-handed. They gave up their possessions and livelihood in many cases, and so had nothing.

1:9–10 Proud Diotrephes

Like Paul, when John encounters a teacher who is deliberately and knowingly leading people astray or abusing them, he names them publicly. Someone called Diotrephes is domineering and not recognizing the authority of the Ambassadors. He gossips against them and even throws people out of the fellowship if they don’t do everything his way.

Sadly, this is a common problem today. There are many preachers who are proud and egocentric. They beat the sheep in their care and demand blind obedience, even excommunicating any who don’t follow their

“vision”. An example was the Purpose Driven fad that swept the world. Many reported being shown the door for resisting or asking questions, and some allege that this is official policy.

Another expression of this pride is concerning women believers. Many who oppose women’s full equality have come to the point of calling those who support it unbelievers and heretics. They refuse to let women exercise their God-given gifts for the benefit of the whole Congregation, and throw out any who teach otherwise. It is truly a case of those who “love to be in charge” domineering over those they consider beneath them.

1:11–12 Good Demetrius

So Gaius is to be sure not to imitate such evil people but only good. In contrast to Diotrephes is one named Demetrius, someone everyone speaks well of.

1:13–14 Final greetings

Like the second letter, John cuts it short so he can say more in person.

The Letter of Jude

Background

The letter from Jude was written around 65 AD, although there is a fairly wide range of possible dates. Scholars seem to agree that this was a half-brother of Jesus, just as James was.

Outline

1. **1:1–2** Greetings
2. **1:3–4** The problem of false teachers
3. **1:5–13** A lesson not learned
4. **1:14–16** Enoch's prophecy
5. **1:17–23** Turning away from falsehood
6. **1:24–25** Praise

1:1–2 Greetings

Another “slave of Jesus” is Jude, who identifies himself as the brother of James. There was an Ambassador named Jude, but this one does not identify himself as an Ambassador. He doesn't say who his intended audience is, beyond their being believers, whom he describes as being “called by Jesus.”

1:3–4 The problem of false teachers

Jude's intentions were to just chat about salvation, but Gnosticism was rising up and infiltrating the young Congregations. Notice that we are to “contend for the faith.” Many today teach that this is wrong, unloving, negative, etc. But there is no way to take this as a vague and gentle “sharing” of what we believe. It is a strong defense and counter-attack against falsehood. And it is The Faith we are to contend for, not our personal convictions beyond salvation. It is The Faith “that was handed over to the holy ones.” That faith is what is recorded in the pages of the New Testament, that Jesus is God in the flesh who paid for our sins and rose from the dead. We dare not be weak or unsure about this, nor fail to oppose any other teaching.

The community of believers had been infiltrated by sneaky false teachers, but such are doomed. And we can recognize them by their immorality and disrespect toward God.

1:5–13 A lesson not learned

This passage gives us a rare glimpse into the realm of Messengers (angels). The “Messengers who did not stay in their positions but left their home” (trad. “fallen angels”) were thrown into an eternal gloomy prison to await Judgement Day. The statement that follows tells us that these Messengers were the ones who “were extremely promiscuous” as told in Gen. 6:1-8. The phrase “different flesh” is not defined but probably refers to the fact that Messengers were intermarrying with humans. It’s possible that the stories we’ve all heard about alleged space aliens abducting people and doing experiments on them related to reproduction are either the remaining fallen Messengers or possibly demons (the hybrid children of the illicit unions) that are trying the same thing. Their destiny is “eternal gloomy darkness”.

Jude ties the false teachers he’s writing about to these fallen Messengers. These people are like animals, dismissing the supernatural as a myth and mocking all who believe in it. Yet not even the Ruling Messenger Michael would mock Satan. This incident of them arguing over the body of Moses is not recorded in scripture. For that reason some believe the letter should not be in the Bible, but Jude is simply referring to an event in history, not promoting any false teaching.

Again, these false teachers are like wild animals who act only on instinct. They are an embarrassment at the “fellowship meals” in the assemblies, treating them only as occasions for gluttony and not recognizing the Master at all.

1:14–16 Enoch’s prophecy

Jude mentions Enoch as making a prophecy about such evil people. Does this mean we should accept as scripture the “Book of Enoch”? Not at all. For one thing, there is no record of any other prophecies from Enoch. For another, there are many forgeries of the book. And for yet another, none of them are from anywhere near the time of Enoch. The Jews faithfully preserved the words of all prophets of God, so the absence of any ancient Book of Enoch should tell us something. If the letter of Jude can be called into question just for quoting it, then certainly the Book

of Enoch should not even be considered.

So though there are some intriguing things in the Book of Enoch, and it may indeed be historically accurate, the point in quoting Enoch is that he predicted the final judgment of such evil people, who do nothing but complain and boast and fool people with flattery.

1:17–23 Turning away from falsehood

Here Jude refers to Ambassadors, implying that he is not one of them. They foretold the coming of scoffers and deceivers who would cause divisions in the Congregation. But in the face of that, we must be vigilant in prayer and in following the Holy Spirit. We must show mercy to those who are confused, plead with those who are backsliding, and thereby “snatch the lost from the fire.”

1:24–25 Praise

Jude closes with yet another of many similar statements found elsewhere in scripture: Jesus is able to guard us and bring us safely into God’s presence. He will again be recognized for the majesty he had before the ages.

The Revelation of Anointed Jesus

Background

The Revelation to John was written around 95 AD by the apostle John while exiled on the isle of Patmos at the order of the Roman emperor Domitian. It includes over 300 indirect quotes from more than half the Old Testament, primarily Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Psalms.

There is a particular correlation between Revelation and the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, commonly referred to as the Seventy Weeks prophecy. In hindsight we know that these 'weeks' or 'sevens' are groups of years, so if one of them remains it must last seven literal years, not literal weeks or days. The Messiah was "cut off" after the 69th week, interrupting the prophetic clock so that the Gentiles could be saved (see Acts 15:15–17, Rom. 11:11–25).

Regarding that 70th week, we are told that its beginning is marked by the confirmation (or renewal, enactment, enforcement) of a seven-year contract or treaty by the "prince that shall come" between Israel and "many", but halfway through he will violate it and the Jewish temple. So when this occurs in Revelation, we know it is the halfway point of the seven-year period. And we know Revelation is that 70th week because it has not yet happened, and Revelation reaches to the end of human history.

Another connection between the two prophetic writings is the matter of their being "sealed" or not; Daniel is told to seal up the prophecy (Dan. 12:9), while John is told not to seal it (Rev. 22:10), so Rev. must be the unsealing of Daniel's prophecy. And in Dan. 12:11 we are given a very familiar expression of time to readers of Revelation: 1,290 days. This is about 3-1/2 years, half of the seven, and is the span between the abolishment of the sacrifices/"abomination of desolation" and the end of the prophecy. So the seven years are divided in two, and we can know the halfway point in Revelation by that event.

But if Revelation is the unsealing of Daniel's prophecy, which only concerns Israel and not the "church", then why is it sent to the "churches" and not the people of Israel? There are several points to consider:

1. Israel had rejected the Messiah and its temple had been destroyed at least twenty years earlier.

2. Christians are charged with knowing when the time of our departure is near, but not to be fooled into thinking we have missed it (ref. 2 Thes. 2:3).
3. The prophecy includes the glorious future awaiting us and is thus a great source of hope.
4. It serves as a counter-argument to the claim that Israel has been abandoned and replaced by the Body of Christ (ref. Rom. 11:1), or that the Body of Christ has been absorbed into Israel (Heb. 7:11–12).

At the end of this document is a very simplified possible chronology. And though the translation itself uses the term Oppression rather than Tribulation (which simply means “trouble”), the traditional terminology will be used in this document since it is a much more familiar term. Likewise for the “wild animal”, which is rendered “Beast”.

Outline

1. **1:1–1:20** Prologue
 - (a) **1:1–1:11** Greeting, scope, and setting
 - (b) **1:12–1:20** Description of Jesus, and John’s responsibility
2. **2:1–3:22** The seven letters
 - (a) **2:1–2:7** (1) To Ephesus (lost love)
 - (b) **2:8–2:11** (2) To Smyrna (fearless)
 - (c) **2:12–2:17** (3) To Pergamos (immoral)
 - (d) **2:18–2:29** (4) To Thyatira (falsehood)
 - (e) **3:1–3:6** (5) To Sardis (dead)
 - (f) **3:7–3:13** (6) To Philadelphia (escape)
 - (g) **3:14–3:22** (7) To Laodicea (indifferent)
3. **4:1–5:14** The throne in heaven
 - (a) **4:1–4:1** After these things
 - (b) **4:2–4:6** General description
 - (c) **4:6–4:8** Four animals

- (d) **4:9–4:11** Animals and elders
- (e) **5:1–5:14** The Lamb is worthy

4. **6:1–8:5** The seven seals

- (a) **6:1–6:2** (1) White horse (conquest)
- (b) **6:3–6:4** (2) Red horse (war)
- (c) **6:5–6:6** (3) Black horse (economic collapse)
- (d) **6:7–6:8** (4) Green horse (1/4 population killed)
- (e) **6:9–6:11** (5) Martyrs at the altar (persecution)
- (f) **6:12–6:17** (6) Disasters, anticipation of doom
- (g) **7:1–7:8** No wind, 144,000 Jews sealed
- (h) **7:9–7:17** The multitude from the Great Tribulation
- (i) **8:1–8:5** (7) Silence (preparing to sound the trumpets)

5. **8:6–14:20** The seven trumpets

- (a) **8:6–8:7** (1) Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned
- (b) **8:8–8:9** (2) Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea destroyed
- (c) **8:10–8:11** (3) Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers embittered
- (d) **8:12–8:13** (4) Heavenly bodies' light reduced by 1/3
- (e) **9:1–9:12** (5) First woe: Locusts from the Abyss torment enemies of God for five months
- (f) **9:13–9:21** (6) Second woe: Four Messengers, 200 million soldiers, 1/3 population killed
- (g) **10:1–10:11** The Messenger and the little scroll
- (h) **11:1–11:14** Temple measurements and two witnesses
- (i) **11:15–14:20** (7) Third woe:
 - i. **11:15–11:19** Praise in heaven, temple opened
 - ii. **12:1–12:18** The woman and the dragon
 - iii. **13:1–13:18** The first and second beasts
 - iv. **14:1–14:5** The Lamb and 144,000 on Zion
 - v. **14:6–14:13** Warnings about the beast and Babylon

vi. **14:14–14:20** Sharp sickles harvest earth6. **15:1–16:21** The seven bowls

- (a) **15:1–16:1** Preparation
- (b) **16:2–16:2** (1) Terrible ulcers
- (c) **16:3–16:3** (2) The sea becomes blood and everything in it dies
- (d) **16:4–16:7** (3) The rivers become blood
- (e) **16:8–16:9** (4) The sun scorches people
- (f) **16:10–16:11** (5) Darkness over the beast's kingdom
- (g) **16:12–16:15** (6) Dry Euphrates and unclean spirits
- (h) **16:16–16:21** (7) The Battle of Armageddon

7. **17:1–20:10** The end of the world as we know it

- (a) **17:1–17:18** The harlot on the beast
- (b) **18:1–18:24** Babylon falls
- (c) **19:1–19:10** Praise in heaven
- (d) **19:11–19:16** Jesus on white horse, armies of heaven
- (e) **19:17–19:21** Final battle of the Great Tribulation
- (f) **20:1–20:6** The thousand years
- (g) **20:7–20:10** The final rebellion
- (h) **20:11–20:15** The final judgments

8. **21:1–22:5** Everything is new

- (a) **21:1–21:8** Sky and earth
- (b) **21:9–22:5** Jerusalem

9. **22:6–22:21** Epilogue

1:1–1:20 Prologue

“Revelation” and “apocalypse” are the Latin and transliterated renderings of the Greek word meaning “unveiling”, or in this context we might say “unsealing”. It is unclear whether the Messenger sent by God is Jesus or another Messenger, but it is clear that the ultimate source of the prophecy is Jesus. Because of common illiteracy, it was necessary for the words to be read aloud by the few who could. So John or Jesus is promising blessings to the reader who does not add or remove words, and the listener who takes them to heart.

1:1–1:11 Greeting, scope, and setting

The prophecy is to be sent to seven actual, historical Congregations in the Roman province of Asia, the area we now know as Turkey. These were certainly not the only Congregations or even the most prominent of them; conspicuous by its absence is the one in Jerusalem for example. So this may be a hint that there is more to these letters than simply to address immediate problems or challenges. Certainly the number seven is significant, seeing that it denotes perfection or completeness in the Bible. If so, then perhaps the prophetic significance is that this represents the completion of the church age.

1:12–1:20 Description of Jesus, and John’s responsibility

All three Persons of the Trinity are cited as the author of the prophecy, along with the promise of Jesus’ appearing. And the “alpha, omega, and the God who is, was, and is coming” make it clear that he is God. This is important to compare with the earlier words that seem to make the Father above him.

John then explains the setting: he has been exiled on the isle of Patmos off the coast of the province where the seven Congregations were, due to faithfulness to the Gospel. It was The Master’s Day, an expression presumed to refer to the first day of the week, our Sunday. While he does not specify what “in the Spirit” means, it was in this state that he heard the voice ordering him to write down what he is about to see and send copies to the seven Congregations.

His description is clearly of Jesus (“the Living One who died”), and every detail is written in superlatives. Whether the individual qualities have symbolic meaning is not clear in this passage, but they may have significance in the detailed greetings to individual Congregations later.

But Jesus explains the meaning of some of the things in the vision (Congregations and their messengers), so the likelihood of symbolic meaning is certainly high.

2:1–3:22 The seven letters

We should keep in mind that not just the individual letters were sent to each Congregation, but all the letters and the entire prophecy. So each Congregation would know about the instructions to the others, though each had specific instructions that applied only to them.

There are different views on what or whether these Congregations also indicated something about the “church age”. Certainly these were historical, literal Congregations, though some do make them entirely symbolic in spite of evidence that they actually existed. Among those who accept them as actual Congregations, some believe the sequence indicates a progression of “church history” to come, while others believe they simply correspond to various conditions the Congregations of any given time might experience. But given the fact that none of the terminology used for Congregations is seen on earth again after the letters, it seems plausible to deduce that they symbolize something about the entire duration of “church history” in some way. Yet we must note that since all these churches existed at the same time in the first century, and since the historical progression theory requires quite a bit of arbitrary generalization (deciding where one age ends and another begins), what these letters signify beyond the immediate and literal can apply to any given Congregations in any given time. That is, there is no clear progression, as if we can determine the lateness of the prophetic hour by the character of the Christian world in general.

But what does it mean that these letters are sent not to the Congregations but to their messengers? We are not told here or anywhere else in scripture, so all theories are pure speculation. Origen believed them to be “guardian angels”, while Epiphanius believed them to be “bishops”. The problem for Epiphanius’ view is that no human was ever called a messenger anywhere else in the Letters. Likewise, the problem for Origen is that no Letter ever mentions or hints at such non-human guardians. So with that in mind, and given the context here, we should consider that they might refer to literal human messengers who would be sent to each Congregation to deliver their letter. We should note that in the specific wording for each, Jesus never speaks to the messenger but to all the

people.

We also note that the parting statement in the letters is the phrase, "Let those with ears pay attention to what the Spirit is saying to the Congregations". Jesus used this phrase in Mark 4's parable of the sower and went on to tie it to Isaiah 6:9-10. He also used it in Mat. 11:15 after discussing who John the Baptist was. So it seems to be an expression of the culture and time to pay close attention to an important principle that requires effort to grasp.

Another repeated phrase is "those who conquer". While most would agree that the specific promises in each letter are aspects of the general promise to all saved people, we cannot conclude that this injunction to "conquer" is a requirement to be saved, as it would contradict the clear scriptural principle of salvation by faith alone, not "works". Instead, noting the context of reprimand in all but two cases, we can understand this need to "conquer" as being tied to whatever is wrong; that is, to correcting a fault. In those two exceptions, the intent seems to be to keep what has already been attained and thus avoid the pitfalls others have fallen into.

2:1–2:7 To Ephesus

In this letter Jesus emphasizes his being the one in charge of the Congregations. And as will be his habit, he begins with praise for what the people are doing right. Specifically, these people practice discernment and don't blindly accept any claims by would-be authorities. But their fault is that they have fallen from the level of devotion or love they started with. Some interpret "the devotion you had at first" as referring to fellowship meals, but the word here is singular; it would make little sense to criticize people for letting go of their first fellowship meal.

Then Jesus adds another positive observation: they "despise what the Nicolaitans do, just as much as I". Who are these Nicolaitans? Hippolytus of Rome, Irenaeus, and others claimed there was a deacon by that name who led people to live in wild indulgence, including eating food offered to idols and wife swapping. But the name itself means "to conquer the people", and given the context and the fact that their deeds are separated from those of Balaam in the letter to Pergamos, it could refer to those who seek to impose illegitimate authority over the Congregation. According to [Albert Barnes](#), the view of Hippolytus *et al* essentially creates a redundancy with Rev. 2:15, and there is no reason

in the context to doubt that it refers to an actual group of people called by that name. In that same article, Cyrus Scofield specifies that it refers to the earliest form of a priestly order, or 'clergy'. Noted historian Philip Schaff³⁰ corroborates the early rise of hierarchy as well.

Finally, Jesus promises that "those who conquer" will eat from "the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God". Certainly all the saved will do so, but the implication here seems to be that it is the saved who will "conquer" the faults Jesus just defined, since salvation is not a foe to be conquered but a gift to be received, because Jesus is the true Conquerer; see Rom. 8:37.

2:8–2:11 To Smyrna

In this letter Jesus emphasizes his being the one who died and lives and is eternal. He sees their troubles and hardships, and the slander they endure from false Judeans. But who are these false Judeans? It may refer to ethnicity, but the bulk of scripture would seem to favor the view that they are those Judeans who have rejected their Messiah and are thus in rebellion against God, in spite of their ethnicity. Or, at the very least, they have abandoned the laws of Moses in favor of the Talmud and other rabbinical traditions which contradict Moses. The latter view would fit well with the prophetic concept of Israel "in unbelief", since the presumption is that those who still follow Moses are real Judeans. We might also note that while Jesus lambasted the Pharisees for their "traditions", the disciple Nathaniel was called "a genuine Israeli".

Though the people of Smyrna are not reprimanded, they are told they will be persecuted by the False Accuser, an obvious connection to the false Judeans and the ultimate source of their falsehood. The "ten days" are not defined but probably refer to more than ten literal solar days here. Some, such as **W. A. Spurgen**, believe it refers to ten persecutions to be experienced by believers through "church history". But others (same reference) take it to mean a relatively short period of time, and we might note the contrast with Daniel's "weeks" for years. A parallel might possibly be drawn as well with the era of papal persecution of various Christian groups such as the Anabaptists. The secular historical record shows that the believers in Smyrna did suffer, as reported by Ignatius (same reference), but it is difficult to say whether it lasted ten distinct periods of time.

³⁰*History of the Christian Church*, Â§ 42, Clergy and Laity.

Now we see the connection with Jesus' opening statement about the one who rose from the dead: the people of Smyrna were to expect some martyrdom, but they could be sure this death is not the end. So the final statement to them is connected as well: they will not be harmed by the Second Death, which as the remainder of the prophecy will make clear, refers to eternal separation from God.

2:12–2:17 To Pergamos

This letter begins with a curious statement: that the people are “where the Adversary’s throne is”. Whatever that means,³¹ we can see why Jesus would introduce himself as the one with the sharp, double-edged broadsword. Their faithfulness in spite of this strong evil against them is particularly noteworthy, because they have already suffered martyrdom and still remained faithful.

In spite of that, they share a fault with the Congregation in Ephesus: they have loose morals, and they follow the Nicolaitans. Here is where there would be a redundancy if the two referred to the same kind of sin. And this is where the “double edge” of that broadsword comes into play: the same sword that fights for them against the Adversary can also fight against them for their own sins. Persecution does not afford them the right to get away with sin— a lesson each of us as individuals should learn so that we make no excuses for our own sins.

The end statement referring to hidden manna and a white pebble with a secret name on it can be seen to refer to the power to endure as well as a verdict of innocence should they conquer the listed faults. The Adversary as their accuser would thus be shown to have lost the quest to have them convicted.

2:18–2:29 To Thyatira

Here Jesus describes himself as the one who is both divine and human, who sees what the people have been going through and the effort they’ve put out. Though this was a small Congregation near Pergamos and was not mentioned in any account of missionary activity in the scriptures, we should note that the convert Lydia was from Thyatira and is the most likely reason this Congregation existed.

But then we see the infamous name Jezebel, first seen in 1 Kings as

³¹See the quote near the end of Appendix C under Mystery Babylon at [An Introduction of Remaining Bible Prophecy](#).

the wife of Ahab. That Jezebel was certainly not a worshiper of God, but what scripture condemned her for was persecuting the prophets of God. She is often held up as the epitome of a manipulative and overbearing wife to a non-assertive husband, but her faults in scripture make no statement directed at such qualities, and instead are concerned with her treatment of the prophets and her enticements to immorality. So whenever someone cites Jezebel as the model of an unsubmissive wife, they are inventing a Jezebel unknown in scripture.

Here we see the focus on enticement to immorality, which likely means Jezebel was not the real name of the woman being discussed concerning the people of Thyatira. If this Congregation had in fact been initiated by the woman Lydia, the woman Jezebel would serve as a stark contrast. Like the original Jezebel, this woman is encouraging immoral behavior and the worship of false gods. But it isn't just she who is being threatened, but also anyone who has followed her; they are responsible for their participation in her sins and cannot offer any excuses to escape her punishment.

In the face of such pressures, Jesus only tells the few who have stayed clean to hold on. And to those who do, Jesus will give command over the non-Judeans. The emphasis here does not seem to be on who is being ruled but that these who overcome will be rewarded in a manner appropriate for their suffering. Like Jesus, they will "shepherd with a rod of iron" which means that any threats to the "flock" will be met with decisive and deadly force, in contrast to the time Jesus has given Jezebel to change her ways. As for the "morning star", it is one of the titles Jesus uses for himself, and probably is another way of emphasizing the co-rule of these who stay pure.

3:1–3:6 To Sardis

Jesus describes himself to the Congregation in Sardis as the one with the seven stars and spirits of God. Seven is widely held to be the number of divinity and perfection, which is about to be contrasted with the sorry state of the people there. And they are blind to this poor condition, being at the brink of figurative death while believing themselves to be the very picture of health and vitality. They are to hurry and preserve what little remains of their former condition as a viable Congregation at their beginning. They are not given time to change their ways as was Jezebel, but a very minimal opportunity whose duration will end without

warning.

But even here there are a few who are not at fault, and they will wear the clothing of purity. They will also be honored with special mention before God and his Messengers as conquerers.

3:7–3:13 To Philadelphia

This one of the two Congregations not reprimanded for anything is greeted by the one who opens doors for those without the power to do so themselves. They have been shut out by false believers who really belong to the “congregation” of the Adversary, but such people will be forced to abase themselves before their former victims, who will be honored by Jesus as his beloved people.

The phrase about guarding them out of the hour of trial that the whole world was about to go through is one which had no immediate and literal fulfillment in history. There has never been a global persecution of Christians, and the phrase “the whole inhabited world” leaves no room for a regional or local event. But whatever it refers to, these people will be kept out of it completely; the Greek grammar clearly states “out of”, not “through or during”. It is the world which is to be tested, not the Body of Christ which has already experienced testing throughout its history. This also connects with Daniel’s prophecy regarding the purpose of the 70 weeks; see Dan. 9:24.

The people are thus to be prepared for their sudden removal from the world. For those who do prepare, the promise is given that they will never leave the most secure place anyone could be: the temple of God in heaven. They will bear the names of God and of Jesus, as well as the New Jerusalem.

3:14–3:22 To Laodicea

In this final letter Jesus describes himself as the one to be trusted and the very Creator Himself (ref. Col. 1:15–16). So for the people to be indifferent to him and the Gospel is utterly repulsive, to the point that it nauseates him. Their self-image of being rich and complete is the exact opposite of reality, so they are strongly advised to come to him for the remedies to their pitiful condition. Above all, they must trade their sickening apathy for strong desire. Jesus has not been silent during this time but has kept knocking on the door. Though the majority have paid no attention, the few who do will enjoy the close relationship that

indifference cannot have. They will also be granted the right to sit on the very throne of the Creator.

4:1–5:14 The throne in heaven

John has been seeing and hearing everything to this point at his place on Patmos, but for the remainder he will be taken to heaven “in spirit”.

4:1 After these things

Since there is nothing in the text to indicate a bodily transportation, and since we know John remained in his mortal body afterwards, we cannot cite it as an example of a literal “rapture” event. However, we should note that this spiritual change of venue happened only after the letters to the Congregations were completed, and that the “open door” has a parallel in the letter to the Congregation at Philadelphia. The passage begins with “after these things”, which refers to all that had taken place up to this point. If the letters as a whole refer to the entire history of Christianity, and since the Congregations are never portrayed on the earth after this point, then there is strong support for this change of venue at the end of the letters to symbolize events which only happen after that history is ended. So while this change of venue is not a *literal* Rapture, it is certainly a *type*.

The Rapture (or Departure) refers to the belief that followers of Jesus will be “snatched away” or “caught up” to heaven (the Latin rendering of the Greek is where we get the word Rapture). The more direct references are found in 1 Cor. 15:50–58, 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11, and 2 Thess. 2:1–12. Among those who take this literally, there is much controversy over the timing. The most common beliefs are known as pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib. Another view called pre-wrath aims to take portions of all the others and arrive at a fourth conclusion. The key points in this debate are not only timing but what it depends upon: the definition of the wrath of God, whether believers would be kept safe through it or taken out of it, the principle of imminence, and whether there are righteous mortals left to repopulate the earth after all the judgments are completed.

The pre-trib view argues that no specific signs or conditions are required to signal the Departure. It is possible that God does not want Satan to know when the Departure will happen, which would explain why Satan seems to keep trying to have a global government ready at all times, and why there are so many false prophecies about the end of

the world. So the lack of prerequisites and the hiding of this event from Satan logically lead to the conclusion that the Departure is before even the first seal judgment begins. This does not require that the 70th week of Daniel begins immediately; it may very well not begin until the 6th seal or 1st trumpet. This would also mean that pre-trib believers are not necessarily mistaken in reading “the signs of the times”, but that such signs do not apply to the Departure itself. Yet by extension, seeing signs of the 70th week of Daniel surely indicates that the preceding Departure must be even nearer. The great error of many holding this view is date-setting based upon those signs. It should be obvious, then, that the pre-trib view is incompatible with any others, since they have clear events to watch for.

The mid-trib view holds that the Departure must come at either the 6th seal (but see detailed discussion in the section about the multitude from the Great Tribulation) or 7th trumpet, depending on which one is believed to mark the midpoint of Daniel’s 70th week. Its proponents argue that the followers of Jesus are promised “tribulation”, yet the pre-trib view does not deny this. It shares with pre-trib the belief that the Body of Christ is exempt from the wrath of God, but it defines that wrath as limited to the last half of the 7 years.

The post-trib view holds that only the “Day of the Master” at the very end of the bowl judgments is the wrath of God, thus only lasting part of a literal solar day. So they believe that Jesus will bring his people up to meet him on his way down to the earth to defeat the Beast/Antichrist. Yet they also believe that the Body of Christ is protected during the 70th week, which seems to be a direct contradiction of the great numbers of martyrs coming out of it. It also leaves no mortals on earth to repopulate it during the Millennium.

The pre-wrath view holds that Jesus’ statement, “those days will be cut short” (Mat. 24:22), allows a blending of the other views. The reign of the Antichrist is cut far short of its prophesied 3-1/2 years by the removal of the Body of Christ, and then after the 3-1/2 years Jesus returns with all the elect to begin the Millennium. Thus the world is repopulated by those who come to faith after the Departure.

This Commentary is written from the pre-trib perspective, holding that the definitions and durations of terms such as “the Day of the Master” and “the wrath of God” cannot be limited to the extreme precision required by the other views.

4:2–4:6 The Twenty-Four Elders

The scene in heaven is, if nothing else, indescribably glorious. Everything there, as well as God Himself, is compared to priceless gems and the brightest lights. One could of course look for symbolic meaning in every detail, and no doubt such meaning exists. But we are not given all the meanings and must be content with waiting for the answers till we see them ourselves. The possible exception would be the two stones mentioned: jasper and carnelian, since they match the first and last stones of the tribes of Israel and were worn on the priestly garments to represent all Israel.

Probably the most significant aspect of the scene, aside from God on the central throne, is the identity of twenty-four elders surrounding him. Some say they represent the righteous of all ages, while others say they represent only the believers of the “church age”, and a minority believe them to be Messengers. But all agree that they represent someone or something else rather than that there are literal elders around the throne of God.

Twenty-four is of course a significant number in the scriptures; this was the number of priestly orders under the old law for example. It is also double the very prominent number twelve, corresponding at least to the tribes of Israel as well as the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples while on earth. We are also told that these elders wear white clothing and golden crowns. White clothing symbolizes purity and righteousness, and throughout the prophecy we will be told that white stands for “the righteous actions of the holy people”. The Greek word for the crowns refers to the type worn by victors rather than royalty. So these elders certainly represent human beings who have conquered and done righteous things. Yet they are not described as martyrs.

But perhaps the most significant detail is that they say to the Lamb, “You bought **us** for God by means of your blood” (5:9). Only humans could say this. According to biblestudytools.com, manuscript study strongly indicates that the elders include themselves in the company of the redeemed. But the four creatures are also singing this song, and it is likely they who refer to the redeemed as “them” in response to the song of the elders. So these elders represent at least all Christians prior to the judgments. It would seem from 1 Thes. 4:16 that the righteous prior to the “church age” will not be resurrected until later, since it specifies

those who died as believers in Jesus.

4:6–4:8 Four animals

Also surrounding the throne are four animals or “living things”. Their meaning is not given, so again we can only speculate. Some say that since the Holy Spirit is represented by seven lampstands, so also these animals represent something about the attributes of God. Others say that they represent the way the tribes of Judah (lion), Ephraim (ox), Reuben (man), and Dan (eagle) would pitch their tents around the Tabernacle. Still others say that they have some connection to the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel as symbolic of certain Messengers. These last two would also indicate that the focus is on Israel rather than Christianity, further bolstering the view that all of Revelation beyond the seven letters is post-“church age”.

4:9–4:11 Animals and elders

Whatever or whoever these entities represent, their purpose in heaven seems to be simply to honor and worship God. But it is only the elders who have crowns to throw at his feet, so they probably do not represent the same entity. And as we’ll see, it is only the animals that call forth the four horses of the first four seals.

5:1–5:14 The Lamb is worthy

Now begins the preparation for the actual judgments. God holds a scroll written on both sides and sealed in seven places, such that the seals must be broken in sequence. It may be that the “strong Messenger” demanding to know who is worthy to break the seals is none other than the Messenger (possibly Gabriel as identified in ch. 9) who had given Daniel the Seventy Weeks prophecy and told him to seal it. John’s emotional reaction to the absence of any such worthy individual is not explained, but it certainly illustrates the great importance of the scroll, which some think may be the “title deed” to the earth that was given to the serpent in Eden.

Then of course the Lamb, obviously Jesus due to having been killed in sacrifice and symbolically portrayed as divine by the seven horns and eyes, is shown as the one worthy to break the seals. Though one might expect to see him in heaven as the Lion of Judah, it is the sacrifice that brought worthiness; the time for taking back the kingdoms of the world is not yet. Those who had been worshiping God on the throne now fall

before the Lamb as further support for this being Jesus who is both divine and human.

6:1–8:2 The seven seals

To this point, everything has transpired in heaven, but now we begin to see the results of heavenly activity on the earth. Yet does the opening of the first seal signify the beginning of the seventieth week? All we know for certain is when the middle of that week has been reached, as noted in the Background. But we are given no timeline for the sequence of events leading up to that point, which will not be until the seventh trumpet. Even if we know that all Christians are brought to heaven before the seals are opened, we do not know that there will be an immediate confirmation of the seven-year treaty at that moment, and nothing at all is said about this treaty in the entire prophecy.

So it is impossible to say whether the events the seals cause are part of that final seven years. At the same time, however, we must note the very close similarity between the seals and Jesus' discourse in Mat. 24, while also remembering that those words were spoken to Jews before the cross. This leads to the possible conclusion that the seals constitute a kind of overview of the seven years. But the problem is in the details; for example, the proportions of destruction are not the same ($1/4$ for the seals but $1/3$ for the trumpets).

Some say that *all* the judgments, including the seals, must happen in the second half of the seven years. Yet because the "two witnesses" are killed by the Beast during the sixth trumpet, and they had been active for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, we can deduce that this period of time was during the first half of the seventieth week, and thus began with the confirmation of the seven-year treaty. Then it seems a stretch to think that none of the disasters caused by the witnesses were part of the judgments of God. So it seems reasonable to conclude that the seventieth week begins at least with the trumpets.

But what if that seventieth week does not start with the seals? It's possible that the seals are during a time between the Rapture and the seventieth week wherein many lesser-known end-times prophecies take place, such as the battles of Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38-39. And it may be that this time is what Jesus called "the beginning of labor pains", and that the Tribulation cannot begin until the entire scroll is unsealed.

Another consideration is that if the seals and trumpets comprise the

first half, why the imbalance of having 2/3 of the judgments in one half and 1/3 in the other? Yet another is whether any given set of judgments takes up an entire 3-1/2 year period or only transpires during a small portion of that time. And still another is whether people could possibly survive at least 3-1/2 years under such horrendous conditions. Many questions arise from the judgments to come.

6:1–6:2 (1) White horse

As one of the four animals calls forth this horse and rider, we need to ponder whether these horses and riders represent people or are personifications of other entities. This one is often said to represent the Antichrist/Beast, but the problem is that none of the other horses are mapped to individuals. It would seem more consistent to view this one as representing the kingdom or government of the Beast, or simply ideological conquest.

“Bow” (*toxon*) is a means of shooting arrows, not any kind of ornamental ribbon or even a halo. The Septuagint does not render this word as anything but a weapon of war (see Zechariah 9), except for the rainbow after the Flood. Note also that this bow is held in the rider’s hand, not worn like a sash. Similarly, the crown (*stephanos*) on the rider’s head is not the diadem of royalty but the wreath of a victor or conquerer. The white color of the horse often represents purity throughout Revelation, but it also symbolized indifference or peace to the Greeks of the time. Considering all of this as well as the fact that it is the Lamb opening the seals, rather than riding the horse, it seems clear that this seal’s horse and rider do not represent Christ and his followers, who were never told to conquer the world but only to evangelize it. Otherwise we would have to say that the Christian community has been without power or weapons.

6:3–6:4 (2) Red horse

The “fiery” (*purros*) horse, if red, symbolized death to the Greeks; if literally made of fire, it would symbolize that which consumes and destroys. From the statements there about the large sword and people slaughtering each other, it seems clear that this seal denotes all-out war. The fact that this follows immediately after the white horse lends further weight to the interpretation that this has nothing to do with Christ or his people. So we can interpret the white horse and rider as denoting a conquest that is not open war, such as political intrigue, espionage,

and organized crime. Also note that these horses and riders are the ones executing the judgments, not suffering them, so they cannot represent the suffering of Christ or his followers.

6:5–6:6 (3) Black horse

The black horse can symbolize mourning, but given the statement about scarcity of necessities it more likely represents economic disaster. If the first horse represented a weakening of society, and the second the open destruction of infrastructure, this interpretation of economic ruin seems to follow logically.

6:7–6:8 (4) Green horse

The fourth horse is green (*chloros*), and in ancient Greece it symbolized fear. But it is ridden by Death and Hades, again the natural results of the preceding seals. Note that these are given power to kill one fourth (not one third as in a later judgment) of the world's population by not only war but also its typical aftermath.

6:9–6:11 (5) Martyrs at the altar

The earthly disaster for this seal is implied: followers of Jesus are being singled out for execution. It shows the martyrs under or at the base of the altar, probably to symbolize that they were a special kind of sacrifice or offering, since their blood was literally poured out to God. Notice that they ask God to avenge their blood, and that the people who killed them are still alive on the earth. These are recent victims, since the murderers still living would not be liable for all the martyrs of history. Also note that they are told to wait patiently for more to be martyred, indicating that this point in the judgments cannot be the end. Later we will be told of others who are martyred specifically by beheading (Rev. 20:4).

6:12–6:17 (6) Disasters and fear

The preceding seals seem like things the earth has endured before, but this one crosses the line into the terrifying; it is reminiscent of the magicians of Pharaoh's court being able to duplicate the first few plagues and signs from Moses but then recognizing "the finger of God". The description could be of a meteor shower and/or other cosmic disasters, some of which could possibly trigger earthquakes and volcanoes, which in turn could darken the sun and moon. John is simply describing what he sees without explanation, but any earthquake large enough to move all the

mountains and islands is unprecedented. It cannot be a normal eclipse, since it would be physically impossible for both the sun and moon to be obscured at the same time.

Regarding the people hiding in caves and crevices, it is interesting to consider the reports of many underground bunkers, not only from the cold war but new ones as well. Speculation is that government leaders around the world are expecting a disaster of this magnitude, which is unprecedented in recorded history. At any rate, the people know why it is happening and do not deny the existence or identity of the God they are hiding from. Perhaps the longstanding demand of many atheists for God to prove his existence will have finally been met.

7:1–7:8 No wind, 144,000 Jews sealed

After this obvious wakeup call from God, all the winds on earth are kept still while God seals 144,000 Hebrews, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. The Messengers holding back the wind are ordered to delay their impending assault by another Messenger who comes from the east. Note that these Hebrews are sealed on their foreheads, which will identify them during the plague of locusts at the fifth trumpet.

7:9–7:17 The multitude from the Great Tribulation

After the sealing, John is shown a crowd of non-Israelis (“the nations”) in heaven, wearing the white robes of righteous acts. But this time he is told who they are: believers who are coming out of the Great Tribulation. Does the multitude’s sudden appearance in heaven indicate that they just arrived there, meaning they were just “raptured”? We can note that in these seal judgments nothing is said about Jerusalem or Israel, and this group is identified as non-Jewish. Yet we must remember that the Congregation is composed of both Jew and Gentile; in fact, such distinctions are not even made within it (Gal. 3:28). We can also note that though the four horses and riders also “suddenly” appeared, no one thinks that they had just arrived; likewise for other entities to come. So we cannot say when this multitude arrived in heaven, and we cannot identify them as the Congregation. But we can connect them to the statements of Paul (Rom. 11:25) and James (Acts 15:14) about “the full number of Gentiles” who were to “come in” before God would “return and rebuild David’s fallen tent”.

In addition, these people were in a process of coming out of the Great

Tribulation; the Greek word rendered “coming” (*erchomenoi*) is a present participle.³² Though there are many contextual considerations to make in determining the temporal meaning,³³ a strong case can be made for the continuing sense of the word. That is, the group was still being added to, not already completed, as also was the case for the martyred souls under the altar.

So we are not compelled to argue that the Rapture must happen at the sixth seal, even though it is only at that point when “the wrath of God” is acknowledged (6:15-17), and it is that wrath which Christians are not to go through (1 Thes. 1:10, 5:9). Not only is the acknowledgement of people not the divine definition of the wrath of God, but they say it *had arrived*, not *was about to arrive*. And since the Lamb opens the seals, and the Lamb is God, then even the seals are part of the wrath of God. Consider the following summary:

1. The Congregation does not go through the Great Tribulation, as even the mid-trib view would agree.
2. The multitude is described by the Messenger as “those coming out of the Great Tribulation” (Rev. 7:13-14), emphasizing their origin.
3. The Great Tribulation is held by all but the post-trib view as certainly not any of the seal judgments, yet the 6th (not the 7th) is when the multitude is shown.
4. We are forced to conclude from this that the multitude cannot be the Congregation.

Therefore, it seems likely that the sixth seal is the outside limit for the

³²Present passive participle, being used to modify “the ones/they” and thus under the “nominative absolute” category; ref. “those conquering” (*nikOn*) in Rev. 3:21. It is therefore not “temporal”, that is, it does not indicate time but instead simply identifies the group’s origination. It would be as much within the bounds of sound translation principle to render the phrase, “These are the ones who will be coming out of the Great Tribulation” as that they “have come” out of it. Regarding a similar issue in Rev. 3:10 (“I will guard you out of the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole inhabited world”), the difference is the present participle; both speak of being “out” (*ek*) of something, but only this instance indicates a continuing process. Probably the most precise rendering would be, “These are the ones that come out of the Great Tribulation”.

³³[Learn NT Greek](#)— excellent resource for Greek grammar

Rapture, in which case all the remaining judgments happen afterwards.³⁴ As for the inside limit wherein the Rapture precedes the first seal, there is no reason why it can't, even if the wrath of God doesn't technically begin until the sixth seal. Also, it can be argued that it is not just the sixth that brings the wrath, but all the seals as a group, especially since they are direct judgments from God. And if it is asserted that Jesus' ministry lasted 3-1/2 years and comprised the first half of Daniel's 70th week, the seals did not happen at all during that time so they would have to be part of the second half. That is, all three sets of 7 judgments would have to be crammed into the space of 3-1/2 years, which seems practically impossible considering all that must take place, and especially considering that not all the end-time prophecies are contained in Daniel and Revelation alone.

So from the grammatical, contextual, and logical clues we've studied, the multitude is composed of Gentiles from the Great Tribulation. One noted characteristic of all three sets of judgments (as well as the OT) is the separation of Jew and Gentile, such that this Gentile-only group would fit the post-"church age" era. So the only conclusion left to draw is that they are arriving in heaven during the bowl judgments. Given that the crowd appears after a massive global earthquake, perhaps they were taken out at that time, though the group was not completed then.

But notice that they are said to come out of the Great Tribulation specifically, meaning the second half by nearly unanimous agreement, in spite of the fact that they appear during the sixth seal. Yet it is only after this that the 144,000 Jews are sealed (presumably to be protected from judgments to come), and they appear on Mt. Zion with the Lamb in ch. 14 just before the bowl judgments, which almost everyone agrees are at least part of the Great Tribulation. But surely the nearly seven-chapter span between the sealing of the 144,000 and the beginning of the bowl judgments is significant.

At this point we face a chronological dilemma: there is a clear sequence (first, second, after this, etc.), yet the points at which various things occur or entities appear seems conflicting. Even if we cram all three sets of judgments into the final 3-1/2 years, which would be required to put the multitude in both the seal judgments and the Great

³⁴Theories claiming that the seals happened over the course of history are too much of a stretch to even consider, being on a par with theories that the millennium has already commenced and Satan is already bound.

Tribulation, we still have to account for such things as the 3-1/2 year ministry of the “two witnesses” (ch. 11) that ends at the sixth trumpet—which precedes the bowls. Now we would have to push the bowls out past the Great Tribulation, which few would agree to since it is the one thing almost everyone says defines that time. So not even putting all the judgments in the Great Tribulation solves the problem. In addition, there is no need for these witnesses while the Body of Christ is in the world, since that is our mission for this era (Acts 1:8). This means that the two witnesses will not appear till we’re gone, and thus the only way to solve the problem is to assume a gap between the Rapture and the Tribulation. Yet if this is so—and it *must* be if the witnesses finish before the bowl judgments begin—then we’re conflicting with the “sixth seal Rapture” theory.

8:1–8:5 (7) Silence, then preparing to sound the trumpets

We will see that the seventh of each of the first two sets of judgments marks the beginning of the next set. Here of course the next to come are the trumpets. Whether the trumpets are said to be contained by the seventh seal or follow it, the sequence is clear: the seven seals precede the first trumpet.

It begins with an unusual but short-lived silence, which is not repeated with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. So there is something different here, something that marks the trumpets and bowls apart from the seals. It could possibly indicate that the treaty marking the beginning of the Tribulation has been enacted, but we are given nothing in the text to explain it.

Then John sees a Messenger first place a censer on the altar, containing the prayers of the holy people. But this same censer is then used to get fire from the altar and hurl it onto the earth, causing many disasters. Is there a connection between the prayers and the disasters, as if the prayers were for vengeance as we have already seen from the souls at the base of the altar? We are not told.

8:6–14:20 The seven trumpets

Spanning nearly seven chapters, clearly the trumpet judgments are significant. However, rather than conclude that the trumpets comprise a larger amount of time than the other sets, we must consider the occasional “flashback” or parenthesis, as being background or explanation or

reminder to help explain what is to come. The overall character or theme of this set of judgments seems to be “1/3”, and like the seals, the first four are different from the rest: the first four concern nature, while the rest concern humanity.

8:6–8:7 (1) Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned

Hail, fire, and blood are thrown onto the earth and burn up a third of the green plants, reminiscent of the disaster of Exodus 9:18–26. The difference is the blood, and no explanation is given for its inclusion.

8:8–8:9 (2) Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea destroyed

The burning mountain that turns a third of the sea to blood and kills a third of marine life could be a meteor. But whatever it is, it also disintegrates ships.

8:10–8:11 (3) Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers embittered

It is called a star but could be any heavenly body. But there is no explanation for such a body making the streams and springs bitter and apparently poisonous. And if we interpret it as man-made, we wonder what country would poison its own water along with that of the rest of the world. Some of course would propose an alien weapon or ship, but were that the case we’d expect to see some reference here to demons or Satan.

8:12–8:13 (4) Heavenly bodies’ light reduced by 1/3

There is no cause given for the darkening of the heavenly bodies, but it accompanies the warning of an eagle about the remaining trumpets. To this point the sources of food and water and light have been crippled, and just when people think things are as bad as they can be, God will turn his rage on the people themselves. He had promised that the seasons and harvests would continue to the end (Gen. 8:22), and now the end has come.

9:1–9:12 (5) First woe: Locusts from the Abyss

What is the Abyss, but a bottomless pit? According to Luke 8:31 it is the prison of demons, and possibly also the fallen Messengers if it is the same place as Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4).

Messengers are sometimes referred to as stars in scripture, and since this one that had fallen from the sky/heaven is personified, we can safely

assume that is the case here as well. This is the point where demonic forces are unleashed on mankind, since they come up from the Abyss and not the earth's surface as literal locusts would.

Their description could indicate flying machines of some kind, but their demonic character is undeniable. Further support for this is that their leader is Abaddon (Destroyer). We have to be careful not to assume that the Messenger who opened the shaft is this leader, but since it is "fallen" and did not just now fall, it is quite possibly a reference to Satan. However, certainly Satan would have released his Messengers a long time ago if he had charge of the prison earlier, but on the other hand the key is not handed over until now.

This is also a rare occasion when we are given a duration: five months. And the hopelessness of relief or escape, even through death, is surely a foretaste of eternal separation from God. The torment is only on those not having the seal of God on their foreheads (that is, everyone except the 144,000 sealed at the sixth seal). Still, the worst is yet to come.

9:13–9:21 (6) Second woe: Four Messengers, 200 million soldiers, 1/3 people killed

Now we see another group of four, this time Messengers who had been stationed (by force, so they are evil) at the river Euphrates for this precise point in history. Though the locusts could only torment, these can kill and are permitted to take out 1/3 of the human population (the earlier 1/4 + this 1/3 combines to reduce it by about half). They command an army of two hundred million, which could indicate the combined armies of the Orient. John goes into great detail here in describing the horses and riders. Of course they could be literal horses, but just as easily this could be a description of modern weapons and armor.

And still the people refuse to change their minds about God. Though it is Satan and his forces that have tormented them and field vast armies spewing death, people still prefer to suffer rather than humble themselves before God. They prefer as their king the one who has caused all the suffering of the world for thousands of years, rather than the one who has limited his activities so people could freely choose. The choice was never between people's autonomy and serving a master, but between one master and another. They have been deluded into thinking that Satan would allow them to indulge themselves forever, when in fact he would torment them as shown in this prophecy.

10:1–10:11 The Messenger and the little scroll

Chapters ten and eleven describe events between the second and third “woes”. Though in some respects this Messenger seems to be Jesus Himself, in other respects this is not the case. For example, he swears an oath to God. The “little scroll” is not identified but also does not appear to be the same as the scroll with the seven seals. That John should eat the scroll, and that it tastes good but upsets his stomach, is surely symbolic of something, but we are not told explicitly what this is. However, since it is John who is told to prophesy when he eats it, and since there is no opportunity for John to participate in any of the events to come, it must refer to his continued mission in his natural life after the prophecy has been completely given.

11:1–11:14 Temple measurements and two witnesses

Another task given to John at this point is to measure the temple of God, which had been destroyed on earth and thus must be one that would be rebuilt sometime early in the seventieth week.³⁵ We can speculate that the building of this temple is part of the treaty with Israel, and we can rule out the temple in heaven because this one will be in the holy city (Jerusalem) which was to be trampled by non-Judeans for forty-two months (3-1/2 years). Since Daniel had been told that the violation of the temple and worship of the Beast mark the midpoint of the seventieth week, and since this trampling was to last 3-1/2 years, we have further support for presuming it was built at the beginning of the seven years. After all, the worship of the God of Israel would never be permitted after the Beast declares himself God in that temple.

Then we are introduced to the famous and controversial “two witnesses”. Most of the current focus is on their identity, but the text does not bother to identify them. The important fact is the duration of their prophetic activities, that being the very familiar 3-1/2 years. And since this is mentioned in the same place as the measurement of the temple, we can connect this period of time to that temple, meaning both the temple and the activity of the two witnesses coincide during the first half of the seventieth week.

The activities of these two witnesses are to wreak havoc on anyone who threatens them with harm, to have power over nature, and to give

³⁵The prophet Ezekiel was told to measure a presently non-existent temple as well; see Ezk. 40-48.

testimony to God. Their being equated with olive trees and lampstands has an echo in Zechariah 4, where the two images refer to the power and Spirit of God as executed by Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the king. Some of their activities also resemble those of the prophet Elijah, including the 3-1/2 years of drought, and the plagues of Moses.

The biggest question these two raise is, Why here and now? Why are these two duration-specified events only brought up as part of the sixth trumpet? A clue might be that it was only at the fifth trumpet that the Abyss was opened, and immediately after the two witnesses are mentioned we are told that the Beast ascending from the Abyss kills them. And since the Beast is presumed by many to be the now Satan-possessed world leader who signed the treaty 3-1/2 years ago, then the midpoint of the seventieth week, when the Beast declares himself God, is shortly after the two witnesses are killed—yet another support for their ministry having begun at the start of that week of years. We can add as well the fact that the world is still functioning enough so that people can celebrate the death of the two witnesses by exchanging gifts for 3-1/2 days (there's that number again), yet another reason to place their activities in the first half of the seventieth week.

But the gloating is short-lived because the two witnesses rise from death and are taken up into heaven while their enemies watch. And lest the Beast try to spin all this into him being Christ who sends the two he might say are the Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire (a great deception if he could get away with it), God destroys a tenth of Jerusalem and seven thousand people with a severe earthquake. The message is clearly perceived and causes the survivors to finally give honor to the God of heaven. There is also an obvious parallel with the cloud in which the two are taken up, and the one in which Jesus was taken up at his ascension (Acts 1:9).

Yet even then, the most severe judgments of all are about to begin, and if this marks the second half of the seventieth week (Dan. 9:27), we can refer to it as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:4–7, Daniel 12:1, Mat. 24:15–22), or traditionally, "the Great Tribulation". As we will see in Rev. 13:5 (same as we did in this passage when the temple was measured), the duration of this time is forty-two months or 3-1/2 years.

11:15–14:20 (7) Third woe:

Many things are covered in this final trumpet and third “woe”. The timing of these events is not at all clear, though parts have a strong symbolic link to the distant past.

11:15–11:19 Praise in heaven, temple opened

At the sounding of the final trumpet, praise breaks out in heaven, because with the completion of the impending final set of judgments will come the kingdom of God to earth. Along with the reward of the holy people of God will come the ruin of those who have ruined the earth. No explanation is given for why the temple is opened to expose the Ark of the Covenant, but we can note that it happens at the onset of the final judgments.

12:1–12:18 The woman and the dragon

These two topics are identified as “signs in heaven”. The first has obvious similarity to that of the dreams of Joseph (Gen. 37:9–11), and is in great contrast to the woman to be discussed later, Babylon the Great. There is also speculation that this sign refers to a particular astronomical alignment. Sometimes the constellation Virgo has the sun near her head and the moon near her feet. If a comet moves up to where it appears to be like a tear coming from her eye, it would be as if she is crying out with the agony of childbirth. Then if it moves up to the top of her head it may appear to be like a crown. This has happened in the past and may also happen in the future, but so far no significant events have accompanied it.

We should also note that not everything in the imagery matches the past. If the child is Jesus, which seems obvious from the description, we know he was not immediately snatched up to heaven the moment he was born. And we also know that neither Israel nor Mary was carried on eagle’s wings into a place in the desert and protected for 1,260 days (3-1/2 years).

However, we have a precedent in Daniel for even a single sentence in a prophecy having a great amount of time elapse from one part to another, in the seventy weeks prophecy. (Of course some views such as Preterism reject this and therefore place all seventy weeks in the past, but there are critical problems with this view which are outside the scope of this writing.) It would seem that such a situation faces us here, since

both the similarities and differences to past events are undeniable. And as we saw with the two witnesses, the point in this seventieth week at which this image is presented probably has significance.

There is a place at the south end of the Dead Sea called Petra, an ancient city carved out of the canyon walls and rediscovered in 1812.³⁶ Many believe this is the place the woman will be taken to in order to be sheltered from the wrath of God for the second half of the seventieth week. But regardless of the location, the woman apparently represents godly people from Israel, and this may be the final fulfillment of Mat. 24:15–25.

As for the dragon, this is clearly representative of Satan. The gap in time would then be between the birth of Jesus and the war in heaven between the dragon and the Ruling Messenger Michael (ref. Jude 1:9, Dan. 10:13, 20–21, 11:1, 12:1), since the words between the two events are literally rendered “and it came to pass”. So at this point in the seventieth week, Satan is forever barred from access to the throne of God to accuse the followers of Jesus.

This prompts the warning to those still on earth, that the False Accuser will add his own great rage to everything else going on. He tries to pursue the woman (Israel fleeing to safety) but fails, then turns in a great rage to go after “the rest of her offspring”, presumably non-Jews, who belong to Jesus.

13:1–13:18 The first and second beasts

Now we are given detailed accounts of the Beasts. Though the first Beast was mentioned earlier as killing the two witnesses, it is only after the woman escapes to the desert that we are given much information about it. The symbolism is clearly related to that found in Dan. 7:7–8, Rev. 12:3 and 17:3,7, and serves to identify it as an empire, yet this includes its emperor as well. We know from Daniel that this Beast must be connected to “the prince that shall come”, whose “people” were historically the Romans; under the Roman Titus they obliterated “the city and the sanctuary” in 70 AD. We will discover more ties with ancient Rome in chapter 17, and should also consider the possibility of the rebirth of Rome as an antitype of the rebirth of Israel.

Notice that it is one of the **heads** of the Beast that is apparently

³⁶Actual footage of the outside of part of Petra was shown in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*). A nice article about the city can be found at [this blog](#).

dealt a mortal wound and then is healed; this would seem to refer not to the whole empire but to a leader, a person. This leader is then worshiped by the whole world and clearly aligns himself with and is empowered by Satan. The wound could be the Beast's claim to being Christ since he had appeared to die and rise again. If so, many are deceived into worshiping him and help to hunt down anyone he opposes. And again we are told that this empire will rule for forty-two months or 3-1/2 years.

Then we are told of a second Beast, given power and authority from the first. Its symbolism is apparently of religious deception, and it forces people to worship the first Beast. This is why the second Beast is also called the False Prophet, though that title is not given in the text until later. We should note that it is this second Beast, not the first, who makes everyone accept an inscription on their forehead or right hand, one that undoubtedly signifies loyalty to the first Beast. As such, it cannot be forced on anyone but must be accepted voluntarily— though the price of rejection will be death. (As a side note, it is quite ironic that the same people who have always denounced God for this “sadistic choice” will eagerly line up to accept the same choice from Satan.) Without such a pledge of loyalty, no one will be allowed to buy or sell.

Much endless speculation could be presented as to the meaning of the number 666. We do know that in that time and culture the letters of the alphabet were used to represent numbers, but all efforts at finding a fool-proof method to determine the precise name or meaning have proved fruitless. At the simplest level we can note that if 7 is the number of divine perfection, the three sixes might represent the failure of Satan to achieve equality with God. But then one wonders why the Beast would want to etch the symbol of that failure on all his subjects.

14:1–14:5 The Lamb and 144,000 on Zion

We were introduced to the 144,000 under the sixth seal, but now these people are in heaven. Their being called a “harvest” would suggest that they were all martyred. But what is the significance of their being single, celibate males? The word for “unmarried” is almost exclusively used for females. If part of the significance of the 12,000 from each tribe is a reference to a military force, it should be noted that one requirement for Jewish soldiers going into battle was sexual purity (Deut. 23:9-10, 1 Sam. 21:5, 2 Sam. 11:11). This is consistent with the overall purity theme in Revelation. As for the phrase about not being “polluted with

women”, it simply means that they were not promiscuous, since marriage does not “pollute” anyone. Some might otherwise jump to the conclusion that there is something inherently vile and poisonous about all women, as many false religions teach.

14:6–14:13 Warnings about the beast and Babylon

Now it appears that we are about to rejoin the sequence of judgment as a Messenger flies around spreading the Gospel and urging people to fear God and honor him as the one and only Creator. But this one is followed by another who announces the fall of a previously unmentioned entity, Babylon the Great. But instead of elaborating on this, the passage moves immediately on to a third Messenger with final warnings about worshipping the Beast and accepting the inscription. Notice the fate of those who do not heed that warning: their eternal, conscious suffering is undeniable with the words “there is no relief day or night for those. . .”. This is of course the exact opposite of eternal life, and if one is endless then so must be the other (ref. Mat. 25:46).

14:14–14:20 Sharp sickles harvest earth

At this point we have certainly picked up the sequence of the seventieth week, as “the time has come to reap the harvest of the earth”. That this harvest is described as “shriveled” or long overdue for harvesting would seem to indicate its lateness. Then there is another harvest of “ripe” grapes, but we are not told if these are in fact two separate harvests, and if so, what the first one means as opposed to the second. The meaning of at least the second harvest is quite clear: an epic bloodbath outside of “the city”, largely held to refer to Jerusalem.

15:1–16:21 The seven bowls

The bowl judgments are described by John as huge and perplexing, a notable difference from the preceding signs. They are the worst of the worst and serve to fully complete the fury of God.

15:1–16:1 Preparation

Before the bowl judgments begin, John is shown something like a sea made of glass mixed with fire. We are not told what this signifies. But the focus seems to be on the people standing next to it, who are those that had conquered the Beast and now hold glassy harps. They sing “the song of Moses”, another possible allusion to the plagues of Egypt. Or it

could refer to the one Moses wrote down in Deut. 32, which seems to have closer parallels to the events of Revelation.

The sequence is clear with the familiar phrase “after these things”, and following the song the temple in heaven is opened again. Seven more Messengers come out of it, and it is they who hold the bowls of the last disasters to be poured out on the earth. The bowls are given to them by one of the four animals, though again we are not told what meaning this may have. And though the temple is opened, it is filled with smoke so that no one can see inside until the disasters are completed.

16:2–16:2 (1) Terrible ulcers

As with the selective plagues of Egypt, only those people with the inscription of the Beast break out in terrible and disgusting sores when this bowl is poured out. We are not told why this particular disaster distinguishes between the people of God and the people of the Beast, while the others are indiscriminate.

16:3–16:3 (2) The sea becomes blood and everything in it dies

As mentioned, the second bowl affects everyone because it is poured out on the sea, killing everything in it.

16:4–16:7 (3) The rivers become blood

Still generally paralleling the less intense trumpet judgments, the third bowl affects freshwater sources. As this completes the turning of all earth’s water to blood, we are told that this is payback from God for spilling the blood of his people. Clearly, vengeance is not incompatible with love, because it shows love and justice to the victims.

16:8–16:9 (4) The sun scorches people

This bowl might be describing the sun going supernova or something similar. The people react here by cursing God because he had control over this disaster, much as many do today. They blame God for not using his power to stop evil from happening, but ignore their own evil actions against people who belong to God, and they failed to use what power they had to stand against the evil done to them. They also want God to do two mutually-exclusive things: leave them alone, and micromanage them so nothing bad happens. The free will of human beings and the evil of Satan must, for reasons we are not told, run their course. But when they do, all scores will be settled.

16:10–16:11 (5) Darkness over the beast’s kingdom

The scorching sun was apparently its last gasp: the lights have been dimmed before, but now they go completely out. Remember this when reading about the remaining bowls.

16:12–16:15 (6) Dry Euphrates and unclean spirits

The rivers had already been turned to blood, but now this particular famous river dries up completely. As an antitype of the passage of Israel through a dry path in the Red Sea, the hordes of the east now cross the dry Euphrates riverbed in preparation for the most famous battle of all. That these hordes are driven by evil is symbolized by the appearance of frogs as unclean spirits from the mouths of the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Dragon, who are responsible for this battle.

16:16–16:21 (7) The Battle of Armageddon

After a parenthetical warning for people of God to stay sharp, the Battle of Armageddon is staged. But apparently before it can start, the final bowl is poured out into the air, the significance of which we are not told. It causes “the mother of all earthquakes”, causing every island and mountain to disappear, as well as causing all the cities of the non-Judeans to collapse. We are not given the identity of “the great city” that is split into thirds, but the two likely candidates would be Jerusalem and Babylon. As it seems unlikely that this would happen to Jerusalem, we can speculate that this is Babylon, especially since it is cited by name as the supreme object of God’s fury.

But before we get a detailed account of the fall of Babylon, and remembering the darkness over all the Beast’s kingdom, we are told that hailstones weighing a hundred pounds start falling from the sky. Not only can people not see them coming, there is also no place left to hide. But even this is not enough to knock sense into them.

17:1–20:10 The end of the world as we know it

The judgments and disasters are complete, but a few other loose ends remain before human history is officially and completely ended, including the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

17:1–17:18 The harlot on the beast

This is where we meet “the other woman”, the Great Harlot. This seems to be a look back, at least for her part in the seventieth week, while her

inglorious demise happens probably at the midpoint. This chapter seems to describe the religious or ecclesiastical aspect of Babylon, while the next seems to describe the political and commercial aspect. It is only an entity that once belonged to God who is ever described in scripture as a harlot, and we have only two to choose from: Israel and the Bride of Christ. Since the former is the victim in this seventieth week and was already represented by the woman with child, we are left with the apostate “church in name only”.

First we are told that she “sits on many waters”, a common Biblical reference to rule over many nations. Her rule is said to have been attained through promiscuity, selling her “favors” for money and power. But John is only told these things, and next he will be taken “in spirit” to see her for himself.

John describes a woman riding a red beast covered with vile names and having seven heads and ten horns. These now-familiar terms tell us that this is the empire of the Beast, though the color seems to convey additional information. So the woman has been using this empire for her own ends, steering and controlling it, though also dependent upon it. But if she represents religion, she must have been active in the first half of the week, since at the midpoint the Beast demands all worship for himself. Shortly after this we will see how the Beast throws her off.

She has become filthy rich, looking and acting the part of queen of the world. And she has in her hand “a golden chalice filled with the disgusting filth of her promiscuity” as proof of her vile behavior. So she is properly labeled “Mother of Harlots and Everything Disgusting”.

On top of all this, she is drunk— with the blood of the holy people, a sight that completely shocks John. We might ask why, since he had been familiar with persecution, until we remember that this woman represents the utterly corrupt “church”. How could she have come to this, and cannibalized her own people? But like everything else the Beast touches, she was set up as the impostor of all that is good and pure.

But here we are not left to speculate; the Messenger explains these two entities. We need to keep this in mind, because many try to allegorize the explanation. The woman and the beast are the symbols, but what the Messenger says next is the authoritative explanation for what they mean, so there is no justification for allegorizing them.

First is the beast or empire. It is this empire which had existed before John’s time but not during, yet it would rise again to take part in this

prophecy's fulfillment. So we know that the kingdom of the Beast is not a new entity but an old one, as mentioned earlier regarding being the antitype of reborn Israel. Now at this point we would rightly conclude that this empire is Babylon and not Rome, since Rome was in power in John's day. And we know from history as well as scripture that Babylon was both a political and a religious empire, and was at its peak in the time of Daniel.

But we also know that Babylon therefore could not be guilty of the blood of people belonging to Jesus, since they did not exist until well after Babylon had fallen from power as a world empire— though its religion lived on in many forms. So at this point we must conclude that this beast is the revived empire of Babylon. Yet even though these details to come are not to be allegorized, they are clues nonetheless and need to be carefully studied. That is, one does not interpret a symbol with another symbol but with something real and definite.

Note first of all that though the seven heads are on the beast and not the woman, they represent some connection between her and the beast: seven mountains or hills. But tempting as it may be to immediately connect this with Rome as "the city on seven hills", the Messenger tells us that these hills stand not for literal hills but for kings. And like the three stages of the empire, these kings follow a sequence: five had already fallen before John's time, one was his contemporary (as opposed to the beast's "is **not** now"), and the other was to come and then be followed by an eighth. So what king was in power as an empire in John's day? None other than the Caesar of Rome.

So the beast itself is the Babylonian empire, while the heads are a line of kings spanning the Babylonian and Roman empires, which will turn out to be the first and the last. Yet here we are also told that the beast itself is the eighth king, which will throw off the woman at last. This means that the line between emperor and empire is not so easily distinguished.

Now we must look for seven, and *only* seven, great world powers, and what we find is this: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece had fallen, Rome was, and Rome and then Babylon was to come. But the woman will have "ridden" them all, so she can be none other than religion which is opposed and wishes to supplant the worship of the one true God. She is all false religion, not one particular religion, though all of them have the same root. Religion has always been the glue that kept

vast empires together.

To summarize then, we would expect the first half of the seventieth week to be the reign of the revived Roman Empire, and the second half the reign of the Beast/Babylon Empire. And as Daniel saw in the vision of the statue, the revived Roman Empire will be weak and short-lived. But all the “masks” of false religion will be torn off when the eighth king takes power and Satan openly demands direct worship.

Now on to the ten horns: they too are kings, but kings that had not yet come as opposed to the long historical line of the 7/8 kings. They will reign only a short time with the Beast, because they will hand him their power.

Back to the woman: the waters she sat upon represent multitudes of people all over the world; false religion is everywhere, no matter what the government may be. But the ten kings and the Beast will finally be rid of her at last, exposing her for what she is and making sure she is really and truly dead forever. And this is all done by decree of God, who often uses evil to be its own executioner. No more hiding or pretending; the line between God and Satan will be clear and obvious when the Beast declares himself God.

But before we leave chapter 18 we are given another identifying characteristic of the woman: she is “that great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth.” So while she certainly is representative of all false religion, she is also to be headquartered in a city that acts like a nation/state. Babylon clearly fits the description, but with its intertwining with Rome, so also does the Vatican fit the description. And remember that we cannot allegorize “city” since it is part of the answer to the symbol of the woman.

18:1–18:24 Babylon falls

Once again we see the phrase “after these things” and know we are moving on in sequence from what has come before. The religious system Babylon was destroyed at the midpoint of the week, but now we are at the end and political Babylon must be destroyed as well. This is proclaimed by a Messenger with great authority, and confirms in no uncertain terms which Babylon this is. This one, like the other, has also been promiscuous, but instead of being drunk with the blood of holy people she has made the kings of the earth drunk with her indulgences. Though the two are really one, they are like evil twins.

As the Babylon that has reigned for the second half of the week, she has used her power and wealth to oppress the nations, and now she must be paid back double portions of what she has dished out. Just before she is, the few who still worship God are to get away from her so they don't share in her punishment. She will fall in one day, enduring everything she thought would never happen to her. And what happens is all about indulgent luxury, including slavery. Many are unaware that the slave trade is going strong even now, even in western countries, and this is not normal employment but literal slavery.

From the detailed description of the laments from various people in this chapter, we can see that such a literal city does not presently exist. There are some that come close, to be sure; the Vatican³⁷ has unfathomable wealth in the form of precious metals and art, and though a city, it is treated like any nation. But its influence is still mostly hidden and passing itself off as poor and humble, while this Babylon is brazen and obvious. So we can expect that after the Departure/Rapture, there will be time for this situation to change. The current economic system is already teetering on the brink of collapse, and talk of fully implementing a New World Order is in full swing.

19:1–19:10 Praise in heaven

After another “after these things”, attention turns back to heaven, where “the mother of all parties” is getting started. People don't only shout about how happy they are to be there, but praise God for exacting revenge upon the Great Harlot as well. The tables have been turned at last. Now begins the reign of righteousness and the healing of the earth. But first there is a cosmic wedding to celebrate, and happy invited guests. One might wonder who the guests are as opposed to the Bride, but this is not a problem for those who see the Body of Christ as a unique entity rather than the righteous of all time. John of course is overwhelmed by all this and falls down to worship the Messenger who showed it to him. But this is not to be done, even to a Messenger, since only God deserves worship.

³⁷See Appendix C under Mystery Babylon at [An Integration of Remaining Bible Prophecy](#).

19:11–19:16 Jesus on white horse, armies of heaven

Then John sees the sky or heaven open up and a white horse appear. The rider is clearly Jesus, and he is followed by “the armies of heaven”, who are not identified. This is the actual Second Coming of Christ, since rather than meeting his people in the air to take them to heaven, he brings them with him to the earth.

Zechariah 14:3–4 specifies that he will set his foot on the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two, moving half the mountain north and half south for a considerable distance. In Mat. 24:27–31 Jesus says that people will see him descend from heaven in the clouds, bringing his chosen ones from one end of heaven to the other; that is, not from the earth. The living will mourn if they were evil, and be overjoyed if they were good. These good people, still in mortal bodies, will then repopulate the earth for the thousand years to come.

19:17–19:21 Final battle of the Great Tribulation

Now comes the final gasp of the kingdom of the Beast. In spite of the spectacle of Jesus and the heavenly armies returning to earth, and in spite of the humiliating defeat of all Jesus’ enemies, the heart of evil knows only hate and rebellion. First there is an invitation much different from the one to the wedding of the Lamb: the flying scavengers of the earth are summoned to a great macabre feast. Then the armies of the Beast, assembled to apparently die to the last soldier, are given their wish without a fight. The Beast and False Prophet are seized and thrown alive into the Lake of Fire, and the armies are killed by the sword proceeding from Jesus’ mouth.

20:1–20:6 The thousand years

The thousand years, traditionally known by the Latin word Millennium, begin with the imprisonment of Satan in the Abyss. Then the kingdom of Jesus is established, with judges who had been beheaded for refusing to worship the Beast or take the inscription; this is their position for the full duration of the thousand years. This is called The First Resurrection, but note that the scope of this phrase must be limited to the seventieth week of Daniel since we were already told of the Bride, the Guests, and the armies of heaven. In this context it would then seem reasonable to see it as referring to the first of those who came to God outside of the “church age”. Those who died in Christ were part of his resurrection and

already received their immortal bodies.

20:7–20:10 The final rebellion

After a thousand years without war or suffering, one might expect people to accept the fact that the kingdom of God is a good thing. But Satan is released and immediately misleads people from all over the world into one final, desperate act of rebellion. Foolishly they surround Jerusalem, but before they can say “lock and load” God brings down fire from heaven and they are all consumed. At long last Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire to join the Beast and False Prophet, all to be tortured forever. If the events of the seventieth week prove nothing else, it is that eternity will not be long enough to get the enemies of God to change their minds.

20:11–20:15 The final judgments

Now we reach the point widely known as Judgment Day, and among Christians as The Great White Throne judgment. All the dead stand before the throne to be judged according to what they had done in this life. Some contend that there are no degrees of suffering for the unrighteous dead, but if that were true there would be no point at all in judging them according to their deeds. Their eternal destination was sealed the moment they died, so the only purpose of judgment would be to determine the appropriate level of suffering according to how they had lived. And after they are all judged, even Death and Hades are dispensed with, since there will never be a need for them again.

21:1–22:5 Everything is new

Since the words “sky” and “heaven” are the same Greek word, we don’t know whether the entire universe will be replaced or only the earth and its atmosphere. But who cares? Everything mortal, corruptible, or in any way associated with the old world of sin will be gone forever.

21:1–21:8 Sky and earth

At the end of the thousand years and beginning of eternity future, the earth and sky/heaven (certainly not heaven as the abode of God though) are replaced. But there is more to this new arrangement than heaven and earth. The first specific item we are told about is the New Jerusalem that had been decked out “like a bride dressed for her groom”, descending from the sky/heaven, but it doesn’t say it touches the earth. Given its enormous size, it may be put in geostationary orbit, unless the new Earth

is much larger than the present Earth.

But before being given more detail about this city, we see the familiar phrases about “the alpha and the omega, the start and the finish”— terms applied to both the Father and the Son and indicative of Jesus’ divinity and full equality with the Father from eternity past to eternity future. We are also given a token list of the characteristics of those who will never enter this intimate relationship with God, and should pay attention to the fact that cowardice is as revolting to God as murder and promiscuity.

21:9–22:5 Jerusalem

Now one of the Messengers who had poured out the bowl judgments has a much nicer task to perform: to show John the New Jerusalem. Again John is taken away “in spirit”, this time to a huge mountain. This was his vantage point for what he had briefly told us in the opening paragraph of this passage. We notice here that this city is described also as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”, just as the saved of the “church age” are. So while one might presume that the New Jerusalem is only for Jews, this passage seems to indicate that it is for the Congregation. As we will see next, it meets the criterion given in Eph. 2:14 of having no divider between Jew and Gentile.

Of course we can hardly imagine the sight John beheld as he tried with mere words to describe it. He lists many precious gems and gold so pure that it is transparent, but we are not told of the significance of the various gemstones. And like everything else from God, the description of this city is done in superlatives. Of particular note are the gates each made of a single pearl (the basis of the popular phrase, “the pearly gates”), and each named after a tribe of Israel.

But of equal significance is the fact that the twelve foundations are each named after the twelve disciples of Jesus. They were all Jews, but also the literal foundation of the Body of Christ. This is the picture of the unified body of Eph. 2:14. The city was measured by the Messenger using human measurements of John’s time. Whether a cube or a pyramid shape, it is almost 1400 miles in length and width, and the same height, which is approximately the height of Alaska north to south (if accurate, there is a nice visual at [Tour of Heaven](#)). However, nothing in the passage states that the city will actually touch the surface of the earth. And there is no need for a temple, a lamp, or a sun, since God and Jesus are there.

But note that the nations will bring their majesty and wealth into the

city, and that those who live in sin will not be granted entrance. And from the description of the River of Life, we can deduce that there is some pathway or connection between the throne of God and the city. But the Tree of Life in the center of the city is said to be for the healing of the nations, which along with all the other clues would seem to indicate that this pertains to the beginning of the Millennium rather than the end. However, it also says, “the Curse will be no more”, which could not be true during the Millennium since some people will die (Isaiah 65:20).

22:6–22:21 Epilogue

In closing the Revelation, the Messenger says that all this will happen “suddenly”, not “soon”. As has been said before and will be said again, when Jesus comes it will be unexpected and quick. And in case anyone says, as many do, that the study of future prophecy is a waste of time or even harmful in some way, Jesus promises blessings to those who take the words to heart and cling to them.

Apparently John is too overwhelmed to remember not to worship the Messenger (the opposite of our human tendency to *shoot* the messenger!) and has to be reminded once again to worship only God. But as noted in the Background, here again John is told not to seal up the prophecy, and the reason is that its time is “near”. Compared to the time of Daniel, anything this side of Jesus’ first coming is certainly near, so we cannot presume that it meant “near to the lifetime of John”, especially since in hindsight we know that this prophecy has not been fulfilled. If all is allegory, or all is past, then none of the blessings apply to us today for studying it, and we are robbed of our hope of Jesus coming for us “in the clouds”. Neither is there any purpose in the many details given over the course of the prophecy; an allegory about good and evil hardly needs this degree of detail.

Then Jesus speaks directly, reminding people that his sudden return will be to give everyone what they deserve, and repeating that everyone not purified will be excluded from all the blessings. He also repeats the fact that he is the First and Last, and adds that he is both the root and family line of David. This is his self-identification as both God and man and the Messiah of Israel.

Finally, there is a solemn warning to not tamper with the words of this prophecy (which many take out of context to apply to the entire Bible, though of course it should go without saying that tampering with

that would bring God's displeasure as well). And with John, all who "long for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) say, "Come, Master Jesus!". Let no one say we are uncaring for the lost when we, like a true Bride, long to see our Groom. Instead, let us use this glorious future for the saved as motivation to spread the Gospel that would grant to the unsaved access with us to the New Jerusalem.

Simplified Chronology

The outline and chart below provide a possible general sequence of events of Revelation. It should also be pointed out that we cannot presume that the sequence of any set of judgments is evenly spaced or takes up the entire 3-1/2 years; they could be sporadic or be all at the beginning or end. Another excellent study on Revelation is one from 1919 by Clarence Larkin at [Sacred Texts](#) (standard disclaimer applies).

1. The "church age", ended by the Departure/Rapture
2. The seal judgments, possibly the "beginning of sorrows" of Mat. 24, battles of Ps. 83 and Ezk. 38, after which the people of Judea burn the weapons of their enemies for 7 years
 - (a) White horse: conquest
 - (b) Red horse: war
 - (c) Black horse: economic collapse, scarcity
 - (d) Green horse: 1/4 world population dies
 - (e) Persecution: martyrs under the altar in heaven
 - (f) Earth and sky disasters
 - (g) 144k sealed, 1/2 hour of silence, 2 Witnesses begin 3-1/2 year ministry, 7-yr. treaty confirmed
3. The 70th Week of Daniel:
 - (a) First half (trumpets), revived Roman Empire and religious / fake "church" Babylon, possibly the 10 kings:
 - i. Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned
 - ii. Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea ruined
 - iii. Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers made poisonous
 - iv. Light from space reduced by 1/3

- v. First woe: Apollyon-led locusts from Abyss torment people for 5 months
 - vi. Second woe: 200 million troops, 2 Witnesses killed by Beast from Abyss, then rise
 - vii. Third woe: Satan pursues Israelis fleeing to safety, then Satan thrown out of heaven, earth is harvested
- (b) Midpoint of the 7 years:
- i. Beast from sea given Satanic power, Satan and Beast worshiped
 - ii. Beast from land (False Prophet) orders Mark of Beast
 - iii. 144,000 with Lamb on Zion
 - iv. religious Babylon exposed and destroyed
- (c) Second half, Beast/Babylon Empire and military/industrial/Satanic Babylon:
- i. the bowl judgments
 - A. Terrible ulcers
 - B. Sea becomes blood and everything in it dies
 - C. Rivers become blood
 - D. Sun scorches people
 - E. Darkness over kingdom of Beast
 - F. Euphrates dries up, unclean spirits
 - G. Armies assemble for Battle of Armageddon
 - ii. Jesus comes to earth, defeats all enemies but Satan
 - iii. Satan locked in the Abyss
4. The Millennium
5. Satan released and sent to Lake of Fire
6. New heavens/earth, New Jerusalem
7. Eternity

Alternate Scenario: Beasts and Sequences

There are three distinct sources for the beasts:

1. from the Abyss (9:11, 11:7, 17:3-12), aka Abaddon/Apollyon

- red
 - ridden by harlot
 - king of locusts
 - slanderous names
 - seven heads and ten horns
 - "eighth king that comes from the seven"
2. from the sea (13:1-8), aka "first beast"
- leopard with bear's paws and lion's mouth
 - seven heads and ten horns
 - slanderous name on each head
 - a crown on each horn
 - one head with apparently mortal wound
 - mouth speaking slander
 - rule for 42 months
 - conquer saints and rule all nations
 - worshiped by whole world
3. from the land (13:11-18), aka "false prophet" (16:13, 19:20)
- two lamb's horns
 - speaks like a dragon
 - given authority of first beast
 - forces world to worship first beast
 - does miracles, causes idol to speak, executes all who refuse to worship it
 - deceives everyone
 - demands all to accept mark of first beast
 - number 666 given for first beast

A fourth entity, called the Dragon, is clearly Satan (20:2), also called the Devil and the Ancient Serpent.

But is the "first beast" the same as the one from the Abyss, even though they appear to have two different origins? The similarities are

obvious; the only major difference, beside the mention of color in one case, is the point of origin. Can we then equate the Abyss with the sea? The first time we encounter the first beast is in Revelation 9:11, at the 5th trumpet, when the locusts come out of it after the Messenger opens its "shaft". The king of the locusts is Abaddon/Apollyon, yet "the beast from the Abyss" is not mentioned again until 17:3-12 as the beast ridden by the harlot. And at that point, the Messenger tells John that this beast had not yet ascended from the Abyss. Yet this "first beast" seems to be the one that kills the two witnesses at the 6th trumpet, in 11:7. The key here is that rather than John witnessing the ascendance of the Beast from the Abyss at this point, the Messenger is telling him about it as future to John's time. So the "not yet" is not a chronological problem here.

John writes things in the order he is shown them, but this is not necessarily the order they will take place. Is there a way to know when a sequence is being interrupted or paused to present background or concurrent events? The most common connecting words are "and, then, next" (*kai*) and "with/after these things" (*meta tauta*). The latter is found only 8 times in Revelation:

- 1:19 "write down... what was, is, and will happen **after these things**" (just prior to 7 letters)
- 4:1 "**after these things** I saw, and look!" (just after 7 letters)
- 7:9 "**after these things** I saw, and look!" (after 144k sealed)
- 9:12 "still two woes coming **after these things**" (between 5th/6th trumpets)
- 15:5 "and **after these things** I saw the temple opened" (before 1st bowl)
- 18:1 "**after these things** I saw another Messenger" (between harlot described and Babylon destroyed)
- 19:1 "**after these things** I heard sound of huge crowd" (after Babylon destroyed)
- 20:3 "**after these things** he must be released" (after Millennium)

Certainly such words indicate sequence, but with the exception of the first one, they still refer to when John saw them, rather than necessarily when they would actually happen. After the 7 letters, John is taken to heaven. After the sealing of the 144k, John sees the multitude from the Great Tribulation. After the 5th trumpet sounds and judgments follow, John notes that two more are to follow. After seeing the sign of the final 7 judgments to come, John sees the Temple in heaven opened and hears the command to pour out the Bowl judgments. After being shown the woman riding the beast, John sees a Messenger announcing the fall of Babylon. After its demise, John hears praise in heaven. After the Millennium, Satan is released from prison for a short time.

After the 7 letters, John is shown heaven's throne and various entities. This includes a group of 24 elders who sing about having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, so they cannot be pre-Christian saints; yet they are in heaven before the seals are opened. And since nothing in terms of judgment has begun, this cannot be considered out of sequence. John is brought to heaven, he sees the elders, and after that the Lamb begins to open the seals.

The first possible out-of-sequence passage is 7:1-8:5, where the wind is held back, the 144,000 are sealed, and John sees the multitude from the Great Tribulation, which by all accounts is at least the trumpet judgments rather than the seals. From every other scripture describing the Great Tribulation, it is the 3-1/2 year span wherein the final judgments against mankind are unleashed. Some include the trumpet judgments in this, while others hold that only the bowl judgments qualify. Yet we see the multitude at the 6th seal, and there is no indication that they are martyrs.

The only event resulting from opening the 7th seal, besides the preparation to sound the trumpets, is a half-hour of silence in heaven. Does silence mean no further judgments during the first half of the Tribulation? Some say yes, since "hour" is sometimes used in scripture to speak of the final judgments, such that half an hour would mean half the 7 years. Rev. 17:12 says that ten kings will receive power for "one hour" along with the Beast, which may or may not span the entire 42 months of his rule, which would be half the "hour of trial", yet it says "one" rather than "one-half".

So also is "day" used to refer to the same time of judgments, and Mat. 24:36 uses both "day and hour" together. "Hour" is also used to refer to a three-hour span of the day (third hour, ninth hour, etc.).

Jesus also used "hour" to mean the entire span of his public ministry in John 2:4, which is held by some to be 3.5 years, though details in the gospel accounts seem to indicate a shorter time. 1 John 2:18 states that the "last hour" had already come. Rev. 3:10 shows a church being exempt from "the hour of trial to come upon the whole world". Yet Rev. 9:15 says that 4 Messengers were kept for a particular "hour" inside that "hour of trial".

So there seems to be no solid basis for the claim that this "half an hour" of silence must refer to the first half of the seven years. And the silence is in heaven, not on earth. However, nothing in any prophecy must be taken as the wrath of God for the first half of Daniel's 70th week. Neither does Revelation state that the three sets of judgments are evenly spaced. Yet what Jesus described in the Olivet Discourse as preceding the Great Tribulation has much in common with the seal judgments, and no indication of duration is given for any of them.

Could the seals, trumpets, and bowls each take 1/3 of the 7 years? Rev. 11:3 states that the two witnesses will be active for 1,260 days (360x3.5), and that this ends in 11:7 when the beast from the Abyss kills them. This is told to John after the 6th trumpet caused the 200 million troops to kill 1/3 of the world's population. But there seems to be a slight break or change in 10:1, when the Messenger with the little scroll has John measure the temple of God, and the two witnesses are introduced.

It is during this possible interlude or out-of-sequence passage that the beast from the Abyss kills them. So are they really killed between the 6th and 7th trumpets, since Abaddon/Apollyon had ascended from the Abyss already? Or does this not happen until 17:8, after the 7th bowl? It seems highly improbable that this beast would not appear until all the judgments have passed, and we do know that it first came from the Abyss at the 5th trumpet.

This being the case, then, it seems that the passage about the woman riding the beast is out of sequence, but the passage where the two witnesses are killed is in sequence. Thus the two witnesses had to have begun their task 3-1/2 years earlier, which means they are not active during the bowl judgments.

Now the question comes, where in Revelation is the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, which is to be when the "prince" violates the covenant, desecrates the temple, and declares himself God? Revelation says nothing

about this, but can we say that the point at which the beast is worshiped must mean he has declared himself God? We see that such worship occurs in 13:8,12. As a side note, it is after this that we see the 144,000 on Mt. Zion. And right after this is when the Messenger announces, "Fear God and give him honor, because the hour of his judgment has come" (14:7), which of course is after the trumpets have passed and the bowls are about to begin.

Yet if the 7th trumpet marks the midpoint, then the bowls are the sole judgments of the 2nd half. But these judgments make life almost impossible, seeing that the 2nd bowl destroys all the oceans and rivers. And if we put them all near the end, then the first two or three years of the reign of the beast experience no judgments from God. Still, we must also consider the fact that the people of Jerusalem are told to flee to a protected area when they see the temple desecrated, which in Rev. 12:14 is specified as "a time, times, and half a time". There is no point in having them run to safety and stay there for 3-1/2 years, if for the bulk of those years there will be no judgments from God. This is part of the vision of the "woman clothed with the sun" as part of, or following, the 7th trumpet. So between this and the death of the two witnesses, we have two reasons to mark the 7th trumpet as the midpoint of the tribulation, yet there seems little reason for the people to flee if the bowl judgments will not begin until one or two years later.

So it would seem that we simply are unable to find the precise midpoint of the Tribulation, a marker reserved for those who will experience it. We also cannot know with precision where in all this the remaining Old Testament prophecies besides Daniel will take place, such as the battles of Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38. The latter involves a period of 7 years when the people in the vicinity of Jerusalem use the weapons of their enemies as fuel, part of which time they also spend burying their enemies' bodies. Such activities seem most unlikely during the bowl judgments, so those battles must have begun at least 7 years earlier.

There is also the matter of how much time might be needed to elicit the wailing and grief exhibited by the world's merchants when Babylon falls. In addition, the gift-exchanging when the two witnesses are killed likewise seems unlikely any later than the 7th trumpet. One might argue that such things could take place in a pause between judgments, but certainly not once the bowls begin.