



The CCP Pastoral Training Course



The CCP (Community Church Planting) Pastoral Training Course Book 1

Reaching all the Nations for Jesus Christ

Bereik al die Nasies vir Jesus Christus

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The CCP Pastoral Training Course



Survey of the New Testament



1

The Synoptic Gospels

Lesson Purpose:

- To give an overview of the three synoptic gospels including an introduction to their authors and distinctive characteristics of each book.

Lesson Outcome:

- Students will know and be able to briefly define all of the terms to know.
These terms are in bold throughout the lesson.
- Students will be able to give information about each author and list several distinctive features of his gospel.
- Students will have an understanding of the basic structure and narrative flow of each gospel.
- Students will honestly and thoughtfully interact with and apply the lessons to their ministry settings and to their personal lives.

Table of Contents :

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- Questions for Discussion

The first four books of the New Testament are called The Gospels because “gospel” means “Good News.” These books tell the good news about Jesus Christ. They report historical events that occurred in the life of Jesus as well as his conversations, teaching, and sermons. All four authors tell the same story, but each selected and organized his material with a specific audience in mind. Each gospel stands alone in its completeness to powerfully tell the story of Jesus Christ. Yet when studied as a group, they form a rich and complete narrative of Jesus’ life and ministry. Their combined work provides Gospel readers a 360° wide-angle lens to see and hear Jesus in action with incredible detail and rich description.

Jesus spent three years teaching, preaching, healing, and training his disciples. While his popularity grew with the masses, the Pharisees became consumed with jealousy and began to plot his death. Intensity builds as the narrative rises to a climax with the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are differences between the four gospels in the selection and order of the stories of Jesus’ ministry. However, in the final week of Jesus’ life, the gospel writers dramatically slow down the pace of their narrative. They focus on the incidents of each day and finally carefully reporting the final twenty-four hours of Jesus’ earthly life and the details of the empty tomb.

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The language of the Gospels as well as the entire New Testament is koine Greek or “common Greek”. It was the official language of the Mediterranean world during the time of Christ. Even in Rome, koine Greek was used as frequently as Latin.

“This, then, is the language of the new Testament, a language belonging to the living stream of the historical development of Greek from the ancient Hellenes to the modern Athenians, a language spoken by common and cultured people alike, a language uniquely suited to the propagation of the gospel of Christ when it began to be proclaimed among the nations of the world.”

(Black, David Allen. Learn to Read New Testament Greek. Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1994. Page 1)

Matthew, Mark, and Luke structured their gospel accounts in a similar chronological and geographical reporting format. They document Jesus’ travels throughout Israel and Samaria during the three years of his public ministry. For this reason these three gospels are grouped together as the synoptic gospels. Synoptic means “presenting or taking the same common view.” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. G. & C. Merriam Co., Philippines, 1979.)

Matthew

The traditional view of authorship for this gospel is that it was written by the Matthew who was one of the twelve disciples. Matthew met Jesus one day while he was sitting at a tax collection booth. Jesus came up to him and said, “Follow me.” Matthew got up and left everything. Matthew was an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry. He was in the upper room during the last supper. He was with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, and he was there when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

Preparation for Ministry	Ministry	Cross & Resurrection
1:1-17 Genealogy 1:18-2:23 Birth 3:1-12 John the Baptist 3:13-4:11 Jesus’ Baptism And 40 Days in Wilderness	Chapters 4:12-25:46 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of teaching and healing among the crowds. • Ministry of training the disciples. • Growing Opposition from the Pharisees. 	26:1-27:66 The cross 28:1-20 Resurrection and Great Commission

CLIMATIC MOVEMENT TOWARD THE CROSS and EMPTY TOMB



Matthew wrote his Gospel with a Jewish audience in mind. In his preparatory section, he began by recording Jesus’ genealogy which proved that Jesus was a direct descendent of King David, and therefore eligible to be the heir of the Davidic covenant. Next he cited seven different Old Testament prophecies within this

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section that were fulfilled through Jesus' birth to the beginning of his ministry. Matthew wanted to firmly establish the fact with his Jewish audience that Jesus was the promised, long-awaited Messiah. He detailed the lifestyle of John the Baptist which would associate him with the Old Testament prophet Elijah, and he quoted Isaiah to confirm that John was a fulfillment of God's promises.

The details of Jesus' early life that Matthew included:

- The story of Joseph's obedience in taking Mary as his wife
- The visit of the magi who followed the star
- The flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt
- The return to Nazareth
- The baptism of Jesus by John
- The 40 Days of temptation by Satan in the wilderness

Matthew's record of the ministry of Jesus contains teaching passages, accounts of healings, other miracles, and many parables. There are several key themes in Matthew. One is the Kingdom of Heaven, the preferred phrase in Matthew, or less frequently, he refers to it as the Kingdom of God which is the phrase that Mark and Luke predominantly use. John the Baptist called people to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was near. When Jesus began to preach, he did the same. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). A kingdom can be a geographical location under the sovereignty of a ruler, or it can be a sphere of authority which is spiritual and relational rather than geographic. Through Jesus, God was physically entering into our world to reveal Himself, to glorify His Son, and to bring salvation and life for all nations through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Kingdom of Heaven was present with the first coming of Jesus, and it is future when it will come into its fullness when he returns at the end time. "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

A few characteristics of the Kingdom:

- It can only be entered by doing the will of the Father who is in heaven (7:21).
- Currently both righteous and evil people live in the Kingdom, but there will be a day when those who are evil will be removed (13:36-43).
- It started small, but will become great (13:31-35).
- The Kingdom of God is more valuable than any other thing (13:44-46).
- Humility, childlike faith, and being poor in spirit are Kingdom values (18:1-4).
- The fullness of the Kingdom will come suddenly; God's people must keep watch and be ready for that day (25:1-13).

Matthew's gospel launched Jesus quickly into his ministry with an expansive summary statement in (4:23-25). He then moved into what is one of the most famous sections of his gospel, The Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew, Jesus' words and teaching are heard before the details and incidents of his ministry are reported. In this message Jesus addressed humanity's relationship and responsibility to the Father, to one another, to the law, to the world, and to Himself.

Jesus also used parables to teach the crowds who did not have the spiritual insight or faith to understand if he spoke to them plainly and directly about the Kingdom of God. A parable is a story that uses objects, people, and scenes from everyday life to illustrate a spiritual truth. One of the parables that is used in all three synoptic gospels is the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15). Jesus told

the story of the sower scattering seeds. The seeds fell on four types of soil. Three of the soil types had problems that negatively affected the seeds or young plants, so they died. The seed flourished abundantly in the fourth soil. Jesus interpreted this parable for his disciples. The Sower is the person who shares the gospel message. The seed is the Word of God. The soils represent different types of human hearts and situations in which people find themselves when they receive the gospel. The application of the parable is left up to the readers.

The story of Jesus, for Matthew, did not come to an end with his resurrection, but was left open-ended as Jesus handed over his earthly ministry to the disciples. These were his closing verses. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20). This is The Great Commission that Jesus gave to his disciples so that the entire world might hear the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Mark

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. Many scholars also believe that it was the first Gospel to be written. Traditionally the author of this gospel is considered to be John Mark, the young man who started out to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but who returned home after the first stop (Acts 13:13). Some also wonder if Mark is the young man mentioned in his gospel who ran off unclothed when his robe came off in the chaos in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51). Even though, Mark was not one of the twelve disciples, he had opportunities to listen to and to see Jesus personally.

Mark focused on the actions of Jesus and moved his narrative along at a quick pace with his frequent use of the word "immediately." Mark's attention to details and movement created vivid scenes and an extremely personal and intimate picture of Jesus. It's almost as if he were making a video recording for the readers using words instead of pictures.

- "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (1:35).
- Jesus' hand reached out and touched the leper (1:41). The crowds were pressing so much against him that he had to teach standing in a boat at the water's edge (3:9).

Mark noted Jesus' emotions.

- "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34).
- "He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts" (3:5).
- "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (10:21).
- "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (14:34).

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OUTLINE OF MARK

Preparation for Ministry 1:1-13	Jesus' Public Ministry 1:14-13:37		The Cross and Resurrection 14:1-16:20
-John the Baptist -Jesus' Baptism -40 Days in wilderness	1:14-8:30 -Teaching that amazes -Miracles and crowds -Messianic Secret	8:31-13:37 -Teaching that amazes -Miracles and crowds -Openly teaches disciples about his approaching death.	

CLIMATIC MOVEMENT TOWARD THE CROSS and EMPTY TOMB



One feature of Mark's writing is his emphasis on the messianic secret. Mark noted that Jesus often told people he healed, not to tell anyone. Obviously, word got out. But it seemed important to Jesus from the number of times Mark recorded this exhortation that Jesus was trying to keep the excitement of the crowds minimized. The people wanted a political savior, but Jesus had come for the cross.

Another remarkable feature of Mark's gospel was his honest, unflattering portrayal of the disciples. They were slow to understand. Jesus had to repeat lessons. Their lack of faith at times seemed even to weary Jesus who nevertheless patiently continued to teach them day after day. "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hand of sinners" (14:41). Jesus died on the cross for them and for all. His desire, no matter how long it would take, was to redeem their lives so that they could faithfully follow Him.

Luke

Luke began his gospel by stating his purpose for writing.

1 Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. 3 Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught (Luke 1:1-4 NLT).

Theophilus was probably a real person, but it is interesting to note that the name itself means "friend of God." Luke, who was a Gentile and a medical doctor, also wrote the book of Acts. Luke joined Paul at Troas on his second missionary journey. From that point on in the book of Acts, the narrative always referred to "we" because Luke traveled with Paul all the way to Rome. Paul mentioned Luke as one of his team in several of his letters.

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OUTLINE OF LUKE

Preparation 1:1-4:13	Public Ministry 4:14-21:38	Cross and Resurrection 22:1-24:23
Many details of Jesus' birth and childhood.	Parables, healings, and teaching. Luke includes sections of the Sermon on the Mount throughout his Gospel.	Only Gospel to mention ascension.

CLIMATIC MOVEMENT TOWARD THE CROSS and EMPTY TOMB



Gentiles were Luke's intended audience. Luke wanted everyone to know that this gospel was the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation for all nations and people. He highlighted Jesus' work and attitude towards women, the poor, and sinners. For example, Luke was the only writer to include the confession and salvation of the thief hanging next to Jesus on the cross. This was, and is, good news for everyone. As long as one is alive, it is never too late to believe. The importance of faith as a virtue that pleases God is also a key theme in Luke. For example in chapter seven, Jesus responded with amazement to the faith of a Roman centurion and consequently healed his son. In that same chapter, the faith of a sinful woman brought Jesus' blessing of salvation. Like Matthew he included many parables and intertwined teaching with the report of miracles. Luke also documented the growing opposition of the Pharisees as Jesus moved back and forth from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south during the three years of his public ministry.

These unique features of Luke's gospel are particularly significant considering that Luke never met, heard, or saw Jesus in his lifetime.

- He recorded the greatest amount of information on John the Baptist's family and his birth, the angel's announcement to Mary, the birth of Jesus, his circumcision, the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, and included the story of the boy Jesus in the temple. (Chapters 1-2)
- He included a trilogy of Jesus' parables in chapter 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. These are powerful stories that illustrate God's joy when each individual person is saved and His expectant hope for the return of those who have wandered away from Him.
- He told a post-resurrection story of two men who were walking on the road to Emmaus, saddened and troubled by the crucifixion of Jesus. Then a stranger, Jesus, joined them as they walked and spent several hours with them, teaching, comforting, and finally revealing Himself as the resurrected Lord.
- Luke is the only gospel writer to mention Jesus' ascension to heaven.

Luke finished his gospel by reiterating the fact that the good news is for all nations (24:27). He continued his second book, Acts, from this point.

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Questions for Discussion

1. Gospel means “good news.” Good news should be shared. If you have an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with someone, what do you say? What do you include in your presentation of the gospel? How do you make sure that what you share is true and accurate? What is your plan for studying and learning the message of the gospels?
2. Read the Great Commission. What are you and your church doing to fulfill that commission from Jesus? What evidence of great commission fulfillment in your ministry can you celebrate and give thanks for? What, if anything, do you need to begin, change, or stop so that you can better fulfill that commission?
3. Mark highlighted the slowness of Jesus’ disciples to understand and exercise faith? What can you learn from this as you think about the people in your church? What areas do they continue to struggle with? Obedience? Faith? Knowledge of the Bible?
4. John and Jesus called the people to repent. What does that mean? Why do people need to repent? The call to repent comes before the call to believe. Why is that order important?



Terms to Know
Gospel
Good News
Koine Greek
Synoptic Gospels
Kingdom of Heaven/Kingdom of God
Sermon on the Mount
Parable
Parable of the Sower
The Great Commission
Messianic secret
Theophilus



2

John, Acts, and Epistolary Format

Lesson Purpose:

- To give an overview of John, Acts, and the epistolary format.

Lesson Outcome:

- Students will know and be able to briefly define all of the terms to know.
- Students will be able to give information about John and list several distinctive features of his gospel.
- Students will be familiar with several historical events and people in the book of Acts.
- Students will know key characteristics of the epistolary format and the importance of considering the purpose and setting of each particular epistle.
- Students will honestly and thoughtfully interact with and apply the lessons to their ministry settings and to their personal lives.

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- John
- Acts
- An Introduction to the Study of the Epistles
- Questions for Discussion

John

John, as one of the twelve disciples, was an eyewitness of Jesus' life. He, his brother James, and Peter also spent additional time alone with Jesus. John himself gave witness to his special friendship with Jesus when he twice referred to himself in his gospel as "the one Jesus loved" (13:32, 20:2, 21:7). In addition to his gospel, The New Testament also contains three letters and the book of Revelation written by John.

John stated his purpose for writing his gospel near the end of his book.

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Throughout this gospel, the word "believe" in various forms is repeated more than 80 times. Most of these references come directly from the speeches of Jesus. Speaking of the importance of a second birth, a spiritual birth through the power of God, Jesus told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

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Prologue and Preparation	The ministry of Jesus 2:1-12:50	The cross and resurrection 13:1-21:25
1:1-18 Prologue 1:19-51 John the Baptist and Gathering of disciples.	Signs Dialogues and Messages The time had not yet come.	Upper Room Conversation The cross Resurrection Peter is re-affirmed The time had come

John's gospel is organized around a series of signs, miracles that Jesus did that revealed his identity as the messiah. "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:5-6). The messianic prophecy was fulfilled in the healing of the invalid and the blind man in chapters 5 and 9. Furthermore, Jesus told the woman at the well that he would give water that would become a spring of water welling up into eternal life (4:14). The abundance, blessing, and authority evidenced in the signs that John included, testify to the fact that Jesus is the promised Son of God.

The fact that Jesus so clearly fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies made the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus much more incredible. The Pharisees were the leading group of religiously devoted Jews who made it their primary task to know and enforce the Old Testament laws. Their spiritual blindness, in the light of their scriptural knowledge, revealed their pride and the profound hardness of their hearts. The Pharisees refused to recognize the signs.

Each sign is set in the context of a lengthy dialogue or message given by Jesus. John emphasized the words of Jesus. His readers are able to "listen" to Jesus' conversations with people from all walks of life. In addition to the signs, John recorded seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. When God identified himself to Moses through the burning bush, he told Moses that his name was "I Am." By using the "I Am" formula, Jesus associated Himself with God, His Father. These are powerful statements of Jesus' identity, authority, power, and purpose in relation to men and women and the world.

The Signs in John are:

1. Turning water to wine at a wedding in Cana (John 2).
2. Healing an official's son with just his word (John 4).
3. Restoring the use of an invalid's legs (John 5).
4. Feeding 5,000 men with 2 fish and 5 small loaves of bread (John 6).
5. Walking on the water during a storm (John 6).
6. Giving sight to a man who had been born blind (John 9).
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11).
8. Providing an abundance of fish (John 21).

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The "I Am" Statements are:

1. I am the bread of life (6:35).
2. I am the light of the world (8:12).
3. I am the gate for the sheep (10:7, 9).
4. I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14).
5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:45).
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).
7. I am the true vine (15:1).

In contrast with the synoptic writers, John began his gospel with an elegant theological prologue that summarizes the essential truths presented in the Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This first verse reflects back to Genesis 1:1. God, who created the universe, is the One who has now sent His Son. John is saying that this is the continuation of the redemption story. Also unique to John's gospel is the upper room message and garden prayer of Jesus in chapters 13-17. John tells how Jesus tried to prepare and encourage his disciples for the great sorrow they would soon endure. He promised that they would not be abandoned, but that God would send the Comforter. Both He and His Father would also love them and be with them. One more thing to note is John's use of contrasts: light/dark, day/night, above/below, not yet the hour/the hour had come. John used these contrasts to set the truth of God apart from the faulty perceptions of humanity.

Acts

The book of Acts is Luke's continuation of the wonderful story of God's plan of salvation for all nations. "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day was he taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). The words of Jesus in Acts 1:8, prepare for all that follows in Luke's narrative of the "acts" or "deeds" of Jesus' disciples and the apostle Paul as they carried out the great commission. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Preparation Acts 1:1-26	Jerusalem Acts 2:1-7:60	Judea, Samaria, and the Ends of the Earth Acts 8:1-28:31
Ascension of Jesus	Pentecost	Jerusalem believers scattered because of persecution
Waiting, praying, studying the Scriptures	Christian community is developed	Phillip ministers in Samaria and to a man from Ethiopia
Choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot	Bold preaching accompanied by miracles	Peter sent to the home of Cornelius
	Martyrdom of Stephen	Paul finds Christ and receives call to the Gentiles
		Missionary journeys of Paul

Pentecost was the first major event in Acts. On that day the disciples received the promised Holy Spirit who would empower them as witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ, comfort them, and enable them to remember and understand the teachings of Jesus (See John chapters 14 and 16). When Peter stood to boldly preach to the crowd, the message that had begun with John the Baptist and Jesus, was proclaimed again. The context, however, had been radically transformed by the historic reality of the cross, the resurrection, and the promised pouring out of the Spirit on all believers. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

The followers of Jesus Christ began to gather to study the Scriptures, pray together, worship, and care for one another. The disciples testified to the truth of the resurrection and to the fact that Jesus was the risen Son of God. When persecution came, just as Jesus had told them it would, they prayed for greater boldness to proclaim salvation through the name of Jesus. This persecution reached a climax in Jerusalem with the death of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. The believers scattered out into Jerusalem, Samaria, and Judea continuing to testify to their faith in Jesus Christ.

Saul, whose name was later changed to Paul, was one of the most aggressive persecutors of the Christians. While traveling in pursuit of believers who had fled to Damascus, he had a divine encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and he was struck blind. Paul continued on to Damascus where he spent three days praying and fasting. Ananias, a believer, received the following affirmation from God: “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:15). Ananias went to Paul, laid his hands on him, and confirmed to Paul that he had indeed met Jesus Christ on the road three days earlier. As Ananias prayed, Paul received both his sight and the Holy Spirit. Paul became a follower of Jesus Christ on that day.

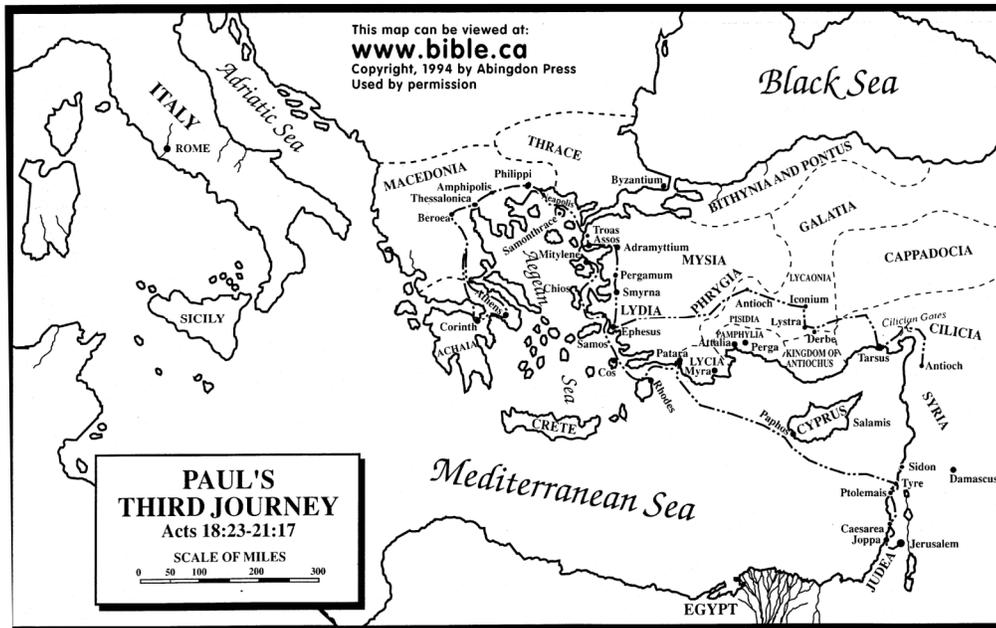
God’s affirmation of Paul’s call to the Gentiles set in motion the fulfillment of the last phrase of Acts 1:8, “And to the ends of the earth.” The gospel was for all people, Jewish and Gentile alike. Yet, the early church, which was Jewish, struggled with the cultural and religious differences between themselves and the Gentiles. One aspect of being “Jewish” was to keep separate in as many ways as possible from pagan people and their practices. The apostle Peter was confronted with this conflict by a vision that prepared him to go to the home of Cornelius—a gentile who had been seeking God. When Peter shared the good news of Jesus Christ with Cornelius, he and his household believed and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Council of Acts in chapter 15 also illustrates the church’s struggle and their obedience to seek God’s direction for which Jewish practices could or could not be compromised in the observance of the Word of God and in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s ministry in obedience to his call powerfully opened the way for the gospel to reach the nations. Ministry and travel were difficult and dangerous for Paul because he was persecuted by both Gentiles and Jews. Everywhere Paul went, he traveled with at least one other brother in Christ and often with a team. He trained leaders in each location to continue the work after he moved on to a new place of ministry. He attempted to return to the churches that he had established to encourage them and to bring correction if needed. Letter writing was one way he was always able to maintain contact with the churches and pastors. Some of these letters, called epistles, became books in the New Testament.

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Luke recorded Paul's three missionary journeys. He concluded Acts with Paul's trip to Rome to appeal an unjust charge that the Jews had brought against him while he was in Jerusalem. Paul's intention for requesting this trial in Rome was not to defend his innocence, but rather to seek an opportunity to preach Jesus Christ. In the final verse of Acts, Luke wrote, "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31).

This is a map of Paul's third journey. Locate Rome. This is where Paul was in the final chapter of Acts.



An Introduction to the Study Of The Epistles:

The literary style of the first four books of the New Testament, the Gospels, is primarily historical narrative. They report the actions and spoken words of Jesus Christ and the impact that his life had on those who were in contact with him. Acts is also a historical narrative. Luke documented the beginning of the church in Jerusalem and the spread of the gospel into the countries bordering on the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

The next twenty-one books are epistles. The first thirteen epistles were written by Paul; the following eight by other writers. These letters typically follow a somewhat standard epistolary format:

1. The letter usually begins with a brief introduction that includes the identification of the author, the intended recipients of the letter, and a short blessing.
2. This is often followed by a prayer and personal remarks that the author makes about the recipients or about himself.
3. The body of the letter follows next. It may address a particular situation or question(s). This is a teaching section that explains different doctrinal issues.
4. The instructional section is followed by exhortations that direct the recipients on how they are to live out the truths that have just been explained. A word that often signals the beginning of this application section is "therefore..."

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5. The letter concludes with closing remarks that might include greetings from others who are with the author, the name of the secretary, or amanuensis, to whom the letter was dictated, and a final blessing or word of encouragement.

When studying the epistles, it is important to remember that each letter was directed to a particular audience, in a particular location and culture, and for a particular purpose. For these reasons, each epistle should be studied individually before it is compared with another. In the case of Paul who wrote the majority of the letters, his tone varied from letter to letter depending on the situation or people he was addressing. The arrangement of the material in his epistles varied at times from the standard epistolary form due to the circumstances that were being discussed. Some of the epistles written by the other authors present unique features. Students of the Scriptures need to pay attention to these variations because they are often important clues to fully understand that particular epistle. Knowledge of the geographic locations and cultures of that time period is extremely helpful. In the absence of study tools and resources, the book of Acts can serve as an important resource for information about people and places that are referred to particularly in the letters of Paul.

Paul's Epistles to Churches	Paul's Epistles to Individuals	General Epistles
Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians	Pastoral Epistles: I & II Timothy, Titus Philemon	Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I & II & III John, Jude
Written to Groups	Written to Individuals	Written to Groups

Although Revelation is a letter, it is not included in the above groups. It will be studied separately because of its apocalyptic format.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus Christ? How is belief in Jesus Christ lived out in a person's life? Is there one particular sign that John chose that might powerfully impact the people in your community? Is there one that might be especially difficult for them to believe?
2. Read through the "I Am" statements of Jesus. What is Jesus saying about Himself in each statement? Essentially they are short parables or object lessons. Do you understand each object and how Jesus is using it to teach us something about himself? When they are studied all together, who is Jesus? Write a sentence or two of praise and worship that lifts up the name of Jesus and who he is. Would there be any of these "I Am" statements that would be particularly meaningful to the people in your community? Are there any that might be difficult for the people of your community to understand or believe?
3. Paul always worked with at least one partner and often with a team. Who are you working with? Who are you training? If God were to move you to a new location, are you preparing your church to be able to continue on?

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4. What evidence do you see of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and ministry? Do you tend to pray more for boldness or for protection when it comes to preaching the Gospel?
5. Read through the standard epistolary format. Is there a person or church to which you should send a word of encouragement or exhortation just as Paul did? Choose one doctrinal point or issue that needs to be addressed. Pray before you write. Ask God for guidance and ask Him to fill your heart with love for the people. If your words are hard ones, addressing an area needing correction, love will give your letter a tone of grace rather than condemnation.

Terms to Know:
Believe
Pharisee
"I Am" Statements
Signs
Pentecost
Stephen
Saul/Paul
Ananias
Cornelius
Peter
The Council of Acts
Epistles



3

The Epistles of Paul - Part I

Lesson Purpose:

To give an overview of Paul's epistles, their recipients, their setting, and the main topics that Paul addressed in each letter.

Lesson Outcome:

- Students will know and be able to briefly define all of the terms to know.
- Students will be able to give information about each epistle, its recipients, and the topics that Paul addressed.
- Students will consider the issues in Paul's letters and reflect on their application to their churches today.
- Students will honestly and thoughtfully interact with and apply the lessons to their ministry settings and to their personal lives.

Table of Contents :

- Romans
- I & II Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- I & II Thessalonians
- Questions for Discussion

Romans

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome. He had heard of this church's faith, but had not yet personally visited it. This is perhaps his most theologically eloquent letter. He clarifies and defends his position through a series of questions and answers. In the final chapter of the letter, Paul sent personal greetings to many individuals in the church that indicated his familiarity with that congregation. He also mentioned the names of several people who were with him and the city of Cenchrea that was in Greece near Corinth. Together, these final details seem to indicate that he may have been that city when this letter was written.

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Introduction 1:1-15	Body of Letter 1:16-11:36			Exhortations 12:1-15:13	Farewell 15:14-16:27
Greeting Personal comments to the church	All the world's need for salvation 1:18-3:20	Righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ 3:21-8:39	God's Relationship to the Jews 9:1-11:36	Personal holiness Christian Community	

Paul begins the body of the letter with a concise statement of his thesis. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17). Next, he establishes his first point: no one is righteous. He addresses the sinfulness of Gentiles who reject the truth of God that is evident to the world through natural revelation. Then he addresses the Jews who, although they have the law, are incapable of fulfilling the law in their own strength. The answer to the sin dilemma is "the righteousness from God [that] comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:22-23). Paul points to Abraham as the first model of this faith. The life giving power of Jesus' death and resurrection has nullified the curse of sin and death that came against humanity through Adam. Therefore through faith in Christ the believer is set free from the bondage of sin. Guided and assured by the Holy Spirit, the believer personally knows the love of Christ. Paul was brokenhearted that so many of his own people, the Jews, had rejected Christ. Yet, he remained hopeful of God's faithfulness to his chosen people and longed for the day when they would return to God and acknowledge Jesus as their messiah. Paul then calls the believer to respond to this great gift of salvation. "Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing will" (12:1-2). Paul encourages individual holiness, but he also discusses the responsibility that believers bear for the lives and faith of one another.

I & II Corinthians:

Paul spent over a year and a half preaching the gospel in the city of Corinth, so he was well-acquainted with this church. Paul's tone in both of these letters is extremely stern. There were serious problems in the church that were damaging the unity of the body, tarnishing their witness in the community, and causing tension and misunderstanding in their relationship with Paul.

Introduction 1:1-1:9	Addressing the Problems One by One 1:10-16:4 I Corinthians	Final Greetings 16:5-24
Introduction 1:1-1:11	Addressing Problems and Defending His Ministry 1:12-13:10 II Corinthians	Final Greetings 13:11-14

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There is a variation in the epistolary form in both of these letters. Doctrine is discussed but always immediately applied to practice. Concerns are taken up one by one and thoroughly discussed before moving to the next topic because this was a spiritually immature church. Paul had to deal directly with their jealousy, immoral behavior, and disorderly worship. At the heart of the problem, the people had forgotten the meaning of the cross of Christ. "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called...the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:23-24). Church discipline and practice that Paul addressed:

- Divisions in the church
- Blatant sexual sin
- Lawsuits among believers
- Marriage, singleness, and celibacy
- Dietary practices
- Orderly worship
- Spiritual gifts
- Love
- The resurrection of the body
- Tithing and special offerings
- The ministry of an apostle. In the second letter, Paul shares in great detail about his experiences and about his call.

Galatians

This letter was not sent to one particular church, but to the churches in the region of Galatia. Each congregation would have been called to come together for the public reading of Paul's letter. Then the letter carrier would travel to the next town. After finishing his visits, he would return to Paul to report the response of the churches to the letter. Because of the topic he is addressing, the efficacy of the law to save versus the efficacy of faith in Christ, Galatians is considered to be one of Paul's earliest letters. At the center of the controversy, the salvific question was, "Can a Gentile man be saved by faith in Christ alone, or should he also be circumcised according to Jewish law?" Zealous Jews, called Judaizers, were confusing the Gentile Christians by their insistence that they must adhere to the Jewish laws, and in particular, circumcision, in order to be saved. Paul traveled in this region before the Council of Acts that decided that circumcision should not be required for Gentile believers (Acts 15).

Greeting 1:1-1:5	Body of Letter 1:6-5:15	Exhortations 5:16-6:10	Closing Remarks 6:11-18
No prayer or positive personal address	Scolding Tone Paul's personal testimony Discussion of the law New relationship through Christ	Live by the Spirit Help each other Live honestly before God	

Faith in Christ, according to Paul, is not only necessary for salvation, but it is through faith in Christ that there is a dramatic change in the believer's life that was not possible through the human act of circumcision. "For I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:20). This new personal relationship

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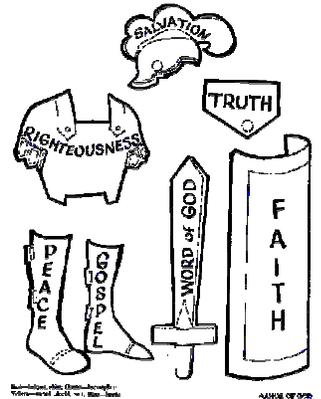
with Jesus sets believers free to serve one another in love. Believers are to live by the Spirit, leading a life of holiness that Paul characterizes in this letter as the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When believers bear this fruit, Paul's exhortations to live in community and honesty before God are fulfilled by a commitment to a person, Jesus Christ, and not to an external code of laws. We obey because we love Jesus and one another.

Ephesians

Paul spent two years ministering in this city. It was a cosmopolitan seaport town that had a great pagan temple. The church was composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles. Forming a new, single identity as the body of Christ was difficult because of the great contrasts in their backgrounds. Paul wrote to give assurance to the Gentile believers that they, like the Jews, were now the people of God. "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (2:20). This transformation is possible for all people because of the grace (unmerited favor) of God. It is a gift He freely gives to all who believe (2:8).

Greeting And Prayer 1:1-1:23	Body of Letter 2:1-3:21	Exhortations 4:1-6:20
Hymn-like Prayer of praise	All saved by grace Unity of the Body of Christ Function of the body is to edify one another	Holiness and Humility in all of life's relationships Armor of God

Paul's first chapter is a lengthy prayer of worship and praise that extols the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, and the gift of the Spirit. Next he addresses their new identity as the body of Christ and their calling to live in harmony and humility with one another. Knowledge and experience of Jesus' immense love is foundational for the formation of this new community of faith. This leads Paul into a lengthy section of exhortation. Interpersonal relationships, marriage relationships, parent-child relationships, employer-employee relationships are impacted because of the believer's devotion to Christ. Holiness, avoidance of immorality, words that are spoken, what is done in private; every aspect of life must come into the light of Christ. Living together in peace and community is not only a blessing, but a necessity because the people of God do have an enemy, the devil. Paul's final words call the church to put on the full armor of God so that they can stand together in God and in prayer (6:10-18).



Philippians

Lydia, the seller of purple cloth, and the jailer who confessed Christ after Paul and Silas' miraculous release from prison were members of the church in Philippi. The affectionate tone of the letter and the references to the Philippians' concern for Paul, show that there was an especially close relationship between Paul and this congregation. Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote the letter. This fact makes his repeated references to joy and rejoicing all the more poignant. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,

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by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace that passes understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:6-7).

Greeting and Prayer	Personal News and Encouragement 1:12-4:9	Thank you and Final Greetings
1:1-1:11	Report on condition in Prison The mind of Christ Personal Testimony Encouragement for the church	4:10-23 Lesson on contentment

This letter varies from the typical epistolary form. Paul does teach and exhort, but the form of the letter is personal and conversational. Everything flows together as Paul reports news and ministers words of assurance to this congregation that also cares deeply for him. Paul has several purposes for writing:

1. He wanted to assure the church that he was well.
2. He wanted to encourage the church to stay strong and to have the mind of Christ.
3. He wanted to give them information about Timothy and Epaphroditus.
4. He wanted to warn them about the Judaizers.
5. He wanted to encourage the church to help two women to end their dispute.
6. He wanted to say "thank you" for a financial gift that they had sent to him.

In the second chapter, Paul included a beautiful hymn-like passage that describes the mind of Christ. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (2:6-11).

Colossians

Like Romans, Colossians was written to a group of people whom Paul had never personally met. The report of this church and their current struggles had come to him through Epaphras, a Christian worker who had left Colosse to be with Paul. As in Philippians, Paul is imprisoned as he writes the letter. The purpose of the letter is to encourage and strengthen this church to stand against false teachers and to remain single-focused in their devotion to Jesus Christ. "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (2:8).

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Greeting And Prayer 1:1-14	Encouragement and Exhortation 1:15-4:6	Final Greetings 4:7-18
Paul's prayers and thanksgiving for this church	Concise theological statement about Jesus Christ Paul's apostolic concern for this church Watch out for deceivers Clothe yourselves with the new gifts of Christ	Like Romans, Paul mentions many individuals by name.

This letter was also meant to be circulated among the churches in the region. Although it is brief, it is a compact letter with a well-formulated Christology (doctrine/theology of Christ). In order to encourage the church to remain steadfast and grounded in its faith, Paul discusses Jesus' relationship to creation and time, his sovereignty, and his work of reconciliation on the cross.

As the letter progresses, the exhortations become more and more practical, addressing various relationships and behaviors. Paul used the image of getting dressed and undressed to illustrate the transformation that Christ makes in believer's lives. This is a transformation that requires personal action. The "new clothes" have been provided, but the believer must put them on.

I & II Thessalonians

These letters come from Paul, Silas and Timothy. They know this congregation and speak fondly of their time of ministry with them. This congregation has suffered for the sake of the gospel and has boldly served as a witness to all the believers in the area. Paul has written to encourage them and to let them know of his love and prayers. But there are also several concerns that Paul must speak to in the letters.

This church is longing for the return of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the persecution that they were suffering made them yearn for the promise of heaven. Some of their members had passed away, and they were deeply upset. They were unsure that those who physically died before the return of Christ would also be resurrected and taken to heaven with him. Paul assures them that those who are dead will be the first to rise. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:16-18). The timing when this will occur is unknown. Paul urges them to remain "awake," always ready. This is to be done by living a life of holiness, as well as attending to the daily work that each has been given to do.

The second letter follows up on the topic of signs of the end times. Paul mentions that someone has upset the church with false messages concerning the return of the Lord. He reminds them of what he has taught them in the past and clarifies his teaching on the man of lawlessness (2:3-4). More than anything else, Paul assures them that they should not fear. They should not fear what will come, and they do not need to fear that they will miss Jesus.

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:16-17)

Greeting/Prayer/ Personal News in I Thessalo- nians	Teaching on the Second Coming with Exhortations for holy living and preparedness	Final Greetings
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Questions for Discussion

1. How can believers offer their bodies as living sacrifices? What would be the evidence in someone’s life that they were living in that type of total submission to God? What would that look like in your community? What obstacles are present that might make that difficult or frightening for someone to live with that wholehearted devotion to God? Have you offered all of your own life as a living sacrifice to God?
2. Paul urges believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds so that they are not pressed into the mold of the world. What thought patterns of the people in your community need to be transformed so that people can rightly discern God’s will? Are there any thought patterns that hold people in bondage? What about your own mind—does God have all of your mind?

3. Read through the list of church discipline and practice that Paul addressed in Corinthians. Is there anything on that list that might be a situation that you are currently facing in your own church? Is there an issue in your church that needs to be addressed? Is there a need for teaching? For discipline? For love? For unity? For a renewed focus on the cross of Christ?

Terms to know
Righteousness Living sacrifice The cross of Christ Judaizers Council of Acts Fruit of the Spirit Grace Full Armor of God Joy and rejoicing Christology Return of Jesus Christ

4. Study the parts of the armor of God. Pantomime putting each piece on. Imagine your congregation dressed as a group in the armor of God. What evils do you have to stand against? Do you put on this God-given armor on every day? Do the people in your church know to put this armor on every day? Do you individually and as a group pray for the protection and strength of God to stand for Him? Notice, it does not stay battle, but stand for Him. God fights for you. Praise and thanks be to Him!
5. What steals your joy? What takes your mind away from Christ? When do you struggle with contentment? Bring your honest answers to these questions to the Lord. Read the exhortation included in your notes from Philippians 4:6-7 and lift these concerns to the Lord.
6. Read through the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit: is there any missing or greatly underdeveloped in your life? Do you see the fullness of this fruit in your church?



4

The Epistles of Paul, Part II

Lesson Purpose:

To give an overview of Paul's epistles, the recipient, their setting, and the main topics that Paul addressed in each letter.

Lesson Outcome:

- Students will know and be able to briefly define all of the terms to know.
- Students will be able to give information about each epistle, its recipient, and the topics that Paul addressed.
- Students will reflect on Paul's instructions to pastors and consider the application of those instructions in their lives and ministry.
- Students will honestly and thoughtfully interact with and apply the lessons to their ministry settings and to their personal lives.

Table of Contents :

- I Timothy
- II Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Questions for Discussion

Paul's last four letters were written to individuals, not churches. Paul's comments are much more personal and specific to the recipient of the letter and to the recipient's situation. Standard epistolary format is still used to give structure to the letter even though it is written to a brother and friend in Christ. The wisdom of those who selected the books for the New Testament is evidenced by their inclusion of both these personal letters as well as Paul's messages to church congregations. There is much that the church can learn from Paul's methods of ministry, instruction, and congregational care through all of his letters in addition to his inspired theological discourses.

Example from Titus of the Standard Epistolary Introduction Format:

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<p>Paul identifies himself as the writer. In this letter, he includes a statement of his call.</p> <p>The recipient of the letter is Titus. Paul includes a descriptive statement that further identifies his relationship to Titus.</p> <p>He closes the introduction with a blessing.</p>	<p>Titus 1-4 (NLT)</p> <p>1 This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives. 2 This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God—who does not lie—promised them before the world began. 3 And now at just the right time he has revealed this message, which we announce to everyone. It is by the command of God our Savior that I have been entrusted with this work for him.</p> <p>4 I am writing to Titus, my true son in the faith that we share.</p> <p>May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior give you grace and peace.</p>
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Example for Titus of Standard Epistolary Closing Format:

<p>Exchange of personal greetings</p> <p>Closing Blessing. In some letters, this blessing is longer.</p>	<p>Titus 3:15</p> <p>Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith.</p> <p>Grace be with you all.</p>
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The letters written to Timothy and Titus are called the Pastoral Epistles. Paul wrote to these two men to encourage them and to guide them in their ministry as church pastors. These letters serve as a model for discipleship and for mentoring young or less experienced pastors. Paul also discusses the organization and selection of church leadership, problems that must be resolved, and some specific areas of instruction for groups within the church.

I Timothy

Paul met Timothy at the beginning of his second missionary journey. “He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of [Timothy]” (Acts 16:1). Paul invited Timothy to join his team. Timothy traveled with Paul and also traveled for Paul, as his representative, on missions to visit different churches. Timothy was ministering to the church in Ephesus when he received this letter (II Timothy 1:3).

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Opening Greeting 1:1-2	Instructions to Timothy 1:3-6:19	Closing Remarks 6:20-21
	False Teachers (chapter 1) Pray (chapter 2) Church Leadership (chapter 3) Study and Preach the Word (chapter 4) Widows and Various Church Concerns (chapter 5) Christian Attitude Towards Money (chapter 6)	

Paul wrote to advise Timothy how to handle a serious problem in the church. ‘If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain’ (I Timothy 6:3-5). Paul exhorts Timothy to refrain from involvement in meaningless talk and purposeless debate. Timothy needs to be on the look out for those who would try to deceive others through false teaching. He calls these people “hypocritical liars” who have seared consciences (I Timothy 4:2).

Paul encourages Timothy to dedicate himself to the study and preaching of the Word. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching....Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them....Watch your life and doctrine closely” (I Timothy 4:13,15-16). Even though Timothy is young, Paul charges him with the responsibility to set an example in:

- Speech
- Life
- Love
- Faith
- Purity

Paul also gives Timothy instructions for the organization and practice of the church.

- The church should pray for everyone, both those inside as well as those outside the church; in particular, intercession should be made for government leaders.
- Church leaders should meet qualifications that testify to their holiness of life at home and in public.
- Timothy, as pastor, should maintain purity in all his relationships: with elders, young men, and women in the church.
- Widows should be cared for and if able, helped to find work.
- Workers should respect their masters.
- Financially wealthy believers should be encouraged to be generous and to put their hope in God, not money.

II Timothy

In his second letter, Paul continues to encourage Timothy, but there is a greater sense of urgency and perhaps finality. Paul wrote this letter from prison. He mentions having to defend himself without the support of any other believers. He gives thanks that he was spared from the lions, but his trial is not yet over. He asks that Timothy come soon to see him and requests that Timothy bring his coat and parchments. This letter may have been written shortly before Paul's martyrdom. Paul says, "And the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith" (4:6b-7). In light of this, Paul's charge to Timothy, in this letter, was more than just another word of encouragement. Paul was passing on the charge to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Opening Greeting 1:1-2	Charge to Timothy 1:3-4:8	Closing Remarks 4:9-22
	Series of exhortations Paul's personal remarks Watch out for evil people who try to deceive Charge to Timothy	Paul's shares his situation.

Paul interweaves personal statements of reflection on his own life and call with a series of exhortations to Timothy. These exhortations come out of Paul's life experiences as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Fan into flame the gift of God which you received (1:6-7).
2. Join me in suffering for the gospel (1:8-9).
3. Maintain a pattern of sound teaching (1:12-13).
4. Guard the deposit that was entrusted to you by God (1:14).
5. Be strong in grace (2:1).
6. Entrust this teaching to reliable leaders who can teach others (2:2).
7. Endure hardship (2:3).
8. Remember Jesus Christ (2:8).
9. Warn others and avoid godless chatter (2:14, 23).
10. Present yourself to God as one approved (2:15).
11. Flee the desires of youth; instead pursue righteousness (2:22).
12. Be kind to everyone to whom you minister—even the difficult people (2:24).

Before Paul gives Timothy his charge to ministry, he reminds Timothy of the importance of the study of the Scriptures. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (3:16-17). Another word for "God-breathed" is inspired. The Scriptures are not the arguments and thoughts of men. The Scriptures are the message, stories, truth and very voice of God who directed that His Words be written.

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Paul's charge to Timothy:

2 Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. 3 For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will reject the truth and chase after myths. 5 But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you" (II Timothy 4:2-5 NLT).

Titus

Titus was an itinerant member of Paul's team. He was willing to be sent out on missions to encourage churches or to gather information and report back to Paul. Paul mentions him several times in II Corinthians. Titus was serving on the island of Crete when he received this letter (1:5). Paul had asked him to remain there in order to put elders in place in that church. This was necessary so that it would be protected from those who might try to spread confusion and false doctrine.

Introduction 1:1-4	Instructions to Titus 1:5-3:11	Closing Remarks 3:12-15
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Paul gives Titus instructions for the encouragement of specific groups: older men, older women, young men, and slaves. The responsibility of the members of the body for one another is at the core of these instructions. Paul, as he did with Timothy, stresses to Titus the importance of his life example.

This letter is not as personal or as affectionate as Paul's letters to Timothy. His relationship with Titus was professional, but nonetheless caring. Paul's letter would have been a comfort and encouragement to a pastor working on the frontlines of ministry.

An interesting feature of this letter is the concise statements of the gospel. If one has to confront argumentative, talkative deceivers, it would be wise to be ready with a powerful, brief response. Paul gives Titus two to choose from: 2:11-14 and 3:4-7.

4 But—"When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7 NLT).

Philemon

This letter is quite different from all the rest because its purpose is not to teach or exhort, but to personally request that a runaway slave be graciously received back by his former owner. The letter, however, does serve as an example of mercy, of Christian diplomacy, and of the transformation that takes place in relationships when people believe in Jesus Christ.

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Introduction 1-3	Blessing and Prayer 4-7	Request Made to Philemon 8-22	Closing Greeting 23-25
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Onesimus had been a slave in the home of Philemon before he ran away to Rome where he met Paul. Through Paul's ministry, Onesimus became a believer in Christ and began to assist Paul while he was in prison. He shared his story with Paul. Paul insisted that the situation be put in order and that restitution must be made. On behalf of Onesimus, Paul wrote to Philemon asking him to extend grace to Onesimus by receiving him back into his household not only as a slave, but also as a brother in Christ. Paul, himself, offered to make financial restitution for any losses that Philemon had incurred because of Onesimus.

In many of Paul's letters, as in this letter to Philemon, there is a thanksgiving and prayer that follows his opening greeting. In these passages Paul speaks words of blessing, hope, love, and encouragement to the recipients. His repeated mention of intercessory prayer for churches and individuals reveals an aspect of his ministry that is only briefly glimpsed in the written prayers. Paul not only attended to the people with whom he had close physical proximity, he maintained involvement through constant and fervent intercessory prayer. He used his letters to speak a word of blessing and affirmation into the lives of others as he does to Philemon.

I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, 5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. 6 And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. 7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people (4-7 NLT).

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you have a Timothy in your life? Someone who is your disciple? How can you encourage this person in ministry and faith? What circumstances are they facing that you may be able to help them through your experience and knowledge of the Word of God? Have you blessed them as Paul blesses Timothy?
2. What might be areas of meaningless talk or purposeless debate that are tempting for you or your church? What do you need to watch out for? How does this type of meaningless talk enter your community? Through people? Through television? Radio? Or internet?
3. Read the list of areas where Timothy is to set an example. How are you doing in those areas? Is there any one of those areas where you are stumbling? Do you need to find someone who can help you and hold you accountable?
4. Is there any situation in your church or life that requires that type of diplomacy and grace that Paul demonstrates in the book of Philemon? Is there a person who needs to be restored to your community as Onesimus was to the household of Philemon?

5. Read Paul's prayer in Philemon. If you have a Bible, read his prayers in chapter 1 of Philippians and Thessalonians. What does he pray for? What does he affirm in those congregations? What can you learn from these prayers about praying for others, particularly for those to whom you minister? What can you affirm? For what can you give thanks to God? What do you desire for them in the Lord?

Terms to know
Pastoral Epistles Meaningless talk Purposeless debate God-breathed Inspired Onesimus



5

The General Epistles and Revelation

Lesson Purpose:

- To give an overview of the General Epistles, their recipients, their setting, and key topics in each letter and to understand the unique features and challenges of studying and interpreting the apocalyptic writing in Revelation.

Lesson Outcome:

- Students will know and be able to briefly define all of the terms to know.
- Students will be able to give information about each general epistle, its author, setting, and the topics addressed.
- Students will learn characteristics of apocalyptic writing and the challenges of interpreting its symbols, time frame, and images.
- Students will honestly and thoughtfully interact with and apply the lessons to their ministry settings and to their personal lives.

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The last group of letters in the New Testament is referred to as the general or catholic epistles. They are general because they are not directed to a specified recipient or church. The term catholic is also used in its meaning of "universal." These are letters addressed to Christians wherever they might be.

Hebrews

Traditionally, Paul was considered to be the author of Hebrews, but generally, most biblical scholars agree that it was written by a different author who chose not to be named. Although the closing remarks of this letter seem to be written by Paul, he is never mentioned by name anywhere in the letter. The opening greeting that names the author and recipients that is standard in all of Paul's letters is missing. Paul was an apostle called to work with Gentiles. The author of this letter is writing a masterful apologetic which is targeted at those who had trusted in the Jewish beliefs and practices of the Old Covenant. The author builds a case for the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things. The focus of this letter is Jesus Christ. The anonymity of the author removes one more distraction from the message of this epistle: Jesus Christ, "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he

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had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (1:3-4).
 Jesus is superior to:

1. Angels, ministering spirits, because he is the Son of God (Chapter 1).
2. Moses, a servant, because he is the Son who is over the house of God (Chapter 3).
3. All other high priests, sinful mortal men, because he was appointed by God, was without sin, and is eternal (Chapters 5 & 7). The author presents Jesus throughout this letter as our compassionate and perfect high priest.
4. The Old Covenant, because the New Covenant is founded on better promises (Chapter 8).
5. The earthly Tabernacle, because Jesus entered heaven itself and offered himself as a perfect sacrifice (Chapter 9).
6. The Old Testament sacrifices, because his one sacrifice, the shedding of his blood was all sufficient to cleanse both the sin and conscience of all who believe (Chapter 10).

The supremacy of Jesus Christ 1:1-10:18	Exhortations 10:19-17	Closing Remarks
Pay careful attention so that you do not drift away 2:1 Fix your thoughts on Jesus 3:1 Encourage one another daily 3:13 Hold firmly to the faith we profess 5:14 Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence 5:16 Let us go on to maturity in Christ 6:1 Our hope in Jesus is an anchor for the soul 6:19	At the center of these exhortations: chapter 11 teaches about faith. It includes a list of the biblical heroes whose example of faith should motivate believers to persevere.	10:18-25

In the chart under the heading "the supremacy of Jesus Christ" there is a list of the exhortations that the author inserts in this section. With each step of the argument for Jesus' supremacy, an additional exhortation is added. The wonderful news of Christ demands a response. Step by step the author builds to the climatic invitation in chapter 10. "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (10:22-25).

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James

Greeting 1:1	Instructions for Wise Living				
	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
	Trials Temptations Obedience to the word	Favoritism Relationship between deeds and faith	Taming the tongue True wisdom	Submission to God in all things	Prayer of patience and faith

The author of this epistle identifies himself as “James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). He identifies the recipients of this letter as “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (1:1). There are several men with the name, “James,” mentioned in the New Testament, but generally it is believed that the James who wrote this letter was the brother of Jesus who gave leadership in the final decision of the Council of Acts (Acts 15:13-21). The twelve scattered tribes were the people who believed in God and in Jesus Christ His Son, Jew and Gentile alike, throughout the entire world. There are many references to trial and persecution, so this letter was written during a time of testing for the Christian community.

The epistle of James has similarities to the wisdom literature in the Old Testament written by Solomon. It contains several short, memorable proverbs, called aphorisms. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (1:19). “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (3:18). There are longer passages that contain instructions for wise living. James uses story and imagery to illustrate his practical message.

- Trials are opportunities for growth and therefore we can receive them joyfully
- The poor are blessed; wealth has extra burdens and temptations
- Favoritism or preference for the wealthy is never acceptable to God.
- The human tongue is a world of evil and extremely difficult to tame
- Faith must be accompanied by acts of faith. Belief and action go together.
- God is in control of time. We should always remember that.
- We should pray for one another because prayer is effective; God listens and answers.

James does not teach about Jesus, yet neither is his letter particularly Jewish. It is filled with godly wisdom that comes from the fear of God and obedience to His Word. James’ teaching is summed up in this verse: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (1:12).

I & II Peter

These letters were written by Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He addresses them to “God’s elect, strangers in the world” (I Peter 1:1) and to “those who through righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours” (II Peter 1:1).

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I Peter		
Introduction and Praise to God 1:1-12	Exhortations to holiness and faithfulness to Christ and the Christian community The suffering of Jesus is our model 1:13-5:11	Final Greetings 5:12-13
II Peter		
Introduction 1:1-2	Exhortations, Warnings, and Assurances	

Peter was writing to a church that was suffering persecution. There are many references to suffering and in particular to unjust suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ. Peter calls the church to:

- remain committed to holiness of heart, mind, and life (I & II Peter).
- live in harmony with one another (I Peter).
- serve as a holy priesthood of believers, giving witness to God (I Peter 2).
- suffer with grace and humility for the sake of Christ (I Peter 2-4).
- beware of false teachers and dangerous imposters (II Peter 2).
- wait expectantly and patiently for the return of the Lord (II Peter 3).

The example of Jesus Christ gives us the model that we are to follow in our suffering on his behalf. Peter's writing in these three passages is deeply moving and powerfully represents his profound understanding of the significance of the cross. (I Peter 1:19-21, 2:21-25, 3:18-22).

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you.

He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

He never sinned,

nor ever deceived anyone.

*He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.*

*He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.*

*He personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross*

*so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right.*

*By his wounds
you are healed.*

*Once you were like sheep
who wandered away.*

*But now you have turned to your Shepherd,
the Guardian of your souls (I Peter 2:21-25).*

I, II & III John

These three letters were written by John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Letters two and three are brief, written to encourage hospitality to itinerant evangelists, but also to warn the churches to take care in evaluating the message of these speakers. Not all evangelists were godly or reliable witnesses to the truth of God. If speakers were found to be disreputable, they were not to house them or give them permission to speak to the church.

First John is a letter of assurance for new believers. John begins this letter with the assurance that his testimony is true. As an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, he heard, saw, and touched Jesus. His message is true and reliable. The phrase, "this is how we know," is repeated throughout the letter as John lists the evidence of one's relationship with Christ. Another important theme in this book is the love of God. "God is love" (4:6). Belief in God involves knowing Him and His truth with our minds and it involves knowing Him as our Father with our hearts. This belief then is demonstrated in our lives through obedience to His Word and love for one another. As in his gospel, John uses contrasts in his letters to illustrate and emphasize his teaching points.

This is how we know:

- We obey his commands (2:3)
- We walk as Jesus did (2:6)
- We recognize the presence of antichrists—those who deny the incarnation and divinity of Jesus, the Son of God (2:18)
- We love our brothers and sisters in Christ (3:10, 14,)
- We are willing to lay our lives down for our brothers because Christ laid his life down for us (3:16).
- We love with action and truth (3:18-19)
- We have received the Spirit (3:24, 4:13)
- We recognize false spirits (4:2-3, 6)
- We love God and obey his commands (5:2)
- We do not continue to sin (5:15—and chapter 3)
- We have understanding and know he is true (5:20)

Introduction 1:1-4	Evidence for determining who is walking with God and who is not 1:5-5:12	Closing remarks 5:13-21
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Jude

Jude identifies himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (1). He was not one of the twelve apostles. He writes a general letter to "those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ" (1). His primary purpose is to warn them to watch out for "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (4). Godless men pose a serious threat. Jude describes them with harsh words. He also makes many references to Old Testament figures and seems to assume that his readers will have an understanding of the

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significance of these figures and knowledge of how they are symbolically used. He closes his brief letter with words of encouragement and exhortation. In the context of this warning, Jude adds a final comment on how to treat those who are wavering. “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (22-23).

Introduction 1-2	Warning 3-16	Closing Words of encouragement 17-25
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Revelation

“This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near” (1:1-3).

John’s vision begins with Jesus	Letters to Churches: A message for that day	A vision of the work in heaven 4:1 - 22:21
1:1-20	2:1-3:22	The Lamb on the Throne Seals/Trumpets/Bowls The woman and the Dragon/The Beast and the Sea The Rider on the White Horse 1000 Years Final Judgment The New Jerusalem

The apostle John received this revelation from the Lord when he was exiled to the island of Patmos. Revelation is apocalyptic literature and addresses the signs and events of the last days. In apocalyptic literature, there are many uses of numbers, descriptions of other-worldly creatures, and catastrophic events in the heavens and on the earth. The interpretation of these images and numbers can be extremely difficult. Some interpreters believe that each image is an allegory for something else, but the difficulty with this position is in determining what that something else is and when in time it is. For example does it represent something in the time period of John, such as Rome? Or is it future? John warns the reader in his final chapter that he or she should not add or take away from anything written in the book (21:18-19). That being the case, the simplest, most straight-forward reading may give the reader the greatest clarity. The images, numbers, and events that seem too large for our minds to comprehend can be humbly submitted in prayer. The Holy Spirit has been given to us by God to help us understand his truth (John 14).

John’s revelation begins with Jesus Christ. John fell at his feet as though dead (1:17). He is the exalted Lord. This revelation comes from Jesus. Next, John records letters directed to seven churches that were in existence at the time of John. While these letters address specific historical situations, many of the same joys, struggles, and problems continue to be present in churches today.

In chapter 5, the vision moves to heaven where the action that impacts all the world takes place. The activity that takes place on the earth follows the progression of signs, trumpets, and bowls. The events described are horrific. God's people are martyred and persecuted. But God's purpose and desire in the midst of this suffering is that people on earth would be humbled and repent. Sadly, many do not and are lost in the destruction. The repeated words to the saints of the church are: "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (14:12).

As John comes to the end of the Revelation, there is promise of a new heaven and earth. The victory is assured, even though the process of coming to that final and glorious day will be one of much suffering as those who are in rebellion against God thrash against their inevitable destruction. Satan will be once and for all defeated. The living and the dead will be judged and either blessed with eternal life or cursed with eternal damnation. Jesus assures John and us that He is coming. "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22:12-13).

Jesus, through this revelation to John, has prepared all believers for that day. There is no need to fear, but we are to be always ready. Let our hearts and lives resound with John's final words: "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20).

Questions for Discussion

1. Are you ready for Jesus' return? Are the people in your church ready? Do they fear that day? If so, what can you do to help them to feel prepared and to practice the "patient endurance" that is called for from the saints?
2. Angels, Moses, Jewish priests—these were stumbling blocks for Jewish Christians. They would put them before or as equals with Christ. Is there anything in your own life over which Christ is not yet Lord? Is there anything in your community, culture, or tradition over which Christ is not supreme? Do you believe and trust that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was totally and completely sufficient to take away all your sin? Is there anything that hinders you from coming boldly and confidently into his presence?
3. James speaks of the difficulty of taming the tongue. How tame is your tongue? What areas still need to come under the control of the Holy Spirit? How about the tongues in your church? Are there tongue problems? Gossip? Criticism? Lies? Profanity?
4. John is clear that if we say we love God, we must also love others. Do all your relationships with your brothers and sisters demonstrate your love for God? Is there any prejudice or judgment that might not reflect the love of God, for He loves the entire world? What should you do if there is a relationship that is out of order? Is there a lack of love in your church for an individual or other community of people?
5. Are you suffering? Are the people in your church suffering? What words of encouragement can you bring to them? Is Jesus your model and hope in this trial? Are you wavering in your obedience to God because of a trial? How can you begin to consider this trial with joy, as a opportunity to grow in Christ?

Terms to know

General Epistles
Catholic Epistles
Supremacy of Christ*
Aphorisms
Unjust suffering*
"This is how we know"*
God is love*
Antichrists*
Godless men*
Apocalyptic literature
Signs, trumpets, bows*
Come, Lord Jesus!*

