

THE BIBLE

Book by Book

A Guide to the Background, Themes,
and Big Picture of Scripture

66 Books • One-Page Overviews • One Big Story

Bret Hammond, D.Min.

The Bible: Book by Book

A Guide to the Background, Themes, and Big Picture of Scripture

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A Word Before You Begin

This Bible survey began as a Sunday School class.

In 2011, our church had been through a devastating fire, and in the months that followed, my adult Sunday School class asked if we could spend some time simply working our way through the Bible, book by book. What began as a class became this collection of one-page studies, originally compiled and taught during 2011 and 2012.

The goal was never to say everything that could be said about any book of the Bible. One page certainly isn't enough for Genesis, Isaiah, Romans, or any other book of Scripture. Instead, I wanted to give our class a place to begin: some background, important themes, interesting details, connections with other parts of Scripture, and questions that would encourage us to open our Bibles and explore the text for ourselves. That same approach carries through the intertestamental period and concludes with a look at "**The Big Picture**"—the larger story that ties Scripture together.

A friend of mine once told me, "*If you're going to quote me, be sure to date me.*" I've always appreciated that advice. These studies were originally written in 2011–2012, before I pursued graduate studies in Bible and theology and, later, a doctorate in preaching. More than a decade of continued reading, study, teaching, preaching, ministry, and formal education has naturally changed some of the ways I understand and express things. There are statements in these pages I would qualify differently today, conclusions I might state less confidently, and probably a few places where I would simply say, "*I don't think I'd put it that way anymore.*"

That's part of growing as a student of Scripture.

Rather than extensively rewriting these studies, however, I have chosen to preserve them largely as they were originally taught. This is not intended to be a scholarly commentary or the final word on any book or passage of the Bible. It is a teaching resource—a starting point. My hope is that it will help you understand some of the background of a biblical book, notice themes you may have overlooked, prepare a lesson or discussion, or simply enjoy working your way through the Bible one book at a time.

There's another, slightly less noble reason I'm making this available now. These pages were created in **Microsoft Publisher**, complete with the fonts, layouts, and clip art that seemed like a good idea at the time. With Publisher itself heading into retirement, I decided it was time to rescue this project from technological obsolescence and give it a more permanent home as a PDF. So yes, some of the design shows its age. I've decided to call that *vintage!*

I'm especially grateful to the people of **Kansas Christian Church**, where this material was born and first taught, and to **Kemp Church of Christ**, along with the many other individuals, classes, teachers, and churches who have used these studies over the years and told me they found them helpful. Knowing that something prepared for one Sunday School class continued to serve people well beyond that classroom has been an unexpected gift.

So use these pages for what they are. Keep your Bible open. Check what you read here against the Scriptures. Ask questions. Dig deeper. Disagree with me when you need to. And remember that no one-page survey can substitute for actually reading the book itself.

If these pages help you do more of that, then they are still accomplishing what I hoped they would accomplish when I first put them together all those years ago.

Bret Hammond, D.Min.

2026

Genesis

“in the beginning...”

- ♦ First book of the Bible
- ♦ First book of the Pentateuch
- ♦ Author: Attributed to Moses
- ♦ Literary form: Historical Narrative

A Book of Origins

Genesis means, “beginning.” The book itself is the story of the beginning of creation, the human race, of sin, redemption, society and language.



Chapter 12 shifts from a global focus to one man and his family, providing the story of the beginning of the Hebrew people.

Major Events of Genesis

- 1. Creation: (1:1-2:2)** God creates the universe and mankind. Everything’s good.
- 2. The Fall (3:1-24)** Adam and Eve sin and lose their place in Eden.
- 3. The Flood (6:1-8:22)** God reboots.
- 4. The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)** Look what we can do when we all work together!*ut oh*.
- 5. The Call of Abraham (12:1-9)** Welcome to One Man’s Family
- 6. Joseph is Sold into Egypt (37:12-36)** Setting us up for the thrilling sequel: *Exodus*

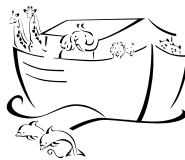
A Book of Covenants

All through Genesis we see God making covenants with his people. Covenants are agreements between two parties with specific promises and conditions.

Adam was promised God’s care if he remained faithful to his wishes (2:28-30)

Noah was given the sign of the rainbow as a reminder of the promises God had made (9:12-16)

Abraham and his family were given the sign of circumcision to mark them as separate from the other nations (17:1-27)



GENESIS FACTOID



If the years and times presented in Genesis are taken literally and without any gaps, then Genesis covers approximately **2370 years** of history. Which is longer than the timeline of rest of the books of the Bible.

Major Characters in Genesis

What do we know of them from these passages?

God: The word “God” occurs 32 times in Genesis 1 alone.

Adam & Eve: (Genesis 1:26-27)

Serpent: (3:1)

Noah: (6:9)

Abraham: (12:10-20)

Isaac: (26:19-25)

Jacob: (27:1-40)

Joseph: (39:7-10)

Abraham’s Blessings

In return for his faithfulness, God made three promises to Abraham that continue to affect us today.



A Land: That his descendants would possess the land of their inheritance (12:1).



A Nation: That they would become a great and plentiful people (12:2).



A Blessing: That all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him (12:3).

How did God fulfill these three blessings? In what ways are we still affected by them today?

The Scandals of Genesis



Genesis is not rated “G.” It contains many stories that would be better suited for the gossip column. A few noted headlines include:

Noah Caught Drunk and Naked: 9:18-29

Abraham Has a Child with His Wife’s Servant: 16:1-16

Lot Seduced by His Daughters: 19:30-38

Jacob Marries Two Women: 29:14-30

Dinah Raped by the Shechemites—Brothers Seek Revenge: 34:1-31

Tamar Poses as a Prostitute: 38:1– 30

EXODUS

"Let my People Go"

- ♦ Second book of the Bible
- ♦ Second book of the Pentateuch
- ♦ Author: Attributed to Moses
- ♦ Literary form: Historical Narrative

The Story So Far...

It's been 400 years since Joseph and his brothers entered Egypt. The descendants of Abraham have grown from 70 to about 600,000 men, fulfilling God's promise of a great nation. However, they are living as slaves in Egypt and the time has come for God to fulfill his promise to them of a land of their own.

Exodus tells the story of the people of Israel from the birth of Moses to the creation of the Tabernacle. But it's more than just history, it is the story of the beginnings of the greatest and most important traditions of the Jewish people. Exodus was written so that they might never forget who they are and from where they have come.

Major Events in Exodus

1. **The Birth of Moses (2:1-10)** One more Hebrew mouth to feed
2. **Moses kills an Egyptian and runs (2:11-25)** The Fugitive!
3. **God appears to Moses (3:1-6)** The burning bush
4. **The Ten Plagues (chapters 7-11)** But Pharaoh kept hardening his heart
5. **The Passover and the Exodus (chapters 12-15)** Hate to eat and run
6. **The Ten Commandments (20:1-17)** The original top ten list
7. **The Building of the Tabernacle (25:1-8)** Our God is in tents!



When?

Dating the exodus has always been a difficult and controversial matter. The book gives us no exact names or events (1:8 for example) so scholars find themselves relying mostly on archaeological discoveries and the names of the two store cities built by the Israelites (1:11).

Scholars have generally centered on either the 18th or 19th Egyptian Dynasties, placing the exodus somewhere between 1580 and 1205 B.C.

In comparison, the Great Pyramid of Giza is believed to have been built somewhere around 2575 to 2150 B.C and King Tutankhamen ruled from 1333 to 1323 B.C.

What Have We learned?

Aside from giving us the history of the people of Israel, what does Exodus teach us? The Apostle Paul had some very definite thoughts about the importance of Exodus in the lives of Christians. What examples does he give? What can you add? **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

Major Characters

What contributions do you see each one making to the story of the Exodus in the passages below?

Moses (4:10-17)

Pharaoh (8:12-15; 10:1-2)

Aaron (7:1-7)

Miriam (15:19-21)

Jethro (18:13-27)

The Israelites (16:1-3)

Joshua (17:8-16)



Appearances of God

God appears in a variety of ways through Exodus. What do each of these appearances tell us about who He is and what He was communicating to Moses and the Israelites?

3:1-6

3:13-15

4:24-26

13:21-22

19:9

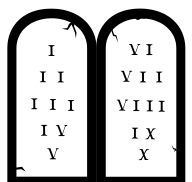
33:17-23

40:34-38



Exodus concludes with the establishment of worship within the Tabernacle. God is with his people, and able to lead them in their wandering.

Hebrews 8:1-6 compares Jesus' ministry with that of the High Priest within the Tabernacle. What comparisons do you see? What is it that makes Jesus' ministry 'superior' to that of the High Priests?



LEVITICUS

“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy”

- ♦ Third book of the Bible
- ♦ Third book of the Pentateuch
- ♦ Author: Attributed to Moses
- ♦ Literary form: Law

The name Leviticus is taken from the name of the tribe of Levi, the priests. When we concluded Exodus, the Tabernacle had been built and Israel was finally ready to approach God in the way he had designed for them—or were they?

While the place of meeting had been prepared, the people themselves were not. Leviticus is a book of rules, regulations and examples that shows sinful people how they may approach a holy God.

Five Major Offerings

From the days of Cain and Abel we have records of people making offerings to God. For the first time, though, Leviticus gives us God’s prescription on what offerings he requires from his people.

Offerings were made as either a sacrifice for sin or an act of worship. What characteristics do you see in the texts below?

- Burnt Offering: Chapter 1 (3-5)
- Grain Offering: Chapter 2 (9-10)
- Fellowship Offering: Chapter 3 (11)
- Sin Offering: Chapters 4:1-5:13 (5:11-13)
- Guilt Offering: Chapters 5:14-6:7 (5:14-16)

What does **Hebrews 10:1-14** tell us about sacrifices and offerings today?

Special Laws

In addition to offerings and priestly intercession, Leviticus gives us details about special laws that governed the behavior of the Israelites.

While in modern times we can find rational and hygienic reasons for many of these laws, those reasons must take a backseat to God’s call of holiness (19:2). In other words, it is enough that these are wrong, “because God said so.”

- ♦ **Clean and Unclean Food: 11:1-23**
- ♦ **Rules of Sanitation: 12:1-15:33**
- ♦ **Rules of Personal Holiness: 17:1-22:33**

5 Festivals

It’s easy to get hung up on seeing Leviticus as a list of what not to do, but it also contains the details of five festivals important for the Israelites’ worship and celebration.

- ♦ **Passover/Firstfruits: 23:4-14**
- ♦ **Feast of Weeks: 23:15-22**
- ♦ **Feast of Trumpets: 23:23-25**
- ♦ **Day of Atonement: 23:26-32**
- ♦ **Feast of Tabernacles: 23:33-44**

Year-Long Celebrations

In addition to the annual festivals listed, there are regulations in Leviticus for year-long celebrations the Israelites were to hold:

- ♦ **The Sabbath Year (25:1-7)**
- ♦ **The Year of Jubilee (25:8-55)**

Other than really liking a good party, what reasons do you think God would have for his people celebrating a year-long festival?



THE DUTIES OF THE PRIESTS

Aaron and his family (from the tribe of Levi) were given the duties to serve Israel as priests in the Tabernacle (Exodus 29). As priests, they were:

1. Called by God (8:1-5)
2. Cleansed (8:6)
3. Clothed (8:7-13)
4. Consecrated (8:14-34)

Compare the role of the priest with what we learn of Jesus in **Hebrews 5:1-10**

God Keeps His Promises: Leviticus 26-27

Leviticus concludes with a list of rewards and punishments for those who either follow or ignore the commands in the book and instructions for dedicating people and possessions to God. Leviticus can be a frustrating book. It’s a reminder that in and of ourselves we are hopelessly lost and unable to stand before a holy God. Thank God Leviticus is not the last word on how we may approach God. **Hebrews 10:19-25**

NUMBERS

"How long will this wicked community grumble against me?"

- ◆ Fourth book of the Bible
- ◆ Fourth book of the Pentateuch
- ◆ Author: Attributed to Moses
- ◆ Literary form: Historic Record

The people of Israel had come out of Egypt. They had established their own laws, built their own place of worship and set their own customs and holidays. In every way possible, they had distinguished themselves as their own nation, different from all the other nations around them. All that remained was for them to have their own land.

However, asking people to give up the security they had as slaves in Egypt was one thing, asking them to fight as warriors for a land of their own proved to be too much. Numbers gives the historic record for that first generation that left Egypt and would never stop wandering.

Census Time

Numbers gets its name from the census taken at the beginning of the book (1:1-4:49). The initial census was to list fighting men (20 years and older) who would be able to serve in the army.

The results of the census are listed in **Numbers 1:44-53**.

Based on the information gathered, chapter 2 gives the arrangement for families camping around the Tent of Meeting.

Since the Levites were excluded from the census, they were counted in chapters 3 and 4.

What About Balaam?

One of the most unusual stories in Numbers is the story of Balaam the prophet. **22:1-24:25**

Who is Balak and what's his motivation? **22:1-3**

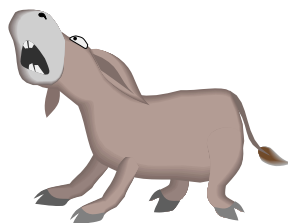
What is Balaam's conflict? **22:5-20**

What did the donkey see? **22:26-33**

Based on these passages, what was Balaam's sin:

2 Peter 2:15-16

Revelation 2:14



The Priestly Blessing

Numbers 6:22-27

Who is the key figure in this blessing?

What are the desires expressed in this blessing?

What is promised in this blessing?



The Rebels

Numbers is full of stories of rebellion. Give a few details from each of the following passages:

- **Numbers 12:1-16**
- **Numbers 14:1-4; 36-45**
- **Numbers 16:1-7; 16:28-35; 17:1-13**
- **Numbers 20:1-13**

Typology in Numbers

Typology is a theological study that looks at Old Testament passages that foreshadow New Testament passages.

There are three instances in Numbers that foreshadow the coming Messiah. Compare these passages with their New Testament interpretations.

1. Water From a Rock: 20:7-11/1 Corinthians 10:1-5

2. The Bronze Snake: 21:4-9/John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34

3. Cities of Refuge: 35:1-35/Hebrews 6:18



12 Men Went to Spy on Canaan

One of the pivotal moments in Numbers is the story of the 12 spies sent to explore the Promised Land.

Read Numbers 13:1-33.

What were they asked to report on and what information did they bring back?

The events of chapter 14 are the result of Israel's grumbling and complaining and the culmination of the report from chapter 13.

Read Numbers 14:1-25.

What does this mean for Israel's future? Who will inherit the Promised Land?



Deuteronomy

"Hear, O Israel..."

God had proven his faithfulness to Israel over and over again. From his initial promise to Abraham, to taking Joseph into Egypt to build the nation's wealth and numbers, to leading Moses and the Israelites back out of Egypt, God kept his word to his chosen people.

However, due to their lack of faith, God's plans for leading them into the Promised Land was put on hold for 40 years. At the end of that time, the previous generation was dead and a new generation was ready to move on in faith and conquer.

But first, the covenant God had made with the previous generation had to be renewed. "Deuteronomy" literally means "the second giving of the law." It is God's renewed promise to a new generation of Israelites.

Renewing the Covenant

As the new generation prepared to enter the Promised Land, God renewed the covenant he had made with their forefathers. Deuteronomy records the elements of this covenant renewal.

- ♦ **The Ten Commandments: 5:1-33**
- ♦ **Curses and Blessings: 27:9-28:68**
- ♦ **The Commitment: 29:1-29**
- ♦ **The Covenant Offer: 30:11-20**

In verses 19-20 Moses calls the Israelites to "choose life." What are the benefits he cites for those who choose to follow the Lord?



We Want a King!

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives instructions about what will eventually happen when the people decide they need a king.

Compare the instructions here with the events of **1 Samuel 8:1-22**.

Compare the restrictions here with what is recorded in **1 Kings 10:1-11:13**.

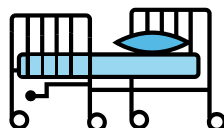
Is there a promise of Christ in this passage?



...Speaking of Kings

Check out the story of the conquest of Bashan in **Deuteronomy 3:8-11**.

That's one big bed!



- ♦ Fifth book of the Bible
- ♦ Fifth (and final) book of the Pentateuch
- ♦ Authors: Historically attributed to Moses and Joshua
- ♦ Literary form: Law and Commentary

THE SHEMA

Chapter 6 contains a statement that is central to Jewish worship to this day. "Shema" means "Hear" and is the first word in the statement in **6:4-9**.

These words are used in the morning and evening prayers of observant Jews and are often their last words before death.

Reading through this passage, how would you characterize their:

- ♦ **Distinction (from other people)**
- ♦ **Devotion (to God)**
- ♦ **Duty (to their future)**

Jesus refers to this passage in **Matthew 22:34-40**. What does he say about it there? Why do you think he says this?



The Prophet

Deuteronomy 18:14-22 gives the distinguishing characteristics of a prophet from God.

What is the responsibility of the people to God in regards to the prophet?

What is the responsibility of the prophet to the people and God?



What is the test to see whether or not the prophet is truly from God?

The Death of Moses

Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moses as he stands on Mount Pisgah and views the Promised Land. God fulfilled his final promise to Moses.

34:1-12

Consider what you've learned of Moses' life over the last four books. How have you seen God's protection on Moses? How was Moses different from other prophets?



JOSHUA

"Be strong and courageous"

- ♦ Sixth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Traditionally Joshua
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Record

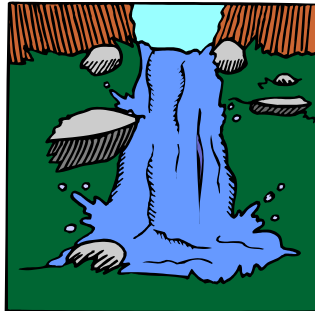
Joshua picks up, almost seamlessly, from where Deuteronomy left off. Moses has died, leaving Joshua as the leader of the Israelites and charged with the task of taking them into the Promised Land.

The first half of Joshua reads like a war journal, detailing the victories and failures in the conquest of Canaan. The second half outlines the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. The big lesson through the book, though, is that God is always faithful to his promises. Therefore we are called to bold, courageous faith in Him.

Crossing the Jordan

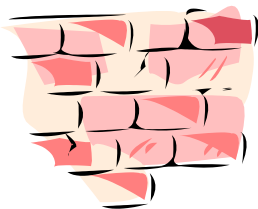
The journey into the Promised Land begins with a huge step of faith—into the Jordan River.

Looking at the passages below, what do you think God's purpose was in giving them these instructions? What was he trying to foster in his people before they took the land?



- ♦ 3:1-5
- ♦ 3:9-16
- ♦ 4:1-9
- ♦ 4:19-24

And the Walls Came a Tumblin' Down



Although difficult to date, archaeology has confirmed that Jericho was once destroyed by what appears to be an earthquake. The walls of the city fell outward and the city burned. Interestingly enough, a section of wall on the north side of the city remained standing.

The Gibeonites

God had commanded Israel to wipe out all the people who lived in the land they were going to possess. In response, many of the cities banded together to go to war against Joshua and his people.

However, the Gibeonites came up with a different plan. Read **Joshua 9:1-27** for the details.

- ⇒ What was the Gibeonites' plan?
- ⇒ What was Israel's mistake(s)?
- ⇒ How did God honor Joshua's integrity?

Key Characters

What do the following passages tell us about the character of these key people and the promises God made?

Joshua 1:5

Rahab 2:1, 8-13

The Two Spies 2:22-24

Achan 7:1, 19-26

Caleb 14:6-15

Rahab is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament:

Matthew 1:5

Hebrews 11:31

James 2:25



The Long Day of Joshua

10:1-15 gives the account of one of the most miraculous events in all of Scripture.



While many do their best to either explain or explain away this event, look at **verse 14**. What does Scripture itself say about this event?

The Covenant is Renewed

After the conquest and the subsequent peace, Joshua called Israel together and gave them his final message and to renew God's covenant with his people.

Read 24:14-27

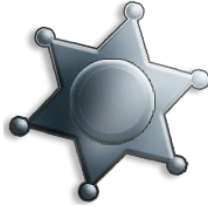
- What is Joshua's Warning?
- Who/What is the Witness to the covenant?
- How would you compare these words with God's call on **Joshua in 1:6-9**?

JUDGES

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

- ♦ Seventh book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Traditionally Samuel
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Record

Israel had entered and settled in Canaan. However, they had failed to obey God and wipe out the inhabitants of the land. As a result they found themselves in near constant conflict with the people around them. Overrun by attacks from the natives and seduced to worship their gods, Israel needed defenders who would bring frontier justice to the hard, untamed land west of the Jordan.



The Judges themselves represent a rag-tag group of leaders, raised up by God and equipped by him with divine skills and courage to deliver his people from their enemies. Their stories teach us of the power of prayer and repentance and the value of one individual when God chooses them.

The Calling of the Judges

Judges is a great reminder that we look at outside characteristics of people while God looks at the heart.

Look at the following examples. What qualities did they possess before they became Judges?

- ♦ **Ehud: 3:15-16**
- ♦ **Gideon: 6:11-15**
- ♦ **Jephthah 11:1-3**

What qualities do you think God saw within them?

DEBORAH

All of the judges have different stories, styles and strengths but few stand out like Deborah. You find her story in Judges 4:1-5:31.

What was Deborah doing before she was a Judge? **4:4**

How would you describe her leadership ability? **4:6-10**

How did she inspire others? **4:14-24**

Deborah celebrated her victory with a song, much as Miriam had celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea in **Exodus 15:20-21**.

Judges 5:24-27 celebrate Jael as “most blessed.” Compare this with the prophecy of **4:9**. Why was Jael “most blessed of tent-dwelling women?”



THE JUDGES CYCLE

While the stories of the individual judges are vastly different, the purpose behind God raising them up is repeated throughout the book. This is called “The Judges Cycle” and is spelled out in **2:10-19**

Read the following passages for examples of the Judges Cycle in action.

- Step 1: The people fall into sin and God punishes them**
3:12-14
- Step 2: The people cry out for a deliverer**
6:7-10
- Step 3: God sends a Judge to deliver them**
6:11
- Step 4: The people serve the Lord and are blessed**
3:30

Read the final verse of this book in **Judges 21:25**

How did the people of Israel change in this book?

Strange Stories from Judges

The book of Judges has its share of oddities, quirks and just plain strange stories. If you're in the mood for some bizarre reading check out these:

- ♦ **Ehud's Obese Overthrow: 3:12-30**
- ♦ **Jael and the Nail: 4:17-24**
- ♦ **The Test of a Tongue: 12:1-7**
- ♦ **The Levite's Awful Atrocity: 19:1-30**
- ♦ **Bagging Brides for Benjamin: 21:1-23**



If the events and years listed in Judges are taken consecutively they cover a period of 410 years. This is far too long to fit in the chronology of Israel.

It's likely some of the leaders overlapped and served in different areas in the land. It's possible that Judges represents a period of only 150 years.

Ruth

"Your people will be my people and your God my God."

- ◆ Eighth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Unknown. Traditionally Samuel
- ◆ Literary form: Historic Record

Ruth is the romance story of the Bible. It's the tale of a poor but beautiful widow, her devotion to her husband's family and the man who rescued her from a life of poverty. It's a story that has been so beloved over the years that it is seen as one of the most beautiful short stories ever written.

And yet it is more. It is an illustration of gift of redemption; what it means to be bought by the love of God. And it is also another story in the amazing and miraculous lineage of Jesus Christ.

The Kinsman-Redeemer

The Israelites followed the practice called "Levirate Law." It emphasized the responsibilities that family members had to each other to preserve their way of life, and ultimately, their lineage. Under the levirate law you might have to avenge the murder of a relative, marry the widow of a deceased brother to provide his family line with children, or buy back a family member who had been sold into slavery.

The kinsman-redeemer had an obligation to Naomi to provide for her family line by redeeming Ruth. However, there was a problem—there was one kinsman who was closer in relation to Naomi than Boaz. That relative would have first choice in redemption.

Read chapter 3. Why do you think Boaz wanted to redeem Ruth even though he was not legally obligated to do so?

What do his actions in **verses 14-17** tell you about his concern for Ruth and Naomi?

Read **Galatians 4:4-7** and **Hebrews 2:11-18**. How is Jesus our kinsman-redeemer?



Did You Know?

In **Ruth 1:4** we are briefly introduced to Orpah, Naomi's other daughter-in-law and Ruth's sister-in-law. Unlike Ruth, she chose to leave Naomi and return to her own people.

Oprah Winfrey was originally named "Orpah" after this Biblical character, but her family and friends didn't know how to pronounce it, and called her "Oprah" instead



Naomi's Name Change

At the beginning of the story, Naomi wants the women in Bethlehem to call her Mara (**1:19-20**).

At the end of the story, Naomi's neighbors call her something different (**4:13-17**).

How would you describe the change in Naomi through the story?

How much of this story is really about her and God's promise to her?

Key Characters

Look at the following passages about the key characters from Ruth. What do these passages tell us about their character?

Elimelech: A Jewish father who tried to provide for his family: **1:1-7**

Ruth: A Moabite. A foreign woman devoted to the mother of her deceased husband. **1:8-18**

Naomi: An Israelite widow who has had her family taken from her. **1:19-22**

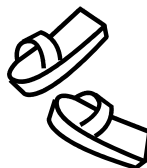
Boaz: A wealthy land owner and a relative of Naomi's deceased husband. **2:1-23**

SANDAL or NO SANDAL

The Book of Ruth offers us a unique look into the civil court of early Israel. Remember, these were the days of the Judges, there was no national system of justice. Disputes and legal matters had to be settled within the community.

Read Ruth 4:1-12.

- ◆ What purpose do the ten elders serve in this story?
- ◆ What does Boaz present to his kinsman as the primary issue? Why does he do this?
- ◆ Based on levirate law, what was the concern of the other relative? Why did he not want to redeem Ruth?
- ◆ What strikes you as important or interesting about the blessings pronounced in 11 and 12?



Earlier in history, when land was purchased the new owner took possession of it by walking through the land. By Boaz's time this was done symbolically through the exchange of sandals.

The Begats: Ruth 4:18-22

The Book of Ruth ends with her family's genealogy. While it's easy to see the importance of such a lineage given that her great-grandson became king, there's something else to be gleaned here.

This was not just a simple love story of two individuals who found each other. This was the hand of God in their lives building something eternal.

What could he build in us?

1 SAMUEL

They have rejected me as their king

1 Samuel provides the transition between the period of the Judges and the rise of the monarchy in Israel. It is a book of endings and beginnings, of births and deaths, of rises and falls.

In the midst of the wars and battles and chaos of 1 Samuel there is a constant picture of a God who desires to answer the prayers of his people. From the mumbled prayers of a heartbroken mother-to-be to the psalms of a boy anointed to become king, we see God as eager to listen to the cries of his people and eager to respond.

It All Begins with a Praying Mother

The events of 1 Samuel are set in motion by Hannah's very simple prayer. Her story is one of a deep desire and a spirit of humility.

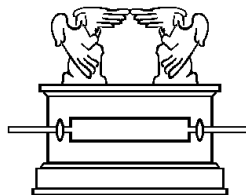
Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

- ◆ How would you describe the difference in the way Elkanah and Eli both tried to comfort Hannah?
- ◆ What do you think Eli heard in Hannah's prayer that caused him to mistake it for drunkenness?
- ◆ What was the significance of Samuel's name to Hannah?

The Faith of a Philistine

In chapter 4 Israel went to battle against the Philistines and lost. The Philistines humiliated them further by capturing the Ark of the Covenant and taking it home with them.

Chapter 5 details the problems this caused the Philistines—sickness, tumors, invasions of rats and the destruction of their idol. In Chapter 6 they *settled on* a plan to return the Ark to Israel.



Read: 6:1-12

- ◆ Compare the guilt offering of the Philistines with the instructions in Leviticus 5:14-15. What was the purpose of a guilt offering?
- ◆ What was the purpose of the cows that they chose?
- ◆ How would you describe the Philistines' faith in verse 9?
- ◆ *What would you have done with golden tumors and rats?*



Jonathan's Faith

Read the story of Jonathan and his armor bearer in **13:23-14:14**

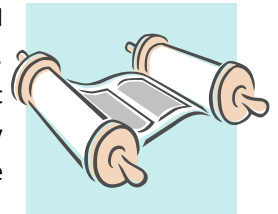
- What disadvantages did Jonathan and his armor bearer have in this battle?
- How would you compare Jonathan's faith with the faith of the Philistines in chapter 6?
- How would you describe the faith of Jonathan's armor bearer?

- ◆ Ninth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Unknown. Legend says Samuel (chapters 1-24), Nathan and Gad wrote the rest.
- ◆ Literary form: Historic Record

The Prequel and the Sequel?

Like Kings and Chronicles, Samuel is a book divided into two parts. First and Second Samuel were originally one book, simply titled "The Book of Samuel." The reason for their division was a practical one: The book was too large to easily fit on one scroll.

The book was first divided into two parts during the third century before Christ. This division wasn't officially adopted by the Jews until the 15th century, A.D.



Leadership Styles

1 Samuel presents us with several transitions of leadership in Israel. Looking at the leaders from this book, what do we learn about their styles of leadership?

- ◆ **Eli: 2:12-26**
- ◆ **Samuel: 3:19-4:1**
- ◆ **Saul: 10:17-27**
- ◆ **David: 17:34-37**

OBITUARIES

The story of 1 Samuel is shaped by the death of its heroes.

What would you write in the obituaries of each of the following?

- ◆ **Eli: 4:12-18**
- ◆ **Samuel: 25:1**
- ◆ **Jonathan and Saul: 31:1-13**



II SAMUEL

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer

It was Israel's Golden Age. King David led his people in victory after victory and called them to a new revival of devotion to God. However, this Golden Age had its share of turbulence and corruption. Like Camelot, it just couldn't last.

2 Samuel tells the story of David's reign. It's far from a cleaned up, sanitized memoir of Israel's greatest king. It's a very human story of military victories and moral failures that reminds us of the power and necessity of God's abiding grace.

A ROCKY START

Even though he was anointed to become King over Israel, David's rise to power seemed anything but blessed. Here are a few details to keep in mind as you read through David's story:

1. **A Divided Kingdom: 2:1-7.** David was originally anointed as King only over Judah. However, he quickly calls the rest of Israel into covenant with him.
2. **Rivals for the Throne: 2:8-3:21.** With Saul dead, his son, Ish-Bosheth became king over Israel. This led to battles between David's followers and those who were loyal to Saul's family.
3. **Murder and Intrigue: 3:22-4:12.** Espionage and assassination run rampant as David's men fight for his rise to power.



Chapter 5 starts David's reign over Israel and his conquest of Jerusalem. Read **verses 6-12**, concentrating on verse 12. What do you think David based this statement on?



DiD YOU KNOW...

2 Samuel 7:18 is the only reference in the Bible to anyone *sitting* in prayer.

ABSALOM

One of the most tragic stories in David's life is that of his son Absalom. It is the single longest narrative within the book of Samuel, spanning chapters 13 through 19.

- ◆ **13:1-21 (20-21) - His Anger**
- ◆ **13:23-39 (28-29) - His Revenge**
- ◆ **14:1-33 (14; 32-33) - His Exile and Return**
- ◆ **15:1-37 (1-4; 13-14) - His Conspiracy and Coup**
- ◆ **18:1-19:8 (18:9-15; 18:32-19:4) - His Death**

The story of Absalom begins immediately after David's sin with Bathsheba and the death of their child. Do you think God used Absalom to teach David about his own heart? What lessons about God would David have taken from what he experienced?

- ◆ Tenth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Unknown.
- ◆ Literary form: Historic Record

David's Songs

Within the context of 2 Samuel we find examples of David's music and poetry that we also see in the Psalms.

Reading from the following selections, what themes do you see present?

How is God presented? How does David present himself?



◆ **1:17-27**

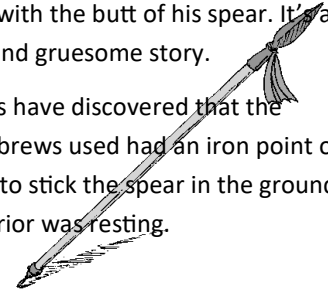
◆ **22:1-51**

◆ **23:1-7**

The Wrong End of the Spear?

2 Samuel 2:18-23 tells the story of Abner killing Asahel with the butt of his spear. It's a very strange and gruesome story.

Archaeologists have discovered that the spears the Hebrews used had an iron point on the butt used to stick the spear in the ground while the warrior was resting.



Mephibosheth

One of the most touching stories in 2 Samuel is that of David's treatment of Mephibosheth, his friend Jonathan's son.



Read through the passages below as the story of Mephibosheth unfolds. How would you characterize David's commitment? How do you see Mephibosheth's gratitude? Is there a lesson here about how God cares for us and our response to him?

◆ **4:4**

◆ **9:1-13**

◆ **16:1-4**

◆ **19:24-30**

Do you believe Mephibosheth's story of betrayal? Do you think David believed it?

I KINGS

But will God really dwell on earth?

The history of Israel is a checkered story of faithfulness and apostasy, of victory and defeat. Through the years and the changes, though, God continued to prove himself faithful to his people and, whether they liked it or not, true to his word.

1 Kings focuses on the events surrounding the reign of Solomon, including his being chosen as David's successor and the repercussions of his death. It is the story of Israel's growth into a powerful and wealthy nation and the story of the corruption that followed.

In the middle, though, it is the story of the completion of David's dream of a Temple where people could meet God. Solomon's Temple stood as Israel's greatest triumph and fell as their greatest defeat.

The Battle for the Throne

As 1 Kings begins, we find David old, infirmed and, apparently, very cold. His condition is spelled out in **1:1-4**

Adonijah, David's son, had his eye on taking the throne of Israel. His plans are shown in **1:5-10**

However, God had already promised the throne to Solomon (**1 Chronicles 22:8-10**). It seems apparent that Adonijah knew this, considering his carefully chosen guest list.

The story continues in **1:11-27**. What do you make of Nathan and Bathsheba's plans? God had already promised the throne to Solomon. Why do they seem to manipulate David's response?



Solomon's Prayer

After the Temple was built Solomon prayed the prayer of dedication over it. It's easy for us to look at a prayer like this and attempt to dissect it and miss the point that this was the cry of Solomon's heart to the God he served and honored.

Look at **8:22-30**. What images of Christ do you see in Solomon's prayer? In what ways is Jesus like the Temple he built? In what ways are we like the Temple?

Jeroboam and Rehoboam

With the death of Solomon, Israel split into two nations ruled by two different kings.

Read the details in **12:1-33**

- ♦ What mistakes did Rehoboam make when he became king?
- ♦ What steps did Jeroboam take to preserve his rule?
- ♦ The people sacrificed their worship of God for the promise of fewer taxes. Isn't it good to see how we've grown over the past 2500 years?

- ♦ Eleventh book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Legend says it was Jeremiah.
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Record (The Annals of the Kings)

Adonijah and Abishag

In chapter 2 Adonijah makes an unusual request of his brother and receives a very stern response. Read about the exchange in **2:13-25**.

Why did Solomon respond this way? What did he see in Adonijah's request that his mother did not see?

If you need a little extra help, look back to **Deuteronomy 25:5-6**.

Coincidence? Your Opinion

Chapter 10 goes into great detail about the wealth and property of King Solomon. **10:14-15** begin this section with an oddly familiar number.

Compare this with **Revelation 13:16-18**. Do you think this is simply a coincidence or is there a greater lesson here? What do the numbers in both contexts represent?



The Prophets

The name "Kings" might be a little misleading. This book doesn't just tell the stories of the kings of Israel and Judah but of the prophets that spoke the word of God to these kingdoms.

Look at the prophets we meet in 1 Kings. What messages do they bring from God?

- The Man of God (13:1-10)
- Ahijah (14:1-11)
- Elijah (18:16-24)
- Anonymous Prophet (20:35-43)
- Micaiah (22:1-28)

2 KINGS

I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD

Second Kings is an extended story about the unfaithfulness of God's people. The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah are seen in their decline into wickedness that ends in the enslavement of the Jewish people. However, in the midst of such apostasy we find incredible stories of faithful prophets and godly kings.

Taken as a whole, 2 Kings tells us much about judgment. But when we look at the stories of individuals we find wonderful examples of commitment from which we can learn and grow.

Bears Win 42 to 2

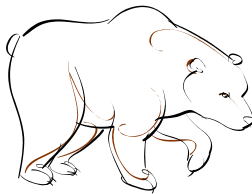
2 Kings 2:23-25

This is one of those odd stories we don't always know what to do with. It's important that we view it in the context of what has just happened and what God wanted to do next.

- ♦ Elijah has just ascended into heaven, caught up in a whirlwind. **2:1-12**
- ♦ It had been prophesied that Elisha's ministry would be even greater than Elijah's **2:13-18**

The children's heckling and public insult was ultimately an attack on the God whom Elisha spoke for. Their sin was blasphemy and their punishment was a reminder that God will not be mocked.

It's also a reminder that we're not all called to be Mr. Rogers.



Naaman healed of leprosy

5:1-15

- ♦ What was Naaman expecting from his visit to the King of Israel?
- ♦ Why was Naaman disappointed by his visit to Elisha's house?
- ♦ What do you think Naaman thought after his 6th dip in the Jordan?
- ♦ How would you describe Naaman's response in verse 15?

Don't forget to read the rest of the story (16-27).

What is Naaman really asking for in verses 16-19?

What are the lessons here about greed and the work of the Lord?



You know you're hungry when....

2 Kings 6:25

Josiah

King Josiah's story is one of amazing commitment and amazing reforms. His story also shows us just how far the Jewish people had fallen since the days of David and Solomon.

How is Josiah characterized in **22:1-2**?

Read **22:3-11**. It's likely that what was found was only the book of Deuteronomy (technically, The Law). How would you describe Josiah's reaction? If the people had lost Deuteronomy, what do you think their worship was all about? What would they have based it on?

Read **22:19-30**. What do you think the significance of Josiah's Passover is in connection to verses 19-20?

2 Kings 23:31-35. How did things go so wrong so fast?

- ♦ Twelfth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Legend says it was Jeremiah.
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Record (The Annals of the Kings)

Miracles

2 Kings begins with Elijah being taken up into Heaven and Elisha beginning his ministry. In many ways, Elisha's miracles foreshadow the miracles of Jesus. Check out the miracles in the texts below. What miracles of Jesus do they seem to correspond with?

♦ **4:1-7**

♦ **4:8-36**

♦ **4:42-44**

♦ **6:1-7**

What do these miracles show God's mastery over?



How would Jesus' audience have reacted to his miracles in light of the miracles of Elisha?

Israel in Exile

17:7-23

Israel had gone from bad to worse. Their list of sins had become a stench to God and—true to his word—he punished them for their unfaithfulness.

How had God shown his faithfulness to his people

What provisions had he made to keep them faithful to him?

How do you think the Judeans reacted to this news?

The Assyrian King Sargon, in his official history, records the capture of Israel as a minor event. Some attribute this to the numerous invasions and deportations over the previous two decades.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

25:1-12

The Fall of Jerusalem took place approximately 137 years after the Exile of Israel. Generations existed that had never known the existence of the Northern Kingdom, let alone its connection to Judah. Rather than being warned by their own history, Jerusalem fell due to the sin of the people and the foolishness of their leaders (**24:20**).

FIRST CHRONICLES

He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him.

The translators of the Greek version of the Old Testament (The Septuagint) referred to Chronicles as, “a supplement to things previously omitted.” The book was seen by the Jews as an addendum to Samuel and Kings.

Chronicles was written after the time of the exile. As the people returned to their home it was essential for them to remember who they were and where they had come from. Their connection to the past would lead them through their period of rebuilding.

DAVID’S MIGHTY MEN

11:10-41 lists David’s top warriors who stood by him and supported his rule. The list begins with his top three warriors, simply known as “**The Three Mighty Men.**” What made them so mighty?

♦ **Jashobeam**—verse 11

♦ **Eleazar**—verses 12-14 (see also **2 Samuel 23:9-11**)

♦ **Shammah** (omitted from the list in 1 Chronicles.

See **2 Samuel 23:11-12**)

Read their exploit in 11:15-19. What’s your initial reaction to this story? Consider it in the context of Genesis 35:14-15 and Leviticus 23:37-38. What does this tell you about the way David treated their sacrifice?

What other stories of David’s Mighty Men catch your attention? Do any names look familiar (see verse 41)?



Uzzah and the Ark

13:1-14 tells the story of the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem...almost. This triumphant event is interrupted by the tragic death of Uzzah.

Why did The Lord strike Uzzah dead?

♦ Exodus 25:10-16

♦ Joshua 3:1-3

♦ 1 Samuel 6:10-12

♦ 1 Chronicles 15:11-14

David’s Census

1 Chronicles begins with a genealogy of the Jewish people, which told them who they were and how they had been blessed over the years.

1 Chronicles 21:1-22:1 tells the story of David’s census, prompted by Satan.

Read the story and consider these questions:

♦ Why was David’s census so sinful? What was his motivation?

♦ Read **Psalm 20** (especially verse 7). What did David learn?

♦ What good came from these events (**2 Chronicles 3:1-2**)?

- ♦ Thirteenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Possibly Ezra
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Narrative

Genealogy

1 Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogical records that goes all the way back to Adam. By the time of the writing of Chronicles (around 450 B.C.) the Jewish people had been exiled and returned to their home. Many of them had lost touch with their roots.

The purpose was to establish their place in history and, on a practical level, to help them maintain the purity that was needed in their worship.

From our Christian perspective, though, the genealogy is another reminder of God’s providence in history as he prepared the world for the coming of his Son.

Psalms and Prayers

Worship plays a big part in the story of King David. In 1 Chronicles we have several examples of David (and others) praying and examples of David’s Psalms.

♦ 4:9-10

♦ 5:18-22

♦ 14:8-17

♦ 16:7-36

♦ 17:16-27

♦ 29:10-20

Sections of the psalm in

chapter 16 can be found in Psalms 96, 105 and 106.



Gotta Dance!

15:29 shows David dancing in worship as the ark is brought into Jerusalem. Worship in Judaism included dancing (**Psalm 149:3**).

Re-Writing History?

Check out the account of Solomon becoming king in **29:21-30**.

Now, compare it to the “official” account in **1 Kings 1:28-53**

What are some reasons that the author of this post-exilic book might have changed this story to make it seem more heroic and present it as a smooth transition?

2 CHRONICLES

Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people.

Chronicles presents the history of the Jews with a definitely nostalgic flavor. The purpose of this book was to familiarize the returning exiles with their history in a way that would remind them of the good times and not the bad, and therefore inspire them in their time of rebuilding.

It was also an attempt to call them back to the faith of their fathers, to return them to faithfulness by showing them God's faithfulness in history. For us it's a reminder of God's providence and of the importance of an optimistic faith.

Solomon's Request

2 Chronicles begins with Solomon's rise to power. Rather than showing the struggles and attempted coup of 1 Kings, this book begins with a firm statement of Solomon's rule (1:1).

1:7-12 tells the story of God's appearance to Solomon and his offer to grant any request he would ask. Read the story and consider the following:

- ♦ What are Solomon's reasons for asking for wisdom?
- ♦ Read **Proverbs 2:1-11**. How do the benefits of wisdom compare here?
- ♦ How would you compare this passage with **Matthew 6:28-34**?
- ♦ Your opinion: Do you think God's other gifts to Solomon (11-12) were to benefit him or test him (or both)?

Splendiferous Solomon

2 Chronicles 9:13-28 describes the riches of Solomon's kingdom and his own personal wealth.

What do you think this passage was intended to convey to the original reader? Keep in mind that this was written after the exile, when the Jewish people returned home and found their land plundered.

What does Solomon's wealth say to you when viewed in the light of God's promise in chapter 1? What does it say to you in view of his failures?

Of all the things listed in this passage, which one would you most want for yourself? What would you not want?



THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

In **chapter 9** we read the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba. Though Scripture does not bear this out, Ethiopian history maintains that this visit was the source of their royal line. Their tradition claims that Solomon and the queen had a son who became **Menelik I**, the first emperor of Ethiopia.

- ♦ Fourteenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Possibly Ezra
- ♦ Literary form: Historic Narrative

The Good Guys

In movies the good guys wear white hats, but how do you recognize a good king in the Bible?

Check out the following kings. What made them good? What were their failures?

- ♦ **Asa**—14:2-7 (16:10)
- ♦ **Jehoshaphat**—17:1-6 (20:31-33)
- ♦ **Joash**—24:1-4 (24:17-19)
- ♦ **Amaziah**—25:1-2 (25:3-4)
- ♦ **Uzziah**—26:1-5 (26:16-21)
- ♦ **Jotham**—27:1-6
- ♦ **Hezekiah**—29:1-11 (32:27-31)
- ♦ **Josiah**—34:1-8 (35:20-25)



...and when they were bad they were horrid

- ♦ **Ahab** (1 Kings 16:29-33)
- ♦ **Jehoram**—21:4-7
- ♦ **Ahaziah**—22:2-6
- ♦ **Ahaz**—28:1-5
- ♦ **Manasseh**—33:1-9
- ♦ **Amon**—33:21-25
- ♦ **Jehoahaz**—36:2-4
- ♦ **Jehoiakim**—36:5-8
- ♦ **Jehoiachin**—36:9-10
- ♦ **Zedekiah**—36:11-14



When the kings were good who were they compared to? Who were they compared to when they were bad?

Micaiah the Prophet

18:1-27 tells the story of Micaiah, a no-nonsense prophet of God who refused to change his message to suit the king.

- ♦ Why didn't Ahab like Micaiah?
- ♦ Why do you think Jehoshaphat called him anyway?
- ♦ Look at verses **18-22**. Why did God authorize lies in this instance?

EZRA

The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him

- ♦ Fifteenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Ezra (compiler)
- ♦ Literary form: History

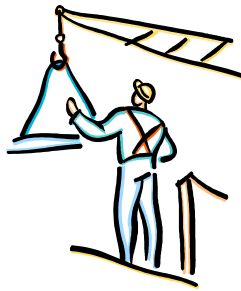
In the Jewish canon of Scriptures “Ezra Nehemiah” is presented as one book telling the story of the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. For convenience sake it has been divided into two books.

Ezra’s story appears to be a compilation of details and events surrounding the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. It is a book that focuses on the holiness of God and his people’s desire to reform and return to him.

The Project Starts

The rebuilding of the Temple began with a proclamation from Cyrus the Great. Some of the details you need to know are:

- ◇ Cyrus was the king of Persia. Persia had defeated Babylon about 20 years earlier and taken its land and people.
- ◇ The Persians were much more compassionate than the Babylonians. They chose to allow their subject nations to rebuild under their leadership.
- ◇ **Ezra 1:1-4** is almost identical to **2 Chronicles 36:22-23**
- ◇ This event is cited as the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. Check out **Jeremiah 25:1-14** and **29:10**. See also **Daniel 9:1-4**.



The Laying of the Foundation

In **Ezra 3:7-13** we have the story of the laying (relaying) of the Temple foundation. Read the story and discuss the following questions:

- ♦ How does the rebuilding compare to the building of the original temple? Check out **1 Kings 5:1-18**.
- ♦ The worship they performed at the laying of the foundation was in accordance with what David instructed the people to do in **1 Chronicles 15:16** and following.
- ♦ How would you describe the difference between the weeping and rejoicing in **verses 12 and 13**? What did the older priests see that the younger did not? What did the younger see that the older could not?

Holiness and Marriage

One of the greatest issues in Ezra is the question of the intermarriage of the Jewish people with outside races. **Chapters 9 and 10** give the details of this controversy and how the people responded. **9:1-7** shows that this issue was not taken lightly.

10:1-8 shows the grief of the people in the realization that they had broken covenant with God.

Look at **9:1**. How does it compare with **Exodus 23:20-26**? **Genesis 24:1-3**?

Why was this such an important issue for the Jews?

Key Players in Ezra

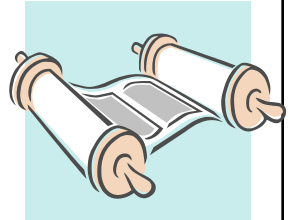
The names during this time period take on a definite Persian flavor. The impact of 70 years of exile were felt in the culture and customs of the Jews.

What do these verses tell you about their roles and character?

- ♦ Cyrus (the Great): King of Persia—**1:1-4**
- ♦ Zerubbabel: Governor of Judah—**2:1-2**
- ♦ Jeshua (Joshua): The High Priest—**5:2**
- ♦ Darius: King of Persia—**6:11-12**
- ♦ Artaxerxes (the First): King of Persia—**7:21-23**
- ♦ Haggai: the prophet—**6:14**
- ♦ Ezra: The Scribe—**7:1-10**

Ezra the Rabbi

Ezra is considered by the Jewish people to be the prototype for the Rabbi of later Synagogue worship. He is also seen by the Jews to be the “**Second Moses**” because of the way he centered the returning exiles on the Torah and emphasized the importance of the Law.



OPPOSITION

Ezra 4:1-5 tells of the enemies that opposed the rebuilding of the temple. What do we know about these people? What was their plot?

Further opposition occurs during the reign of Xerxes. What is their strategy in the letter in **4:11-16**?

The ploy worked. Construction halted for two years until the reign of King Darius.

The Dedication of the Temple

Ezra 6:13-18 gives the details of the completion of the Temple and its dedication. The third day of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of Darius corresponds with March 12, 515 B.C.

NEHEMIAH

"I was cupbearer to the king."

The story of Nehemiah begins in a distant city, far away from Jerusalem and infinitely more beautiful and powerful. And yet, even in the citadel of Susa, the hand of God was seen and plans were set in motion to restore His people.

Nehemiah is an amazing book with lessons about persistence, overcoming opposition and understanding God's timing. It's a wonderful reminder of how God places us in certain locations and jobs so that we can be useful to him.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

While Ezra tells the story of the rebuilding of the Temple, Nehemiah focuses on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. A city without walls was a city with no protection, no future and no pride.

Read **1:1-11** and discuss the following:

- ◆ How would you characterize Nehemiah's reaction to the news in verses 3 and 4?
- ◆ What does he confess in his prayer?
- ◆ What does he remind God of in his prayer?
- ◆ What does he want for himself in his prayer?

Building During a Bad Economy

In chapter 5 we're told of an economic crisis in Nehemiah's time.

Why is Nehemiah "very angry" in verse 6? What have the wealthy people done?

What does he do about the problem in verse 11? (see also **Leviticus 25:8-13**)

What example does Nehemiah himself set in 14-16?



Ezra Comes to Town

8:1-18 tells the moving and astonishing tale of Ezra's visit to Jerusalem and the reading of the Law in the presence of all the people. Some of the details you should note are:

- This passage is where the concept of a pulpit is derived (8:4).
- Ezra read "The Book of the Law of Moses." This would be the "Torah" or "The Pentateuch." That is, the first five books of the Old Testament.
- The people are moved to tears at the reading of the Law, but in verse 9 their remorse becomes a distraction from their obedience.
- Verse 13: On the second day they were still reading in Leviticus. When they reached Leviticus 23:34-44 and about the Feast of Tabernacles which was to be celebrated that week. The people responded immediately in obedience and gathered branches to build their booths (tents).
- How do their emotions in 8:17 compare to their emotions in 8:9? What do you think made the difference?



- ◆ Sixteenth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Ezra (compiler), Nehemiah
- ◆ Literary form: History

Job Opening:

Cupbearer to the King

In **1:11**, Nehemiah states very succinctly that he was the cupbearer to the king of Persia. This was more than just a servant or even a butler, the cupbearer was a highly trained and valuable member of the king's court. As cupbearer, Nehemiah would have been:

- ◆ Trained in the etiquette of the court.
- ◆ Handsome (**Daniel 1:3-4**)
- ◆ Knowledgeable about wine selection.
- ◆ A companion to the king, willing to listen.
- ◆ Influential with the king, willing to give advice.



Did you notice the one skill Nehemiah didn't have in his job as cupbearer?

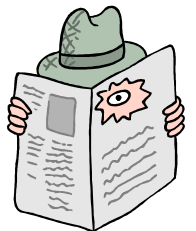
Nowhere in his job description does it say anything about knowing how to build walls!

Sanballat and Tobiah

Through the book of Nehemiah we read of the trouble stirred up by two men who opposed the rebuilding. We first meet them in **2:10**.

Read the following verses. What tactics did they use to discourage the builders? How did Nehemiah respond to their attacks?

- ◆ **2:11-20**
- ◆ **4:1-5**
- ◆ **4:6-9**
- ◆ **6:1-14**



The end of the book tells of Nehemiah's reforms. Note his "reform" in **13:28-29**.

A Few Details

Susa was about 800 miles from Jerusalem. By the time of Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem had been down for about 140 years. However, Nehemiah is likely distressed over the failed rebuilding read about in Ezra 4:7-23.

Based on 5:14, these events took place over a period of 12 years.

Esther

“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”

There is no other book in the Bible quite like Esther. From its unwavering confidence in the providential hand of God to its macabre humor, Esther is a unique blend of reverence and irreverence that has fascinated readers for millennia.

Those who study the book struggle to define it in the Scriptures. Perhaps rather than define it we should simply enjoy it for what it is. This tall tale of pageantry and murderous plots confirms God’s plan and protection for his people and provides an opportunity for celebration in the midst of the Jewish exile.

The Girl Who Grew Up to be Queen

When we first meet Esther she is a beautiful young Jewish girl living among the Persians during the exile. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, which means “Myrtle.”

Check out the following prophetic mentions of the myrtle plant. How does Esther/Hadassah fulfill these prophecies?

- ♦ Isaiah 41:19
- ♦ Isaiah 55:12-13

The name Esther means “Star,” which may be the origin of the name of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, from which we derive the word “Easter.”



According to the Talmud:

A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordecai.”

Where is God in Esther?

Some will point out that there is no mention of organized religion or prayer in Esther. However, this book tells a story about the Jewish people during a time when they had no access to Jerusalem. Their worship was evolving from Temple-centric to Synagogue-based. We should expect some differences from the earlier writings that were based in Israel and Judah.

Instead we find a more personal faith of Mordecai and Esther. While it may not appear organized, it is based in ancient practices and truths we find elsewhere in the Scriptures.

Read **Esther 4:1-17** and compare the examples of faith and devotion here with the examples seen in the following passages:

- ♦ **2 Samuel 12:15-23**
- ♦ **2 Kings 6:24-30**
- ♦ **Psalms 18:1-2**
- ♦ **Daniel 3:16-18**
- ♦ **Romans 8:28**

- ♦ Seventeenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Sometimes attributed to Ezra or Mordecai
- ♦ Literary form: History
- ♦ Genre: “The Five Megilloth”

Is the story of Esther True ...or True-ish?

Part of the controversy over the Book of Esther is whether or not it should be considered as a true historical event or a comic, fictionalized history. While it might be difficult for us to consider the possibility that a book of the Bible might be not be true, we should remember that Jesus and the prophets told fictional stories to make points and inspire people.

Jewish scholars put Esther in with the “**Five Scrolls**” (Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ruth and Ecclesiastes) and viewed these works with a very different eye than the Torah and Prophets. The fact that there is no mention of God or Jerusalem in the story may point to the desire of the author to keep this story separate from the more respectable historic record of the day.

The Main Characters

During the celebration of Purim, it is customary for the Jewish children to put on a play or do dramatic readings about the book of Esther. What qualities would you emphasize about each character if you were organizing a production?

- ⇒ **Esther**—2:7
- ⇒ **Mordecai**—2:21-23
- ⇒ **King Xerxes**—2:16-18
- ⇒ **Haman**—3:5-6



That Vile Haman!

During the Purim plays, when Haman’s name is mentioned, the children and adults boo loudly. They also swing a “gragger” (a ratcheting noisemaker) to drown out his name. One of the traditional foods eaten on Purim is a pastry called “Hamantash” or “Oznei Haman” which means, “The Ears of Haman.”



JOB

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him”

Job is one of those stories we tend to apply personally. When someone is going through a difficult time we often speak of them suffering “the trials of Job.” There is something universal about the this story and something heroic in way Job handles his pain and loss.

If we regard Job’s story with such value it shouldn’t surprise us that others have done the same through the ages. It seems likely that the pious Jews during the Exile clung to this book for answers to their suffering and viewed it with comfort and conviction that God was not blind to their pain but very aware and ready to reward their faithfulness.

The Great Debate

Job is essentially a symposium on the question of suffering. From the interaction of God and Satan to Job’s wife, from his friends and his own responses, the book is a raging debate on the sources of Job’s troubles which ultimately points to the source of all suffering.

What does **1:1-5** tell us about Job’s character?

As readers, we see something that Job never knew about—the encounter between God and Satan. What does **1:6-2:10** tell you about the source of Job’s suffering?

Based on **2:9**, why do you think Satan spared Job’s wife?

The advice that each of Job’s friends is essentially the same. They all believed—to one degree or another—that Job’s suffering was the result of his sin.

What “comfort” would you take from their words if they were your friends?

- Eliphaz—**4:7-11; 15:17-26**
- Bildad—**8:3-7, 20-22; 18:5-21**
- Zophar—**11:4-20; 20:4-11, 27-29**
- Elihu—**32:1-9, 33:8-30**

How does their advice compare with what Jesus says in **John 9:1-7**

Theophany...God Shows Up!

After the advice of Job’s friends and his responses, God finally speaks to Job. God is the one who knew about the contest with Satan all along. God is the one who knew the truth about Job’s righteousness. God is the one who could answer all of Job’s questions....but he doesn’t.

Job 38:1-7; 39:1-4

Rather than answer the question of the origin of suffering, God simply reminds Job of who is in control. Job’s response is to humble himself and accept God’s presence as answer enough.

Job 40:1-5; 42:1-6

Putting yourself in the place of the Jews in the middle of the Exile, what lessons would you take from Job for your own suffering? What universal lessons do you see that address all human suffering?

Philip Yancey in Disappointment with God makes the point that at the end of Job, while restoration had been made and blessing had been imparted, Job was still pretty much in the dark. He still had no idea of the cosmic game of tug-of-war that had been played with his life. More amazing than this is that Job seems content, not continuing to ask questions despite the lack of answers. Perhaps the key is, as Frederick Buechner put it in Wishful Thinking, “God doesn’t reveal his grand design. He reveals himself.”

- ♦ Eighteenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Traditionally Moses
- ♦ Literary form: Wisdom, Poetry

WHEN?

It’s very difficult to determine when the story of Job took place. Nothing in the story enables us to date its historic setting.



Job is from the land of Uz, but it’s difficult to pinpoint which Uz this is (there were several). Some believe that **22:16** means Job must have taken place after the flood, while others believe it may be the oldest story in the Bible.

It seems likely that at the very least Job is a contemporary of Abraham and the other patriarchs who lived before the time of Moses. There is no mention of the Levitical law or priesthood in Job and he offers sacrifices as the head of his house, much as the patriarchs did (Genesis 8:20).

More to the point, the story of Job remains a timeless classic that speaks to the universal questions of suffering.

Diagnosing Job

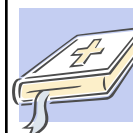
The details of Job’s illness are spelled out in **2:1-10**. The symptoms could point to several known illnesses.

Pemphigus is an autoimmune disease that affects the skin and mucus membranes causing large blisters.



Elephantiasis (also called black leprosy) is often marked by burning ulcers on the skin.

Ultimately, we can’t know for sure whether Job’s sickness was a known illness or a curse. The point is rather for us to know that this man suffered.



Job is only mentioned in one other book of the Bible. **Ezekiel 14:14 and 14:20** where God cites him as an example of righteousness alongside Noah and Daniel.

PSALMS

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord

- ♦ Nineteenth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Various
- ♦ Literary form: Poetry



Billy Graham was once quoted as saying he would read five Psalms and 1 chapter of Proverbs every day. The five Psalms taught him how to get along with God and the Proverbs taught him how to get along with other people.

Psalms is not a book of laws to obey or warning to heed. It is a collection of songs sung to God. It is the Bible's hymnbook. It is a very personal look into the worship of both the individual authors and the people of Israel as a whole.



Why Don't They Rhyme?

The question is often asked, *"If the psalms are songs, why don't they read like songs with verses and choruses? Did they rhyme in the original Hebrew?"* These are good questions but they reflect our views of what songs and poems are supposed to be. Even in English we realize that not all poems rhyme.

Hebrew poetry employed a variety of literary devices and styles to express itself. Some include:

Acrostic—each line/verse would start with a different letter of the alphabet.

Psalm 25; **119**

Progressive Parallelism—each line continues the thought of the previous line and moves forward to complete it.

Psalm 1; Psalm 29:1-2

Chiastic—or "Cross-shaped" where themes and ideas are repeated in reverse order (ABBA or ABCBA).

Psalm 110; **147**

Some have referred to the Hebrew styles as "thought rhymes."

Imprecatory Psalms

One of the most controversial types of psalms in the book are those called the **"Imprecatory Psalms."** These are songs that contain curses and call for punishment for the wicked and death for the enemy of the author. Their language is harsh and not what we would normally associate with a book of worship songs:

♦ **Psalm 6:8-10**

♦ **Psalm 137:8-9**

It's important that we think of the Psalms not just as songs for worship but as the authors' own spiritual journals. They may not always be godly, but they are always honest and deal with the authors' feelings and emotions in honest ways.

The imprecatory psalms are a reminder to us that God wants us to come to him without any false humility or pretend piety. More than anything God simply wants us.

?#@*&%!

Who Are The Authors?

We usually think of King David in association with the Psalms. While David wrote 73 of them, there are other psalmists mentioned in the book as well:

"The Director of Music" - this notation appears in 55 of the psalms (4-6; 8-9; 80-81 for example). This probably indicates that these psalms came from an older collection.

Jeduthun—(Psalms 39; 62; 77) He was a Levite appointed by David to be the director of music at the Temple (2 Chronicles 5:12).

The Sons of Korah (Psalm 42) Twelve psalms are attributed to these descendants of Levi who served as temple musicians.

Asaph—One of David's choirmasters and author of 12 psalms (including Psalm 50).

Solomon—Psalms 72 and 127

Heman the Ezrahite—a wise man (1 Kings 4:31). He wrote Psalm 88.

Ethan the Ezrahite—a counselor of Solomon (1 Kings 4:31). He wrote Psalm 89.

Moses—Authored **Psalm 90**. Possibly the oldest psalm in the collection.

The inclusion of Psalm 90 means that the writing of Psalms spans the years 1500-500 BC

Selah . . . Say what?

Through the psalms the Hebrew word **"Selah"** appears in various places (for example, **Psalm 3**). The exact meaning of this word is unknown, but it is believed to be a musical notation. Perhaps it was used to indicate a change of tempo or other musical instruction. Some think it may have been an instruction to the reader/singer to stop and consider what was written. Some think it's the word David would say when he broke a string on his harp.



Proverbs

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

In ancient times wisdom literature served an important purpose. It not only told people about what pleased God but what was essential for both society and individual happiness and prosperity. Even within the last few hundred years we have examples like **Poor Richard's Almanac** that put short, easy to remember wisdom sayings into the hands (and mind) of the common man.

Proverbs are often defined as “short pithy sayings.” The Hebrew title for the book, “Mashal,” simply means “Sayings.” While the book contains some proverbial statements, it also contains its share of parables, warnings and comparative statements.

A Purpose-Driven Book

The purpose for the Book of Proverbs is clearly stated in the first few verses. Read **Proverbs 1:1-7** and determine the following:

- ♦ To whom is this book attributed?
- ♦ How are proverbs defined?
- ♦ What will proverbs do for you?
- ♦ What must you do for them to work?

The Personification of Wisdom

In **Proverbs 8:1** we are introduced to Wisdom in very personal terms. “She” is presented as feminine, which was common in Eastern cultures. Unlike other cultures, though, wisdom is not presented in terms of another deity but rather an attribute of God himself.

Many look at the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs and draw comparisons between her character and the character of Christ in the New Testament. This makes sense since Jesus reveals the nature of God in human form.

Read **Proverbs 8:1-36**

- ♦ What statements that present Wisdom in human terms catch your eye?

How do the following statements about Jesus compare to what you have read about Wisdom?

- ♦ **Matthew 11:19**
- ♦ **Colossians 1:15-20; 2:3**
- ♦ **1 Corinthians 1:24; 30**

TRUTH OR TRUISMS?

While we cannot deny the wisdom of Proverbs, there are times when we question the truth of them and wonder how to apply them.

Proverbs 22:6 is a prime example. While we know it is true, we also know there are many examples where it just didn't work. How do we handle problems like this without losing faith in God or his word?

In philosophy, a sentence which asserts incomplete truth conditions for a proposition may be regarded as a “truism.” Under the proper circumstances it will *usually* be true. The call of wisdom is not so much about what it will get for you, but about your commitment to God.

- ♦ Twentieth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Solomon, Agur and King Lemuel
- ♦ Literary form: Wisdom

The Wise Guys

Proverbs 1:1 attributes the book to Solomon, but other authors are mentioned through the book as well.

Chapter 30 is presented as “*The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh*.” Some ancient scholars believed Agur was actually Solomon presenting these very different proverbs under a pen name.

Chapter 31 is titled, “*The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him*,” a man who only appears here. Jewish legend says that Lemuel is again actually Solomon presenting the advice of his mother Bathsheba anonymously.

“...taught to fear Jesus in a small town.”

The term “**fear of the Lord**” can cause some confusion for the English reader. While the Hebrew word for “fear” can mean “terror” or “dread” (**Deuteronomy 1:9, Jonah 1:10**), it also carries the idea of “to stand in awe” (**1 Kings 3:28**) and simply “reverence” (**Leviticus 19:3**).

“The fear of the Lord” is an expression of reverential submission and true worship. It is where we must begin if we want wisdom.

What do the following passages say about “the fear of the Lord?”

- ♦ **1:7**
- ♦ **2:3-6**
- ♦ **9:10**
- ♦ **10:27**
- ♦ **14:27**
- ♦ **15:16, 33**
- ♦ **16:6**
- ♦ **19:23**
- ♦ **22:4**
- ♦ **23:17-18**

ECCLESIASTES

Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!

If someone was going to find out what was really important in life they would need two qualifications. First, they would have to be smart enough that they would try everything. Second, they would need to be rich enough that they could afford to try everything.

And so, Solomon sets himself up as “The Teacher,” with the task of examining every possibility that life has to offer. Through his searching and vanity, futility and frustration we gain a perspective on exactly what God offers us to find meaning under the sun.

The Key Word Is: Meaningless

This word appears 37 times in the book. In the Hebrew language it literally refers to steam rising from a hot bath, or breath coming from your mouth on a cold day. The steam and breath disappear quickly. **The Message** interprets it as “smoke.”

Look at a few of the examples of things Solomon considered “meaningless.” How are they like steam, vapor or smoke?

♦ 2:1-3

♦ 7:15

♦ 4:4

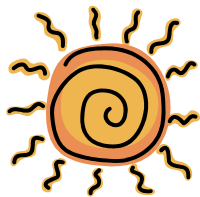
♦ 8:14

♦ 5:10

♦ 11:10



“Under the Sun”



While we cannot doubt Solomon’s wisdom, we can wonder about his perspective on the world around him. While his search for meaning covers every available possibility, he limits himself through much of the book to a very humanist perspective.

Solomon uses the phrase “*Under the sun*” twenty-nine times.

While this phrase is broad enough to take in all of humanity, it removes the influence of heaven from the search for meaning. This perspective simply leads to more futility in the search:

♦ 1:3

♦ 4:1

♦ 1:9

♦ 9:3-6

In addition to his worldly perspective, Solomon uses a very generic word for “god” all through the book—thirty-two times in all. There is no room for a relationship with a Heavenly Father in his world. His existence is limited to the forces of duty and frustration.

The Conclusion of the Matter

After examining every possibility of meaning that this world has to offer, The Teacher reaches his conclusion in **12:9-14**.

How does his conclusion compare with other “purpose statements” found in the Bible? How do you feel about his conclusion? Is it accurate? Is it lacking anything?

♦ Deuteronomy 6:4

♦ Micah 6:8

♦ Ephesians 2:10

♦ 1 Samuel 15:22

♦ Matthew 22:36-40

- ♦ Twenty-first book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: “The Teacher”
Traditionally Solomon
- ♦ Literary form: Wisdom

Solomon: The Weatherman

The Bible tells us that there was no one as wise as Solomon and Ecclesiastes proves that out.

Much of the ancient world believed that the earth was flat and that the rain would fall on the mountains and flow down to the rivers and then into the sea and then fall off the edge of the earth.



Solomon, however, does a fine job of describing the water cycle, as well as the wind cycle in, **Ecclesiastes 1:6-7**.

Solomon was not the only ancient wise man to make observations about the water cycle. **Job 36:27-29** also refers to this phenomena, as do some Chinese writings from the 4th century, B.C. However, the principles of the hydrological cycle were not fully understood and compiled until the work of **Bernard Palissy in the 16th century**.

TURN! TURN! TURN!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 has an enduring poetic beauty that most people immediately recognize. It’s a call to see God’s hand in all the moments of our lives. Read through the verses and consider the following questions:

- ♦ What dangers are there in not recognizing the changing seasons in our lives?
- ♦ This poem was written to a mostly agricultural community. Does that change any of the meaning for you?
- ♦ **3:9-14** form the conclusion to this section. How do you see the connection here between time and eternity?

Of all I have ever seen or learned, that book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man’s life upon this earth — and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound. - Thomas Wolfe

Solomon's Song of Songs

Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.

- ♦ Twenty-second book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Traditionally Solomon
- ♦ Literary form: Poetry

There are few books in the Bible that cause as much controversy as The Song. For ages people have been divided about how to read it. Should the book be taken as an allegory about the love of Jesus for his Church (The Bride)? Should the themes in it be seen as purely symbolic or should they be read as literally—as an epic erotic poem?

Ultimately it doesn't have to be an either/or question. God designed marriage and physical relationships for his purpose and our pleasure and they should be celebrated as such. If we remove that component from this book we run the danger of calling "impure" what God calls "holy" and missing out on a gift that he calls good and has created for us in his will.

Meet the Cast

Solomon's song is read/sung/performed in three separate voices or characters.



Beloved: The female lead. She is a young virgin and is called a "Shulammit" (6:13). This may actually be a derivative of "Shunemite" which would be a woman from the town of "Shunem" like David's wife Abishag (1 Kings 1:1-4).

Oddly enough, she speaks first (1:2-4). She is bold in her desires and sees herself as an equal to the man.

Check the following verses for other descriptions of her:

1:5-6

4:1-7

7:1-9



Lover: The male lead. He is a king (1:4) and from several references we can assume that Solomon is speaking about himself (3:7, 11).

He calls the Beloved "darling" nine times. It's a word that can simply mean "associate" or "companion" or "friend." But from his praise of her we see he is looking for more than just companionship.

How does the Beloved see him?

2:3-6

5:10-16

8:14



The Friends: All we know from the text is that they are "we." Scholars through the ages have called them "The Daughters of Jerusalem." What's clear from the text is that they are very encouraging of this relationship and are there to help the Beloved through her searching and questions.

1:4

5:1

5:9

6:1

8:5

You Can't Hurry Love

If there is a consistent message through The Song it is found in three nearly identical verses: 2:7; 3:5; 8:4

The accompanying imagery is of a wild animal that cannot be tamed or beaten into submission. What is the lesson here for the readers as they consider the power of an intimate connection between two people?

What About the Title?

Some Bibles refer to this book as "Song of Solomon" and others call it "Song of Songs." So what's the proper way to refer to this literary work?

Chapter 1 verse 1 calls it, "Solomon's Song of Songs." Read that phrase as you would the expressions "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords." It's the author's way of saying, "This is the greatest song ever written!"

Apparently Solomon was also wise in the way of marketing.

Historically this book has been seen as so sexually explicit that Jewish boys were not allowed to read it until they had reached the age of manhood—**thirteen years old**.

Personally, I think thirty might be too young.

What's He Talking About??

Solomon's Song contains a lot of poetic imagery that simply cannot be taken literally. Some of the symbols he uses were common in poetry of the time.

- **1:6**—Vineyard. A woman's body
- **1:12**—Table. In those days people reclined while eating rather than sitting in chairs. It's likely this passage refers to reclining rather than dining.
- **1:15**—Dove. A symbol of purity and virginity
- **2:9**—Gazelle or young stag. Symbols of male virility
- **4:3**—Temples. Not the temples at the sides of the head, but her cheek bones.
- **4:12**—A garden locked up. She is a virgin
- **5:3**—Feet. Often used as a euphemism for male genitals (remember the book of Ruth?).
- **7:13**—Mandrakes. A phallic-shaped root believed to be an aphrodisiac.

ISAIAH

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given

Isaiah is one of the most often quoted books in the New Testament. Jesus quoted from Isaiah more than any other prophet. So we should wonder if he had Isaiah in mind when he said, “I have come to fulfill the law and the prophets” (Matthew 5:17).

Isaiah’s message is one of hope. It is a message that calls us to trust in God and what he has done and what he will do. It points us to God’s hand working through history as well as in the lives of his people and our own hearts. It’s no wonder Jesus loved this book so much!

Immanuel: The Suffering Servant

One of Isaiah’s most notable contributions in Scripture is his Messianic prophecies—the statements he makes about Jesus.

From his birth to his death, Isaiah paints a picture of the suffering servant who is both God and man.

What images of Jesus do we get from the following passages?

- | | |
|----------|---------------|
| ♦ 7:1-17 | ♦ 52:13-53:12 |
| ♦ 9:1-7 | ♦ 61:1-3 |
| ♦ 11:1-3 | ♦ 63:1-6 |
| ♦ 42:17 | |

Salvation in Isaiah

The name “Isaiah” means, “Yahweh is Salvation.” Much of what Isaiah writes reflects his own name.

Here are some of the images of salvation used in the book. What do these represent to you?

- | | |
|---------|------------|
| ♦ 12:3 | ♦ 52:7-10 |
| ♦ 25:9 | ♦ 59:15-16 |
| ♦ 26:1 | ♦ 61:10 |
| ♦ 45:17 | ♦ 62:1 |
| ♦ 49:8 | |

Seven Things that are Everlasting

Tired of living in this throw-away world of ours? Isaiah puts an eternal perspective on the temporary things of life by listing seven things that are everlasting. Look at the following verses and list them for yourself.

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| • 26:4 | • 54:8 |
| • 33:14 | • 55:3 |
| • 35:10 | • 60:19 |
| • 45:1-7 | |

- ♦ Twenty-third book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Isaiah
- ♦ Genre: Major Prophets

The Timing of Isaiah

One of the great things about Isaiah is how it firmly sets itself in history. In **Isaiah 6:1** we have the story of Isaiah’s commission as a prophet and are told when it occurred. In addition we have stories of Isaiah from the lives of the Kings and the history of Israel (**2 Kings 19:1-7; 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:32**).

Why are the Major Prophets Major?



The Old Testament divides the prophets up as Major and Minor. What’s the difference?

The books of the Major Prophets are longer. Yes, it’s really that simple!

Isaiah’s Family Tree

It’s believed that Isaiah was part of the royal family and therefore a descendant of King David (and a relative of Jesus).

Isaiah 1:1 identifies him as the son of Amoz. This is believed to be the brother of King Amaziah and the cousin of King Uzziah.

The Consistency of the Book

It was long suspected by liberal scholars that Isaiah was not actually a single person. They point to different language use and different themes within the book and claim inconsistency. This led to the formation of the “Deutero-Isaiah Hypothesis” which states that at least 2 (possibly three) authors wrote the book.

However, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, we now have a copy of Isaiah that is over 1700 years older than any previously known manuscript. What was discovered was that the older copy was word-for-word identical to the later copies.

What an amazing testimony to the loving care of the scribes who copied the Bible and the hand of God that guided them!

JEREMIAH

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.

- ♦ Twenty-fourth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Jeremiah
- ♦ Genre: Major Prophets
- ♦ Style: Prophecy/Narrative

Have you ever known someone who “couldn’t win for losing?” The kind of person who, “if it weren’t for bad luck they’d have no luck at all?” Now, imagine giving that person an urgent message for their time and promising them that despite all their efforts no one is going to listen to them.

We call Jeremiah “the weeping prophet,” and rightly so. Like Jesus he is also a “man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.” Also like Jesus he comes with a message of hope and demonstrates that God is intimately aware of his people’s sufferings and needs. Reading Jeremiah is a challenge, but within the pages we find sightings of God’s wonder and power in creation and in the lives of his people.

A Prophet is Born

Jeremiah is far more autobiographical than the other Major Prophets. We don’t just have a record of what he wrote, but of how he lived and the experiences he had.

He begins at the very beginning—and even before that—with the story of how God called him to be a prophet. Read **1:4-19** and consider the following:

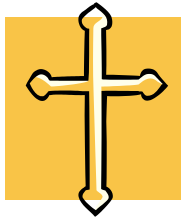
- ♦ When did God call Jeremiah? Where have we seen this before in Scripture?
- ♦ What is Jeremiah’s response to God’s call? What is his excuse for not wanting to serve?
- ♦ What does God say will be the central message of his ministry?
- ♦ What promises did God make to Jeremiah?

Jeremiah and Jesus

Jeremiah has been called “*the most Christlike of the prophets.*” As you look closely at his life and message you see many parallels with Jesus.

1. In Jeremiah’s day, Jerusalem was about to fall and the temple would soon be destroyed (**52:12-14**). Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in his day too—**Matthew 24:1-2**.
2. Both condemned the misuse of the Temple for financial gain. **Jeremiah 7:11/ Matthew 21:13**.
3. Both wept over Jerusalem. **Jeremiah 9:1/Luke 19:41**.
4. Both were rejected by their own families. **Jeremiah 12:6/John 1:11**.

Jeremiah is so identified with Christ that many rabbis identify him as the person Isaiah writes of in **Isaiah 53**.



A Promise of Hope

One of the beautiful things about Jeremiah is that we can see the impact his message had in other passages of Scripture. In **Daniel 9:1-4**, Daniel is reading **Jeremiah 29:10** and realizes that now, nearly 70 years later, the exile he is experiencing is about to end. This realization drove Daniel to prayer and inspired his message of hope for his generation.

The Family Business

Jeremiah 1:1 identifies him as “the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests.” We read about Hilkiah in **2 Kings 22:1** and following (specifically **8-10**).

Jeremiah was a prophet by God’s calling but a priest by birth. Verse 2 places his calling during the reign of Josiah but prior to the reforms of 2 Kings 22.

In **Jeremiah 1:6**, he refers to himself as “*only a child.*” While we cannot determine Jeremiah’s age from his language, the total context of the book seems to indicate that he would have been about twenty years old when he said this.

Do you think he sees his youth as an excuse or a hindrance to the message?

The Prophet’s Prayer Life

One of the blessings Jeremiah passes on to us is a very open and honest prayer life. His communication with God helps us to see the place of emotion in prayer. During the course of his book we see Jeremiah:

- ♦ Cursing: **11:18-23**
- ♦ Complaining: **12:1-6**
- ♦ Crying out: **15:10-21**
- ♦ Angry: **18:18-23**
- ♦ REALLY angry: **20:7-18**

What does all this tell you about the way God accepts our prayers?

In what ways would you say your prayer life is like Jeremiah’s?

Jeremiah’s Persecution

He’s called “the weeping prophet” for good reason. Jeremiah suffered many persecutions in his life.

- He was put in stocks: **20:1-6**
- Dropped in a muddy cistern: **38:1-13**
- Carried off to Egypt: **43:1-7**

And again, all of this was promised by God in **1:19**!

LAMENTATIONS

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end

- ♦ Twenty-fifth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Traditionally Jeremiah
- ♦ Genre: Lament/Funeral Song

The Hebrew title for this book is simply, “**How?**” It is the first word of book and the first word of the first, second and fourth laments. It expresses the frustration and sadness for the loss of Jerusalem. “How could this have happened?” “How could we have failed so miserably?”

The title “Lamentations” is plural and the book itself contains five distinct songs or laments. It could be that the author chose this number to reflect the five books of the Law. While tradition states that Jeremiah was the author, that has been debated. From the graphic nature of the poems, though, it seems apparent that the author was an eye witness to the destruction of Jerusalem. His emotion and pain is clearly felt through the writing.

Lament #1

The first chapter or song of Lamentations pictures Jerusalem as a widow and a queen (1:1) and a harlot (1:2, 8-9). In the first half of the song Jeremiah speaks as he views the city (1:1-11a), in the second half Jerusalem speaks for herself, crying out in distress (1:11b-22).

Verse 12 is considered by some to be the key verse of Lamentations. Read it and consider how you might connect this verse (especially the first half) with the passion of Jesus and his sacrifice for us.

Lament #2

From the very beginning God has promised to protect his people. He chose them out of the nations to be a people just for him. But when they rejected him, how should he react?

Read through this lament and note the number of expressions about how God is against his people. *What images are used to express his anger?*

It seems likely that this song was composed around the time of the events of **2 Kings 25:3-4**.

Lament #3

This lament is longer and more personal. Jeremiah expresses how the destruction has impacted him personally (see **3:1-18**).

And yet, even in this suffering there is still hope and grace. **Verses 19– 39** call us to look to God still despite our sufferings and promise his continued presence.

How do 55-66 demonstrate Jeremiah’s personal faith and relationship with God?

Lament #4

This lament expresses the contrast between Jerusalem as it once was and how Jeremiah now sees it. **Read 1-5**. What contrasts are shown in these verses?

According to verses **12-16**, where does the blame lie?

What is the promise of verses 21-22?

Lament #5

This is Jeremiah’s final appeal to God. It is a call for him to remember the orphans and the fatherless of Jerusalem.

Every verse of this chapter ends with a word ending in “u.” Every verse, except **21**, which is a verse of praise. *Why do you think Jeremiah did this?* Speculate on the sound this song would have emphasized.

Where and When?

The Septuagint (The Greek version of the Old Testament translated around 132 B.C.) offers the following introduction before the main text of Lamentations:

“And it came to pass after Israel was lead into captivity that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamenting and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem.”

This places the date of the book somewhere around 586-538 B.C. The lack of any kind of hope for the nation in the laments places it before the events of **2 Kings 25:27-30** (562 B.C.).

The very personal language and imagery used in the laments makes it easy to imagine that Jeremiah wrote them while walking through and looking at the ruins of Jerusalem.

It seems likely that the first lament was written last, but is placed at the beginning due to its overwhelming impact.



Structure and Style

As with **Psalms**, the songs of Lamentations makes use of the structure and style of Hebrew poetry. Chapter 5 contains 22 verses as most Hebrew poems did. Chapters 1-4 are acrostic poems, where the first line of each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The acrostic structure made the poems easier to memorize, an important quality for transmission in times of illiteracy and lack of resources. The structure also would have provided Jeremiah with a framework to express his grief—a means of controlling his emotion while still expressing it.

And yet another reason for this form might be that the A-Z structure expressed a completeness to the grief and loss of Jerusalem.

EZEKIEL

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel

If modern psychiatry would consider Jeremiah to be clinically depressed then they would likely consider Ezekiel to be suffering from hallucinations. Ezekiel saw things that no one else could see. And even the ordinary things he saw became extraordinary through the touch and guidance of God.

Whether it's a wheel in the sky or a valley of dry bones, Ezekiel's visions continue to inspire faith and debate and even music among believers and non-believers today. While people will continue to debate the meaning of his visions, you cannot miss the central message that God is sovereign and in control.

EZEKIEL SAW THE WHEEL

Everyone knows that Ezekiel saw a UFO, right? Or did he?

Ezekiel opens his book with a fantastic vision that has left many people scratching their heads. You can read all about it in **Ezekiel 1:1-28**.



What was the purpose of this vision? **Ezekiel 2:1-8**

What are the creatures Ezekiel sees? **Ezekiel 10:15, 20**

What might be the significance to the use of the number 4 in this vision? Consider especially **1:15, 17**.

What do you think the presence of all the eyes in this vision means?

So if you're God and your people have been held captive for nearly 70 years in a city where the walls sparkle with golden images of foreign gods, how are you going to make your message known through your prophet? Still, small voice or big showy visions?

Them Bones, Them Bones, Them Dry Bones



One of the most memorable visions from Ezekiel is chapter 37's valley of dry bones. The vision actually begins back in 36:16 with a message about God's disgust over Israel's sin.



How would you describe God's feelings in **36:16-21**?

Levitical law demanded that dead bodies be buried (**Leviticus 21:11**). This valley of bones is not only unclean it would make anyone who walked there unclean as well. The vision that Ezekiel sees is not only one of death and restoration but of holiness. It's a promise of hope for even the most vile and lawless of God's people.

Who Is the King of Tyre?

In **Ezekiel 26**, he begins a prophecy against Tyre. In **chapter 28** the prophecy becomes personal, against the King of Tyre himself.

But something happens in **28:11-19**. the prophecy switches to the past tense—the distant past. Does this passage seem to be speaking of a person or of someone else?

THE WATCHMAN ON THE WALL

Read **Ezekiel 33:1-20**

- ♦ What is the responsibility of the watchman?
- ♦ What if he fails to do his duty?
- ♦ What if the people fail to heed his warning?
- ♦ How would you characterize Israel's response in verses 17-20?

- ♦ Twenty-sixth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Ezekiel
- ♦ Genre: Major Prophets

SON OF MAN

Ezekiel's name means "**God strengthens.**" While the name is significant to his ministry and message, even more significant is the title that God gives Ezekiel—**Son of Man**.

This title occurs 93 times in the book. While on the surface it sounds like a humble title, the Babylonians used this title to refer the heir of the kingdom (the prince).

In the John's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man twelve times. It's likely that he's calling his hearers to remember the words and visions of both Ezekiel and Daniel with this title.

The Man IS the Message

Ezekiel's prophecy wasn't just about what he saw or said, but how he lived. His very life became an illustration of God's messages to his people—sometimes in some painful ways.

- The Lying Prophet—**4:1-8**
- Baking Bread—**4:9-15**
- Hair Today Gone Tomorrow—**5:1-6**
- A Message of Hole-iness—**12:1-12**
- Big Boys Don't Cry—**24:15-27**

Perhaps more than any other Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel knew the personal expense of carrying the message of God.

Considering God's words in **2:4-8**, Ezekiel stands as an incredible example of faith in and devotion to God.

A River Runs Through It

Read **Ezekiel 47:1-12**

- ♦ How does this compare to **Revelation 22:1-5**?
- ♦ What impact does this river have on the life around it?
- ♦ What is the source of this river?
- ♦ How would you compare this passage to **John 7:37-39**?

DANIEL

- ♦ Twenty-seventh book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Daniel
- ♦ Genre: Major Prophets

“Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.”

Reading through Daniel you find a unique blend of history and prophecy that doesn't occur anyplace else in Scripture. In one chapter, Daniel is in exile in Babylon, serving the king and in the next he is disclosing a vision of the future centuries away. While the visions are both glorious and ominous, they never lose sight of God's sovereignty over history and his ability to step into our own future and call us back to him.

The Daniel we meet in this book is a young man (just a teenager when taken captive), full of the fire of faith and commitment to God. His life and the way he practiced his faith have served as an example to both Jews and Christians alike for centuries as they **“dare to be a Daniel”** in their own worlds.



Welcome to Babylon

We're familiar with the history of Israel's sin and failure and subsequent exile to Babylon, but we're not all that well versed in the nation of Babylon itself.

Babylon was a wealthy and powerful empire that valued knowledge, diversity and beauty.

Daniel's story is set in the 6th century B.C. during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius—until the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.

Daniel 1:1-21

- What qualities was Daniel born with that made him desirable to service to the king?
- What did Daniel have to learn in order to serve?
- What God-given qualities helped Daniel in his service?

The Ram and the Goat



While some stories in Daniel get a lot of attention (like the lion's den and the fiery furnace) one story that is often overlooked but equally as amazing is Daniel's vision of the Ram and the Goat.



Daniel 8:1-27

This vision accurately predicts the future of the Median and Persian empires and how they will be conquered. Verse 5 is a vision of Alexander the Great and predicts the direction, spread and growth of his empire—an event that wouldn't happen for another two hundred years after Daniel's time.

The vision continues with the expansion of the Greek empire under Alexander until his sudden death (**verse 8**, Alexander was poisoned at age 33) and the splitting of his empire into four new kingdoms: the Seleucids, the Antigonids, the Attalids and the Ptolemys.

Reading this passage (and using a little knowledge of history) consider the following:

- ♦ How does this vision affect Daniel physically? Spiritually?
- ♦ **Daniel 8:13-14** is referenced by Jesus in **Matthew 24:15** as both a prediction of the desecration of the Temple in 168 B.C. and a vision of future events. Since the word of God had proven true concerning Daniel's prophecy, what can we know about Jesus' prophecy as well?
- ♦ How does this vision relate to Paul's words in **Galatians 4:4**?

Daniel's Angel

Daniel 10 contains the most detailed vision of an angel in all of the Bible. Read **Daniel 10:4-6**.

How would you compare this vision to:

- ♦ **Luke 24:4**
- ♦ **Revelation 10:3**

DANIEL AND JOSEPH?

What comparisons can you draw between Daniel and Joseph (skim **Genesis 41:14-16** and **Daniel 2:24-28** for some answers)?

If you were a living in Babylonian captivity (or immediately after, rebuilding your home in Jerusalem) what hope would you take from Daniel's story?

Praying Like Daniel

In **Daniel 6** we have the story of the den of lions. In **6:10** we're told that Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem three times a day. We're simply told that this was Daniel's own practice of devotion.

However, by 70 B.C. this became the standard Jewish practice of prayer. One man's devotion became an entire nation's tradition.

How do you feel about that? Do we see the same kind of traditions today? How? Where?

HOSEA

- ♦ Twenty-eighth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Hosea
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us.

Imagine you're a prophet, but it's not enough that you preach the message God has for his people, you have to live it out. Now imagine that you have to live it out at great personal cost—your future, your wealth and your reputation. That barely begins to scratch the surface of what Hosea lived out as a prophet.

Hosea's writings take place during the last 60 years or so of the kingdom of Israel. As the nation sank further and further into sin, Hosea brought a message of their unfaithfulness to God and lived his message out in a scandalous way.

Meet the Family

As with some of the other prophets, the Book of Hosea is more than just his message, it is a biography of his life. We begin with an introduction to Hosea and his family.

Hosea 1:1-11

Hosea—His name means "*Salvation*." This is also the theme of the book

Beeri—Hosea's father. His name means "*Well*" and may signify that his family was healthy or that they were well-off financially.

Gomer—Hosea's wife. Her name means "*Complete*" but also may mean "*Vanishing*." She does seem to vanish from time-to-time.

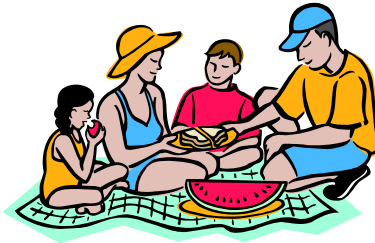
Jezreel—Hosea's oldest son. He is after the city where Jehu slaughtered the house of Ahab in **2 Kings 9:27-10:28**. His name stood as a reminder of God's anger over Jehu's sin and a prophecy of the destruction that would come.

Lo-Ruhamah—Hosea's daughter. Her name means "*Not Loved*."

Lo-Ammi—Hosea's youngest son. His name means "*Not My People*."

Discuss these thoughts:

- ♦ How would you feel about naming your children as Hosea did? Would the message be worth the shame the names would bring them?
- ♦ What does **verse 10** remind you of? What do you think the original audience was to take from this?
- ♦ **Hosea 2:1** begins Hosea's message to Israel. What is significant about the way he addresses the people?



Hosea's life message was that Israel had prostituted itself with false idols. He specifically mentions two idols that vied for the people's adoration:

Baal—This idol had been worshiped since before the Israelites came into the promised land. Baal was a generic name for false gods. Israel gave them their time and devotion and their wealth (2:8). They also suffered for their idolatry (13:1).

Calf-idol—When Israel and Judah divided, the Northern Kingdom lost access to the temple. In response they set up two calf-idols, conveniently located at both ends of the kingdom in Dan and Bethel (8:5-6; 10:5).



FUN FACT

Hosea 8:5

The phrase, "*Throw out your calf-idol*" literally says, "*Your calf stinks!*"

Hosea 11:1 saw its ultimate fulfillment in **Matthew 2:13-15**.



A Homer for Gomer

Read Chapter 3

We should not read **verse 2** as Hosea hiring his own wife for prostitution. Rather, this appears to be an act of redemption. Hosea is offering Gomer the "bride price" and committing himself to her in love.

- ♦ How do you interpret the phrase, "*Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites*?"
- ♦ How is this seen as an allegory of Christ's love for us?
- ♦ What is the future promise for Israel in **4-5**?

REPENT!

Chapter 14 concludes Hosea with a message of repentance. After all that Israel has done to reject God, what does he promise if they repent?

- What is Israel to promise God in **verses 2 and 3**?
- How does the conclusion in **verse 9** compare to other Scripture you have read?



Joel

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill.

The name “Joel” means “*Jehovah (Jo) is God (el).*” We don’t know much about the man, but his message is one that is seen consistently through scripture and continues to resound with us today.

“*Jehovah is God*” is a statement that reminds us of the sufficiency we have in our faith. We don’t need to go looking for other gods for help, our God is enough. And whether we receive blessings or trials, we can look to our God for help and direction.



The Locusts

As has been mentioned before, when Israel came into the promised land they had to become an agrarian society. The other nations around them worshipped fertility gods and the blessing of good crops was attributed to these gods (Baals).

So, when Joel foretold the coming invasion of locusts, it was not only a horrifying site for a nation of farmers, but seen to have spiritual implications as well.

- ♦ **Read Joel 1:1-4** How devastating is this plague of locusts?
- ♦ **1:5-12** Throughout this section, does Joel blame the locusts on the people’s sin or God’s judgment?
- ♦ **1:13-20** Joel calls the people to prayer concerning the plague. What is their prayer about?
- ♦ How do you think the people of Israel viewed this in comparison to **Exodus 10:1-20**?
- ♦ How does Joel call us to respond to natural disasters? How can this be a witness for us?

In **Joel 2:12-17**, Joel calls the people to commitment and repentance. He calls them to, “*Rend your heart and not your garment.*” In other words, this isn’t just a symbolic repentance for show, but a true change of heart for God. How would you describe this call? How could it be seen in our world and community today?

Joel on Pentecost

In **Acts 2**, we have the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Peter stood up among the Apostles and disciples and addressed the crowd to tell them what had happened. The very first Scripture he took them to was **Joel 2:28-32**.

- ♦ What were the signs of the outpouring of the Spirit on the people? How were they seen in **Acts 2**?
- ♦ Paul also quoted Joel in **Romans 10:13**. How is this passage a hallmark for the Church?

- ♦ Twenty-ninth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Joel
- ♦ Date: Unknown
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

WHEN?

Most of the prophets give us some information about when they lived and wrote. They will include names of kings or other nations or make reference to historic events like invasions. However, Joel does none of these things. Determining exactly when he lived and made these prophecies continues to be a major controversy for this minor prophet.

The closest scholars come to agreeing on the date of Joel is to harmonize the locust attack mentioned in this book with the one in Amos, who was known to have prophesied during the time of King Uzziah. From this connection, we can then see the similarities in the sin and idolatry of the time.

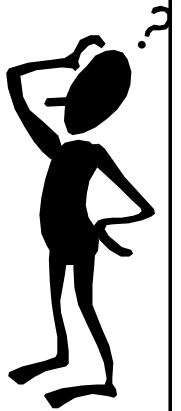
This dating places Joel around **792-740 B.C.** and makes him a contemporary of Isaiah and many other prophets.



Hmmmmmm....

Isaiah (a likely contemporary of Joel) wrote in **2:4**, “*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*” It was a symbol of peace in the last days.

How does this compare/contrast with **Joel 3:9-10**? How would you explain the differences in this apparent contradiction of Scripture?



The Final Blessing

Read Joel 3:17-21.

- ♦ What is the promise for the people who seek God for blessing?
- ♦ How would this be a comfort for a people who were expecting a horrible invasion of locusts?
- ♦ How does this passage compare to **Revelation 21:2-3**?

Amos

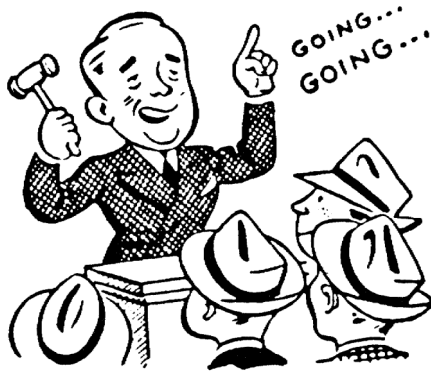
*The LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me,
"Go, prophesy to my people Israel."*



- ◆ Thirtieth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Amos
- ◆ Contemporaries: Isaiah, Jeroboam
- ◆ Genre: Minor Prophets

The prophetic pedigree of the Old Testament tended towards wealth and power. Isaiah was the cousin of the king, Daniel was a royal official, even poor Jeremiah was the son of a priest. God often used people in places of power to convey his message.

Then there's Amos—a poor shepherd/farmer and the son of the same. His name means "burden" and that's what his message is—a burden he must carry to Israel. His message is long and difficult but it is a reminder that even in their sin, Israel is still chosen and God is still sovereign.



I Have Three...Do I Hear Four?

Amos begins with eight prophecies against Israel, Judah and their neighbors. Each oracle follows a numeric poetry device that we've seen in other scriptures as well (**Job 5:19; Proverbs 6:16; Ecclesiastes 11:2**).

Read through the oracles of **Amos 1:3-2:5**.

- ◆ What are some of the sins Amos speaks against?
- ◆ What are some of the common elements of their punishments?
- ◆ How does his oracle against Israel in **2:6-16** compare with the others?

Amos n' Jesus

While we can find comparisons with Jesus among many other personalities of the Old Testament, the comparisons with Amos stand out in some unique ways.

- ◆ Both were identified as shepherds: **1:1 & John 10:11**
- ◆ Both were known for their humility: **7:14-15 & Matthew 11:29**
- ◆ Both used parables in teaching: **7:1-9 & Matthew 13:10-13**
- ◆ Both were charged with treason: **7:10 & John 18:28-32**
- ◆ Both spoke against the worldly rich: **6:4-7 & Luke 12:14-21**

Amos n' Opposition

In chapter 7 there is a break in the prophecy and we're witness to the intimidation that came against Amos and his message.

Read **Amos 7:10-17**

- ◆ Amaziah was the priest of Bethel. This was one of the two locations of the golden calves that were worshipped in the Northern Kingdom.
- ◆ Amos' opposition came as a result of his prophecy in 7:9
- ◆ What is Amos' defense for his message?
- ◆ Amaziah insisted that Amos stop prophesying against the nation. How would you characterize Amos' response in **15-17**?



EARTHQUAKE

Amos dates his writing for us in **1:1** as, "two years before the earthquake." This was a major event in his time and its reverberations are felt through history and prophecy.

Zechariah 14:5 also mentions the same earthquake and the imagery of the disaster is used many times in scripture. From **Isaiah 6:4** likely all the way down to **Hebrews 12:28**. The destructive force of the earthquake truly shook the Jewish people...in more ways than one.

Archaeology confirms the timing and destructiveness of the quake. Masonry and rock walls in several cities have been found with cracks and bows in them. The destruction has been mapped and the epicenter found north of present-day Israel.

Based on the extent of the destruction it's estimated that this was a magnitude 8 earthquake—which would have been more intense than the quake of 1812 that caused the Mississippi river to flow backwards.

The Day of the Lord

In Amos' day, people believed that a day was coming when God would return in judgment and conquer all the evil nations around Israel. People placed their hope in this day...but didn't necessarily live up to their own desires.

Read **Amos 5:18-27**

What is God's word concerning their expectation in verses **18-20**?

What is his judgment against their own sin in verses **21-27**?

How would you compare their expectation of "The Day of the Lord" with modern Christians and their view of the second coming? Are there any similarities in our attitudes with those of Amos' audience?

Obadiah

*The day of the LORD is near for all nations.
As you have done, it will be done to you.*

- ♦ Thirty-first book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Obadiah
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

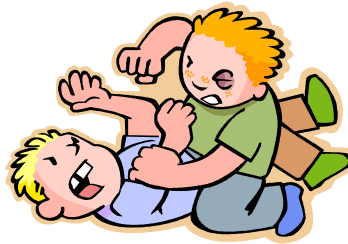
At 21 verses in length, Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament. However, to truly appreciate this little book you must understand details of history as old as the Jewish people themselves.

Obadiah's message is against the nation of Edom—a people with whom Israel had a long history. To fully appreciate his message you have to begin with the story of two fighting brothers and end with a nation fleeing for its life.

A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS

The people of Edom traced their lineage back to Esau, the brother of Jacob (Israel). It's a story that begins back in **Genesis 25:21-34** and **27:1-40**. From the very beginning their history with Israel was one of vicious sibling rivalry.

The Edomites lived in a rocky and mountainous area. They were known as nomadic raiders, often taking advantage of the weak. Due to their rocky surroundings—and propensity for moving around a lot—it was difficult for others to retaliate.



From God's perspective, there was a connection between Edom and Israel. They shared a common history, and yet Edom refused to live in harmony with Israel.

When the Persians attacked Israel, many Jews fled to the mountains. The Edomites stood back on the hills and watched. When they saw their brothers fleeing, they attacked them, stripped them of their possessions and handed them over to the Persians. Later they came down to scavenge what was left.

This is why Obadiah writes: **10-14**

Question: *Edom was not a "godly nation," nor were they God's chosen people (Malachi makes that clear). Why would God have expected good from them? Why would he judge them for this?*

What does this say about issues of morals and "ethical relativism" today?

Can I Borrow a Cup of Prophecy?

As we saw with Isaiah 2:4 and Joel 3:9-10, sometimes the prophets seem to borrow off each other or play off of other prophecies. Obadiah does this in a few instances too.

Obadiah 1-5 - Jeremiah 49:4, 14-16

Obadiah 17 - Joel 2:32

Obadiah 10-14 - Ezekiel 35

It's difficult to tell whether one prophet is borrowing from another, or if they're both borrowing from a separate common source, or if it's simply a matter of all being inspired by the same God.

Oba-who?

Obadiah means "**Worshiper of Yahweh.**" The name appears several times in the Old Testament and it's difficult to determine if any of the other Obadiah's mentioned are the author of this book.

Some believe that this Obadiah was also the one mentioned in **1 Kings 18:1-15**. The Jewish Talmud states that he was extremely wealthy (which he would have to be to feed all those prophets). However, he would have to be a few hundred years old for the timeline to fit!

Poetry: For Fun and Prophet

The text of Obadiah is laid out like a Hebrew Poem, carefully crafted with repeating words and ideas. Note specifically the repetition of the phrase "you should not" in **12-14** which repeats and amplifies the charges against Edom.

Fact:

Obadiah is one of 8 Old Testament books that are not quoted in the New Testament (the others are Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Nahum and Zephaniah).



Does this make Obadiah any less inspired? No. As someone has said, "*Just because you do not have a quote from Henry Ford in your 2012 Ford F-150 owner's manual, does not mean your F-150 is not a Ford.*"

The Day of the Lord

God's final judgment on Edom came in the latter half of the sixth century before Christ.

Obadiah prophesied it in **15-21**. Malachi wrote of it in **Malachi 1:2-5** and Ezekiel wrote of it in **32:29**

Jonah

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

Chances are you learned about Jonah when you were very young. You colored pictures of a man inside a fish and talked about how it's important that we obey God (and our parents). At some point you stopped coloring pictures and put Jonah away. You probably haven't given him much thought since then.

It's a shame that we relegate some Bible stories to the children's church when they have much to say about how we live our lives in faithfulness. There's more to Jonah than a big fish and this "children's story" has a message for your life today.

You're Going the Wrong Way!

Read **Jonah 1:1-17**

We know from **2 Kings 14:25** that Jonah was from Gath Hepher, which was just four miles from Nazareth, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God called him to go to Nineveh, an ancient and powerful city in Babylon (**Genesis 10:11**). A trip to Nineveh would have taken close to a month. Instead Jonah went in the opposite direction to Joppa (a three day journey) and boarded a ship headed for Tarshish, which was on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea in modern day Spain.

When you're running from God, how far is far enough?

What is the significance of the way Jonah identifies God in **verse 9**?

Read **verses 6** and **14-16**. How did God use Jonah even in his disobedience?

The people of Nineveh worshipped the Babylonian god Dagon (**1 Samuel 5**). Dagon was seen as a combination of both man and fish (kind of like a merman). People worshipped him as a god of power and fertility.

This makes Jonah's arrival in Nineveh all the more significant. If you worshipped a fish and were standing by the shore one day when a giant fish vomited up a preacher, you would be inclined to listen to what he had to say.



JONAH AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

No discussion of Jonah would be complete without getting Jesus' word on the meaning of the great fish.

♦ **Matthew 12:38-40**

♦ **Luke 11:29-32**

In years past, God used miraculous signs to strengthen the faith of the timid and fearful (Abraham's stars and sand, and Gideon's fleece for example). What is the difference between them and *this* generation?

What are the connections between Jonah's message and the message Jesus brought? How are they similar?

What does Jesus mean by "*the sign of Jonah*?"

Is the sign of Jonah still sufficient for this generation? What does **1 Corinthians 1:21-25** say about this subject?

- ♦ Thirty-second book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Unknown. Traditionally Jonah
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets/Narrative

A Whale of a Tale?

The Bible never refers to the animal that swallowed Jonah as a whale. Rather it is simply called, "*a great fish*." (**1:17**)

Some scholars link this beast to Leviathan found in **Job 41** and **Psalms 74:13-14; 104:26**.

Without specific information about the nature of the beast, speculation on how God used it is merely that—speculation. A more important question for us would be, "*Why did God choose to use the great fish?*"



FACTOID...

According to Jewish tradition, Jonah is the little boy that Elijah brought back to life in **1 Kings 17**.

Animals Fasting?

When Jonah preaches to Nineveh and they respond the king issues a very strange proclamation. Read **Jonah 3**.

This is the only instance in the Bible of animals being included in a fast. Even stranger, God indicates his mercy was extended towards those "beasts" in **Jonah 4:11**. This seems like an odd reference, but when understood with Genesis 1:26 and even the story of Noah, it's a reminder that in repentance we return to God's original plan for us as caretakers of his world.

So What About the Worm?

Most people want to conclude the story of Jonah at the end of chapter 3. They forget about the events in Jonah's life after Nineveh repented.

♦ Read **Jonah 3:10-4:11**

♦ Why was Jonah angry in verses 1-4? Why was he angry in 8-9?

♦ What is the connection between the vine and Nineveh from God's point of view?

♦ How might we be like Jonah in our judgment of others and the punishment that we feel they deserve?

Last Question: Did Jonah repent?

MICAH

What does the LORD require of you?

- ◆ Thirty-third book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Micah
- ◆ Genre: Minor Prophets

Micah Who?

Micah 1:1 introduces us to the author and gives us all the background information we have about him. The name Micah means, “Who is like Yahweh?” In a culture where pagan gods had taken the attention of the people it was a very provocative question.

Micah was from Moresheth, a poor farming community southwest of Bethlehem. It was close enough to Jerusalem to be of value on the trade routes and yet far enough away that the corruption of the big city didn’t reach them.

As you read through Micah consider how his home environment impacted the message he brought to Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah is also mentioned in **Jeremiah 26:18**. Check out the full context in **12-19**. What is the point of this reference? How were they treating Jeremiah differently?

What Does God Want?

Micah 6:8 is one of the simplest expression of faith and ethics in all the Bible.

- ◆ Micah begins with the statement, “He has showed you.” When did he show them? How does the Law of Moses relate to the simplicity of verse 8? How could they have missed it?
- ◆ Compare with **James 1:27**.
- ◆ Why do you think we miss the simplicity of our faith so often?



How does God promise to treat our sins in **Micah 7:18-19**? Compare this with **Exodus 34:6-7**. Compare it with the message of Micah’s contemporary in **Isaiah 53:4-6**. How would you answer the question, “Who is a God like you?”

Micah prophesied during the eighth century B.C., along with Isaiah and Amos. This was an age of prosperity and affluence for Israel and Judah. They enjoyed great wealth and many material goods. However, it was also a period of spiritual poverty and decadence. The wealthy were becoming rich at the expense of the poor and the whole nation was suffering due to the rejection of God’s blessings.

Sound familiar? Micah’s message was one that is just as relevant today as it was in his time. His solution wasn’t social reform, but spiritual renewal. How well would we take care of our fellow man if we saw compassion as our duty to our God?

Micah’s First Message: Things are About to Get Very Bad

Micah 1:2-2:13

Micah’s first oracle is a message of impending judgment against Israel and Samaria. From the very beginning of this message there is to be no doubt where this judgment comes from—it’s a terrible prophecy that serves to answer the question that Micah’s very name asks—who is like God?

- ◆ **Read 1:3-7**—How does Micah’s background as a hill-country farmer impact the imagery of his prophecy?
- ◆ **Read 2:1-5**—How would you describe those Micah is prophesying against here? What is their punishment to be?
- ◆ **Read 2:6-11**—How do these false prophets compare to **Amos 7:16** and Jesus’ words in **Matthew 24:10-14**?

Micah’s Second Message: Where Does the Buck Stop?

Micah 3:1-5:15

The next oracle is an indictment of the leaders of Israel and her prophets. It is within their sin, actions and inactions that the blame lies for the failure of the nation.

- ◆ **Read 3:1-7**—How does the warning about false prophets here compare to **2 Timothy 4:3**?
- ◆ **Read 4:1-5**—Many scholars see a relationship between 4:2 and **John 1:14**. How did Jesus’ life and very nature fulfill this prophecy?
- ◆ **Read 5:1-5**—We understand 5:2 to be a prophecy of the birthplace of Jesus, but look at it in the context of 1-5. How does Bethlehem stand in contrast to verse 1? How does 5:3-5 contrast with “Israel’s ruler” in verse 1?

Micah’s Third Message: God Serves You with Papers

Micah 6:1-7:20

Micah’s final oracle begins as a lawsuit from God against Israel. They have broken covenant with him and he is calling them to court over it.

Read 6:1-5—As we’ve seen many times before, this section begins with a retelling of God’s care for Israel through history. Why do you think we see this so often? What does the language of 6:3 tell you?

Read 7:8-13—What is Israel’s hope? **Verse 9** returns to the earlier legal language. What does God promise to do for Israel?

Read 7:14-20—What is the answer to the question in Micah’s name?

NAHUM

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.

- ♦ Thirty-fourth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Nahum
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

The name Nahum means “compassionate.” A quick glance at his oracle might leave you wondering if his name had anything to do with his message. It’s full of words of judgment and destruction and images that inspire the fear of the Lord. And yet a closer look does reveal that God is not only to be feared for his judgment, he is to be recognized for his faithfulness and—yes—even his compassion.

Nahum’s message is given to the people of Nineveh, the same city that Jonah preached against 100-150 years earlier. In Jonah’s day they repented (much to his surprise). In Nahum’s day they had returned to their wickedness and God’s compassion had reached its limit.

Chapter 1: I’ve Had All I Can Stand, I Can’t Stand No More!

It’s been at least a century since Jonah’s day, when Nineveh repented. Much like the period of the Judges in Jewish history, the people have returned to their wickedness and God once again sends warning. However, this time they will not repent.

Read **Nahum 1:2-6**. What are some of the images of destruction seen in these verses?

Read **Nahum 1:7-11**. How does this compare with **Psalms 46**? What phrases do they have in common? How would you describe the difference in the purposes of these two passages?

Read **Nahum 1:12-15**. Verses 12-14 are a “solemn decree” from God while verse 15 is the response called for from Nineveh. Judgment had already been spoken against Judah, but since their oppressor was now under judgment they are called to celebrate.

Chapter 2: Shock and Awe

While chapter 1 details the why of Nineveh’s destruction, Chapter 2 is all about the how. This isn’t just a vague prophecy to be interpreted as the reader sees fit. These are actual historic events that unfolded with divine accuracy.

Read **Nahum 2:1-7**. Again, what images are used to declare Nineveh’s destruction? Which of these images really stand out to you?

Read **Nahum 2:8-10**. According to the history books, Assyria had taken so much wealth from their victories over other nations that when the Babylonians invaded Nineveh they stopped pursuing the fleeing citizens and started gathering up plunder instead.

Read **Nahum 2:11-13**. The walls of Assyrian cities were decorated with images of ferocious and strong lions. How does that impact you as you read these verses?

Chapter 3: Nineveh’s Funeral Song

Your English translations have done a service to Nineveh in chapter 3. The “**Woe**” of verse one is more akin to a “**HA!**” of laughter at their destruction. The song ends in verse 19 with a round of applause at Nineveh’s expense. This oppressive city is gone and no one is sad to see them go.

Read **Nahum 3**. Again, what are the stark images that Nahum uses that show the intensity of his message?

Do you think his images are due to the impending nature of their destruction (within a few years)? Why or why not?

Where was Nahum From?

If you go to Iraq today, to the city of Alqosh you will find a synagogue said to house the tomb of Nahum. The residents will tell you that in ancient times Alqosh was “Elkosh.” **Nahum 1:1** identifies Nahum as an “Elkoshite.”

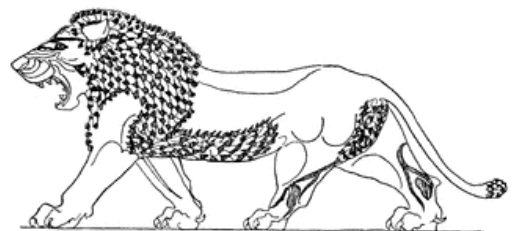
The Jews were forced to leave Alqosh in 1948 and the tomb was turned over to the care of a local man. Few Jews are able to visit the tomb, but it continues to be cared for though it is in poor condition. Money has been donated to have the tomb restored.

Digging Deeper

In 612 BC the Babylonians destroyed Nineveh. Their armies attacked for almost two years before overrunning them. During that time, the Tigris river flooded Nineveh and broke down the floodgates and parts of their walls (**Nahum 1:8; 2:6 and 3:13**).

In **Nahum 1:9** it’s predicted that the city will never be rebuilt again—and it never was. When Alexander the Great fought near there in 331 BC he stated that he had no idea there had ever been a city there.

The city wasn’t discovered in modern times until 1850 when archaeologists finally uncovered the remains.



HABAKKUK

The Sovereign LORD is my strength

- ♦ Thirty-fifth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Habakkuk
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

“Theodicy” is a theological term for the *“defense of God’s goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil.”* (Merriam-Webster)

Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is such a loving Father why are his children often treated so poorly? How do we reconcile the reality of pain with faith in an all-powerful God?

If you’ve asked these questions you’re not the first person to do so—and you won’t be the last. Six hundred years before Christ, Habakkuk was asking the same questions and receiving some very difficult answers. Much like the book of Job, God chooses to respond not by revealing his reasons but by revealing himself.

Habakkuk’s First Complaint: Why is there Evil in the World?

Habakkuk 1:2-4 introduces the first lament. Habakkuk complains that (verse 2) God doesn’t seem to listen, (verse 3) God doesn’t do anything about evil and (verse 4) there’s no justice in the world.

God’s response is a very intimidating, *“You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”* In **verses 5-11** he details his plan to use the Babylonians (an evil nation) to punish the wicked (Judah). Those events took place about 20 years after his writing.

How does Habakkuk’s view of justice differ from God’s view?

Compare God’s response with **Romans 2:4-11** and **1 Timothy 5:24**. How does God view the accountability of our sin?

Habakkuk’s Second Complaint: Is God Really Good?

Having been let in on God’s plan to use the Babylonians, Habakkuk moves on to question how a holy God could associate with an evil creation. He begins in **1:12** with praise of God’s holiness and then continues in **13-17** by questioning God’s methods. **Habakkuk 2:1** puts God on notice. *“I’m watching you!”*

God’s response is a revelation he wants shouted across the world and for all time (**2:2-3**). The message is a series of “woes” to those who trust in idols culminating in a call for them to examine the true worth of what they have created—**2:18-20**.

God says that his message speaks of the end and will not prove false (verse 3). The key to his message is found in **2:4**.

Read the following passages. What do they have in common? Why is Habakkuk’s message relevant to these passages?

- ♦ **Romans 1:16-17**
- ♦ **Galatians 3:10-14**
- ♦ **Hebrews 10:32-39 (and chapter 11)**

Habakkuk’s Prayer: I Stand in Awe

Having aired his complaints, Habakkuk now submits himself to God’s will and plan.

- **3:2-7** How is Habakkuk’s attitude toward God different here from 1:2-4? What made the difference?
- **3:8-15** What specific events is Habakkuk referencing in these verses?
- **3:17-19** This is Habakkuk’s resolution to his complaints. Rather than changing God’s mind, his attitude and worship has changed.

Have there been times in your life when you’ve had to live out verses 17-19? What did you learn in those times?

Habakkuk Who?

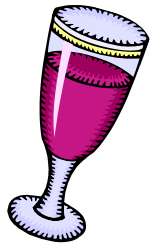
The name Habakkuk means *“to wrestle”* in Hebrew. The book that bears his name is definitely about a man who wrestled with God’s holiness and judgment.

The first verse of the book identifies Habakkuk as a prophet, but the last verse of the book sounds more like a psalm. Habakkuk may have served as a singer in the Temple.

Never Go To a Party with a Babylonian!

Habakkuk 2:15

Babylonians were known for getting their enemies drunk and then stripping them naked to humiliate them.



The Dirty Job of Translating

Part of the job of Bible translating is to paraphrase ideas and metaphors into ones that are more palatable and understandable to the modern reader. The term for that is “contextualization” and **Habakkuk 3:16** is a prime example of just that.

We see our hearts at the seat of our emotions, but in Habakkuk’s day it was the bowels. The phrase in the NIV, *“my heart pounded”* is literally, *“my bowels quaked.”* Habakkuk is relating a terrifying experience in this verse. If you read the literal translation of this verse you realize just how scared he truly was.

Zephaniah

Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near.

2 Chronicles 34 tells us about the boy King, Josiah and the reforms he made to Israel. How he tore down the places of pagan worship and restored the Temple. It was during Josiah's reign that the Book of the Law of Moses was found and the people recommitted themselves to the word.

Zephaniah prophesied during those days. His message is one of impending judgment coming on Israel and her neighbors due to their idolatry. The major question for scholars has been, "Was this written before or after Josiah's reforms?" Could it be that Zephaniah's message inspired Josiah to lead his people into national repentance? Or does Zephaniah's message speak to all generations in their idolatry? Maybe the answer is both.

The Day of the Lord

"*The Day of the Lord*" is a common theme in the prophets, but Zephaniah uses the phrase more than any other. The people of Israel saw it as a day when their enemies would be crushed and the people of God would be rewarded for their faithfulness. Zephaniah's picture is a bit different.

Look at the following references. What does he say about "*The Day of the Lord*" in each passage?

- ♦ **1:7-9**
- ♦ **1:14-18**
- ♦ **2:1-3**

Based on Zephaniah's comments alone, how would you define "The Day of the Lord?"

Prophet's Digest

Zephaniah almost seems like a compendium of the other prophets. Many of his themes and images are also seen in the writings of other prophets. Here are some examples.

- ♦ **1:7—Habakkuk 2:20 and Joel 1:15**
- ♦ **2:14—Isaiah 13:21 and 34:11**
- ♦ **2:15—Isaiah 47:8**

Given the brevity of his book (compared to Isaiah), Zephaniah's imagery is very intense. He graphically explains the reach of God's judgment and the trials those who are under his wrath will suffer.

Is There Any Hope?

With all of his prophecy of destruction and doom, remember that shortly after writing this book, Judah experienced the greatest revival since the days of King David. Josiah's reforms truly changed the people...for a while.

Zephaniah does end with a note of hope. Read **3:14-20**.

What images of Jesus do you see in this passage?

- ♦ Thirty-sixth book of the Bible
- ♦ Author: Zephaniah
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

The Prophet's Pedigree

We've seen prophets who were linked to kings and priests before but none were so exact in their pedigree as Zephaniah.

1:1 identifies him as the great, great, great grandson of King Hezekiah. This would have made him either a cousin or great nephew to Josiah. More to the point: it means he had a family relationship that would have given him access to the King's ear.

The name Zephaniah means, "*Hidden by God*," "*The Lord is My Secret*" or possibly, "*Treasured by God*." Israel was God's treasure, but her sin would soon cause her to be exposed.

WATCH YOUR STEP!

Read **1 Samuel 5:1-5**. Now check out **Zephaniah 1:9**. See the connection?

The practice of stepping over the threshold became common among pagan cultures (it continues as a superstition today). Zephaniah's reference may not tie directly to Samuel's but considering the reforms that Josiah would make, it shows how pervasive pagan practices were in Judah.

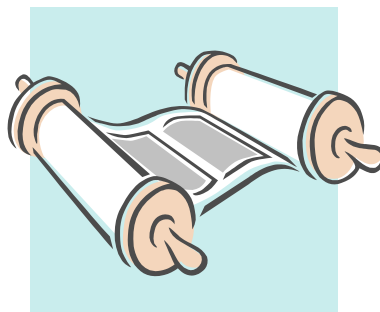
Bad News for the Neighbors Too

Zephaniah doesn't limit his prophecy to just Israel and Judah. In **2:4-15** he speaks out against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush and Assyria.

As bad as the words against Judah were, there is absolutely no hope given for these pagan nations. Whereas Judah is promised a remnant (**2:6-7**) the other nations are promised only destruction.

2:5-7—The Philistine cities that once flourished were wiped out. However, they were later used as grazing ground by Judean shepherds

2:9—Top this day Moab is filled with rock-strewn ancient villages. It continues to be a wasteland.



Haggai

*Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work.
For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty.*

- ◆ Thirty-seventh book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Haggai
- ◆ Genre: Minor Prophets

A time of rebuilding can be exciting, but fear, discouragement and a lack of clear priorities can paralyze us and keep us from doing what needs to be done.

These were the realities of Haggai's world. The people of Judah had been set free from their captivity and were back home in Jerusalem. But rather than rebuild the temple, they were busy with their own concerns and comfort. God's home wasn't a priority.

Haggai's message reminds us of the place that God belongs in our lives—**first!** He also reminds us that when we put God in that place we can expect blessings to follow.

A TIME TO BUILD

Haggai's first message was delivered on August 29, 520 BC, by modern reckoning. Prior to this, according to **Ezra 4:6-24**, the rebuilding effort had come under opposition due to a Samaritan petitioned to Darius' predecessor, Artaxerxes. For nearly two years, Judah ceased their national project to rebuild the Temple. Instead, they began working on their own houses.

Haggai 1:1-15

- ◆ In verse **4** how did the people's homes compare to God's Temple?
- ◆ In verses **5-11** God calls the people to "give careful thought to your ways." What were they doing wrong? What was the consequence?
- ◆ How is God's message different in verse **13**? What is the difference in the people?

Haggai 2:1-9

- ◆ Compare God's message to Joshua the High Priest here to God's message to Joshua son of Nun in **Joshua 1:1-9**. What comparisons can you make? Why would God give them such similar messages?

Attitudes are Contagious

God never wanted his people to be defined by a Temple, but by their holiness and relationship to him. Haggai's second message, addressed to the priests, is a test to see if they've moved beyond the letter of the law and into the Spirit.

Haggai 2:10-19

- ◆ How would you define the questions in verses **11-13**?
- ◆ How had the lax attitude of the people in rebuilding the Temple infected them? When their work was brought to a halt, what happened to their commitment?
- ◆ How would you compare this passage with Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:28-34**?

God's Seal of Approval

Haggai's first message was delivered to the people, the second to the priests and the third to the governor. Zerubbabel may have been a descendant of King David, but his title and position came from Persian appointment. He was simply a pawn.

Haggai 2:20-23

- ◆ What terms does God use to describe Zerubbabel? How does God confirm his leadership?

When?

Haggai is unique in that he fixes exact dates to his prophecies. His book details events that occurred over a four month period in **520 BC**.

His message coincides with **Ezra 5:1** and is presented 2 months before the message of Zechariah (**1:1**).



Who?

The cast of characters from Haggai should look familiar to you. They also appear in several other books of the Old Testament.

- ◆ Haggai: The prophet. His name means "Festival!" Rabbis believe his name points to the hope of celebration that rebuilding would bring.
- ◆ Darius the First (the Great): King of Persia.
- ◆ Zerubbabel: Governor of Judah, appointed by the Persians. He was a descendent of King David.
- ◆ Joshua: Also called Jeshua. The High Priest.

A Point to Ponder



The Temple that Haggai helped build was considered to be inferior to the Temple that Solomon built. It lacked the size and opulence of Solomon's.

However, Haggai's temple stood for around 500 years—almost 100 years longer than the lifespan of Solomon's temple.

Also, **Haggai 2:9** points ahead to something special God had in store for this temple (**Luke 2:21-40**, for starters).

It's a "great" reminder that our perspective is not God's perspective and we shouldn't limit ourselves to our own view of what's best when God might have something much better in store for us.

Zechariah

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,"
says the LORD Almighty.

- ◆ Thirty-eighth book of the Bible
- ◆ Author: Zechariah
- ◆ Genre: Minor Prophets

Zechariah began prophesying two months after Haggai. While Haggai concentrated his attention on the national project of rebuilding of the Temple and the leadership of Jerusalem, Zechariah looked ahead—far ahead. His prophecy concerns what God planned to do with his people and how they needed to get ready for Him.

The impact of Zechariah's prophecy is still felt today. While our interpretations can be confusing, the message of the nearness of God comes through crystal clear—**"Return to me," declares the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you."**

SECTION I: EIGHT VISIONS IN THE NIGHT

Zechariah accompanies Haggai's themes very well. They were both writing to the same people at the same time. However, Zechariah appeals to his listeners in a very different way. While Haggai is very straightforward in his pronouncements (**Haggai 1:2-4**), Zechariah uses visions to stretch their minds and their faith.

While we may not fully understand the scope of the visions, keep in mind that they were first written to a people who had just returned home and were given the task of building a new Temple and restoring the nation. Allow that context to color your interpretation before anything else.

Read through the following visions. What do you see as God's messages to his people in these visions?

- ◆ The Man Among the Myrtle Trees: **1:7-17 (14-17)**
- ◆ The Man with a Measuring Line: **2:1-12 (10-12)**
- ◆ Clean Garments for Joshua: **3:1-10**
- ◆ Four Chariots: **6:1-8 (8)**

SECTION II: HOW TO TRULY FAST

Chapters 7 and 8 are concerned with outward shows of faithfulness and true faithfulness. There are themes in these chapters that continue on through the New Testament.

- ◆ Read **7:1-7**. How would you put God's question in your own words?
- ◆ How does it compare with **Matthew 6:16-18**?
- ◆ How does Zechariah **7:8-14** compare with **Micah 6:6-8**? With **James 1:27**?
- ◆ What does **Zechariah 7:13-14** tell us happens when we miss this point?

Read **Zechariah 8:1-5**.

- ◆ How is God's jealousy different from ours? What is he jealous for?
- ◆ How does this vision differ from the reality of their times?

SECTION III: PREVIEWS OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

Zechariah 8:20-23 concludes with a vision of the future centrality of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. The remainder of this book is a vision of God's glorious plans for his chosen people.

Theologians have said that Zechariah is the most Messianic of all the writings of the Old Testament. What images of Jesus are in the following passages:

- ◆ **9:9-17**
- ◆ **12:10-14**
- ◆ **11:12-13**
- ◆ **13:7**

Zechariah Who?

Zechariah means *"God had remembered."* His name reflects the theme we see through the Old Testament of reminding the people of all God has done for them from the exodus on.

Zechariah is mentioned alongside Haggai in **Ezra 5:1**. He is identified as the son of Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo. Iddo was one of the priests who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zechariah was born during the captivity and was still a "young man" when he was prophesying (**2:4**).

Consider This...

How does **Zechariah 2:10-13** compare with **John 1:14**? How about **Revelation 21:1-4**?

Prophecy Begets Prophecy

Zechariah's visions and prophecies had a lot of influence and connection to other prophecies that followed—specifically Revelation.

- ◆ **1:8; 6:2—Revelation 6**
- ◆ **1:18—Revelation 17:12**
- ◆ **2:1-2—Revelation 11:1**
- ◆ **4:1-6—Revelation 1:20**
- ◆ **14:6-7—Revelation 6:12-14**
- ◆ **14:20-21—Revelation 11:15**

Archaeology and Prophecy

Zechariah 14:4-10 speaks of a massive earthquake on the Mount of Olives coinciding with the return of Christ. The result is a very specific leveling of ground and the creation of a new valley of escape for the people.

Interestingly enough, seismologists have found a fault line running right through the Mount of Olives. GPS analysis in 2001 showed that this "Rift Valley" is widening.



Malachi

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Malachi has the distinction of getting the last word in on the Old Testament. This little book of prophecy concludes God's word to His people until His Word becomes flesh **400 years later**.

The themes in this little book have extraordinary reach—extending back to the very beginning of God's chosen people and continuing to the beginning of the New Testament. Malachi writes as though God is having a dialogue with His people—one last conversation **before four centuries of silence**.

In the Beginning...

Malachi begins with words that take us all the way back to Genesis—to the beginning of Israel itself. He takes us back to God's love for Jacob.

Read Malachi 1:2-5.

This passage calls us back to **Genesis 25:21-34**. In his sovereignty, God chose to call his people through the line of Jacob rather than Esau. While it may be uncomfortable for us to think of God in terms of love and hate, it is precisely what Malachi's audience needed to hear.

These people had just returned from exile. God had used the nations around them (including the descendants of Esau) to punish them. Do you remember how Esau had treated Judah in **Obadiah 10-14**?

How does Paul use this passage in **Romans 9:10-18**? Remember that this passage belongs to the greater context beginning in **Romans 8:28**.

That's Robbery!

One of Malachi's most significant contributions to Scripture is his statements on tithing. The people of his day were very self-involved (**Haggai 1:2-3**). Tithing (giving), if it was done at all, was seen in terms of ritual and duty. Malachi counters that view with something much more personal.

Read Malachi 3:6-18

- What kind of personal language does God use in this passage?
- What promises does God make here? To whom does he make them?
- How does this passage fit with the following:
 - ♦ **Matthew 6:28-34**
 - ♦ **Acts 5:1-11**
 - ♦ **2 Corinthians 8:7**



Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord

As Malachi draws to a close, we are introduced to "*The Messenger*." For 400 years, Israel waited for the one who would come to prepare the way of the Lord. In fact, Jews still wait for him to this day.

Not only is this passage cited in the New Testament, but **it is also interpreted for us by Jesus himself**. There can be no doubt who this prophecy refers to.

Read through Malachi's words and compare them with the verses from the New Testament.

Malachi 3:1—Matthew 11:7-11, Luke 7:24-28

Malachi 4:5—Matthew 11:12-15; 17:11-12, Mark 9:11-13, Luke 1:17

- ♦ Thirty-ninth book of the Bible
- ♦ Last book of the Old Testament
- ♦ Author: Malachi
- ♦ Genre: Minor Prophets

Malachi Who?

The name "*Malachi*" means "*God's messenger*." Is it the author's name or the title by which he chose to be known? No one knows!

Malachi stands apart in the Bible, with no cited events or names to definitively date its writing. Yet, from the earliest times, the Jews have placed Malachi at the conclusion of the Bible. The Talmud underscores the importance of Malachi's role, linking him to Haggai and Zechariah as the three prophets who emerged after the exile.

A Wing and a Prayer

Malachi 4:1-3 speaks of the coming of "*The Day of the Lord*" and is a prophecy of the Messiah. Verse 2 speaks of him having healing in his wings for those who revere him.

The wings spoken of here are a term for the folds in a Jewish prayer shawl. This led to the belief that when the Messiah came, he would be so godly that healing would come through simply touching his garments.



Now, read **Mark 5:24-34**. This is no act of desperation by a sick woman. This is an act of faith and a recognition of who Jesus indeed was!

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son

For the average Christian, the division of the Old and New Testaments amounts to nothing more than the turn of a page. In reality though, 400 years of silence was anything but silent. God was preparing his people and history for his greatest revelation—his Son.

Getting From There to Here

A lot of things had to happen for the message of the Old Testament's one chosen people to become the message of the Messiah born to save all mankind. Walls had to be broken down and roads built for the Good News to be spread.

The Apostle Paul refers to this in Galatians 4:4 as the "fullness of time." Theologians refer to this by the Greek word "pleroma" or "fullness."

The changes that occurred during this time are huge, but we'll highlight just a few that show God's amazing will being worked out in human history.

The Greeks Are Coming! The Greeks Are Coming!

In **Daniel 8:5-8**, Daniel has a vision of a goat, running over the earth so quickly that its feet don't even touch the ground. Daniel's prophecy is an accurate depiction of the conquest of Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire, which occurred in 330 BC.

Alexander's conquest brought the Greek language to the Jewish people, unifying them with the rest of the people of the area.

This is why the New Testament was written in Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic and why the gospel was able to spread so quickly throughout the world.

A New Language Needs a New Bible

With the Greek world unified through the common tongue, the need became evident for a translation of the Scriptures. According to history (and legend), King Ptolemy II ordered the translation of the Hebrew Torah into Greek to be performed by 72 scholars. The name "Septuagint" means, "Of the Seventy" and is often abbreviated as LXX.

Translating was difficult work and took nearly 200 years to complete. Due to the sacred nature of the name of God, it was determined to be blasphemous to translate. Instead they chose to substitute the Greek word *κύριος* (Lord) for God's name. This is why many English Bibles display the word **LORD** in small caps.

This is the Bible that Paul and most of the early church would have known by heart and quoted from. Their understanding of Jesus as the Christ was colored by this translation.

How does this understanding change our interpretation of **John 20:28** and **Philippians 2:9-11**?

The Romans Are Coming! The Romans Are Coming!

In 63 BC the Romans conquered Palestine. They installed their own puppet king to rule the land for them (Herod the Great) and brought Judea under the Pax Romana (Roman Peace). Their vast empire and love of building roads brought about conditions that further allowed the gospel to spread unhindered.

This is why Paul was able to declare that in his day the gospel was being declared all over the world—**Colossians 1:6**

When: Generally agreed upon as the period of time from Malachi to the appearance of John the Baptist (circa 420 BC to 5 BC).

Stop! It's Hammer Time!

After the breakup of Alexander's kingdom, the rule of the Seleucid Empire became oppressive to the Jewish people. One family, led a revolt—essentially waging guerilla warfare—and over threw the Seleucids. They were known as **The Maccabees** (Greek for "Hammer").

One of the most well-known stories from this time is that of the cleansing of the Temple and the miracle of the one day supply of oil that lasted 8 days which is celebrated at Hanukkah.

This is also known as the Feast of Dedication and is the festival that Jesus attended in **John 10:22-42**.

Abomination!

One of the most dreadful stories from the Maccabean Era is that of Antiochus Epiphanes. He sought to destroy the Jews and end Temple worship. He went so far as to desecrate the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar in Jerusalem.

It is believed that **Daniel 8:9-12** prophecies his reign. Also, he is the precursor to the wicked one Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 24:15**.

There's One in Every Family

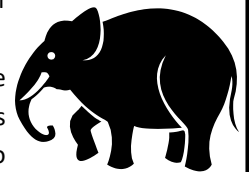
Within the heroic tale of the Maccabean Revolt, there's the extremely brief story of little brother, Eleazar (Avaran) Maccabeus.

During the battle of Beth-Zechariah,

Eleazar identified one of the war elephants as belonging to Antiochus V, the king.

These elephants were covered with armor to prevent them from being injured. Eleazar bravely ran to the elephant and stabbed it in its exposed belly with a spear. The elephant died and collapsed on Eleazar, killing him as well.

Turns out it was the wrong elephant.



MATTHEW

*From that time on Jesus began to preach,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

- ♦ First book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Matthew (Levi)
- ♦ Genre: Gospels (Synoptic)

The word “gospel” means “good news.” For a message to truly be good news it must address the needs and expectations of the hearers. Matthew’s Gospel does that—it is good news for the Jewish people. Time-after-time, Matthew turns to Old Testament passages to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to send the Messiah.

Key Word: Fulfill

Some of the Gospels were written to combat heresies or other problems in the early church, Matthew’s Gospel is pure good news about God’s promised Messiah, Jesus.

Look at the passages below. What prophecies do they specifically point to? How do you feel a Jew reading these in the first century would have reacted?

- 1:22-23
- 2:3-6
- 2:14-15
- 8:16-17
- 12:15-21
- 21:1-5

Beginning With the Begats

One of Matthew’s distinctive features is that he begins his Gospel with one of the two genealogies we have of Jesus. He takes us through history, following Jesus’ lineage back through King David to Abraham—the Father of the Jews.

Matthew’s genealogy (1:1-17) has some very important qualities we don’t get from Luke’s genealogy:

- ♦ It is arranged into three important periods of history: From Abraham to David, from David to the exile and from the exile to Christ.
- ♦ Each period contains 14 (or so) names, which is a symbolic number that points to the completion of God’s plan for his people.
- ♦ It includes the names of women, which were not normally included in such listings. On top of that, it includes the names of scandalous women!

Son of God

Matthew refers to Jesus as both “Son of God” and “Son of Man,” his use of “Son of God” is distinct to his writing and seems to be his favorite. He uses it eight times, beginning in 4:3 as a taunt from Satan and ending in 27:54 as a declaration from a gentile.

It’s a title that identifies Jesus’ deity and his reliance upon the Father. Look at the following passages. What does Matthew’s use of “Son of God” indicate to you?

- ♦ 3:17
- ♦ 8:28-29
- ♦ 14:32-33
- ♦ 16:13-16
- ♦ 26:63-64
- ♦ 27:38-44

In **Matthew 14:27**, as Jesus is walking on the water he says to his disciples, “**Take courage! It is I.**” “**It is I**” can be literally translated as “**I Am**,” which is the name God gives himself in **Exodus 3:14**.

THE TAX MAN WRITETH

Though nothing in the Gospel says it is by Matthew, his name has been attached to this book since the earliest copies.

We are first introduced to Matthew (also known as Levi) while he’s at work in **Matthew 9:9-13**. He is a tax collector, employed by the Roman government. He was paid for his services by taking a cut of the taxes—which the tax collectors would often raise based on their own greed and extort from the people.

Matthew is upfront about who he was, which points to God’s amazing grace and his desire for even the lowest sinners to come to him.

The Word of the Day: Synoptic



Matthew, Mark and Luke stand apart from the Gospel of John in that they follow a similar structure and tell the same stories—occasionally even using the exact same

language.

These three are called the “**Synoptic Gospels**” due to this relationship.

Only 20% of Matthew’s material is unique to him, the rest is shared with Mark and/or Luke.

A New Torah?

Some scholars have suggested that Matthew was attempting to write a new Torah—Jesus’ commentary on the teachings of the Jews. His writing structure is very similar to the Torah and Jewish readers would have noticed this.

The Sermon on the Mount specifically addresses the misguided nature of Rabbinical teaching and calls people to a deeper and more meaningful obedience to God.

Examples: Matthew 5:21-22; 27-30; 31-32; 33-36.

Mark

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

As the message of salvation spread throughout the Roman world it was encountered by people from a variety of backgrounds who were unfamiliar with the story of Jesus. It became necessary to preserve the stories with more than just oral tradition. And so, the writings of the Gospels began as an attempt to record those early events for whole new generations of believers.

Historically, it's been believed that Mark's Gospel was a record of stories that Peter recounted to him. It is believed to have been written to gentiles—Romans in particular. Mark takes the time to translate Jewish events and ideas into language that would be more understandable to a wider audience.

AN ACTION-PACKED GOSPEL!

Mark's key word is "**immediately**." He uses the word 41 times in 16 short chapters. This was a literary style used to draw the reader into the action. In addition to "immediately" he also uses the historical present tense over 150 times.

Read through a few of Mark's stories paying careful attention to the word "immediately." How does it color your view of the action?

♦ 1:40-42

♦ 6:45-56

♦ 2:6-12

♦ 9:17-27

♦ 5:24-29

♦ 14:66-72

Though it is the shortest Gospel, Mark records nineteen miracles in his book, indicating great emphasis on Jesus' divine power and nature. Eight miracles show his power over disease, five over nature, four authority over demons and two his power over death.

Mark's Controversy: Where Does it End?

The greatest debate about the Gospel of Mark is the question of the ending. Some manuscripts have it ending in **16:8**, while others have it continuing to **16:20**. Scholars have long debated whether or not the longer ending is a later addition to the text.

There are compelling evidences on both sides and it's a debate Christians should at least be aware of. There are a few points to consider in the discussion:

- ♦ Many of the early manuscripts that lack the longer ending include a blank space where the longer ending should be.
- ♦ The shorter ending concludes the Gospel with no resurrection and on a note of fear. Is this really consistent with "Good News?"
- ♦ One intriguing possibility is that the original longer ending was lost (resurrection passages would often be read in worship and the brittle papyrus would cause them to break off). Knowing there was more to the story, transcribers left room at the end and the longer ending we have today was passed down through oral tradition until it was added back into the manuscripts.

In your opinion, does the longer ending add anything more that you need to know to believe who Jesus is? Does the shorter ending take anything away from the power of the gospel?

- ♦ Second book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Mark (John Mark)
- ♦ Genre: Gospels (Synoptic)

Meet Mark

We actually know a lot about the author of this Gospel—mostly through our encounters with him in the book of Acts and Paul's writing.

- ♦ Mother's name was Mary—**Acts 12:12**
- ♦ He was a relative (cousin) of Barnabas—**Colossians 4:10**
- ♦ Traveled with Paul and Barnabas—**Acts 12:25; 13:5**
- ♦ Abandoned Paul and Barnabas during his first missionary journey—**Acts 13:13; 15:36-41**
- ♦ Became one of Paul's most trusted companion—**2 Timothy 4:11**
- ♦ Was also a close friend of Peter—**1 Peter 5:13**

A Personal Anecdote?

It's possible we also encounter Mark in the Gospel itself. **Mark 14:51** records an event that is shared in none of the other Gospels. Many scholars believe that the "young man" in the story is John Mark himself and he includes it as a signature and to indicate that he—like the others—abandoned everything when they forsook Jesus.

SON OF MAN

Mark's favorite title for Jesus is "Son of Man," a title thought to emphasize his humanity. However, Mark makes heavy emphasis on Jesus' deity. Perhaps he is drawing the title from the account in **Daniel 7:13-14**.

A Primary Gospel?

As with Matthew and Luke, Mark is part of the synoptic Gospels, using common material and possibly having a common source.

Mark is considered by many to be the earliest of the Gospels, possibly being written as early as 15 years after the resurrection. Matthew and Luke seem to borrow heavily from Mark. 76% of his writing is shared between the three and only 3% is unique to Mark.

Luke

*So that you may know the certainty of the things
you have been taught.*

- ◆ Third book of the New Testament
- ◆ Author: Luke
- ◆ Genre: Gospels (Synoptic)

There were lots of Gospels floating around in the early days. Some of them were collections of miracles or sayings of Jesus. Some were written to add weight to false teachers while others tried to demonstrate the true power of salvation. By the time Luke wrote it was hard to separate fact from fiction and make sense out of any of it.

So Luke set out to write “an orderly account” of the story of the life of Jesus. His Gospel provides us with the chronological framework that ties the other Gospels together and gives Jesus his proper place in history.

Luke's Genealogy—Luke 3:23-38

Matthew and Luke both provide genealogies of Jesus. There are several differences between the two of them though, which raise interesting questions and possibilities.

- ◆ Matthew begins with Abraham and ends with Jesus, establishing Jesus as the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham.
- ◆ Luke begins with Jesus and ends with Adam, identifying Jesus' place in the human race and as the “Second Adam” (**1 Corinthians 15:45**).
- ◆ Matthew groups names into a symmetrical order, Luke simply lists names.

The names do not all agree. There are several possible explanations for this:

- ◆ Matthew is tracing Joseph's lineage and Luke Mary's.
- ◆ Matthew is tracing the legal line, Luke the actual line (accounting for levirate marriages).
- ◆ There was no Greek word for “son-in-law” so some sons listed may have been related by marriage.

The Cost of Discipleship

One of Luke's unique themes is the attention he places on the great sacrifice that followers of Christ must commit to. If he were writing in AD 60-65, as is supposed, it would have been just a few years until the great persecution of Rome in AD 70. That makes the focus on the cost of following Jesus very understandable.

Read through the following unique passages. What do they say about discipleship?

- ◆ **6:24-26**
- ◆ **9:57-62**
- ◆ **14:25-35**

Good News for the Poor

Luke begins the story of Jesus' life by explaining that his parents offered the sacrifice reserved for the poor to consecrate him at the Temple (**Luke 2:22-24**).

Through his Gospel, Luke emphasizes God's attention to the poor and the outcast more than the other writers. Read the following passages paying careful attention to those who truly needed to hear these words from God.

- ◆ **6:20**
- ◆ **7:36-38**
- ◆ **10:30-37**
- ◆ **15:1-7**
- ◆ **17:11-19**
- ◆ **23:40-43**

PAGING DR. LUKE

Luke was one of Paul's traveling companions. We learn about him through the travels in Acts and in comments and greetings in Paul's own letters.



- Luke was a doctor (**Colossians 4:14**). Some see his writing as containing more technical and medical language than the other Gospels.
- The context of **Colossians 4:10-14** seems to indicate that Luke was a gentile.
- Luke was still with Paul at the end of his life—**2 Timothy 4:11**.

Some scholars believe that Luke wrote his Gospel sometime between the events of **Acts 16 and 28**. It is generally placed around AD 60-65.

Being part of the Synoptics, Luke shares 41% of his Gospel with Mark and Matthew and 23% with Matthew alone, leaving 35% that is completely unique to Luke.



Between his two books of the **Gospel of Luke** and **The Acts of the Apostles**, page-for-page and word-for-word Luke actually authored more of the New Testament than Paul.

Theophi—who?

Luke addresses both of his books to someone named “*Theophilus*.” No one knows who this was. The name means “**friend of God**” and could simply be a literary device indicating these books are for the curious believers who want to know more. However, the title “*most excellent*” could indicate this is a person of distinction. Maybe we'll meet him in Heaven.

JOHN

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.

- ♦ Fourth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: John the Apostle
- ♦ Genre: Gospels (Not Synoptic)

John the Beloved

As with the other Gospels, John does not identify himself as the author. We rely on historic tradition and internal evidences to establish his authorship.

Towards the end of the book we're introduced to a person simply identified as "*The disciple whom Jesus loved*" (13:22). By examining the context it seems obvious that this is John (21:24). While this title seems a bit immodest, simply being known as "*the beloved disciple*" would have been considered a mark of humility.

7 Miraculous Signs

John records only seven of Jesus' miracles and refers to them as "signs," meaning they point to something greater than the miraculous event itself. His signs are:



1. Water in to Wine—2:1-11
2. Healing of the Official's Son—4:43-54
3. Healing by the Pool—5:1-9
4. Feeding the 5000—6:1-5
5. Walking on Water—6:16-25
6. Healing the Blind Man—9:1-41
7. Raising Lazarus from the Dead—11:1-44

The Purpose-Driven Gospel

John clearly states his purpose for writing in **John 20:30-31**.

The "signs" John recorded were more than just stories of Jesus' miraculous works. They point to his character, his power and his love and compassion for human need. They also point to the final and greatest sign—his resurrection itself.

John writes to introduce the readers to the Jesus he knew and walked with and continued to walk with in new life. The promise is that this is the Jesus we can know and the life we can have if we believe in him.

The gospel had spread across the world just as Jesus had promised. The Church was now made up of believers from every stripe of society known to the Roman world. The small core of early witnesses had now been replaced by a growing number of believers who had inherited their faith from previous generations.

But the diversity of believers had led to a diversity of beliefs. Heresies like Gnosticism taught that you had to have special secret knowledge from God to truly understand his message from Jesus. So, at the close of the first century, the aged Apostle John wrote his Gospel to establish his first-hand account of the work of Jesus Christ and the hope that God had sent to the world through him.

In the beginning . . .

From the first verse, John comes out swinging at those who claimed special secret knowledge of Jesus. John instead introduces his friend as the one God had promised from long ago and revealed to all mankind.

Read John 1:1

- ♦ "***In the beginning***" - This phrase takes us back to **Genesis 1:1**. The expression does not refer to a particular moment in history but rather a timeless eternity.
- ♦ "***was the Word***" - Plato had used the word "logos" to express the ideal, unseen perfection of reason. The Old Testament had also spoken of the creative power of "the Word" in passages like **Psalms 33:6**.
- ♦ "***and the Word was with God***" - This phrase indicates a distinction from God himself and yet a closeness. It can be expressed as "the Word was face-to-face with God."
- ♦ "***and the Word was God***" - the Word is not *a god*, but deity itself!

Read the rest of John's prologue in **1:2-18**. What do you think John is trying to say about Jesus here?

Where Are the Parables?

One of the most obvious distinctions between John and the Synoptic Gospels is his lack of parables. There are none of the familiar stories present that made up Jesus' teachings in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Instead we have a selection of "parabolic statements" or "abbreviated allegories" not about the "kingdom of heaven" or "a certain man" but about Jesus himself.

Read the following statements. What metaphors are used?

- ♦ **6:32-35**
- ♦ **7:37-40**
- ♦ **10:1-10**
- ♦ **15:1-8**



John 13:1-17

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet he wrapped a towel around his waist, which indicated he was a slave. Washing feet was a job reserved for Gentile servants, slaves or women. Jesus set the example of the lowest form of service and promised we would be blessed if we imitated him.

The Acts of the Apostles

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

- ◆ Fifth book of the New Testament
- ◆ Author: Luke
- ◆ Genre: History

The early Church spread so quickly into so many different cultures that people must have been asking, “*Who are these people? Where are they from? How did they get here?*” So Luke, the historian, set out to once again put the facts in order and provide us with a history of these people who were now known as Christians.

He picks up where he left off, with the ascension of Jesus into Heaven and his final instructions to his disciples. These instructions form the framework for the history of the Church as he wrote it.

You Will Be My Witnesses . . .

Acts 1:1-11

Jesus’ final words here are not just the marching orders for his followers but also form the outline for the rest of Acts. Verse 8 perfectly reflects the growth and spread of the early Church, proving Jesus’ words as true and his followers as faithful.

... In Jerusalem,

Acts 2:1-13

With the Feast of Pentecost in full swing there would have been Jews visiting Jerusalem from every nation with a Jewish population. In fact, the list in **verses 8-12** are countries and communities known to have had large Jewish populations.

Luke is emphasizing the juxtaposition of a myriad of cultures being addressed by people from one of the most un-cultured areas known (Galilee). He seems to emphasize both the humility of the disciples and the power of God in their lives.

... And in all Judea and Samaria,

Acts 8:1-3

The persecution of Saul resulted in the Church’s obedience to Jesus’ command to carry the gospel out of Jerusalem. One of the first areas the believers went to was Judea—the province surrounding Jerusalem. Residents of Jerusalem likely had friends and family they could stay with in the other towns of Judea.

Samaria was another story. This was the home of the half-breed Jews that had come out of the exile. The Jews hated them and considered them to be unclean (as seen in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan). However, Luke changes his focus to Philip as he travels to Samaria during this time.

If you were a good Jew like Philip, what reasons would you have to go to Samaria? Consider also **John 4:1-4**.

... And to the ends of the earth

Acts 16:6-10

This one act likely changed the direction of history and the development of Western Civilization. By taking the gospel west into Macedonia instead of east into Asia, Christian history moved in a westerly direction. Without this guidance from the Holy Spirit we very well might have been evangelized by missionaries from China.

LUKE: The Sequel!

Acts is the second book written by Luke and addressed to the mysterious Theophilus. It is written as a continuation of his Gospel.

As a member of the early church, Luke appears in Acts though he never draws attention to himself. Instead, he appears in the what are known as the “We Passages” (**Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28**).

The book of Acts ends very abruptly and even somewhat prematurely—definitely without the conclusive elements of Luke’s Gospel. This has led to some speculation that Luke had intended to write a third volume, or may have had to end due to some personal tragedy that kept him from continuing.

It’s also been speculated that he just ran out of paper.

Disagreements & Disagreeability

Luke is honest with his record of the early Church, but he seems to downplay the controversies and arguments that pop up from time-to-time. It may be that Luke was sugarcoating these events, or it might be that he was choosing to show the positive outcomes of each disagreement.

Reading through the following passages, what are the disagreements about? What is the outcome of each? What can we learn from these?

- ◆ **Acts 11:1-18**
- ◆ **Acts 15:1-35**
- ◆ **Acts 15:36-41**

Acts 20:35

Paul references the words of Jesus here, however these words are never found in the Gospels! It may be that Paul received these words by revelation or that it was a well-known quote from Jesus that was not included in the Gospel accounts.

ROMANS

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

- ♦ Sixth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

Rome was the center of the Roman Empire. It was only natural that as Christianity spread it would find its intellectual home in Rome. But long before the growth of the Roman church as the center of the faith, Paul wrote to a small community of believers about how to balance their faith with their responsibilities as good citizens and neighbors.

Romans has been called Paul's greatest letter and one of the most comprehensive explanations of the plan of salvation ever written. Romans is a valuable resource for new and established Christians alike—much as it must have been for its original audience.

BIG IDEAS in Romans

Within God's plan of salvation there are a lot of big concepts that we struggle to understand. Paul lays them out and connects them for us in some great ways in this letter—even though they're still difficult for us to grasp.

Look at the passages below and the list of words to the right. Which concepts are linked in these passages and what do we understand of them from these passages?

♦ 3:21-31

Baptism

♦ 5:1-21

Grace

♦ 6:1-23

Justification

♦ 10:1-13

Reconciliation

Righteousness

The Practical Part

Like most of Paul's letters, the first half of Romans is full of theological concepts that we struggle to understand. The second half of the letter contains practical instructions on how to live out our faith.

Paul begins the practical section in chapter 12 with the word "Therefore," indicating that the information he is giving now hinges on everything we've learned before. Look at the themes of this section. What practical expressions of faith is Paul calling us to?

♦ 12:1-8

♦ 13:8-14

♦ 12:9-21

♦ 14:13

♦ 13:1-7

♦ 15:1-4

DOXOLOGY!

From time-to-time in Paul's writings he simply bursts out in words of praise. We call these passages "Doxology."

Romans 11:33-36 is Paul's doxology for this letter. What is it about this expression of praise that connects with you?

When in Rome?

No one really knows when the Roman church started. **Acts 2:10** indicates that there were Romans in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Perhaps they took the faith back home with them. By the time of Paul's writing there was an active body of believers there in need of his instruction.

Paul wrote in his introduction of his eagerness to visit Rome. Read **Romans 1:1-17**. What are some of the reasons Paul cites for wanting to visit? What does he state explicitly and what is implied?

Spiritual Worship and Reasonable Worship

There are two words for "worship" used in the New Testament. One has a literal meaning of "to come towards to kiss" and the other means "to sweep out the temple." It emphasizes service as worship.

This is the word Paul uses in **Romans 12:1**. It's not simply worship that desires intimacy with God, but rather worship that serves.



Personal Greetings

Chapter 16 contains a list of greetings to individuals in Rome. Some of these names are familiar to us, others are lost to history. Some notable ones are:

♦ **16:3**—Priscilla and Aquila who we meet in **Acts 18**.

♦ **16:7**—Andronicus and Junias as known to be "great among the Apostles." Does this mean they were Apostles or had simply distinguished themselves with the Apostles? Also, Junias (Junia) is a feminine name.

♦ **16:13**—It is believed that this is the same Rufus Mark mentions in **Mark 15:21**

1 Corinthians

And now I will show you the most excellent way

Imagine a church in the most sinful city you can think of. What challenges would that church face? What influences would quietly creep in unnoticed—which ones would walk unashamedly in through the front door?

Through this letter Paul confronts and challenges, loves and instructs and draws us back to the amazing presence of Jesus.

Sex and the City

Corinth was called “**The Bridge to the Sea.**” It was a prosperous trade city, a center of culture and the home of the Isthmian games. Corinth was also famous as the home of the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Temple worship revolved around the services of 1000 temple prostitutes. A common insult of the day was to say that someone was “*living like a Corinthian.*” It was only natural that their societies influences would invade the church.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5 to confront a situation in the church that has arisen from the culture around them. Read **5:1-13** and discuss:

- ◆ What is the scandal happening in the Corinthian church?
- ◆ What is the church’s reaction?
- ◆ What is Pauls’ recommendation?
- ◆ According to verses **9-11**, how is the reality of immorality outside the church different from inside the church?

Love and the Church

Corinth was a city with a lot of problems. Along with the immorality, the church faced divisions over who was more spiritual and who was more gifted. After addressing these divisions in chapter 12 Paul turns his attention to “the most excellent way” in chapter 13.

- ◆ Read **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**
- ◆ How would you link verses **1-3** with **John 13:34-35** and **1 John 4:8**?
- ◆ In verses **4-7** love is presented in positive and negative characteristics. What are they?
- ◆ In **verse 13** why is love the greatest?

If Christ Be Not Risen . . .

Among all the Corinthian controversies was the false teaching that there was no personal resurrection—that essentially there was no afterlife for believers to look forward to. Paul spends the very lengthy chapter 15 validating the reality of personal resurrection by taking us back to Jesus’ own resurrection.

- ◆ Jesus resurrection is of “first importance” in our faith—**15:3-8**
- ◆ If He is not raised from the dead then none can be raised—**15:12-13**
- ◆ If we cannot be raised from the dead then we’re wasting our time—**15:17-19**

Paul concludes his argument with the encouragement of **15:58**. The truth of Jesus’ resurrection ought to drive us to greater hope, greater service and greater love.

- ◆ Seventh book of the New Testament
- ◆ Author: Paul
- ◆ Genre: Pauline Epistle

Paul and Corinth

Read the story of Paul’s first trip to Corinth in **Acts 18:1-18**. How would you describe his stay there? What challenges did he face? What was his approach to sharing Christ with them?

How would you expect these experiences to influence his letter?

Blame the Mailman?

While your Bible will tell you that this is Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, it’s actually the first letter *that we have* from Paul to that church. Judging from contextual clues in this and 2 Corinthians he actually wrote four letters to them:

1. **1 Corinthians 5:9** indicates a letter that proceeded this one.
2. 1 Corinthians (which is actually 2 Corinthians).
3. **2 Corinthians 2:3-4** and **7:8** refer to a “Severe Letter” or “Letter of Tears.” This does not fit the overall tone of 1 Corinthians, so there must have been another letter between the two.
4. 2 Corinthians (actually 4 Corinthians).
It’s interesting to wonder why the Church Fathers and the Holy Spirit chose to preserve these letters and not the others. Perhaps the others were too personal. More to the point, though, the fact that he wrote at least 4 letters shows Paul’s deep love and personal involvement with this church.

MIRROR, MIRROR

1 Corinthians 13:12 makes reference to “seeing through a glass darkly.” Mirrors in those days were simply pieces of metal that had been beaten flat and highly polished. The image that came back was distorted and imperfect.



Later in **2 Corinthians 3:18** Paul uses a similar phrase to express God’s reflection in us.

2 CORINTHIANS

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed

- ♦ Eighth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

How do you prove you're qualified for a job that's never existed before? How do you defend your role against those who would define your role for you? That's what Paul sets out to do in this follow-up letter to the church in Corinth.

2 Corinthians is one of Paul's most personal and passionate letters. From his first sentence he is on the defensive—standing firm for his calling and his ministry as well as his love for the Corinthian Church.

Forgiveness and the City

While not all scholars agree, many believe that **2 Corinthians 2:5-11** is in reference to the events of **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**. Whether or not it's the same case, Paul's advice seems to have been similar and has had its intended effect.

- ♦ What is Paul's advice to the Church now?
- ♦ According to **verse 9**, his advice was also a test for them. What was the test?
- ♦ According to **verse 11**, what is one of the problems with unforgiveness?

Paul's Resume and Defense

There was an element in the Corinthian church that sought to discredit Paul's work and calling as an Apostle. He peppers this letter with his defenses and qualifications as an apostle.

Looking at the following passages, what does Paul say about his calling and ministry? How does he defend it?

- | | |
|---------|------------|
| ♦ 1:1 | ♦ 10:1-2 |
| ♦ 1:8-9 | ♦ 11:1-6 |
| ♦ 3:1-3 | ♦ 12:11-13 |
| ♦ 5:12 | ♦ 13:3-4 |
| ♦ 7:2-4 | |

CLAY JARS AND CRACKED POTS

In **2 Corinthians 3:7-18** Paul describes the New Covenant we have received. He compares the glory we have received with the glory Moses received on the mountain. How does it compare?

In **4:7-12** he compares this message to *"treasure in jars of clay."* What does he mean? How are we like jars of clay? How do our lives reflect the glory God has given us in **4:16-18**?



The Last Place You'd Ever Look!



Homes were far from secure in Paul's day. If you had a treasure, where would you hide it? Rather than keep it in an obvious looking strong box, they would hide it in simple and unsuspecting looking clay jars.

It's a wonderful testimony to the value God places on us that he would hide his own glory within us.

OOH, THAT SMELL

Can't you smell that smell? Paul could! It was one that was familiar in the Roman world.

In **2 Corinthians 2:14-17** he writes of the spread of the gospel and compares it to the incense the Roman army would burn after a victorious battle. To the Romans, it was the smell of victory. To the defeated nation it was the stench of death.

What does this say about the way the gospel is perceived in this world? Who leads us in our triumphal procession? How should we expect the world to receive our message?

Here Comes the Judge!

2 Corinthians 5:10 reminds us of the reality of judgment. As Christians we are aware that we will have to answer to Jesus. But how do we convey that reality to non-believers?

What is the proper response to this reality according to **2 Corinthians 5:11**?

A THORNY PROBLEM

In **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** Paul makes a veiled reference to a problem he had that he called *"a thorn in my flesh."* Paul never specifies what this thorn is, but that hasn't kept people from wondering. Some have theorized it was:

- ♦ Persecutions and accidents since becoming a Christian
- ♦ Impiety
- ♦ Temptation to unbelief
- ♦ A physical infirmity, possibly a defect in his sight or hearing
- ♦ A bad temper
- ♦ Some annoying person in his life
- ♦ Paul's inability to forgive himself for persecuting the church

But the real question is, what was the point (pun intended) of the thorn? Do you think God has ever given you a thorn?

GALATIANS

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,
but Christ lives in me.*

- ♦ Ninth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

When Paul began his letter to the Romans he wrote, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you." He starts his letter to the Philippians by writing, "I thank my God every time I remember you." Paul begins Galatians with, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."

Galatians is the only epistle that Paul does not begin with an expression of praise for the church to which he is writing. Instead, he launches with an attack on the heresy that was poisoning the Christian community. It's an intense letter that focuses on the liberty we have as Christians and the complete work of Christ's sacrifice.

Paul vs Peter: Apostolic Rumble!

The heart of the Galatians letter is found in an incident Paul recounts about when Peter came to visit the church in Antioch. When he first came to Antioch, Peter enjoyed his new found freedom of being able to eat with Gentiles. But when Jewish believers came from James, he pulled away from the fellowship and ate only with the other Jews. To Paul, Peter was declaring that the law was still in effect and Gentiles were unclean because they did not keep the law.

Read **Galatians 2:1-21** for the full details of Paul's conflict with Peter

In Paul's response to Peter's hypocrisy we find his detailed explanation of salvation through Christ alone. Paul's rebuke also opens our eyes to his definition of hypocrisy and perhaps helps us find instances of the same attitude in our own lives. The argument can be followed like this:

1. The law cannot justify us, that is, make us clean in God's sight. Justification can only come through faith in Christ **(15-16)**.
2. We have been crucified with Christ, therefore we no longer live. The law only has effect on those who live. Since in Christ we have died, we are no longer obligated to keep the law **(19-20)**.
3. Now, instead of living by the law we live by grace, which cleanses us from sin and makes us righteous before God **(17,21)**.

Paul's conclusion is that salvation cannot be found in the law or any other human system, instead it is found in Christ alone. Therefore, when we find ourselves relying on anything other than the grace of God alone for salvation we undermine the death of Christ, declaring it to be worthless as a means of achieving salvation.

Healing a Broken Church

The church in Galatia was broken. False teaching had distorted the body and their relationships had fallen apart. How do you fix a broken church?

Read through **Galatians 6:1-10**. What does Paul tell them to do for each other? what does he tell them to do for themselves? How do these instructions repair the damage done by hypocrisy and false teaching?



Which Galatians?

Galatia wasn't a town, it was a large province in the Roman Empire, comprising the country of Galatia as well as many surrounding cities. Scholars debate on whether Paul wrote his letter to the churches in the Northern section of Galatia or the Southern. The way we date this letter hinges on which group of Galatians received it.

This whole issue may not effect your enjoyment of the letter much, but after reading the harsh language Paul uses, just imagine if you were a northern Galatian. Would you want to be blamed for all time for the foul ups committed by the Southern Galatians?

Acts of the Flesh or Fruit of the Spirit?

In **Galatians 5:16-26** Paul provides two list of behaviors that define where our loyalty is: whether with the Holy Spirit or with our own fleshly desires.

What does Paul mean when he writes that the acts of the flesh are obvious **(5:19)**?

How do you take his warning in **5:21**? How does this compare with what he wrote in **2:17-21**?

In **verse 23** Paul says of the fruit of the Spirit, "Against such things there is no law." how does this relate to what he wrote in **3:23-35**?



What do you think attracted the Galatians to the false gospel? Why do so many people today reject the grace of God in favor of trying to be good enough to be saved?

Why is it important in **3:26-4:7** that we see ourselves as sons and not sons and daughters? This relates to the significance of the "male nor female," reference in **verse 28**.

Ephesians

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" This was the national motto of Ephesus—a city of pagan fertility worship and witchcraft, a city of wealth and trade, and a city of power and politics.

Paul spent more time in the city of Ephesus than in any other city. From Acts to Revelation, we know more about the Ephesian church than any other church mentioned in the New Testament. Ephesus has shaped our view of the church and evangelism in more ways than we have imagined.

JUST WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

As with most of his other letters, Paul begins with a statement of praise. Ephesians begins with praise for what God has done for us and Christ.

One of the greatest challenges anyone faces in life is their own self-perception. Many people struggle with feelings of worthlessness, or with false views of their own worth. **Ephesians 1:3-14** calls us to examine our own worth in God's eyes. What does this passage tell you God has done for you?

Prodigal Kind of Grace

Many people wonder what the word "prodigal" means in the parable of the Prodigal Son found in **Luke 15:11-24**. The word actually means "lavish" and it describes the lifestyle the son lived both when he was away spending his father's money and when he was back home, restored to his life as his father's son. Paul uses the same word in **Ephesians 1:8** to describe God's grace in our lives. He has not given us "just enough" grace, but **abundant** grace!

Some have noticed similarities between the parable of the Prodigal Son and **Ephesians 2:1-10**. Read them side-by-side. What are the points of comparison?

An Imaginative Prayer

While we tend to focus our prayer requests on our shortcomings or on problems within the church, Paul focuses his prayer for the Ephesians on the strengths they already have in Christ. He encourages them to grow into a deeper understanding of the blessings God has given them.

Those same blessings are available to us today. In **Ephesians 3:14-21** Paul prays for the Ephesian church. What are the blessings he prays for? What would those blessings do for our church today?

Put On Your Sunday Best

In **Ephesians 4:17-24** Paul uses one of his favorite metaphors and describes the Christian life as a change of clothing. We have taken off the garments of our old lives which were getting more and more filthy from sin and have put on a new self. The new life we wear has been "created to be like God." He is not only the tailor, but the pattern for the new life we now wear.

Compare his follow up instructions in **4:29-5:6** with the more familiar fruit of the Spirit and acts of the flesh in **Galatians 5:16-23**. How do the two compare?

- ♦ Tenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline (Prison) Epistle

Everything on Ephesus

A study of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church would not be complete without a comprehensive look at what the Bible says about the city itself. What do we learn from these passages:

- ♦ **Acts 19:1-41**
- ♦ **Acts 20:13-38**
- ♦ **1 Corinthians 15:29-34**
- ♦ **1 Timothy 1:3-4**
- ♦ **Revelation 2:1-7**

In addition to the Biblical information on Ephesus, Church history maintains that the Apostle John lived there in his later years along with Mary, Jesus' mother, whom he cared for. It is believed that John wrote his

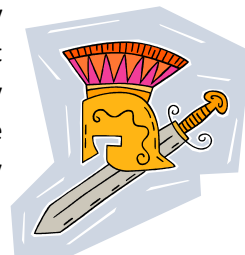
When You Wish Upon a Star...

The temple of Diana/Artemis in Ephesus was originally built in the 6th Century BC to replace crude shrines used in earlier times. It's likely that the statue of Diana was partially constructed out of a meteor (Acts 19:35 hints at this). This also explains the use of silver in worship of Diana.

The temple was constructed out of marble, as were the streets leading to it.

THIS MEANS WAR

Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest, likely chained to a Roman centurion. Ephesus was home to many stadiums where gladiator fights would take place and the site of one of the largest gladiator graveyards in the Empire. So, his instructions in **Ephesians 6:10-20** were not only fitting for his current condition, but a very visible reminder to the Ephesians of the reality of spiritual battle.



Philippians

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

- ♦ Eleventh book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline (Prison) Epistle

What could you teach people about joy? What words would you use to express the importance of an attitude of “contented pleasure not dependent upon circumstances?” As if that wouldn't be difficult enough, how would you do all this from prison?

Paul's letter to the Philippian Church is a letter of thanks to a church he was truly thankful for. It's a great example to us of the blessings we have when we serve together and support each other and the joy that we can know no matter our circumstances.

Ode to Joy

More is said about joy in this letter than in any other letter in the New Testament. As we read through the letter it becomes obvious that “joy” is not simply another word for “happiness.” Joy is not dependent upon us having a good day or everything going just right—joy is much deeper than that.

Look at the following verses and pay attention to causes and characteristics of joy.

- | | |
|-----------|--------|
| ♦ 1:4 | ♦ 2:29 |
| ♦ 1:15-19 | ♦ 3:1 |
| ♦ 1:25-26 | ♦ 4:1 |
| ♦ 2:2 | ♦ 4:4 |
| ♦ 2:17-18 | ♦ 4:10 |

Based on what you've read, how would you define joy?

AN EARLY CHURCH HYMN

In Philippians 2 Paul calls the Philippians to unity by encouraging them to look to each others needs rather than their own. He turns to Jesus as the most obvious example of this attitude.

His words in **Philippians 2:6-11** change and it is believed that Paul is actually quoting an early Christian hymn. Read this passage and discuss the following:

- ♦ What characteristics of Jesus are emphasized in this song?
- ♦ Are there any songs that we sing today that reflect these words and themes?
- ♦ How does the hymn in verses 6-11 reflect the encouragement Paul has for them in verses 1-4?



The “dogs” Paul refers to in **3:2** are not cuddly little companions, but vicious wild pack animals that scavenged the streets and attacked the citizens.

This was Paul's view of the Judaizes who wanted to put people back under the Old Law and steal their joy.

WELCOME TO PHILIPPI!

Philippi was a major city in Macedonia and one of Paul's first stops in Acts 16 after receiving his vision of a man from Macedonia calling him to come preach there.

Paul wrote this 7-14 years after his visit to the city during a period when he was under house arrest in Caesarea or Rome. During this time the Philippians had sent Paul a gift of monetary support with Epaphroditus who stayed and helped Paul with his ministry. His letter to them is a “thank you” for their gift and partnership in the work of the gospel.

Philippi was a wealthy city with a great economy. Many of the Philippians were retired Roman military men. Imagine the pride of a city occupied by war veterans who had helped keep the country safe.

Paul seems to address this pride in **Philippians 3:17-20**. This would have meant a lot to the Philippians as they viewed themselves as citizens of a far away city (Rome) and took great pride in their citizenship.

Philippian Plumbing

Philippi was a tourist city. What's one of the biggest necessities for tourists? You guessed it! Public toilets! The bathrooms in Philippi were conveniently located right on the streets—you couldn't miss them!

In **Philippians 3:7-8** Paul compared his previous way of life—which he felt would profit him spiritually—with...well...let's just say Paul didn't think much of his previous way of life.



COLOSSIANS

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- ♦ Twelfth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline (Prison) Epistle

The Book of Acts is a wonderful companion to Paul's letters. It gives us details about many of the churches and communities that Paul wrote to. However, Acts makes no mention of the Colossians. There's no record of Paul visiting it and no clue as to when a church was established in the city. Everything we know about the Colossians comes from this letter to them.

While we might be tempted to write this letter off as belonging to an unimportant little church in the middle of nowhere, it's actually a letter of incredible importance in our understanding of who Jesus is eternally and what our roles are as Christians in society and in our families.

Jesus 101

The church in Colosse was plagued by what Paul referred to as a *"hollow and deceptive philosophy. (2:8)"* There were beliefs being taught within the church that did not agree with the commonly held doctrine of the Church. As a result, Paul wrote to them to clarify many of the details about who Jesus is, was, and always will be.

Read through the following passages. What do they teach us about Jesus? What do they teach us about our relationship with him? How would you put these ideas in your own words?

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| ♦ 1:15 | ♦ 2:9-10 |
| ♦ 1:16 | ♦ 2:11-12 |
| ♦ 1:17 | ♦ 3:1-4 |
| ♦ 1:18-20 | ♦ 3:15-17 |
| ♦ 1:27-29 | |

One Big Happy Family

Christianity introduced a new morality that our world had never before known. People were now treated with a value that was not based on social status, relationship or sex. These changes did not come easy—nor have they been easy to keep. Paul wrote to the Colossians about their new lives and new relationships and how to treat each other.

Read **Colossians 3:1-14**. What changes have been brought about in our attitudes and motivations because of our relationship with Jesus? According to **15-17**, how are these changes seen in the ways we treat one another?

Look through the list of instructions in **3:18-4:1**. How would you characterize the way we're called to treat one another?

THE DELIVERY BOYS

Paul sent this letter to the Colossian Church with two of his companions—Tychicus and Onesimus. You can read more about Onesimus in the letter to **Philemon**, his master.



Welcome to Colosse!

Many of Paul's letters were written to churches in large, influential, metropolitan locations. Colosse was none of those things.

Colosse was literally a town at a crossroads. It sat 12 miles from Hieropolis on one side and Laodicea on the other. Both of these cities were important. Colosse was . . . well . . . a nice place to be from.

But the care and concern that Paul placed in this letter reminds us that we're all important in the Kingdom and that no matter our size we can still do great things and have great influence on our world.

Touched By an Angel?

The people of Colosse had a very strong belief in angels. There was a popular myth that the city had once been saved from a terrible flood



by the Archangel Michael. There were people who were so obsessed with angels that they worshipped them, knew their names and lineages and even prayed to them.

Paul lumps this in with the heresy of legalism in **2:16-19**. What does he warn them could happen if they follow these ways?

Do we see any similar obsessions today?

Any Scythians Here?

In **Colossians 3:11** Paul makes a wonderful statement about the unity and equality we have in Christ, even declaring barbarians and Scythians as equals in Christ.

So who are/were the Scythians? In the Greco-Roman culture, Scythians were the most barbaric of barbarians. They celebrated victories in battle by drinking their enemy's blood. They were not the kind of people you wanted on your church softball team.

Why do you think Paul includes them in this list?

1 Thessalonians

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ♦ Thirteenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

Acts 17:1-15 tells of the opposition that Paul met in Thessalonica. However, within a few months of leaving in what he felt was failure, a small seed of a church began to bloom into a vibrant and energetic congregation. As you read 1 Thessalonians you can sense Paul's excitement for these young believers and their new faith community.

Paul's letter to these new Christians is exactly what you would expect—a lot of encouragement to continue in their new life, some warnings about their old way of life and words of hope about the future. 1 Thessalonians is the kind of letter you would want to receive from your own spiritual father.

Thessalonian Thanksgiving

1 Thessalonians seems to overflow with thankfulness from Paul for the growth and faithfulness of the church there. His words are reminders to us of the importance of an ongoing attitude of thanksgiving (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**).

Read through Paul's greeting in **1:1-10** and consider how we express thankfulness for each other:

- ♦ **Verse 2—How does Paul express his thankfulness for them?**
- ♦ **Verse 3—What are the circumstances of his thankfulness?**
- ♦ **Verse 4—What is the cause of his thankfulness?**

One of the beautiful things about thanksgiving is how it overflows into the lives of others. How did Paul see that in the Thessalonians? How do we see that in each others lives as well?

JESUS IS COMING—EVERYONE LOOK BUSY!

From both letters to the Thessalonians it's obvious that these people had a lot of questions about the second coming of Christ. While many in our day obsess over the date or timing of Christ's return, Paul's concern for the Thessalonians was more practical.

Read through his advice in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11** and consider the following:

- ♦ What are Paul's concerns in verse 13? What about verse 18? What are the words between these verses to do for us?
- ♦ Why does Paul say he doesn't need to write to them about times or dates?
- ♦ What qualities should characterize our lives as we wait for Christ's return?
- ♦ **5:11** repeats **4:18**. How do we do this today?

And Finally....

Paul wraps up his letter with a quick-fire series of directives in **5:12-21**. These were new believers coming out of a sinful culture and they needed skills to understand how to work together and hold to their new faith.

Which if these commands really catch your attention? What do you see as the main emphases here?

Thessalona-who?

1 Thessalonians is believed by many scholars to be the earliest of all of Paul's letters. Based on clues in the context of the letter as well as Acts 17, we can date the letter at around 51 AD.

Thessalonica (also known as Thessaloniki) was the second largest city in Greece. It was a seaport that boasted a large marketplace which traded not only goods and food but ideas and philosophies brought in from the cultures around them.

In **Acts 17:1-8**, Paul went head-to-head against this marketplace of ideas. Paul reflected on these events in **1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5**. Reading the two together, how do you think Paul handled the events there? Would you have shown as much care or as much trust in God?

The Oldest Church in the World?

Acts 17:1 tells us of Paul's trip to Thessalonica from Apollonia. From this direction he would have entered through The Arch of Galerius on the south-east side. At that spot today stands The Church of the Rotunda. Built in 306 AD it is believed to be the oldest surviving church building in the world.

Dionysius Anonymous

Thessalonica was known for its worship of the Greek god Dionysius, who was the god of the grape harvest, winemaking, wine and ecstasy. Thessalonians liked to party.

In **4:1-12** Paul addresses the world around them and the new life they were called to. Do his warnings still apply to us today?

What does he recommend for them instead of their former way of life?

2 Thessalonians

As for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

- ♦ Fourteenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

If you knew for a fact that Jesus was coming back before the end of the year what would you do differently? Would you quit your job? Would you buy something extravagant? Would you tell people what you really thought of them (take that however you want)?

The church in Thessalonica had been bitten by the End Times bug. They were obsessed with the promise of Christ's return and—unfortunately—it had led to some very unchristian behavior. Paul wrote this letter to set this young church back on course and call them back into focus on their commitment to Christ and to each other.

WE OUGHT TO ALWAYS THANK GOD

In 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Paul expressed his thankfulness for this church and their faithfulness to the work. In **2 Thessalonians 1:3-12** he again begins with an expression of thanks for them.

Read through the verses and consider the following:

- ♦ In **verse 3**, what is the reason for Paul's thankfulness? How does he express it in **verse 4**?
- ♦ What promises does Paul remind them of in **5-10**?
- ♦ What does Paul pray for them in **11-12**?

Can you think of those in your life who have stood up under a lot of struggles? How would you pray for them based on Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians?

JESUS CAME BACK—DIDN'T YOU GET THE MEMO?

Scams, rumors and urban legends aren't just the product of spam emails, they've been around for a long time! At some point, between 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, the church had received a letter—supposedly from Paul—letting them know that Jesus had already returned. While that might sound ridiculous to us today, this was a brand new church, cut off from much of the rest of the Christian community. What were they to think?

The bulk of this letter (**2:1-3:15**) deals with this deception and the problems it has caused the Thessalonians.

- ♦ What do we learn about "*The Day of the Lord*" from this passage?
- ♦ Paul warns of the coming of the "*Man of Lawlessness*." Again, just from this passage, what can we know about this person?
- ♦ What is Paul's advice to the Thessalonians for overcoming this deception? What does he encourage them to do? What does he warn them against?

While we may not fall for the ol' "*Jesus has already come back*" scheme, we can still find ourselves deceived at times and other times we can get caught up in issues that aren't grounded in truth. How does Paul's advice for the Thessalonians help us? In what ways does it apply situations in our lives?

The Thrilling Sequel!

2 Thessalonians follows hot on the heels of Paul's first letter to this church. Paul begins the letter in **1:1** stating that it is from "*Paul, Silas and Timothy*." By Acts 18, these three are in Corinth together. After that Luke makes no mention of them traveling together.

That places this letter within a few months of the previous one—perhaps 6 months to a year.

Death, Taxes and the Second Coming

Thessalonica was in the unique position of being a tax-free city. This was a reward to the city because of their faithfulness in a civil war in 42 B.C.

Paul wrote this letter about 90 years later. The city had a population of around 40,000 people and no work had been done on the infrastructure in a very long time.

So when the false report spread that Jesus had already returned the Thessalonians responded by simply laying down and expecting other people to take care of them. What was the point of working if we're all going to be in heaven in a few days anyway, right?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 is about more than just the church's misunderstanding about the return of Jesus—it's a statement about their culture. What example did Paul set for them in his behavior? How did he expect them to act towards each other? How were they to treat those who refused to work?

Do these commands translate to our world at all? How could we face the problem of idleness in our culture with Paul's advice to the Thessalonians?

Paul wrote this letter in response to a false letter that had been sent in his name. In **3:17** he concludes by giving them a sample of his own handwriting, hopefully clearing up any question as to his true identity.



1 Timothy

*Beyond all question,
the mystery of godliness is great.*

- ♦ Fifteenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle/Pastoral Epistles

Up until now all of Paul's letters have been written to churches. 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus are classified as "**Pastoral Epistles**" because they are written to individuals Paul left in charge of the pastoral oversight of churches he had ministered to.

There is great value in these letters. Not only do they contain instructions on church doctrine and leadership, but the warmth of Paul's friendships with these young leaders is very evident. The Pastoral Epistles teach us about the blessings of serving together.

How Do You Do Church?

In Paul's day churches met in homes for prayer, worship and sharing meals. Christians were in the minority and were often oppressed for their beliefs. In such a setting, knowing how to meet and what to focus on when they came together was essential. In **2:1-15** Paul provided Timothy and the church in Ephesus with a brief outline of what should happen when they come together.

- ♦ What do you notice about the emphasis on prayer here? What was to be the focus of their prayers? What was the purpose of their prayers?
- ♦ Verses **8-10** focus on the differences between men and women. While the instructions are very different, there is unity in the purpose of the instructions. What are the goals of these sets of instructions?

As for **11-15**, what we misunderstand about this passage today is that Paul gave women something here that they never had before—**inclusion**. While his words sound harsh to us and even primitive, they are instructions to a culture where women were often left out.

The Mystery of Godliness

In the center of Paul's letter we find his greatest desire—to return to Ephesus and teach them about how to truly be a church. In case those plans don't work out, he briefly covers the essentials for Timothy in **3:14-16**.

Verse 15 is a great reminder that they were still new at this "church thing." Paul uses some interesting imagery for the church. What do these images emphasize?

- ♦ **God's household**
- ♦ **Pillar and foundation of the truth**

Verse 16 is likely an ancient Christian hymn or creed (or both). It's likely that new converts were taught these phrases as a way of indoctrinating them into the core beliefs of the church.

Looking at the phrases found in verse 16, what qualities about Jesus are stressed? How are these qualities related to each other? If you had no written word (no Gospel), what would you believe about Jesus from these sayings?

Welcome Back to Ephesus!

Paul had left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to complete the work he began there. Between the letter to the Ephesians, his letters to Timothy and Acts 19 and 20 we know more about the Ephesian church than any other New Testament church.

Read through **1:3-11**. What are the reasons Paul wanted Timothy to stay in Ephesus? How does he state them in both negative and positive terms?

PAUL HATES WOMEN?

It's easy to see from **2:11-15** how some people view Paul as misogynistic. However, we have to be honest with ourselves and realize we're not taking in the full picture of this man who valued women and was blessed by their ministries.

In **2 Timothy 1:5** and **3:15** Paul praises Timothy's mother and grandmother for their ministry. In **Titus 2:3-4** he commands older women to teach the younger. And we cannot forget how Paul was blessed by the partnership of Lydia and Priscilla in the book of Acts.

Personal Instructions

1 Timothy 4:1-16 are Paul's instructions to Timothy as the leader of the church in Ephesus. They are his guidance on various subjects Timothy was to teach about and the way Timothy was to conduct himself in his role in the church.

Verse 6 indicates that these instructions are a test of the effectiveness of Timothy's ministry. How do these compare to the topics we consider to be essential to the faith and the way we relate to one another?



1 Timothy 6:10 is probably the most often quoted and misquoted verse from this letter. How have we misunderstood and misapplied this verse? How do you see it fitting into the broader context of **6:3-10**?



II TIMOTHY

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

- ♦ Sixteenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle/Pastoral Epistles

Biblical scholars date this letter as being written in A.D. 65 and from Rome. Five years later, Nero would lead an attack on the Christians from this very city. The storm clouds of persecution and apostasy were already on the rise. As you read through this letter you can't help but pick up on the urgency in Paul's tone. The letter is a warning that better days are *not* ahead.

From the very beginning, though, we are reminded that this is a personal letter of encouragement. Before his warnings of the trouble that is ahead, Paul looks back at his young friend's life and reminds him of where he has been.

Father and Son

Paul addresses Timothy in **1:2** as, "my dear son." There is a deep familiarity in this letter that demonstrates a long friendship and deep commitment.

Read through **1:3-14**. What can you ascertain about Paul's relationship with Timothy from this passage? What encouragements does Paul offer? How did his relationship with Timothy enable him to write these with impact?

WHEN ARE THE LAST DAYS GETTING HERE???

Peter applied the words "*last days*" to the events of the Day of Pentecost. Decades later Paul was still warning about their coming in this letter.

In **3:1-9** Paul writes to warn about the character of people in the last days. This leaves us with a very important question—*don't people already act like this??*

He gives us 18 characteristics of people in the last days. How do you define these in your own terms? What is his advice concerning these people?

Verse 8 mentions two men named Jannes and Jambres. These men are not named in the Old Testament but according to Jewish tradition they were the magicians that were able to copy the miracles God worked through Moses (**Exodus 7:11**). How do you see Paul's comparison of those in the last days and these two men?



Paul's Final Words

As we read through this letter we can sense Paul's loneliness and his realization that there aren't many days ahead for him.

Read **2 Timothy 4:6-8**.

In **verse 6** he compares his current state to a drink offering. This was a sacrifice poured on a lamb just before it was burned on the altar. He uses the same phrase (though slightly differently) in **Philippians 2:17**. How are the two uses different?

Verse 7 seems inspired by the athletic events of Paul's day. "I have kept the faith" literally means "I have played by the rules." How does this compare to Paul's statement in **Acts 20:24**?

Verse 8 isn't about a crown of royalty, but instead continues the athletic theme. Compare it with **1 Corinthians 9:25**.

He's In the Jailhouse Now

We identified some of Paul's previous letters as "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians). While writing those letters Paul was under house arrest—not free but not terribly uncomfortable. However, while writing this letter Paul was actually imprisoned in a Roman dungeon. There was no comfort and no real hope of release other than death.

2 Timothy is generally agreed upon to be Paul's final letter. According to church history he was beheaded in prison about six months after this letter was written.

Demas

Through the course of Acts and his letters, we learn the names of several of Paul's traveling companions, though we don't necessarily know much about them or their character.

One such companion mentioned here is Demas. We only have three verses about him in the whole Bible, but through those three verses we sense struggles and heartache for both him and Paul.

- ♦ **Colossians 4:14**
- ♦ **Philemon 1:24**
- ♦ **2 Timothy 4:10**

Truly Inspired!

In **2 Timothy 3:16** Paul refers to all Scripture as "*God-breathed*." The imagery in his statement takes us back to **Genesis 2:7** where God gave Adam life by breathing his own life into him. This reference shows us that our lives are uniquely linked to the life we find in Scripture.

Looking at **3:16-17**, what "*good*" is Scripture to us? How do you link this passage to **2 Peter 1:21**?



TITUS

*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done,
but because of his mercy.*

- ♦ Seventeenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle/Pastoral Epistles

In Acts 2 we have a list of the different nations and people groups present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Within that list we find “Cretans”—that is, inhabitants of the island of Crete (**Acts 2:11**). However, we never hear anything else of them. What became of these new believers? Who taught them? How did they grow in their new faith on such a troubled place like Crete?

It isn’t until Paul’s letter to Titus that we find any mention of a church on Crete—and it’s one that needs a lot of work! Much like Timothy, Titus was left there to help the churches organize and stand firm in their faith so that they might have influence to change their culture. Paul’s advice is practical and valuable for anyone seeking to change their world.

Sound Doctrine and Small Groups

Chapter 2 outlines Paul’s instructions for teaching the Church how to be a church. His goal in verse 1 is for Titus to, **“teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”** Literally his instruction is to teach what is fitting (or proper) and will promote spiritual health.

Read through Paul’s instructions to various groups in **2:1-10**. What groups are listed? What are they to do for each other? Do we see these groups within our church today and how could we encourage them to grow together as Paul has done here?

Just Say No?



Titus 2:11-15 brings the various groups back to the unifying message of the gospel. We are sin-addicts—we cannot simply stop our bad behavior. Rather, God’s grace teaches us to behave in godly ways.

We are not simply saved by grace—with out sins washed away. We are also trained by grace to put sin away and live lives that truly honor God.

Doing Good for the Good of All

Paul’s remarks in **Titus 3:1-11** remind us again of the wild reputation of these Cretans. They were a rowdy bunch, but not beyond the saving power of God’s grace or it’s transforming power.

Compare **3:1-2** with Paul’s instructions in **Romans 13:1-7**. We might be tempted to get hung up on his call to obedience, but how could we apply his call to **“be ready to do whatever is good”** in response to the authority in our nation?

Verse 3 is a reminder that we’ve all had our foolish days. When taken with **4-8** it calls us again to the power of God’s grace in our lives. Compare this section with **Romans 5:8-11**. Both passages address our **“justification.”** How do you define that word from the way Paul uses it?

Cretans may not be beyond salvation, but some are beyond *our* help. Look at **3:9-11**. These are some harsh words. How do you see the goal of these instructions in the light of Paul’s overarching goal from **2:1**?

Welcome to Crete!

(Keep an eye on your valuables)

According to **1:5**, Paul had left Titus on Crete to **“straighten out what was left unfinished.”** Crete is a Greek island in the Mediterranean Sea. It was a farming island, known for its grapes and wine production. It was also known for its inhabitants—Cretans. Ever heard of them?

Paul had—in fact he quotes one of them in **1:12**. They were a disrespectful, abusive and hot-headed people and they were plenty proud of that!

Titus had his work cut out for him—just as we might in our world. It’s encouraging to consider that Paul didn’t simply write the Cretans off for being...well...Cretans. And he was confident in Titus’ ability to bring order to their chaos and peace to their island.

Read through **1:5-16**. What challenges do you see Titus facing on Crete? How do they compare to the challenges we face in our community and society? Does Paul’s prescription for them apply to us as well?

Titus and Acts?

We read about many of Paul’s traveling companions in Acts, but Titus is never mentioned. There have been many attempts to reconcile this (some even claiming that Timothy and Titus were the same person). It remains a mystery that you will have to ask Luke about someday.

Here is a Trustworthy Saying...

One of the unique characteristics of the Pastoral Epistles is Paul’s use of the phrase, **“Here is a trustworthy saying.”** He uses it to draw attention to a particular teaching that we can rely on to always be true.

Read through Paul’s trustworthy sayings in **1 Timothy 1:15, 3:1 and 4:8-10; 2 Timothy 2:11 and Titus 3:4-8**. What do they have in common? Are these truths that we still stress today?

Philemon

Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

- ♦ Eighteenth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Paul
- ♦ Genre: Pauline Epistle

Up until now we've read letters from Paul to faithful churches, giving churches and even troubled churches. We've seen letters to fellow workers in ministry with instructions on how to care for the needs of the believers in their communities. The letter to Philemon is different. It is a personal letter written to ask a favor. Paul encourages his friend to set aside his right to do what is right in favor of doing what is best.

Paul's style and tone are different here. In addition to being personal it's also very flattering of Philemon. But it's not a hollow flattery. It's a reminder that now that we are in Christ the rules for how we treat each other have changed.

The Major Characters

It's important that we understand who Paul is writing to and what he is writing about. Before reading this letter, take some time to familiarize yourselves with the people Paul mentions.

Philemon—a wealthy man who lived in the city of Colosse. The church in that community met in his home. His wife's name was **Apphia**.

Archippus—Paul identified him as a “fellow soldier.” He was likely one of the leaders of the church in Colosse and someone who held some influence over Philemon and his faith.

Onesimus—A slave owned by Philemon. He stole from his master and then ran away. Paul met him while he was under arrest in Rome and brought him to Christ. It seems likely that Onesimus knew of Paul's reputation for kindness from his master, so he went to him hoping to find help. Onesimus is also mentioned in **Colossians 4:9**.

The Fellow Workers—As he often does, Paul also mentions his fellow workers, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke.

Now that you know the players, read through the letter to Philemon much as you would read through any letter from one friend to another. Consider the following questions:

4-7—Paul's request of Philemon is based on his relationship with him. How does Paul describe that relationship in these verses? What has Philemon done for Paul and the Church?

8-16—How does Paul describe his relationship with Onesimus? How does he see Onesimus' relationship with Philemon?

17-22—What would Paul's confidence in Onesimus do for Philemon? Do Paul's statements and requests in 21-22 seem overly bold to you? How would you feel receiving such a request from an Apostle?

Very Punny, Paul!

In **verses 10 and 11** Paul makes a pun that we don't recognize in English. The name Onesimus meant, “*useful*.” During his time away from his master he was literally “*useless*” to him. Paul's desire is for Philemon to see that Onesimus has lived up to his name to Paul and is willing to live up to his name once again to Philemon.

Welcome Back to Colosse

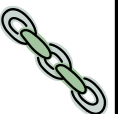
Paul was under house arrest at the time he wrote this letter. While his financial needs were taken care of by supporting churches (like the one in Philippi) his physical needs were taken care of by several companions who served him. Among these was Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colosse.

Colosse was a trade city known for its specially dyed wools. With so much wealth and manual labor in this city it was only natural that there was a large population of slaves there.

SLAVERY 101

In the Roman Empire slavery was not a matter of racial oppression but of economics and social class. Some slaves worked as craftsmen in various industries while others were teachers for children in wealthy families. Some slaves were “indentured servants” working to buy their own freedom. While it might seem completely foreign to us, the reality is that slaves in that culture were more akin employees than the slaves we know from more recent times.

It is believed that at one time about 80% of the population of Athens was made up of slaves.



Paul On Slavery

Read the following passages from Paul about the way slaves and slave owners ought to treat each other. How is his advice in these passages lived out in Philemon and Onesimus?

- ♦ **Ephesians 6:5-9**
- ♦ **Colossians 3:22-4:1**
- ♦ **Titus 2:9-10**

HEBREWS

... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son

Old habits are hard to break—especially when your culture is so identified with those habits that to lose them might even mean to forget who you are and where you have come from!

The letter to the Hebrews is written to just such a people—Jewish believers faced with the temptation to give up the free gift of salvation by grace and return to the rituals that they identified with for so long. The author writes them to remind them of what they have received from Christ, of how much better his sacrifice was than any sacrifice they could offer, and of what they would lose if they were to return to their old way of life.

Who is Jesus?

From the very beginning, this letter is about identifying who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Read through the following verses. What do we learn of Jesus through each of them?

- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| ◆ 1:1-4 | ◆ 9:15 |
| ◆ 3:1-6 | ◆ 10:19-20 |
| ◆ 4:14-16 | ◆ 12:2 |
| ◆ 8:1-2 | ◆ 13:11-14 |

Who is Melchizedek?

One of the obstacles the Hebrews had to overcome in their faith was the image of Jesus as our Great High Priest who became the sacrifice for our sins (2:17-18). Under the Law a High Priest had to be of the tribe of Levi. If Jesus was a priest why was he born of the tribe of Judah? The author defends Jesus' role by taking the readers back to Genesis and Abram's encounter with a man named Melchizedek.

Read **Genesis 14:17-20** and then the interpretation in **Hebrews 6:13-8:13**. Some of the points the author draws us to are:

- ◆ Melchizedek is identified as a priest and a king, like Jesus.
- ◆ We have no record of his birth or death, so in a sense he's eternal, like Jesus.
- ◆ Abram was the father of the Hebrews, so all the tribes were inside him at the time of this meeting. This means that even Levi submitted himself to Melchizedek.
- ◆ Melchizedek blessed Abram and served him bread and wine, representing Christ's sacrifice.
- ◆ Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he had, paying tribute to him as a tithe.

In short, Melchizedek supersedes the Old Covenant. Since Jesus is a priest of his order, he is able to provide a sacrifice for us that is better than the old system.

What is Faith?

One of the most well known passages in Hebrews is **chapter 11**—the Faith Chapter. It recounts a list of those from Jewish history who stand as examples of faithfulness. **Hebrews 11:1** and **11:39-40** sandwich this list. How do we define faith by these verses?

What does faith do for us in **12:1-4**?

- ◆ Nineteenth book of the New Testament
- ◆ Author: Unknown
- ◆ Genre: Epistle

Author! Author!

Who wrote the letter to the Hebrews? That remains one of the great mysteries of the Bible. From the text we can see that whoever wrote it, they were familiar with Jewish customs and beliefs, knew their Old Testament and knew Timothy.

While Paul remains the most popular choice for author, much of Hebrews doesn't fit with his style (example: **2:6-8**). Other possible candidates have been Barnabas (who was a Levite), Apollos, Priscilla and Clement of Rome. It has also been suggested that the letter is actually one of Paul's sermons that was then transcribed by Luke (**13:22**).

Perhaps Origen said it best when he wrote, *"Men of old have handed it down as Paul's, but who wrote the Epistle God only knows."*

Which Hebrews?

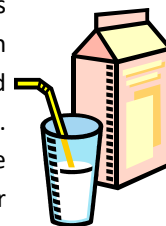
Unlike other epistles, no particular city or recipients are mentioned here. We have no way of determining who the original audience was other than their race.

Some have suggested that the recipients were the priests who became obedient to the faith in **Acts 6:7**. As persecution made life more difficult they longed to return to the life and system they had been brought up with. Whether this is the audience intended or not, it seems to be the mentality of the original recipients.

Milk or Solid Food?

Read through **Hebrews 5:11-6:3**. What do you consider to be the *"milk of our faith?"* How do we know when we have matured beyond the need for milk and on to solid food?

The author continues his thoughts through **6:4-8** with some very difficult teaching and then concludes with **6:9-11**. What encouragement does he have for us, no matter what our spiritual diet?



James

*As the body without the spirit is dead,
so faith without deeds is dead.*

- ♦ Twentieth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: James
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

James is a little letter with a lot of controversy. It was omitted from several early collections of Christian writings (that would later become the canon of Scripture). It was seldom referred to by early Christian writers. Later in history, Martin Luther referred to it as an “*epistle of straw*” and didn’t believe it belonged in the canon of Scripture.

The problem with James stems from apparent contradictions with the writings of Paul and the understanding of salvation as a free gift of grace. However, James wrote to a very different audience than Paul. These contradictions are a matter of understanding the needs and challenges of the community to which James wrote—needs and challenges that continue to exist within us today.

James’ Definitions

Through this letter James seeks to identify and define certain elements of faith in ways that might seem very different from others. Rather than simply dealing with concepts, James deals with faith as it is lived out in the community. He puts flesh and bone to the Christian life and defines how it is seen in community.

Definition: Faith

We use the word “faith” in different ways. We may use it to indicate a belief in the unseen as in **Hebrews 11:1** or as the means by which we except the free gift of salvation from God as in **Ephesians 2:8**.

Read **James 2:14-26**. How is James using the word “faith” here?

- ♦ Based on this passage, how would you define faith?
- ♦ How would you compare this passage to **Romans 3:20**?
- ♦ Do you see contradictions between this passage and **Ephesians 2:8-10**? If not, how do they agree?

How does James see the relationship between faith and works?

Definition: Wisdom

The word “wisdom” is differentiated from “knowledge” in that it is seen as the understanding of how to apply God’s truth to your life rather than simply knowing about something.

James defines wisdom in **3:13-18**.

- ♦ How would you define wisdom from James’ words here?
- ♦ How does James words here compare to Paul’s fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-26**? How is wisdom related to the fruit of the Spirit?
- ♦ James specifies this wisdom as “from heaven” (**3:17**). What other sources of wisdom are there? Do they work together or do they contradict each other?

Definition: Patience

Patience is something we all know we need, but we certainly fight against having in our lives. James’ audience was likely a group of oppressed poor believers. After speaking judgment against their oppressors in **5:1-6** he turns his attention to their great need of patience in **5:7-12**.

- ♦ How does James define patience and what examples does he give from their history and society?

Which James?

In the first century, much like today, James was a very popular name. There are four men in the New Testament named James. Which one of these—if any—authored this letter?

The consensus from early days has been that this is none other than James, the brother of Jesus mentioned in **Mark 6:3** who later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 21:17-18**).

From the controversy of the Jerusalem Council in **Acts 15**, we see James not only as a leader but as a very practical man. That spirit seems to continue in this letter.

From James towhom?

In **James 2:2** he uses the Greek word for “*Synagogue*” for “*meeting*” or “*meeting place*.” This word may have been chosen as a hold over from his upbringing in the Jewish community or an indication that the believers he was writing to were meeting at a synagogue building. Either way, there a strong Jewish tone to the letter and the examples he uses which would lead us to assume he was writing to an audience of mostly Jewish believers.

Taming Your Tongue

While there are those who will argue over the connection between faith and works in James, few would be bold enough to argue over the wise advice he gives about taming the tongue in **James 3:1-12**.



- ♦ What are some of the images he uses to describe the tongue?
- ♦ How might this passage be seen as a bridge between the discussion of faith and works and the discussion about wisdom?

I PETER

He who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

- ♦ Twenty-first book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Peter
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

Simon Peter—the name of the disciple immediately brings to mind images of a hot-headed, impulsive disciple who once cut the ear off a Roman guard in a fit of rage and panic. But when Jesus called him to be an Apostle he called him “*The Rock*,” a source of stability and commitment for the Church he would lead.

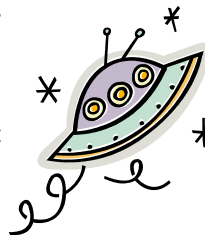
The letters we read from Peter are from an older and wiser Apostle, a man who knew discipline through the trials experienced through life. His call to his readers is a call to encouragement in the face of suffering today and to look ahead to the hope they have for eternity.

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Peter addresses his letter to “*God’s elect, strangers in the world.*” The term means “resident aliens.” It was used in Roman society, much as today, to indicate that they were foreigners dislocated from their homelands. They didn’t possess the same rights and privileges as native born citizens.

In a very real way, Peter’s audience was people who had been scattered due to persecution. They were living on the run, far from home. But it was also a spiritual reminder that, “this world is not our home, we’re just passing through.”

Read through **1 Peter 1:3-12**. What words and ideas does he use to remind us that we are not of this world? What does this world have in store for us? What does our true home have in store for us?



IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLES

Peter makes no promises to his readers of a rosy, perfect life here on this earth. Instead his letter is full of warnings about persecution and sufferings that they can expect to go through here.

Read through the following passages. Does Peter see suffering as optional for the Christian? What promises are in store for those who suffer? Where are we to find our strength in the face of suffering?

♦ **1 Peter 2:13-25**

♦ **1 Peter 4:12-19**

♦ **1 Peter 3:8-22**

How to Get Along with Everybody (Are you sure this was written by Peter???)

With the two complimentary concerns of living like strangers in this world and living together as the Church, there was bound to be friction, trouble and even confusion about how to treat your fellow believer and fellow man. Peter addresses various groups throughout the letter with instructions on how to best demonstrate Christ to those groups.

Read through his instructions. What character and qualities are emphasized to each? How can Jesus be seen as an example to each group?

♦ **2:13-25**

♦ **3:8-12**

♦ **3:1-7**

♦ **5:1-11**

This Sounds Fishy...or not Fishy Enough

Critics struggle with the idea that an unlearned fisherman from rural Galilee could write a letter with the depth of understanding and the elegance of language as this one. They conclude that the letter must have been written by someone else using Peter as a pseudonym to add credence to the writing.

This assumption makes a lot of assumptions though. For example, we have to assume that Peter, a businessman, would not know the language and customs of the Greek people. Does that seem likely? While **Acts 4:13** refers to Peter and John as “unschooled, ordinary men,” this doesn’t necessarily mean that they were illiterate, but rather simply that they lacked expertise in the law. Also, Peter himself admits in **5:12** that he wrote with the help of Silas. It would not be unheard of to have someone more skilled in writing put the finishing touches on a letter of this importance.

He Descended into Hell...

Within the Apostle’s Creed there is a clause concerning Jesus that states, “he descended into hell.” This foundational doctrine about Jesus is largely based in **1 Peter 3:18-20** and **4:6**. But what does it mean?

Some choose to take it literally and believe that during the time Jesus’ body was in the tomb he spiritually went to hell and proclaimed the news of his victory to those who were under punishment there. Others see it as a symbolic proclamation—that since Noah was a preacher of righteousness (**2 Peter 2:5**) Jesus was proclaimed through Noah’s preaching.

Beyond the confusion or controversy, though, lies a deep truth about who Jesus is. He is the one that holds the power over life, death and hell in our lives and can promise us heaven (**3:21-22**).

II PETER

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness

- ♦ Twenty-second book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Peter
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus tells Peter, "when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." We are told that this was a prophecy concerning Peter's death as a martyr. For thirty years he lived with this reality sometime in his future. As he wrote his second letter he told his readers, "I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. (1:13-14)" He knew his time was short and there was still so much to say!

We should read Peter's second letter with the urgency and importance with which he wrote it. His heart's greatest desires are found in these chapters.

Fruit of the Spirit—Simon Peter Style!

In several instances in the New Testament we find lists of Christian virtues. 1 Corinthians 13 has the love chapter, Galatians 5 has the Fruit of the Spirit, Colossians 3 has its list of the Christian's clothing and 2 Peter 1 has Peter's progression of Christian character.

- ♦ Read through **2 Peter 1:3-11** and consider the following:
- ♦ How does this list differ from the more well known **Galatians 5:22-23**?
- ♦ Peter sees these qualities as a progression of growth. How do you see one leading to another?
- ♦ What purpose do these qualities have for your life?
- ♦ What are the dangers of never growing in your character as a Christian?

Peter on Prophecy

The bulk of Peter's letter concerns prophecy and the believer's responsibility to what they know from God and his revealed word. This is more than just a matter of paying attention to the end times. It's a matter of paying attention to the way we're living.

2 Peter 1:16-21

Even in the first century there were already conflicting opinions about the return of Jesus. Rather than rely on the opinions and imaginations of others, Peter goes back to what he himself had witnessed. What event is he alluding to here?

In **verse 19**, how were the words of the prophets made more certain for Peter?

Is there a point of comparison for those of us who weren't eyewitnesses to Jesus on earth? How can we be more certain of what we believe?

2 Peter 2:1-22

How does Peter characterize the false teachers? What do you believe their goal is?

2 Peter 3:1-18

How are scoffers different than false teachers? What do you think he means by they "deliberately forget?"

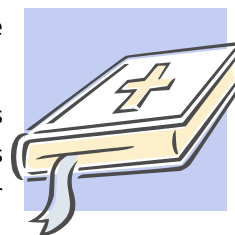
What kind of people ought you to be?

All Scripture is God-Breathed

There are those who have struggled with seeing the New Testament as having the same level of inspiration as the Old Testament. Can a collection of letters and stories written over a 30-50 year period really carry the weight of centuries of writings from the prophets and patriarchs?

Peter seemed to think it could. In **2 Peter 3:14-16** he equated Paul's letters with the Old Testament Scriptures, showing us that in the First Century these collected writings were already being given the same weight as the Old Testament.

In what ways does Peter compare Paul's writings to other Scriptures?



The Latest Word on Hell

In **2 Peter 2:4** he writes of the fallen angels being held in gloomy dungeons. The word he uses here is "Tartarus" and this is the only time it is used in the Bible.

In Greek mythology Tartarus was the pit in the underworld—beneath the earth—where souls were punished after death. Peter borrows this term because it fit the point he made and it was likely one that his readers were familiar with from childhood.

Hey Jude!

Reading through 2 Peter you will notice a lot of similarities between it and Jude's letter. There is no definite explanation of the connection, but it's an interesting oddity. Check out the following examples:

2 Peter	Jude
2:1	4
2:6	7
2:10-12	8-10
2:13	12
2:17	13

1 John

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

- ♦ Twenty-third book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: John
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

Gnow Your Gnostics

Much of John's letter is written to counter the false teachings of the Gnostics—early Christian heretics. These false teachers infected the church and were leading many people astray. They taught:

- ♦ Spirit is good, matter is evil
- ♦ God is too pure to deal with sinful humanity directly
- ♦ Jesus was therefore not a real person, but a spirit that manifested from heaven.
- ♦ In order to be saved you have to be selected by God and given special secret knowledge that is not available to everyone.

As you read through 1 John keep these destructive teachings in mind. Look for points where John addresses them.

The specific form of Gnosticism John addressed was called "**Docetism**." From the Greek word for "*to seem*" they taught that Jesus only *seemed to be* human but was actually a spirit.

FACTOID

The word "love" appears 30 times in John's 3 letters! That's quite a lot for such short letters!



John and James?

As we learned in our study of James, his letter has often been derided due to its emphasis on works rather than grace. However, compare **James 2:14-17** with **1 John 3:17-18**. What similarities do you see? How would you describe the relationship between James' concept of faith and John's concept of love?

In the Gospel of John Jesus gives us our new command, to love one another (**John 13:34-35**). In his first letter he teaches us that God is love. Church tradition tells us that when he was very old the disciples would carry him into the meeting place, he would lay on his mat and simply say, "Little children, love one another." After some time, the disciples asked him why he always spoke the same words and he replied, "It is the Lord's command, and if this alone be done, it is enough!"

That spirit is clearly seen in John's writings. However this is not merely a gentle and understanding love—it is a fierce love that fights for the object of its affection—the Church.

In the Beginning . . .

There's something very familiar to the way John begins this letter. His words take us back to **Genesis 1:1** and also to the beginning of his Gospel.

Read **1 John 1:1-4** and **John 1:1-18**. What words and ideas appear in both? What is John emphasizing here?

Based on what you know of the Gnostics from the column to the right, which of their teachings was John refuting with this passage?

John is a Poet . . . Did You Know It?

Halfway through chapter 2, John pauses from his prose and writes in poetic form. Within the poem he addresses three different groups in two verses.

Read through John's poetry in **2:12-14**. Who are the three groups he addresses? Do you think these should be taken figuratively or literally? What qualities does he impart on each group?

Why do you think he switched styles here?

John and the Antichrists

If you say the word "*Antichrist*" today you will get a variety of opinions about a particular person and the role they either played in history or the future. John is the only Biblical author who uses the word—and he uses it in the plural.

Read through John's statements about "*Antichrists*" here and in his second letter. How does he define an antichrist? What does he say about their character? Who are they and when do they come?

♦ **1 John 2:18-27**

♦ **2 John 7**

♦ **1 John 4:1-6**

All You Need is Love

You can't read any of John's writing without seeing the centrality of love to his teaching. His words are at times difficult and convicting but they should also be reassuring. Unlike the Gnostics he wrote to refute, John's God doesn't hide behind secret knowledge or special rituals—he is known through love.

Take the following passages verse-by-verse. What does each verse teach us about love and its relation to God, Jesus, Christians and Faith?

♦ **3:1**

♦ **4:7-12**

♦ **3:11-24**

♦ **4:19-21**

2 JOHN

To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth

- ♦ Twenty-fourth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: John
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

As we've worked our way through the New Testament we've seen letters to several churches and a few individuals. But we've never seen anything with quite the personal nature of John's second and third letters. These aren't so much grand epistles of the faith as they are brief notes from one friend to another. Yet as we open our eyes and hearts to their messages we see true inspiration and can know the instructing and encouraging presence of God's Spirit through their words.

In the thirteen brief verses of 2 John we see the passion of this aged Apostle who has suffered for and defended his faith and never lost the simplicity of his message of love.

The Elder and the Lady

The author of the letter introduces himself in verse 1 with the simple title, "Elder." While we are used to that title being one of recognition and respect, we cannot miss that it is obviously one of familiarity between the writer and recipient here.

The recipients of the letter are simply known as "the chosen lady and her children." While this may have been an actual unnamed noblewoman, it's more likely an elusion to the Church itself (see **Revelation 21:2**).

Read through the greeting in **verses 1-3**. Consider the following:

- ♦ What roles do truth and love play in this introduction and in the relationship between the elder and the lady?
- ♦ John wrote to combat the Gnostic heresies. What does his focus on truth and love tell you about them?
- ♦ "Grace and peace" was a common greeting in those days. Why do you think John adds "mercy?"

Truth and Love

John's salutation of verse 3 continues with his estimation of the church in **verses 4-6**

- ♦ How do you see the relationship between truth and love expressed here?
- ♦ How does this passage relate back to the **Gospel of John 13:34-35**?
- ♦ How does it relate to **1 John 3:18**?

SALVATION: FRAGILE? HANDLE WITH CARE?

As with 1 John, 2 John contains warnings about the antichrist(s). **Verses 7-11** are a warning about the deceivers—who they are and what do. The danger of these false teachers is especially apparent in **verses 8-9**.

There is a textual problem in verse 8. It's possible to read the verse as, "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for," or "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for." What do the two differences mean for the interpretation of this verse?

- ♦ How do John's words here compare with those of Paul in **Philippians 2:14-16**?
- ♦ How do you see John's concept of "reward" here compared to **Revelation 22:12**?

Verse 9 is difficult to understand. How does a person "run ahead" of God? **The Message** paraphrases this verse with, "Anyone who gets so progressive in his thinking that he walks out on the teaching of Christ, walks out on God." How would you compare these words with **Hebrews 12:1-3**?

John? Is That You?

The author of this letter never identifies himself by name—neither does the author of the other letters or the Gospel attributed to John. Rather John has been assigned as the author by church tradition and some important clues found in the context of the letters.

There is a consistency to the message and language of all three letters as they focus on the need for love and the danger of the Gnostic heresy. In addition there is great consistency with what is known of the character of the Apostle. Amazingly, even given the lack of hard evidence of his authorship, most critics attribute this letter to John.

A Final/Final Warning

The seriousness of these false teachers is shown in John's warning in **verses 10-11**. These warnings go against everything the Christian community had come to know and stand for.

When viewed with the perspective of **Romans 12:13**; **1 Timothy 3:2** and **Hebrews 13:2** you really see just how dangerous the false teachers were. From a compassionate point of view we see hospitality as one of the greatest gifts we can offer someone. But for these newly developing baby churches it would have meant

Spiritual CPR?

The phrase "face to face" in **verse 12** is actually "mouth to mouth" in the Greek. It was an expression of intimacy and fellowship (**Romans 16:16**).

3 John

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth

- ♦ Twenty-fifth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: John
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

Who would you allow to read your mail? What mail would you allow them to read? Would it depend on the content or the sender? If you received a letter from someone famous or influential would that encourage you to share the content more?

What if the letter you received was . . . *truly inspired*?

Third John is a simple letter from the Apostle to a friend. The content doesn't really mean much to us personally—but maybe it's not supposed to. Maybe it's been passed on to us to further understand the character and concerns of Jesus' dearest friend.

Good Guy Gaius,

John addresses this letter to a friend and begins with a very warm greeting. Read through it in verses 1-4.

- ♦ How does John use the word "truth" in these verses?
- ♦ What areas of Gaius' life does John pray for?
- ♦ Looking at the what John says, how would you describe their relationship?



Band of Brothers

In 3 John, John writes of "*the brothers*." This is apparently a term for the missionaries being sent out from the church. It was expected that as these evangelists moved from city to city other churches would take them in and care for them on their travels.

Verses 5-8 tell of their mission. How does John encourage them to treat these servants? Compare John's advice here with that of Paul's in **2 Corinthians 8:22-9:5**.

DUELING WITH DIOTREPHES

In John's writings we've become accustomed to conflict with the Gnostic sect. However, in this letter we're exposed to a more personal kind of conflict—that is conflict within the church!

The heart of the trouble seems to rest with a church leader named Diotrephes. Verses 9 and 10 are the only two verses directly addressing him, although I can't help but think that verses 11 and 12 are addressing him indirectly.

Read **9-12** and discuss the following:

- ♦ In the beginning of verse 9 it appears that John has previously written this church but that letter is lost to us. What do you suppose happened to it?
- ♦ *This was a time of transition within the Church. John was the last of the Apostolic leaders and now churches were more and more dependent upon local leadership and individuals. As with any transition, there were apparently conflicts and differences of personality in play here.*
- ♦ How would you define "*loves to be first*?" Do you think this indicates a rivalry between John and Diotrephes or does it speak of Diotrephes' ego?
- ♦ What do you see as Diotrephes' sins from John's perspective?
- ♦ In what ways did his sin/attitude hurt the church?
- ♦ If Diotrephes was in your church, how would you attempt to *lovingly* correct him?

A Little Letter with a Lot of History

3 John is the shortest book of the Bible. As with 2 John, it credits itself as being written by "The Elder," but church history and tradition have named the Apostle John as its author. Also, internal evidence shows it was likely written by the same author as 1 John (and therefore the Gospel).

While the authorship of the letter has been disputed from time to time the content has not. 3 John is the most perfectly preserved book of the New Testament.

What's in a Name?

Verse 7 speaks of the missionary brothers who went out in service of "The Name." This seems to have been a way to express the name of Christ in the early days (**Acts 5:41**).

The Jewish people considered the name of God to be so holy that they would not even speak it out of fear of misusing it (**Exodus 20:7**). So it's an amazing transition when we consider that early Christian missionaries spoke the name of Jesus with this same kind of reverence.

Defending Demetrius

We don't know anything more of this man than what we read in **verse 12**. He may have been the one carrying the letter to Gaius. For some reason John felt it necessary to let Gaius know he could trust Demetrius.

How awesome would it be to know that the Apostle John had your back? It's a wonderful that our own encouragement might carry that kind of weight in some people's lives.

JUDE

Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

- ♦ Twenty-sixth book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: Jude
- ♦ Genre: Epistle

Jude is one of the most troublesome letters in the canon of Scripture. From early times its authority and content have been called into question. Jude quotes from sources that others don't view as authoritative, he tells bizarre stories mentioned nowhere else in scripture and he makes sweeping judgments about false believers within the church.

And he also provides some of the most glorious images of Christ found in the Bible and one of the most beautiful expressions of praise seen outside the Psalms. I've often thought of Jude as "Jesus' weird little brother." In many ways this little brother saw some amazing spiritual realities that must have rivaled his big brother's vision.

JUDE'S HISTORY LESSONS

Paul once wrote of the events of the Old Testament, *"these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved (1 Corinthians 10:6)."* Jude takes that to heart in his letter and uses several events and people from the Old Testament as bad examples for believers today.

Reading through verses **5-11**, what examples from the Bible do you find there? What points do those examples make? What examples leave you scratching your head and wondering?

Michael v. Devil: The Thrillah on Pisgah

One of the scholarly problems with Jude is his quoting of the events found in the apocryphal book, *"The Assumption of Moses."* According to the book (and early Jewish oral tradition) the devil claimed the right to Moses' body because of Moses' sin of murder. All the Bible tells us about Moses' death is the approximate location of his death and that the place where he was buried was unknown (**Deuteronomy 34:1-8**).

Read Jude's quote of the account and the context in which it is given in verses **8-10**. The Archangel Michael is a powerful being for the army of heaven, yet even he would not slander the devil. What lesson are we to understand here about how we speak of others (whether they be devils or not)? What does the bad example of the "dreamers" show us?

Enoch, noch....who's there?

Probably the most bizarre reference in Jude comes in verses **12-16** where he quotes from **1 Enoch**, an early pseudepigraphical book—it wasn't actually written by Enoch and everybody knew it. Still, the work was highly respected among both Jews and Christians and was often read for inspiration and discussion, much as we might read a Christian novel today.

Jude quotes Enoch to give his readers a vision of the judgment that is to come when Christ returns. What warnings does Jude offer about these people who are under judgment? What peace do we receive from Enoch's vision concerning Christ's return?

Persevere

Rather than leave us with judgment as the final word, Jude concludes with a call to perseverance. Read through verses **17-23**

What comfort does he offer us in these words? What are we called to commit to? How would you describe Jude's call for our treatment of others?

Hey Jude

Jude identifies himself in **verse 1** as, *"a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James."* If this James is the same as the author of the letter of James, then this Jude is actually Jesus' half-brother.

Jude is shortened from the name *"Judas."* In **Matthew 13:55**, Judas is listed as one of the brothers of Jesus (the last in the list and probably the youngest).

While admitting kinship with James, out of modesty he refers to himself simply as *"a servant of Jesus Christ."* This letter does not carry the authority of a brother of Jesus, but is simply the words his master would have him write.

Why, Jude?

In **verses 3-4** Jude gives his reason for writing this letter.

Compare Jude's reason for writing with **Galatians 2:4**, **2 Peter 2:2-3** and **Acts 20:29-30**.

How would you define these problems that plagued the early church? Are these problems still with us today?

DOXOLOGY

Biblically, we use the term "doxology" to define a short expression of praise and glory to God that often seems to interrupt the flow of the writing. Doxology breaks into the letter as it breaks out of the author and fills him with shouts of praise.

Jude's doxology is at the end in verses **24-25**. What vision of God's glory does he express here? What power does God have in our lives?

Revelation

Behold, I am coming soon!

- ♦ Twenty-seventh book of the New Testament
- ♦ Author: John (of Patmos)
- ♦ Genre: Prophecy/Apocalyptic

The word “*revelation*” means “*the revealing*” or “*the uncovering*.” The implications of the word is that there are no more secrets, no hidden knowledge. God has put everything out in the open and available to us all.

So why does the book that bears the name “Revelation” seem like such a mystery? Perhaps the problem rests with the multitude of interpretations that have clouded our view or with the images and concepts that have been obscured over two thousand years. Whatever the issue, though, one thing should be clear: God wants us to read, understand and be blessed by this book.

Holy, Holy, Holy—Images of Worship

While many would like to concentrate on images of destruction and terror in Revelation, you cannot read it without being overwhelmed at the images of worship.

Read through the following passages. What images of worship do you see in them?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| ♦ 4:1-11 | ♦ 14:1-5 |
| ♦ 5:1-14 | ♦ 19:1-10 |
| ♦ 7:9-17 | ♦ 22:8-9 |

Take a Number

All through the Bible we see the repetition and symbolism of certain numbers. Those patterns seem to culminate in Revelation. Look through the following passages and discuss the significance of the numbers seen:

- ♦ **Four:** 4:6-8; 5:6-14; 7:1-4; 9:13-16; 20:7-10
- ♦ **Seven:** 1:4-5; 1:12-20; 5:6; 8:1-2; 10:1-4; 12:1-3; 15:1-2; 16:1; 17:9-11
- ♦ **Ten:** 2:10; 12:3; 10:1; 17:3; 17:12-18
- ♦ **One Thousand (and multiples of one thousand):** 5:11; 11:13; 20:1-7

Other significant numbers you will find repeated in Revelation are three, three and a half, and twelve.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

All through Revelation we have visions of the throne room of God and the worship that occurs there. At the end, however, after judgment, the vision is of a new heaven and a new earth. God is not simply bringing us to his dwelling place but is creating a new place for us to be with him for eternity.

Read through **Revelation 21:1-27**.

In verse 4 Jesus declares, “*The old order of things has passed away.*” What has changed? What will be different in the new heaven and on the new earth?

P.S. I Am Coming Soon!

Revelation ends on a note of excited anticipation and open invitation! Read through **Revelation 22:7-21**. What commands are found here? What promises are found? What warnings should we heed?

As you read through these final words of Scripture and consider all that we’ve been through as we’ve surveyed the whole Bible, what strikes you about this, God’s final written word for mankind?

A Revealing Book!

The first verse of the book declares it to be “*The revelation of Jesus Christ.*” The book is both about Jesus and by Jesus. Also, it’s singular—there is only *one* revelation.

The author identifies himself as John. It is believed that he was about 75 years old and in exile on the island of Patmos when he had the vision and wrote down what he saw. He was the last of the Apostles and his time was running out.

Things were about to change for the Christians—new leadership, new heresies and new enemies were going to attempt to pull them apart. They needed one last vision to bind them together and keep them strong.

A Beastly Question

In Revelation 13:1-18 we are introduced to two beasts—the second of which has often been identified as the Antichrist.

Through the past two thousand years many famous people have been identified as this person. From Pope Leo, Napoleon, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Henry Kissinger, Gorbachev (maybe it was the birthmark) and even Ronald Reagan.

So far every attempt to identify this person has been wrong, so I’m *sure* the next one will be right!

By the Sea, by the Sea...

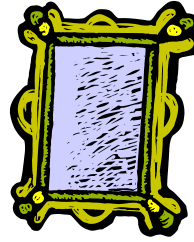
In **Revelation 8:8-11** the sea is poisoned in various ways. In **13:1** a beast comes out of the sea. In **18:17-24** a horrible disaster happens to a city by the sea. Through the book, the sea seems to be a place of evil and judgment.

Then in **Revelation 21:1** there is no more sea. Praise God! The place that has been the source of so much evil is removed from us forever!

The Bible: The Big Picture

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.

At 31,103 verses, 1189 chapters, 66 books and 40 or so authors you would think the Bible was a hodgepodge of ideas and rules that contradict each other. However, instead we see incredible consistencies and principles that span history itself. This tapestry has been called “**The Scarlet Thread**” but we might simply think of it as “**The Big Picture**.”



In the Beginning . . .

The Big Picture all begins with God’s original plan. After God created everything else, his attention was turned to the pinnacle of his creation—humankind.

Read through **Genesis 2:4-25** and consider the following:

- ♦ According to verse **15**, what was God’s original purpose for Adam?
- ♦ What is the warning given to man in verse **17**?
- ♦ What was the first thing God declared as “*not good*?”
- ♦ What do you think is the significance that they were “*naked and unashamed*?” (**25**)

Power in the Blood

From the moment that sin circumvented God’s original plan, there has been one solution to the sin problem—sacrifice. The problem, though, is what kind of sacrifice is God truly pleased with? What can solve our sin problem and restore God’s original plan?

- **Genesis 4:1-11**—How do you view this passage in the light of **Hebrews 9:22**?
- **Exodus 12:1-13**—What did the blood of the Passover lamb do for the Israelites?
- **Exodus 24:1-11**—What did the blood of the covenant do for the children of Israel here?

Blessed Is The Peace Maker

Israel knew they were special—God’s chosen people. The problem was they forgot what they were chosen for. What made them special was the gift they were bringing to all mankind.

There were hints of this all the way through the Bible. Can you tell what their gift was?

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| ♦ Genesis 12:1-3 | ♦ John 10:14-16 |
| ♦ Leviticus 19:33 | ♦ Ephesians 2:11-22 |
| ♦ Isaiah 56:7-8 | |

Restoring the Plan

No amount of sin or rebellion could keep God’s plan from fulfillment. Jesus Christ was not a “last ditch effort” to save mankind. God knew from the beginning that his creation would cost him dearly.

Read **John 6:53-59**.

- If we view Jesus as the sacrificial Passover lamb, what does his blood do for us?
- If we view his sacrifice as the blood of the covenant sprinkled on his people, what does his blood do for us?

What confidence does **1 John 1:7** give us?

And They All Lived . . .

Jump ahead to the end of the story in **Revelation 21:1-5**. What do you see here that is consistent with the beginning of Genesis?

Read **Revelation 22:1-6**. What has been removed and what is the result of its removal?

If you had to sum “*The Big Picture*” up in one sentence, how would you word it?

The Scarlet Thread Through the Bible

In 1961, Dr. W.A. Criswell preached a sermon that detailed the events of the Bible through the “*scarlet thread*” of Christ. He explained how Jesus himself was revealed from the very beginning of the Scriptures as God’s ultimate plan for mankind.

His sermon was over four hours long! You probably could have read a good chunk of the Bible yourself during that time!

BIBLE FACTOID

Who performed the first animal sacrifice? Check out **Genesis 3:21** for the answer.



A CURSE IS A CURSE. OF HEARSE. OF HEARSE

Romans 6:23 tells us, “*The wages of sin is death.*” It would seem we are trapped in this life to suffer the ultimate punishment for our sin. If only there were some way for someone to pay our penalty and take the curse on for us! **Deuteronomy 21:22-23** presents a principle from God. Why do you think leaving the dead body hanging would desecrate the land?

Galatians 3:10-14 applies the principle of Deuteronomy to the curse of sin we are all under. How did God choose to deal with our own desecration?