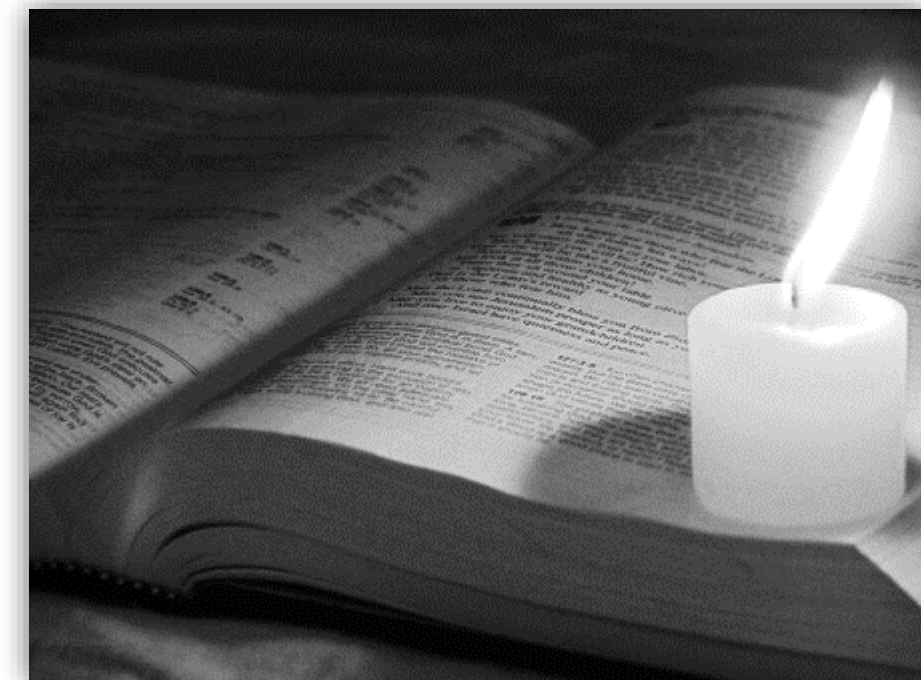


BIBLE SURVEY COURSE

FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

The New Testament - 203



School of Global Missions
Dr. Frederick Osborn, M.Div., D.Min.

Bible Survey Course Syllabus
The New Testament - 203

Copyright © Rev. Dr. Frederick Osborn, 2022-2023-2024

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other – except for brief quotations in printed reviews without prior permission of the author.

Unless otherwise indicated all images were obtained through Internet searches on public platforms. Copyrights are included when shown.



www.school-missions.com



www.bfaBooks.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frederick Osborn traveled the world teaching and preaching the Word of God from 2005 - 2017. His first trip to South Asia was in 2001, and since 2005 he has been fully involved in ministry. His books and study guides have been used in classrooms by hundreds of students around the world.

In 2013 he earned his M.Div. from Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad, India and in that same year was officially ordained into the ministry in a holy convocation administered by Indian pastors representing AG, CSA, and other independent ministries. In 2017 he completed his D.Min. from Covenant Bible College & Seminary, Florida, USA.

He and his wife, Deena now live near Atlanta, GA where he continues to write, teach, and publish his books and study guides.

Portions of this BIBLICAL STUDIES course are taken from the following books by this author:

Exploring the New Testament

Exploring the Old Testament: Vol. One – The Pentateuch

From Genesis to Revelation: Interpreting the Book of Revelation Through the Old Testament Scriptures

Judges: A 21st Century Prophetic Commentary

The Apocalyptic Vision: Understanding the Apocalyptic Writings of the Bible

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: John the Apostle's Heavenly Vision of Jesus Christ

The Way, the Truth, and the Life: The Teachings and Ministry of Jesus the Messiah

This Gospel of The Kingdom

School of Global Missions

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES: NT 203

COURSE SYLLABUS - PROFESSOR

Dr. Frederick Osborn, Academic Dean

Chancellor/President, SGM

678-702-1597 frederickosb7@outlook.com

SGM www.school-missions.com

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course in **BIBLICAL STUDIES** is designed to teach and train three groups: (1) those who are preparing to go to unreached people groups in foreign mission fields (2) for indigenous workers who need more teaching and training for the work they are doing, and (3) to provide materials for indigenous church planters to teach and train others for evangelism and church planting.

CREDIT VALUE:

SGM uses what is known as a *Trimester Calendar* for holding classes. In a trimester system, students have three terms of 12 weeks in each school year. The students will cover a full year's worth of teaching in a normal two semester year. This course in **BIBLICAL STUDIES** has a 30 credit hour value (Three Terms in Old Testament Studies and Three Terms in New Testament Studies).

COURSE TEXT:

The only required text for all Biblical Studies Courses is **THE HOLY BIBLE**. We recommend that each student has a good Study Bible, if possible.

NOTE TO STUDENTS: SGM recommends the website, www.blueletterbible.org for Bible translations and reference materials for Bible study. The site is also available on Mobile apps for your phone or tablet.

NOTE TO PROFESSORS: Additional material is included at the end of the teaching materials. You may or may not wish to take advantage of the Handouts. Anything that is identified as **HANDOUT** material is **NOT** seen by the students unless you copy and give to them as supplemental material. It will be up to the individual teacher to review the teaching materials and decide what to emphasize in their class time. Whatever is not covered in the class, the students will be able study as homework assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STUDENTS:

1. **Read the required texts.**

NOTE TO PROFESSORS: Because the Bible is the only required text for all BIBLICAL STUDIES classes, the students should read the relevant chapters from the Scriptures. The chapters and verses covered in each class will be listed at the beginning of each lesson.

2. **Attend all classes in person, Online, or review recording of an excused class (maximum two per term).**

3. **At the end of each term (12 weeks) write a term paper of at least three typewritten pages (12 point, Times New Roman font, single space.)**

NOTE: Some of the materials for the School of Global Mission's BIBLICAL STUDIES, NT 203 are taken from *Exploring the New Testament* © 2010, 2015 by Dr. Frederick Osborn.

These special Teaching Notes are intended for the teachers only; they are in Times New Roman #14 for ease of reading while teaching. A separate set of notes for the students has been produced and are intended for the student to read and follow as you use the Teaching Notes.

Because this course uses the Inductive Method of Bible Study (see HANDOUT), you will notice a number of places where words, phrases, or sentences are in **bold print and underlined** these are intended for the students as fill-in-the-blank answers in their Student Notes as they follow your lesson.

For some lessons, there may be more material for the teacher than can be taught in a one-hour class time. So, it is best to review each lesson before you start teaching and refer to the student notes for reading and homework assignments. Any additional materials in the *Teacher's Notes* allow the teacher some flexibility in how they teach this course.

**SUPPLEMENTAL READING FOR N.T. COURSE WRITTEN BY
REV. DR. FREDERICK OSBORN:**

(NOTE: These books are not required-reading. They are listed for your benefit as additional sources for your Term Paper, as well as for your personal edification and growth. Portions of these books are included in the teacher's curriculum)

DISCIPLE-TO-DISCIPLE: Making Disciples Like Jesus

EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT

FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION: Interpreting the Book of Revelation

Through the Old Testament Scriptures

KINGDOM DISCIPLESHIP: Becoming Like Jesus

THE APOCALYPTIC VISION: Understanding The Apocalyptic Writings of The Bible

THE BOOK OF ACTS: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Speaking Truth to Power

THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION: Our Complete Salvation in Body Soul and Spirit

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOU: Nourishing the Life of Holiness and Power In You

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER

MESSIAH: The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: John the Apostle's Heavenly Vision of Christ the King

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE: The Teachings and Ministry Of Jesus The Messiah

THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

BIBLICAL STUDIES COURSE: NEW TESTAMENT 201 – 203**NT 201 The Gospels and Acts**

1. Introduction to the New Testament
2. Matthew pt. one: “King of the Jews” – The Background to the New Testament
3. Matthew pt. two: “Jesus, the Spokesman to Distortion”
4. Matthew pt. three: “The Parables of Jesus”
5. Mark pt. one: “Jesus, Messiah, Son of God, and Savior”
6. Mark pt. two: Jesus, the Son of Man”
7. Luke pt. one: “The Messianic Hope”
8. Luke pt. two: “Jesus the Teacher”
9. John pt. one: “The Word Became Flesh”
10. John pt. two: “Jesus, Lord and Savior”
11. The Gospels: “From the Tomb to the Throne”
12. The Book of Acts - Overview

NT 202 The Letters of Paul the Apostle

1. Romans
2. 1 Corinthians
3. 2 Corinthians
4. Galatians
5. Ephesians
6. Philippians
7. Colossians
8. 1 Thessalonians
9. 2 Thessalonians
10. 1 Timothy
11. 2 Timothy and Titus
12. Philemon

NT 203 The Later New Testament

1. Hebrews pt. one
2. Hebrews pt. two
3. James
4. 1 Peter
5. 2 Peter
6. 1 John
7. 2, 3 John and Jude
8. Revelation pt. one
9. Revelation pt. two
10. Introduction to ?
11. The Mission of the Church in the New Testament
12. Early Church History: The First Seven Ecumenical Councils

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES**NT 203: THE LATER NEW TESTAMENT**TABLE OF CONTENTS

NT 203 The Later New Testament

203-1	Hebrews Part One	10
203-2	Hebrews Part Two	23
203-3	James	33
203-4	1 Peter	44
203-5	2 Peter	54
203-6	1 John	65
203-7	2, 3 John, Jude	77
203-8	Introduction to the Book of Revelation	87
203-9	Interpreting the Book of Revelation	100
203-10	The Mission of the Church in the New Testament	110
203-11	Early Church History: Golden Age of the Apostolic Fathers	121
203-12	Early Church History: The First Seven Ecumenical Councils	132

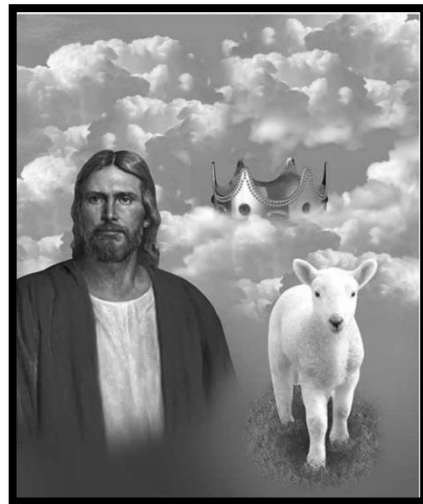
NOTE: ALL HANDOUTS FOR THIS COURSE ARE IN A SEPARATE FILE AT THE END OF THESE LESSONS. HANDOUTS ARE NOT INCLUDED WITH THE STUDENT NOTES. THE HANDOUTS MAY BE COPIED FOR THE STUDENTS AT THE TEACHER’S DISCRETION.

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-1

HEBREWS, PART ONE

Lesson Outline

- I. Hebrews, Part One, “The Superiority of Christ”
 1. Jesus is above all creation and superior to the angels (1:1-14)
 2. Jesus is superior to Moses (3:1-19)
 3. Jesus is the superior to the Old Testament Priesthood (4:14 – 5:11; 7:1-28)
- II. The Five Warning Passages in Hebrews
 1. Hebrews 2:1 – 14 “Do not ignore so great a salvation”
 2. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:16 “Do not be like Israel in the wilderness and come short of God’s promised rest.”
 3. Hebrews 5:1 – 6:21 “Do not turn against God and fall away after having already repented and received the blessings of God’s salvation.”
 4. Hebrews 10:19-39 “Do not sin willfully and head in the direction that leads to eternal destruction.”
 5. Hebrews 12:15-29 “Do not fall short of the grace of God, refusing him who speaks.”



HEBREWS

Author: Unknown (Some scholars argue it may have been Paul, others think it may have been Apollos or one of the other Apostles, but most agree that there is no way to prove who wrote it. All agree that ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the author).

Approximate Date Written: Some time before A.D. 70

Original and Primary Audiences: Christians of Jewish heritage, and all believers

Purpose: Very early on, significant numbers of believers were Jewish. Hebrew Christians were troubled by the numbers of Gentiles flooding into the church. How were the religious sacrifices, ceremonies, and traditions to be understood in light of this new revelation of salvation by grace and faith in Jesus Christ? The author presents the all-sufficiency and superiority of Christ as the answer.

Context: Because there is no mention of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, this letter was probably written before 70 A.D. when Jewish Christians were facing severe persecution from both Romans and non-believing Jews.

Introduction

Jewish followers of Jesus were being pressured by non-believing religious leaders to return to a pure religion based upon salvation by keeping the Jewish laws and keeping themselves separated from Gentiles. Many of these Jewish believers were wavering in their faith and others were trying to convince the Gentile believers that they must first become circumcised and obey the Jewish ecclesiastical laws if not before then certainly after they received Christ. The author of Hebrews had an intimate knowledge of the Jewish religion and may have been Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas or one of the many other Jewish candidates put forth by scholars. But whoever it was, they argued forcefully from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of the Jews and that the gospel of salvation in Christ alone that the Apostles were preaching was the truth.

Christ is central to the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews argues forcefully for the **superiority of Christ** over all that had come before Him. Because the author of Hebrews is addressing those who stepped out of Judaism and into Christianity, knowledge of **the Hebrew Scriptures** and sacrificial system is essential to understanding the book.

At the time, Jewish believers were suffering intense persecution at the hands of their non-believing Jewish kinsmen. There was tremendous pressure on these believers to renounce Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) and revert back to pure Judaism. The writer of Hebrews encourages them to not give up, and based his appeal on the argument that there is *nothing* or *no one* who compares to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is superior to anything that came before Him. Jesus Christ is:

- A superior revelation (1:1-2)
- A superior position (1:3-13; 9:1)
- A superior covenant (3:1 – 4:10; 8:7-13)
- A superior priesthood (4:14 – 5:11; 7:1 – 8:6)
- A superior sacrifice (9:1 – 18)

Many Gentile Christians fail to understand the significance of Hebrews because they have little or no knowledge of the Old Testament’s priesthood and sacrificial system, which are essential to understanding Hebrews. But the Jewish Scriptures are directly quoted or alluded to in well over 100 verses in the book of Hebrews. The priesthood and sacrificial system of the Jews were a foreshadowing of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His position as the Great High Priest and intercessor for all believers. The more Gentile Christians understand about the Old

Testament, the more they will understand the weight and power of the author's argument in the book of Hebrews for the superiority of Christ.

JESUS CHRIST	
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
Concealed (types and shadows)	Revealed (in person)
Restrained (mystery)	Explained (proclaimed)
Foretold (in prophecy)	Fulfilled (in history)

The intention of the author of Hebrews is to keep the focus on God as the primary speaker and to show the context of his words in this Book as being equal to those of the divine revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Since the primary audience of the Book of Hebrews is Jewish, the author's main goal in relying heavily upon the Hebrew Scriptures was to demonstrate to those believers the continuity and connection between the faith of their fathers and faith in Jesus Christ.

It is very important to remember that at the time Hebrews was written, there was no New Testament Canon. The books that now form our New Testament were still being written. The only "Scriptures" universally recognized by the church as authoritative Holy Scripture were what Christians now call the Old Testament. Therefore, anyone who wanted to make an authoritative argument for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior MUST have used the Jewish Scriptures to do so. The Book of Hebrews preserves for us how the Jewish Scriptures were used at that time to prove all that the Apostles said about Jesus was true. The author of Hebrews masterfully wove into the fabric of the Old Testament Scriptures the Gospel message that was being proclaimed by the Apostles to both Jews and Gentiles alike – that Jesus is the superior sacrifice for sins; our great, eternal High Priest; and is above all creation and superior to the angels (Note Luke 24:13-27).

Hebrews is important because it shows how the theology of the New Testament church is consistent with the theology of the Old Testament.

One of the most important contributions of the Book of Hebrews to our New Testament is the way it demonstrates how the Gospel message is drawn out of the Jewish Scriptures like water out of a well. The Old Testament was the source and the inspiration for Christianity. Again, it cannot be overemphasized that when the word "Scriptures" is used in the New Testament writings, it is always referring to the books we now call the Old Testament because at the time, the New Testament was not complete and none of the books had been canonized. Although many of the Gospels and Epistles known to have originated from the Apostles were being circulated through the churches and were revered by all believers, their formation into Canon and their acceptance as "holy Scripture" was still in the future. So, the

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

more than 50 times that the word "Scriptures" appears in the New Testament, it always refers to the Hebrew Scriptures of our Bible (Note the following examples: Acts 17:2-3; 18:28; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The writer of Hebrews skillfully uses the Jewish Scriptures to prove Jesus Christ is all the Apostles proclaimed He was and is. The writer of Hebrews uses the conclusions of centuries of Jewish theology to form the foundations upon which His arguments for the supremacy of Christ are based. And it is from the overwhelming evidence found in the Jewish Scriptures that the author of Hebrews is able to conclude his work with these words:

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (13:20-21)

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

The first few chapters of the book of Hebrews present Christ as the divine **Prophet, Priest, and King**. These were the God-ordained, anointed offices of leadership for the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament times, and the Jews believed that the Messiah (Christ) would be God's specially Anointed One who would fulfill all three of these offices in one Person. So the author of Hebrews wastes no time in presenting Jesus Christ as the perfect and eternal fulfillment of each of these positions of authority.

Prophet

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds..." Hebrews 1:1-21

Priest

"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (2:17)

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus." (3:1)

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (4:14-16)

King

“But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.’” (1:8)

The superiority of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King adds up to Him being superior to Moses, himself:

“...who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” (3:2–6)

This would have been particularly hard for the non-believing Jews to accept because the Jews practically equated Moses with God and every word spoken or written by Moses was considered spoken or written by God Himself. So it was the idea of Jesus being superior to Moses that caused the greatest anger and resentment towards Christians. The anger that led to Steven’s arrest and eventually made him the first Christian martyr was in part over this issue:

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ And they stirred up the people, the elders,

and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.” **Acts 6:8-12**

Note also the riot in Jerusalem that led to Paul’s arrest, and which eventually resulted in him being taken to Rome for trial:

Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.” **Acts 21:27–30**

The argument in Hebrews for Christ’s superiority was by no means intended to supplant everything “Jewish” about Jesus or to cut off Christianity from its Jewish roots. Quite the contrary; the rich heritage of the Jewish faith is what gives context and meaning to our faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Savior. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” In the same way, the New Testament was not written to abolish the Old, but to fulfill it. Therefore, it is in that sense that the Old Testament “makes full” the New. However, once the superiority of Christ to Moses and the old sacrificial system is firmly established, there is only one thing for the Jewish believers to do: press forward in faith and fully embrace the new way of trusting in the once-for-all atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that turning back is not an option; it only leads to destruction.

THE FIVE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

1. “Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” (2:1–4)

The warning in **2:1-4** is **do not ignore so great a salvation.**

It comes after the proof of Christ's superiority to the angels is presented. This outstanding salvation was:

- Announced by the Lord Jesus, the Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15)
- Was confirmed by those who heard Him
- Was testified to by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit

2. "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said:

'Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." (3:7-19)

The warning in **3:7-19** (concluding in **4:1-16** is **Not to be like Israel in the wilderness and come short of the promised rest.** It comes after the proof that Christ is superior to Moses. For good or for bad, the children of Israel serve as examples to all of us. The study of the Exodus wilderness wanderings of Israel after their great deliverance from bondage in Egypt is the story of a people who:

- Hardened their hearts to God's voice spoken through Moses
- Were deceived by sin
- Fell away from God and perished before entering the Promised Land
- Were unbelieving

Christians are not immune from making the same mistakes and falling away in the trials and tribulations in the Wilderness experiences of this life. We must

learn from Israel's mistakes, turn away from sin, and press on with hearts full of faith and obedience towards the high calling of God that we have received in Christ Jesus. Paul was a model for us:

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." **Philippians 3:12-16**

Jesus is superior because he provides spiritual rest for his people that Moses himself could not enter (Deuteronomy 32:48-52), but Hebrews 4:1-10 states that believers must claim God's promised rest:

"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word, which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'; and again in this place: 'They shall not enter My rest.'

Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, 'Today,' after such a long time, as it has been said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.'

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His."

Israel was never able to enter into that rest because of **unbelief, disobedience and rebellion in their hearts.** The word of God is our guide, and the Law will expose and lay bare our sins before God. But the greatness of our

Salvation in Christ makes it possible for us to approach the throne of grace by faith, confident that we will find mercy and grace waiting for us there and not condemnation:

“For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (4:10-16)

3. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” (6:4-6)

This next warning passage comes in the context of Hebrews 5:1 – 6:21. There is always a danger of falling away if a Christian is content with learning the “milk” of the elementary doctrines of our faith, but not walking out a life of righteous living in Christ (5:12-16). The writer of Hebrews explained how Christ, our great high priest is superior to the old priesthood because Jesus was appointed as a God’s own Son (5:5). And because Jesus is God’s Son, He was perfect, and so became the source of **eternal salvation** to all who obey Him (5:9). Therefore, once a Christian turns against God and falls back into a lifestyle of sin and idolatry, after having already repented and received the blessings of God’s salvation, it is not possible to convince them to repent again and return to Christ again.

These verses from 6:4-6 are a clear warning to anyone who is considering going back to their old life, and religion after having been saved. They must consider carefully their decision because God will not be mocked. His salvation is clearly revealed to all who believe. Once you understand the depth God’s

salvation and receive the power and blessings of the Holy Spirit in your life, if you reject God’s salvation and deny Christ, how can you expect to come back at some future time? “For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” (6:7-8)

But in Christ, we have the promise of better things. Not because we are any better than those who perished in the Wilderness, but because we received a superior Savior who has secured for us a superior promise (6: 9-20).

4. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (10:19-25)

The fourth warning is against sinning willfully, and heading in the direction that leads to eternal destruction (10:26-31). It comes in context of Hebrews 10:19-39 – after the call to enter into God’s Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. The purpose of our salvation in Christ is not that we may continue to go on sinning without fear of punishment (as Paul pointed out in Romans 6:1-2). The purpose of our salvation is to set us free from sin so that we might be holy and therefore, able to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”

Our salvation in Christ does not insulate us from the trials and many temptations of this life. There are many traps and snares the devil places on our path through this life; no Christian is automatically immune to temptation, and we may stumble and fall, but we have hope, “for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” (Proverbs 24:16 NIV).

The wicked are brought down by calamity because they will excuse sin or attempt to justify themselves in spite of their sins. But faithful, mature Christians are not like those who shrink back and are destroyed, but they are with those who believe and remain saved (10:39). Those of us who persevere and who refuse to compromise with sin are not like those who are destroyed.

Therefore, we must never give up or try to excuse or justify sin in our life. We must stand our ground against the schemes of the devil; resist him in the full armor of God, and he will flee from us.

Christians have been given much. We have been given God's unmerited favor (grace) and mercy through the cross of Christ. Before we were saved, we were not aware of what we were doing that was wrong. Satan had us deceived and masquerading as an angel of light, he often led us astray. However, once saved, all of that began to change. Like the children of Israel, Christians are called to a life of holiness and to walk in the light. We have been given the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us into all truth. We have the Word of God as a lamp for our feet and a light to our path. We no longer have to live in ignorance of the truth and be in bondage to sin. But, as Jesus reminded us in His parable of the wise and wicked stewards, much is required from those to whom much is given, for their responsibility is greater (Luke 12:42-48).

Therefore, the warning in Hebrews 10:26-39 begins, "...if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." If the severe punishment for rejecting the law of Moses was something to be feared, "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (10:29). Hebrews notes that God will repay those who rejected His offer of salvation and trampled on His Son in the process; "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:31)

One of the primary roles of the Old Testament prophets was to remind the people of Israel of their destiny to be light to the Gentiles and bless the nations (Note: Nehemiah 1:8-9; Isaiah 44:21-22; Ezekiel 36:16-38; Micah 6:5). People often forget from whence they came and with the passage of time may forget the Lord is supposed to be their first and last love. In verses 10:32-39, the writer of Hebrews acts like a prophet of old and admonishes Christians to remember their destiny and calling in Christ. Even in the midst of persecution, they kept the joy of their salvation "knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven." Hebrews is an encouragement for any Christians who are suffering for the faith not to throw away their confidence in God's salvation, "which has great reward" but to endure it, "so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" to be fulfilled at the Lord's Second Coming.

5. "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 12:25-26

Hebrews 12:15-29 contains the fifth and final warning in Hebrews: do not fall short of the grace of God and refuse Him who speaks. This warning comes after believers are called to endure in the face of trials and hardships. Believers are encouraged to "endure hardship as discipline" (12:4-7). Understanding that God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness (12:10). If we have the right attitude of mind, then we will look beyond the immediate circumstances and see the "harvest of righteousness and peace" that it produces (12:11). Therefore, believers should make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy because "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

Those who do not have the right attitude about the trials and tribulations that followers of Jesus must endure in this world are setting themselves up for disappointment because:

- They believe that being a Christian means they deserve a special, or privileged place in this world
- They believe that being a Christian means they must always prosper and have only the best this world has to offer
- And they believe the Christian life should always be an unbroken line of blessings and unending prosperity as their birthright in Christ

However, Jesus taught His disciples to expect suffering, "If they persecuted Me," He said, "they will persecute you also." But those who suffered for righteousness sake would be blessed. As the Apostles spread the Good News throughout the world, they learned from Jesus' example; and by the power of the Holy Spirit within, they were able to show great courage in the face of great suffering. The early believers learned they too must suffer many hardships because of their faith, but they were strengthened by the Spirit-filled words of the Apostles that encouraged them to remember that God was in control, and one day all the suffering they were experiencing would end, and they would all be with the Lord. (See HANDOUT "Called To Suffer")

Of course no sane, rational person wants to suffer in this world. And Christians are not called upon to go out and deliberately bring pain or persecution upon themselves. However, we are called to follow Jesus no matter what the cost, and that cost for many Christians includes making painful

decisions to deny many of the pleasures and comforts this world has to offer. Trials and hardships will come to anyone who seeks to follow God with a whole-hearted devotion in this world. Therefore, when suffering for the sake of Christ comes upon them, if they are not prepared to accept them, a “root of bitterness” can spring up in them and will trouble them.

Almost every experienced pastor and ministry leader can share stories of people they ministered to who became bitter and disappointed with God when they did not get the answers to prayer they were looking for, or when they suffered an unexplained setback or loss. These disappointments can cause bitterness that leads to anger, resentment, or jealousy directed at God or other believers. Their wrong attitudes lead to wrong conduct or doctrines that cause trouble amongst believers and lead others astray. The author of Hebrews understood this and admonished believers not to be like Esau who sold his birthright when the going got a little tough for him, but to look beyond the immediate circumstances of our trials and keep our eyes set upon Mount Zion, the city of the living God that is our spiritual inheritance in Christ Jesus.

Questions for Lesson One

1. Without quoting any verses from the New Testament, can you make the case that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ)?
2. Without quoting any verses from the New Testament, can you make the case that Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament’s priesthood?
3. After studying the warning passages of Hebrews, can a Christian lose their salvation? Explain your answer.
4. Many Christians around the world are being persecuted for their faith; in prosperous, Christian-majority countries, suffering for their faith comes by making sacrifices of some of pleasures of this world to live like Christ. Review Matthew 5:3-12 (the Beatitudes). How will the application of these verses affect believers in this world?
5. If new believers are not taught about the costs of following Jesus Christ with a whole heart, what may be the end result? (Note Luke 14:25-35).

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-2

Hebrews Part Two: “The Old Testament in Hebrews”

Lesson Outline

- I. The Old Testament in Hebrews
 1. The Jewish Contribution to Hebrews
 2. Old Testament References in Hebrews
- II. Old Testament Theology in Hebrews
 1. God is Communicator
 2. Superiority of the Son of God
- III. The Superiority of The Christian’s Walk of Faith

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HEBREWS

The Jewish contributions to Hebrews are found throughout its pages. In fact, of all the writings included in the New Testament canon, no document cites the Old Testament text more extensively than Hebrews. By direct quotes and indirect references, the author of this book weaves the images and theology of the Hebrew Scriptures into the New Testament book in such a way that it is impossible to separate the two without destroying the whole fabric of the book. (see HANDOUT “The Old Testament in Hebrews”). The book of Hebrews refers to the Old Testament over 100 times:

- Direct quotations (36)
- Allusions to specific passages (35)
- General references to OT historical events (18) and persons (14)

The quotes concerning Israel’s redemptive history depend most heavily upon the Pentateuch (THE LAW or TORAH), the first five books of the Bible composed by Moses. Hebrews also relies upon the Psalms for its Christology. Quotations from the OT are almost always framed as coming from the mouth of God (23 of 36 quotations have God as speaker; 4 are from Christ; and 4 others are the Holy Spirit speaking).

After reading the John 5:39-40; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 17:2-3; and 18:24-25, (keeping in mind that in each passage the word “Scriptures” is referring to the Old Testament), the question for Christians is, “If all you had in your possession is

what we call the Old Testament, could you make a strong case for Jesus of Nazareth being the promised Messiah (Christ) and Savior of both Jews and Gentiles?" Paul and the other Apostles were able to do it. Jesus, Himself, was able to do it with His confused disciples on the road to Emmaus, but can Christians do it today?

Certainly, we can thank God that He sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples to teach them all things, and "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" John 14:26. And we can thank God we have the rich treasure of the New Testament Canon to guide us and instruct us concerning our faith, but Christians did not always have a New Testament to help them make their case. **The Book of Hebrews is of immense value to Christians because it is a blueprint for how the early Christians made their case from the Jewish Scriptures.** No one knows for sure who wrote this book, and theologians will, no doubt continue to argue for one person or another, but the underlying truth is that no matter who the human author was, ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the author of Hebrews.

Hebrews' first appeal is to a **Jewish audience**. Therefore, there is little explanation within the text for how or why certain passages from the Jewish Bible were used. But experts in Judaism will immediately recognize the **Rabbinical method** of arguing from the Scriptures incorporated by the author of Hebrews. But Hebrews is not for the Jews only; although Gentiles may not fully understand or appreciate the "Jewishness" of Hebrews, from the beginning they have been strengthened and encouraged by the messages of faith in Christ, hope for their salvation, and perseverance in the face of trials set against the backdrop of the long history of God's chosen people.

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY IN HEBREWS

The book's view of God is squarely founded on the writings that make up the Old Testament. The spiritual, transcendent and eternal character of God is affirmed. God is Creator, and Redeemer. He is the final judge. The author of Hebrews seamlessly weaves the Old Testament Scriptures into his arguments for the all-sufficiency and superiority of Jesus, the Son of God.

The Starting Point of Old Testament Theology: God as Communicator

- From the very first words of the discourse:
"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds..." **Hebrews 1:1-2**

The writer of Hebrews established the fact that the Holy Scriptures were God-breathed. He identified the words spoken by Jesus as having equal authority to the word of God spoken by the Jewish prophets of old because God's Son had spoken them (Exodus 23:20-22; Leviticus 26:13-17).

- Therefore, the people of God must pay more careful attention to the voice of God's messengers not only in the Hebrew Scriptures but also the Gospels:
"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" **Hebrews 2:1-4.**
- Hebrews addresses an audience in danger of turning away from the Christian faith and returning to Judaism. Therefore the purpose of the book is to **urge Jewish believers** to endure in their trials, looking forward to the promised new covenant rewards for all those who are obedient to the word of God and who remain faithful in their relationship with God's superior Son.

The essential proclamations of the gospel's apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers concerning the Son are developed through the book of Hebrews using the Jewish Scriptures to prove (1) The Son's superiority to the angels; (2) the Incarnation of the Son of God; (3) the Son of God's Appointment as High Priest of New Covenant; (4) The Superior Offering of the Son of God.

The Son's superiority to the angels

In three movements, Hebrews 1:5-14 argues for the superiority of the Son over all the angels: First, He is God's Son (1:5-5); Second, He is worshiped by angels (1:6-7); and Third, He reigns and rules over all creation (1:8-14). Each of the three main movements of the passage presents the Son as superior on the basis of a pair of Old Testament texts:

FIRST MOVEMENT

"I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." **Psalms 2:7** (NIV)

“I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.”

2 Samuel 7:14 (NIV)

These Old Testament passages support the unique father-son relationship Jesus enjoys with the Father.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Combines:

“All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols-- worship him, all you gods!” **Psalms 97:7** (NIV)

“Rejoice, O nations, with his people, [The LXX includes: and let all the angels worship him] for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.” **Deuteronomy 32:43** (NIV)

(See HANDOUT “Septuagint LXX”)

WITH

“He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.” **Psalms 104:4** (NIV)

In these verses, the Son’s preexistence and his right to be worshiped by the angels is expressed.

THIRD MOVEMENT

These verses proclaim the eternal reign of the Son.

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” **Psalms 45:6-7**

“Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.” **Psalms 102:25-27**

In these verses, the Son is called “God” (Gr. *ho theos*). He is to have an eternal reign and to have been an agent in creation.

CONCLUDING VERSES

“But to which of the angels has He ever said:

‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (1:13–14).

The undeniable theological message of Hebrews 1:5-14 is that the OT Scriptures confirm all that the Apostles said about Jesus, Son of God. Verse 13 proclaims the exaltation of the Son to the right hand of God and therefore, He has a **unique and supreme status** in the universe above all Creation.

The Incarnation of the Son of God

Hebrews 2:7-9 declares that the Son of God was made “a little lower than the angels” and was crowned with “glory and honor.” All creation was put “under his feet” (meaning it is in subjection to Him). In this present age we do not see everything subject to him. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” (2:9).

Again, the author of Hebrews turns to the Old Testament Scriptures to support his argument. Psalms 8:5-8 supports Hebrews declaration of the Incarnation and Exaltation of Jesus Christ:

“For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. [Incarnation]

You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; [Exaltation] You have put all things under his feet,

All sheep and oxen – Even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.”

The OT Scriptures in Hebrews declare the purpose for the heavenly Son becoming incarnate: To make death powerless; to establish His lordship over creation; and to bring “the sons of earth” (mankind) to glory. The OT texts help make the transition from Christ’s exaltation as the eternal Son in heaven to His incarnation and earthly ministry. Hebrews 2:10-18 is written in context of Psalms 22:22 & Isaiah 8:17-18.

Psalms 22:22 (Hebrews 2:12)

“I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”

Isaiah 8:17-18 (Hebrews 2:13)

“And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him.

Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!

We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.”

Jesus Christ is called the “author of salvation” made perfect by suffering. He is trustworthy because He shared in their humanity. Therefore, by His death, He destroyed once and for all “the power of death” (the devil) and free those who were enslaved by their fear of death and eternal punishment:

“For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” (2:16–18).

The OT Scriptures speak to us of another purpose of Christ’s incarnation: His **brotherly relationship and presence** among God’s people. The sons are called “brothers” and “children”, and the Son is in their midst. This unity with the “children of God” – with whom the Son shares flesh and blood – was a necessary prerequisite for the Son’s sacrificial atonement and appointment as God’s chosen High Priest.

The Son’s Appointment as High Priest

The third proclamation of Christ in Hebrews supported by Old Testament theology is His appointment as **Our Great High Priest**. Because the high priestly Christology presented in chapters 5 – 7 is found nowhere else in the New Testament, only Hebrews reveals this essential element of Christ’s heavenly ministry on our behalf.

Hebrews 5:1-10 quotes Psalms 2:7; and 110:4 to introduce the Son as a High Priest superior to the Aaronic priests. Jesus, like every high priest was selected from among men (5:1-4) but Jesus is superior because He is God’s Son (5:7-10). Because He is God’s Son, in His humanity, Jesus was made perfect through

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

obedience from what He suffered. The Aaronic priests were not perfect, while Jesus Christ, the source of eternal salvation for ALL who obey Him, is superior: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” **Psalm 110:4**.

Melchizedekian Priesthood of Jesus

Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4 are the only Old Testament passages that mention the mysterious figure, Melchizedek. Citing these two passages, the author of Hebrews reasoned in chapter 7 that the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus is superior to the priesthood of Aaron in the older covenant. These supporting verses – like many of the other Old Testament Scriptures cited by the author of Hebrews – incorporated the Midrashic style of commentary in the book of Hebrews that Jews would have understood. (See HANDOUT “Midrash: Thinking Hebrew”)

The author of Hebrews makes a great effort to convince Jewish believers that Jesus is a High Priest superior to the Levitical high priests (7:1 – 8:6). Hebrews compares Jesus’s priestly office with the mysterious “king of Salem and priest of God the Most High” Melchizedek.

The Old Testament offers little information to help identify exactly who Melchizedek is. Hebrews 7:1-10 reviews what is known from the verses in Genesis and Psalms. However, it is implied that because both Jesus and Melchizedek are called kings and priests without beginning or end, they represent a superior priesthood apart from the Levitical priesthood established by Moses and Aaron. Christ’s superior appointment as High Priest stems from:

1. **His imperishable nature** (7:15-16), rather than from tribal descent. “And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.”
2. **God’s absolute pronouncement** of Christ’s position with an oath (“You are a priest forever...” 7:17). This statement assures the permanence of His priesthood and offers believers a superior guarantee for the hope that their sins are forgiven.
3. **Because Jesus lives forever**, He has a permanent position and is able to save completely those who come to God through him. because he always lives to intercede for them. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (7:25).

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

4. **His holy and spotless purity** makes Christ superior to any human high priests. Under the old system, the high priests were weak and sinful men who could not keep from doing wrong, but Jesus never needs the daily blood of animal sacrifices, as other priests did. High priests needed to offer sacrifices to cover their own sins first before they offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. That makes Jesus exactly the kind of High Priest we need; for he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin, undefiled by sinners, and to him has been given the place of honor in heaven (7:26-28).

The Superior Offering

Hebrews verses 8:3 – 10:18 make the argument that our superior high priest has presented a superior new covenant offering. The prophet Jeremiah foretold the coming of this new contract between God and His people Jeremiah 31:31-34:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

The prophecy was one of hope for a better covenant than the one made with their forefathers. Once this new covenant was sealed in the blood of Jesus, it became clear through the Holy Spirit that this new covenant promise extended to the Gentiles as well (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 11:15-18).

Hebrews 8:7-13 presents the prophecy of a new covenant in Jeremiah as the Old Testament proof that the new covenant promised long before had come and superseded the old: “For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.”

Verses 9:1 – 10:18 declares that new covenant offering of Christ the Lamb of God is greater than the old covenant offerings on **three counts**:

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

1. The New Covenant offering was made in the **true, heavenly Tabernacle** (9:1-11) rather than an earthly copy. “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.” (9:11).
2. Christ’s offering consisted of **His own blood** rather than the blood of animals (9:12-14). This is necessary because under the old covenant, almost everything was cleansed by sprinkling it with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (9:22). “...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” (9:28). His offering, rather than having to be repeated year after year, was made once for all time
3. Since the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming and are not the reality themselves. His superior offering **perfects new covenant believers permanently**. God no longer remembers their sins; and they receive a superior basis for endurance in the Christian way of holiness (10:1-18).

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN’S WALK OF FAITH

The author of Hebrews applies what he has been saying about the superiority of Christ by warning his readers of the danger of discarding their faith in Christ (10:19-29). The faith that believers must maintain is defined:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (11:1-3).

Hebrews illustrated this faith in 11:4-40 using a number of faithful figures from the Old Testament stories. The triumphs and accomplishments of faith in the lives of these heroic believers should encourage those who have received “something better” in Christ to look for “unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (12:2).

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” (11:39-40).

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

CONCLUSION

Whether Jew or Gentile – whether you argue it from the Old or New Testament Scriptures – the character of our lives in Christ must be shaped by our dedication to Christ who is superior in every way to all that came before Him and all that have come after Him – in heaven and on earth. This character will be manifested in our love for each other through our hospitality, concern, purity, contentment, and obedience in faith. Therefore, as Hebrews 13:20-21 reminds us:

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Questions for Lesson Two

1. Even though the Book of Hebrews was written for Jewish Christians, it is of immense value to Christians. What makes Hebrews so important for all Christians?
2. How does the Starting Point of Old Testament Theology (God as Communicator) relate to our understanding of the inspiration of the book of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament?
3. Most of the book of Hebrews describes the superiority of Christ to creation, the angels, the priesthood, etc. How do the arguments in Hebrews help Christians present Christ’s superiority to other beliefs?
4. What makes Christ’s sacrificial offering for sins superior to any other religion’s means atonement for sins?
5. Hebrews chapter 11 is known as “the faith chapter.” How does this chapter encourage Christians to trust God and press on steadfastly for whatever the future holds for them?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-3

The Epistle of James

Lesson Outline

- I. Genuine Christian Religion – James Chapter 1
 1. Who was James?
 2. James and the Sermon on the Mount
- II. Genuine Christian Faith – James 2:1 – 3:12
- III. Genuine Christian Wisdom – James 3:13 – 5:20

Author: James, the Lord’s brother (Mk 6:3)?

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 49

Original and Primary Audiences: First-century Jewish Christians, and all believers

Purpose: James, Jesus' brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church, wrote this letter to teach right Christian behavior (works) in proper perspective to salvation in Christ (faith)

Context: After being persecuted and driven out of Jerusalem, many Jewish Christians were residing in Gentile communities far away from Jerusalem and Judea. James was concerned about how these scattered believers would carry on in the faith apart from the direct leadership of the Jerusalem church.

WHO WAS JAMES?

Because the author of the letter of James does not exactly identify himself, we have no absolute proof of who this “James” is. We know that there are four individuals named “James” in the NT:

1. James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13)
2. James the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3)
3. James, the son of Zebedee/brother of John; died as a martyr under Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2)
4. James, the Lord’s brother.

Although we have no absolute proof, the most probable candidate for the author of this letter is James, the Lord’s brother identified in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; and Galatians 1:19. At first, James was not a believer (John 7:2-5) and did not understand Jesus’ earthly ministry. However, the Scripture confirms that the risen Christ appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:7), removed his doubts, and he became a follower of Christ (Acts 1:14). References to James in Acts (12:17; 15:12-29; 21:18, 25), and Galatians (1:18-19; 2:6-9, 12) suggest that he quickly became an important leader in the early church.

James was a devout Jew and a pillar in the church in Jerusalem. The Jewish character of this epistle is evident with its stress upon the Law. His Epistle offers a large number of similarities to the Sermon on the Mount and relied heavily on Jesus' teachings.

The Book of James offers a large number of similarities to the **Sermon on the Mount** – more than any other book in the New Testament. James relied heavily on Jesus' teachings for his instructions to the church:

CHART: James and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount

Subject	James	Matthew
Be joyful when troubles come your way because of your faith in Jesus Christ	James 1:2	Matthew 5:10-12
You are perfect, complete, and needing nothing even as your Father in heaven is perfect.	James 1:4	Matthew 5:48
Ask God in faith, and he will answer your prayers.	James 1:5; 5:15	Matthew 7:7-12
Believers who are poor by the world's standards should be glad and humble for God honors them.	James 1:9	Matthew 5:3
Watch out for anger; it can place you in danger of God’s judgment.	James 1:19, 20	Matthew 5:22
Be merciful to others and forgive them, as God is merciful and forgiving towards you.	James 2:13	Matthew 5:7; 6:14
Your faith must express itself in right actions.	James 2:14-16	Matthew 7:21-23
Blessed are the peacemakers who plant seeds of peace. They will reap a harvest of goodness and righteousness.	James 3:17, 18	Matthew 5:9

Friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God; you cannot serve God and worldliness.	James 4:4	Matthew 6:24
When you humble yourself and realize your dependence on God, he will comfort you, lift you up, help and encourage you.	James 4:10	Matthew 5:3, 4
Do not speak evil against each other. If you do, you are bringing judgment upon yourself.	James 4:11	Matthew 7:1, 2
Store up eternal treasures in heaven because where your treasure is, there your heart is also.	James 5:2, 3	Matthew 6:19
Be patient in suffering, as God's prophets were patient, for your reward is in heaven.	James 5:10	Matthew 5:12
Be honest in your speech; do not make rash oaths or vows. Just say a simple yes or no so that you will not sin.	James 5:12	Matthew 5:33-37

JAMES AND GENUINE CHRISTIANITY

Is there such a thing as a genuine Christian? And if so, how do you know what one looks like? These questions have been asked almost from the beginning of the church. And as the church grew and gained members from every tribe and tongue around the world, the question became harder to answer. Countless denominations have sprung up around the world and at times it seems like total anarchy in the church with no one able to agree on even the simplest of things. Today, if you choose ten Christians at random, put them into a room, and ask them “What is a genuine Christian?” you would most likely get ten different and sometimes contradictory answers. The only way we can come together and find a unified answer to what is a genuine Christian is to return to the source: the word of God. If we turn to the Book of James to help us find the answer, we will discover a clear, concise definition of what a genuine Christian is from one of Christianity’s founding Apostles who knew Jesus personally and heard His teachings. A simple outline of James answers what a genuine Christian is in three parts:

- James chapter 1, A genuine Christian practices an **authentic Religion**.
- James chapters 2 – 3:12, A genuine Christian possesses a **sincere Faith**.
- James chapters 3:13 – 5:20, A genuine Christian has **godly Wisdom**.

When you add all of the above, you will have a clear definition of a genuine Christian.

JAMES CHAPTER 1 – GENUINE RELIGION

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” **James 1:2-4**

A sure sign that a person’s religion is genuine is how they persevere in trials. Those who are “fair weather” Christians will quickly fall away when the storms of life come upon them. They are like the one Jesus warned about in Matthew 7:24-27:

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

James 1:5-8 tells us that person who practices genuine religion will ask for wisdom from God since He gives it generously to all without judgment. But when asking for wisdom, do not doubt God’s word, “because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” A man who doubts the truth and authority of God’s word will not receive anything from the Lord; “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

The wisdom of this world tells us what is *practical* (what is scientific and mechanical – as in certain laws of cause and effect). Worldly wisdom tells us what is *expedient* (what is immediately advantageous without regard for ethics or consistent principles); but godly wisdom is a wisdom that is grounded in reverence for God and respect for His word. Godly wisdom leads to **righteousness**; it does more than just help us follow a legalistic system of rights and wrongs. Godly wisdom provides us with **spiritual insight** that guides us to making the right decisions and helps us to avoid making costly mistakes – if we will listen to it: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death.” (Proverbs 16:25).

The book of Proverbs contains godly wisdom that if followed, will help us avoid many of the pitfalls of this world. Christians also have the advantage of

direct access to divine discernment through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15).

The faith produced by genuine religion is more than just faith that God exists; it is a faith that believes God hears us when we pray and causes us to wait expectantly for His answer. Genuine belief produces a true faith that endures temptations and knows that God’s desire is for His children to resist and overcome every trial and temptation this world throws against us. (More will be said about genuine faith in James 2:1 – 3:12)

Having Genuine Religion makes us **a doer and not just a hearer** of God’s commands. Of course we should study and understand what God’s word says. We must in our prayer time and in our meditations listen to the Holy Spirit of God speaking to us. But all of that is in vain if in the end we do not *do* what God commands. “To whom much is given, much is required.” Therefore, we must put into action what God has spoken to us:

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”
James 1:26-27

JAMES 2 – 3:12, GENUINE FAITH

Many Christians talk about their faith, but those who have a genuine faith are those who **live their faith** from day-to-day. Every Christian denomination or independent church has some *Statement of Faith* or an expression of what they believe. Most members are asked to subscribe to the statement and abide by it. It can be argued that what James was doing in this epistle was laying out the Faith Statement that every Christian should subscribe to and abide by. With that in mind, in the next few verses he presents *three principles* of the Christian faith:

1. **Commitment** is an essential part of genuine faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with certain biblical facts. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble.” (2:18–19).

You must not only commit your mind and heart to Christ, but you must also behave as Christ would in every situation. Christ never showed favoritism and treated all people equally, and so we should do the same. Man-made barriers like social class, caste, income and education, etc. are

designed to separate people. Jesus taught in word and deed not to show favoritism based upon these things. James says those who show favoritism have broken the Lord's "royal law" that says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

2. **Right actions** are the natural by-products of genuine faith. A true Christian will have a changed life. It does no good if a person claims to have faith, but their actions tell another story. "Can such a faith save him?" James asks (2:14).

James 2:21- 25 gives two examples from the Hebrew Scriptures of two very different people whose lives were drastically altered by their genuine faith in God: Abraham who was considered a righteous man, and Rahab the prostitute. Abraham believed God's promises against all evidence to the contrary and credited with righteousness. Rahab was considered righteous because she took a risk and hid the Hebrew spies in Jericho, believing God was able to deliver the fortified city into their hands.

3. **Good works** put faith into action. Right actions lead to good works and good works lead to more right actions. Faith must be built upon good works because without putting good works into action, faith is useless to those in need (2:15-17).

Some have attempted to argue that somehow James and the epistles of Paul are not in agreement concerning salvation by grace through faith and not of works. But there is no disagreement between the two – only a difference in emphasis about what genuine faith produces. Paul's teaching is that we receive salvation by faith alone; his emphasis is on the *purpose* of faith, which is to bring salvation. James emphasizes the *results* of faith, which is a changed life.

A key indicator for James of a life that is changed is the ability to tame the troublesome tongue. Using a series of word pictures, he vividly describes that struggle. (See HANDOUT "Think Hebrew in James: Word Pictures on the Importance of Our Speech").

JAMES 3:1 – 5:20, GENUINE WISDOM

Everybody in this world is searching for knowledge of some kind or another. Some are searching for financial knowledge in order to become wealthy and prosperous; others search for knowledge on how to have a happy family life; and still more are seeking scientific knowledge to make this world a better place. But where do we find genuine spiritual wisdom? Gurus and mystics from every religious background promote some kind of deep spiritual knowledge that they

claim only they possess. Therefore, if someone wants their knowledge, they must come to the guru and sit at his feet to learn keys to unlock this special knowledge.

In the early church, there were of course, the Gnostics. They attracted many followers on the false promises that they held the secret to a special saving *gnosis* (knowledge) of the universe that only a few could understand. But true spiritual wisdom is not for a select, privileged few. The true wisdom that comes from God is not complicated; it is not a multi-layered enigma wrapped inside another enigma in order to hide its true meaning. Proverbs says true spiritual wisdom is openly calling to God's people to come to her: "Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech..." (Proverbs 1:20-21 NIV)

Although godly wisdom is readily available to those who seek it, that does not mean that godly wisdom is cheap: "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7 NIV).

Following God's wisdom may cost you in this world, for it is often contrary to the worldly wisdom that seeks its own rewards in this lifetime. Wisdom from God seeks heavenly rewards first and therefore, its rewards are not necessarily in this world. Worldly wisdom seeks immediate results that can be measured. Some of the things that the world uses to measure wisdom:

- By what college degree a person holds
- By how much money they have
- By their possessions – where they live, what kind of car they drive, the clothes they wear, etc.
- By whether they have a happy spouse and raise smart children
- By their level of achievement (i.e. the title or position they have in a company they work for or own)

But how does God measure wisdom? Wisdom that comes from God has as its foundation established in the fear of the Lord: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10 NIV). Therefore, Godly wisdom

- Is based upon how we **worship and respect the Lord**. Jesus began His instructions on prayer: "our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Thy name..." Reverence for God is the starting point if we want to hear from Him.
- Is **eternal** and has its sights set upon **pleasing God not men**. It is not about the accumulation of things here on earth but is about seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

James says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” (3:13). So, true wisdom is measured by the depth of a person’s character. In the same way you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, so you can evaluate a person’s wisdom by their actions: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (3:17-18). Those who have godly wisdom will be full of:

- **Mercy**
“The wicked man craves evil; his neighbor gets no mercy from him.” Proverbs 21:10 NIV
“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 NIV
- **Love for others**
“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” Proverbs 3:1-4 NIV
- **Peace**
“Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.” Proverbs 3:16-18 NIV
- **Consideration for others**
“He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.” Proverbs 28:27
“The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge.” Proverbs 29:7
“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” Romans 12:10-13

- **Submission**
“Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.” Proverbs 4:1-5
- **Sincerity, impartiality**
“Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the Lord understand all.” Proverbs 28:5
“Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.” Deuteronomy 16:19 NIV
“To show partiality is not good-- yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread.” Proverbs 28:21 NIV
- **Righteousness**
“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path.” Proverbs 2:6-9

James reminds us how worldliness and *pride* are the roots of wars and conflicts between believers: selfishness, jealousy, envy – these all lead to strife. “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

James 4:7-10 offers a simple cure for all the worldliness and strife that plagues the church:

- **Submit to God and Resist the Devil**
“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (4:7-8)
- **Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord**

“Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (4:9-10)

James makes a statement on the dangers of being judgmental:

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (4:11–12).

There is a lot of controversy in the Western church today about being “judgmental”. Some Christian churches boast that they accept anyone regardless of their lifestyle. They argue that to tell anyone that their behavior is sinful is intolerant and they quote the words of Jesus, “thou shalt not judge,” or this verse from James: “who are you to judge your neighbor?” But Jesus and James were not talking about ignoring or excusing sin in the lives of believers. Jesus Himself prescribed a method for dealing with a sinful brother or sister in the church:

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

What James is talking about here (4:11) is slander. *The Living Bible* says it this way: “Don’t criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God’s law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is not to decide whether this law is right or wrong, but to obey it.” Christians must not speak evil, slander, or speak about another brother’s faults to others (See HANDOUT “Church Wars”). None of us are perfect human beings. And any one of us at any time could be the target of slander, gossip or rumors that may or may not be true about us.

James is urging us not to condemn another believer to eternal judgment when we see a flaw in their character, but that does not mean we are to excuse sin or ignore it and not address it for fear of being called judgmental. If we see a brother or sister struggling with sin, then it is right and appropriate to approach them in love and encourage, correct, and if necessary, rebuke them in order to turn

them back on the right path, but not to condemn them. Only God and His angels can pronounce eternal judgment on human beings and then only at the end of the age. (Remember Jesus’ parables of the “Wheat and Tares” and “The Dragnet” in Matthew 13).

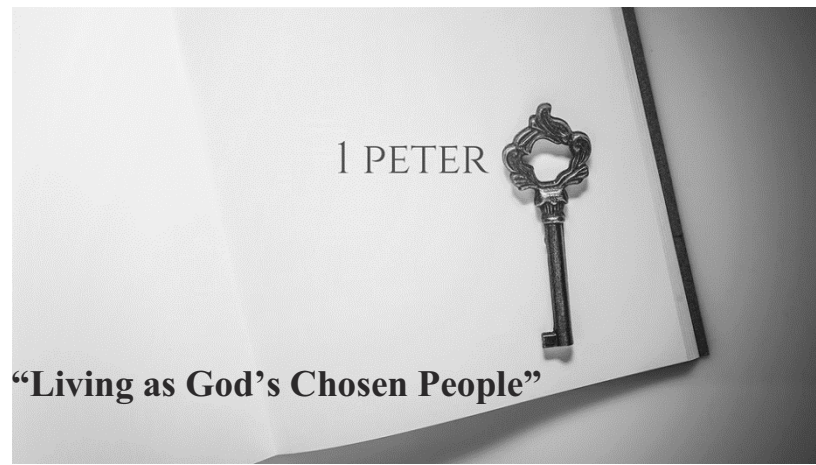
James says, “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (4:12). James closes his Epistle by encouraging believers to pray for one another (5:13- 15); he uses the Old Testament prophet Elijah as an example for how the prayer of the righteous “avails much” (5:17-18). He encourages believers to help one another to stay on the right path:

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (5:19-20).

Questions for Lesson 3

1. The Book of James relies heavily on Jesus' teachings. How does James help Christians interpret and apply Jesus' instructions to the church?
2. Explain in your own words how a genuine Christian practices an authentic Religion (James chapter 1).
3. Explain in your own words the kind of faith a genuine Christian has (James chapters 2 – 3:12).
4. A genuine Christian has godly Wisdom (James chapters 3:13 – 5:20). How do Christians obtain this wisdom?
5. What happens to a church that is full of worldliness and strife? What is the cure for that church (James 4:7-10)?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-4



Lesson Outline

- I. The Great Blessings of God's Salvation (1:1 – 2:11)
 1. References to Old Testament Scriptures in 1 Peter
 2. Characteristics of God's Great Salvation
- II. The Great Responsibilities Living as God's Chosen People (2:12 – 3:22)
- III. The Suffering of Believers (4:1-19)
- IV. Shepherding God's People in the Midst of Suffering (5:1-14)

Author: The Apostle Peter

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 62-64

Original and Primary Audience: Jewish Christians driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor, and all believers

Purpose: Peter was one of the original twelve disciples and an apostle. He wrote to suffering Christians to offer them encouragement to stand firm in the midst of their trials

Context: Peter wrote this letter during a time of great persecution under Emperor Nero. Throughout the Roman Empire, Christians were being tortured and killed for their faith, "These trials will show that your faith is genuine.... So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world" (1:7).

THE GREAT BLESSINGS OF GOD'S SALVATION (1:1 – 2:11)

Peter wrote his letters to encourage and strengthen all Christians who would likely face trials and persecution in this world.

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." (1:1-2).

The travels of Paul and the other early missionaries created many small communities of mixed Jewish and Gentile believers throughout Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. By the time this first letter was written, most Jewish Christians had been driven out of Jerusalem by non-believers and had mingled with these far-flung Jewish communities. This first letter from Peter was specifically addressed to these believers in Asia Minor. Peter acknowledged these believers as "strangers" or "pilgrims" of the *Dispersion*, a term commonly used in the first century for those Jews who were then scattered throughout the ancient world, but those terms would have applied metaphorically to the Gentile believers since they are Abraham's children by faith (Gal. 3:29).

Although Peter was addressing a specific community of believers, because the Holy Spirit was upon him as he wrote, his words are timeless and speak to all Christians everywhere to this day. The letter of 1 Peter encourages us to live in the great blessings of God's salvation with the hope we have received in Christ.

The time and place of this letter suggests it was written shortly after **the book of Acts** was completed. Once the Gospel reached Rome, Christians got the attention of the highest authorities of the Empire. Roman leaders believed Christianity was a threat to the State because they refused to worship Caesar as a god, which was to them the equivalent to rejecting the authority of Caesar. So, Nero began a time of great persecution that for the first time singled out the growing Christian sect. The persecution of Christians by Rome would continue on-and-off until 313 A.D. when the Christian Emperor Constantine declared freedom of religion throughout the Roman Empire and became Christianity's protector and patron.

Like other New Testament authors, Peter made frequent references to the Old Testament Scriptures. Sometimes by direct quotation (as in 1 Peter 2:6-8):

⁶"Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,
*Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means
be put to shame.*" [Is.28:16]

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

⁷“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

*“The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,”* [Ps. 118:22]

and

⁸*“A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense.”* [Is. 8:14]

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

And sometimes by indirect reference (as in 1 Peter 3:6 and 3:20):

⁶“...as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” [Genesis 12:11-13; 21:13]

²⁰“...who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” [Genesis 6:13-22]

Peter describes the great blessings of God’s salvation and the **Characteristics of God’s Great Salvation** that all believers share:

- **HOPE** – God, motivated by His great mercy has caused us to be brought from despair to a living hope.
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” (1:3)
- **ASSURANCE** – Peter was a witness of the resurrection and saw the promise of the imperishable in the midst of this world that is passing away. The resurrection became for us the assurance of “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...” (1:4)
- **FAITH & JOY** in spite of trials (1:5-9). Although they were witnesses to the resurrection, Peter and the other Apostles had to stand in faith by God’s power with all believers until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1:5). And though we have not seen

the Lord, Peter wrote that we love Him (1:8) We believe Him through the Apostles’ word and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the goal of our faith, which is the salvation of our souls.

Peter reveals that these great blessings of God’s salvation – hope, assurance, faith, and joy – are the strengths of the Christian faith. The Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the tomb, is the Father’s agent who guides us in the communication of the gospel. The Holy Spirit takes the apostles’ word – God’s Word – and makes it real in the hearts, minds, and actions of those who hear it. Our faith enables us to rejoice in the face of all kinds of trials “...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7).

Peter states that our great salvation (deliverance) was **foreseen by the prophets:**

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.” (1:10-12)

Although they wrote about it, this salvation (John 3:10-21) was something the prophets did not fully understand. Many questions as to what it all could mean remained unanswered; even after Jesus arrived on the scene His followers struggled to understand the full meaning of Jesus’ words and actions:

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:25-27

The Old Testament prophets wondered what the Holy Spirit was talking about; for the LORD told them to write down events which had not yet happened to the Messiah: His suffering and His great glory afterwards. And they wondered when and to whom all this would happen – even the angels in heaven wanted to

know more about it. They came to the realization that these things would not occur during their lifetime, but many years later. And when at last, this Good News was plainly announced to all, it was preached to all (both Jew and Gentile) in the power of the Holy Spirit who spoke to the prophets of old.

THE GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES LIVING AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE (2:12 – 3:22)

Peter reminds the church that salvation includes a call to holiness. Salvation begins with the living hope established by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Peter makes it clear that believers must endure the suffering of this present age, but they have the promise of God's protection to sustain them. **Holiness is our response** to the hope we have been given by our salvation and by the promises of God for our provision and protection:

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:13–16

Since we have become Abraham's children by faith (Gal. 3:7), we have been given the same command from the Lord to **“Be holy, because I am holy.”** Here Peter reminds us, as did the writer of the book of Hebrews, that we have been redeemed by a better sacrifice “...the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect”:

“He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” 1 Peter 1: 20-21

Holiness is more than avoiding sin; holiness means we must make the right choices in how we live. He gives Christians guidance on how to conduct our relationships with one another (1 Pet. 3:1-12); we must rid ourselves of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander (2:1).

Christians must never forget that we live as aliens and strangers in this fallen world. Others may succumb to the same trials and temptations that come upon all people, but Christians are expected to stand even when others fall and abstain from sinful desires, which war against every soul (2:11). Holy living in this world means

we must learn respect for authorities and live in harmony with mutual submission towards one another:

“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (2:11-12)

Christians must discipline their lives because:

1. **They are called to live as foreigners in a hostile environment.** Christians should be strangers to the godless – no longer participating in their way of life.
2. **The flesh wars against the spirit** and if a Christian yields to the flesh, they will lose the battle for the life of the Spirit in the inner man.
3. **The whole world is watching Christians** to see if they are living what they say they believe. Some are watching, hoping we will fall, so that they can delight in our failures. Others are watching in hope that they too will find the way to overcome the fleshly appetites that wage battle against their better selves.

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For

‘He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.
Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.’” (3:8–11)

True holiness compels us to strive for **mutual love between brothers and sisters in Christ.** Jesus said the Greatest Commandments are to “love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength... and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, it is impossible to keep His commands without mutual love and unity within the body.

In the modern church, holiness is all too often confused with externals that are irrelevant to true holiness. Regulations on clothes, hair, jewelry, food, days and times of worship, kinds of music, etc. are poor substitutes for the vital *qualities* of holiness, which include being sympathetic, loving, compassionate, meek, humble, able to turn the other cheek, and able to control the tongue. This is the holy living that glorifies God:

“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (4:7-11)

Holiness was never intended to make us be worthy of God’s grace or make us feel we are better than anyone else. Holiness is intended to make us:

- **Clear-minded and self-controlled**, which makes our prayers for ourselves and others effective
- **Loving** – because loving each other deeply restores and reconciles us to one another so that the body of Christ will be unified and strong
- **Hospitable** – Hospitality is essential for us to serve one another in Christ

Our gifts are given by God not to make a spectacle of ourselves and to draw attention to our church or ministry, but for us to use to glorify Him. Self-righteousness puffs up the ego and makes a person feel superior to others, but true holiness leads us to a humble spirit able to submit to others and serve “the least of these” in the name of Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:40 & Mark 9:35). Therefore, through holiness in our words and actions, “God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”

THE SUFFERING OF BELIEVERS (4:1-19)

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” (4:1–2).

After reminding them of their sinful past life, Peter warns them that living for Christ’s sake will bring suffering because past associates will reject them with disdain or contempt. People will be surprised and angry when a new Christian will no longer join them in the wicked things they do. It almost always happens that non-Christian family and friends will spurn those who have been born again of the Spirit. Christians will always feel the hatred and scorn of those who glory in their sinful lifestyles that satisfy the flesh. But Christians know that all must face the Lord who is Judge of all – the living and dead. The wicked may be on top now, but they will end being punished and cast into hell for the way they have lived.

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (4:6). That is why the Good News was preached even to those who died so that although their bodies were punished with death, they could still live in their spirits as God lives. (See HANDOUT “Commentaries on 1 Peter 4:6).

In one accord, the apostles preached the end of the world and the nearness of the Second Coming. Applying the Lord’s teachings, Peter urged the church to be like the first believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:40-47) who continued in prayer, showed love for each other, and shared with those in need.

God has given every person spiritual gifts and special abilities to use to help and bless others. “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (4:11).

Suffering for being a believer is something the early church had to take for granted. In many places around the world today, it is the same situation. Christians in a growing number of nations around the world, accept persecution as a normal state of being for the church. Like the early church, they are not bewildered or surprised by the fiery trials they are facing; for them, it is not strange, or unusual but they learn from the start that persecution is going to happen. Peter’s words give strength and comfort, “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” Therefore, as strange as it seems to the carnal mind, Christians can be happy if they are cursed and insulted for being a Christian, for when that happens the Spirit of God will be with them. God is always glorified when His people stand in the fiery trials that the wicked put God’s people through.

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now

“If the righteous one is scarcely saved,
Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” (4:17-19)

Peter urges all believers to endure suffering with the right attitude of suffering joyfully for Jesus’ sake. Peter wrote for their benefit – and ours – so that we might be encouraged and remain steadfast in our Christian faith. Suffering must come to God’s people ahead of all others because through suffering:

- Christians are being refined (made holy) in this age. The suffering of everyone else will come at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the age (Revelation 21:11-15).
- Christians turn towards God for deliverance and protection.
- Christians turn their attention from self and the pleasures of this world and seek Christ and His kingdom.
- Christians acknowledge that they are totally dependent upon God.
- Christians focus upon God, fellowshiping and communing with Him and other believers.

SHEPHERDING GOD’S PEOPLE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING (5:1-14)

“When people enter the eldership, no small honor is conferred upon them, for they are entering the oldest religious office in the world, whose history can be traced through Christianity and Judaism for 4,000 years; and no small responsibility falls upon them, for they have been ordained shepherds of the flock of God and defenders of the faith.” William Barclay

Peter closes his letter by addressing the elders of the church. He exhorts “those who are among you” as “a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.” Peter’s call for the church to be “submissive to one another and be clothed with humility” indicates how much Peter himself had grown since his time with Jesus began. Peter’s story in the Gospels reveals a man who struggled with submission and pride. He was humbled totally under the mighty hand of God on the day Jesus was crucified, but the resurrected Jesus restored him days later by the Sea (John 21). So, Peter learned firsthand that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (Proverbs 3:34).

Shepherding God’s people involves **spiritual warfare**. “Therefore,” Peter says, “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (5:6-11).

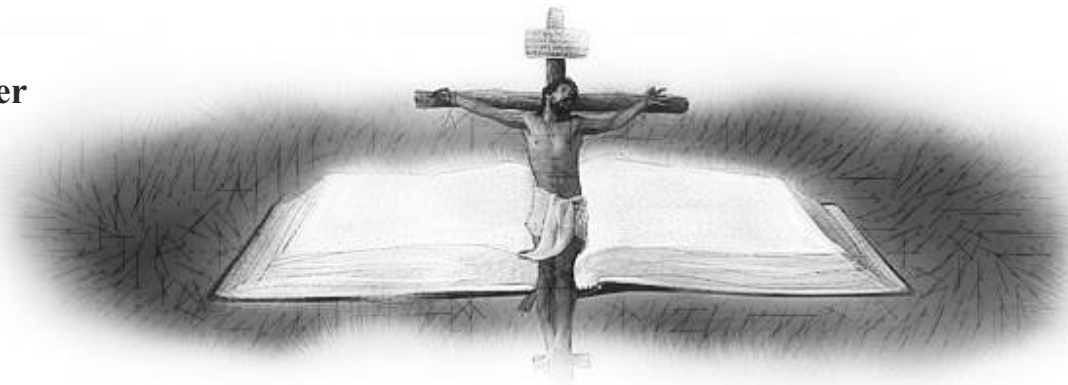
The success or failure of a church or ministry depends upon choosing the right people who are able to lead God’s people in the good times and in times of trouble. Far too often leaders are chosen to serve in the church because of outward appearances. But wealth, social status, or personal charm are no way to choose leaders who must be able to strengthen and rally the church even in the middle of persecution. The spiritual attributes of faith, hope, and especially, love are the greatest attributes of servant leaders that the church needs.

Questions for Lesson Four

1. What are the Great Blessings of God’s Salvation that Peter describes in (1:1 – 2:11)?
2. What are the Characteristics of the person who has received the Great Salvation that Peter describes?
3. What are the Great Responsibilities Living as God’s Chosen People (2:12 – 3:22)?
4. Explain why it is important for Christians to discipline their lives.
5. Explain why it is important to choose the right people to be elders.

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-5

2 Peter



Lesson Outline for The Student

- I. The Great Salvation of God (1:1-21)
- II. The Warning Against False Teachers (2:1-22)
- III. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the End of the Age (3:1-18)

Author: Peter

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 67

Original and Primary Audiences: The church at large

Purpose: Was written to warn Christians about false teachers in the church and to exhort believers to grow in their faith in and knowledge of Christ

Context: Peter realized that his days on earth were coming to an end (1:13, 14), so he wrote passionately about what was on his heart. In his first letter, he strengthened those who felt the attacks coming from outside the church in the form of persecution, but in his second letter, he was warning believers of attacks that would come from inside the church in the form of false teachers coming to lead them astray. He encouraged his readers to stand upon unchanging truth of the gospel.

THE GREAT SALVATION OF GOD (1:1-21)

“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine

power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (1:1–4).

Peter’s primary motivation for his second letter was his concern over the encroaching influence of heretical teachers in the church. The church had been suffering from the intense persecution under Emperor Nero that began two or three years earlier. Peter’s first letter addressed the need to hold fast in times of hardship, but his second letter focused on the danger presented by false teachers and prophets who were leading Christians astray. 1 Peter gives the church the effective strategies to fight and defeat their heresies:

- Expose and denounce the evil motives of false teachers.
- Reaffirm the truths of Christian doctrines
- Stand upon the authority of Scripture
- Declare the supremacy of faith
- Proclaim the certainty of Christ’s return

Contrary to what the Greeks believed, the pursuit of scientific knowledge and human wisdom are not the salvation of the human race. To live a truly godly life requires knowing Jesus Christ, not philosophical learning or supernatural experiences. Having the right Christian doctrine is not the way to salvation either; but if believers truly want to experience the abundance of God’s grace and peace, they must put forth the effort to know God’s word. God has given us His “great and precious promises” so we may be “partakers of the divine nature” and grow in our knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

In his opening verses, Peter declares that the power to lead a godly life comes from God. This divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life. Through the knowledge of Him “who called us by glory and virtue” we have been “given great and precious promises.” God empowers believers to share His divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by carnal desires. However, to all that has been given to those who have faith in God, more is required.

Christians cannot wait passively for God to do all the work. What God has done on our behalf should motivate us to be diligent and resist the devil by adding to our faith integrity along with the knowledge of God and His ways. But knowing the will of God is not enough, we must control our fleshly desires and persevere though every trial and temptation that comes our way. Godliness must be put into

action with brotherly kindness and love towards others. “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” (1:8-9). Therefore, Peter makes it clear that believers must be diligent in the practice of their faith if their call and election is to be certain. When believers co-operate with God’s power at work in them and do the will of God, they will never stumble, “...for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (1:11).

“Our faith must go beyond what we believe; it must become a dynamic part of all we do, resulting in good fruit and spiritual maturity. Salvation does not depend on good deeds, but it results in good deeds. A person who claims to be saved while remaining unchanged does not understand faith or what God has done for him or her.” *Life Application Bible Notes*

Peter affirms what all the other apostles were saying: that God does the calling, electing, and implanting the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect, which in turn produces the good fruit of the Spirit. Faith is not passive; the nature of faith is to grow, reproduce, and expand. As Jesus said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” (Luke 13:18–19).

Peter wanted to counter the false teachings of the Gnostics that believed deeds done in the body – good or bad – had nothing to do with salvation. Gnostics taught that a person could act in this world any way wanted because the spirit had no connection with the material world. They distorted the Christian teaching that salvation was by grace through faith alone and not by works to mean that Christians could go on sinning because God is not concerned with anything that happens in the flesh.

However, Peter and the other apostles taught that if a person truly belongs to the Lord, their good works will prove it. Salvation by faith leads to godliness, and walking in the way, truth, and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. If anyone is not persevering and working to develop the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit listed in 1:5–7 they do not belong to Christ. A Christian is known by the good fruit of the Spirit they produce. For this reason, Christians should be constantly growing and becoming more like Christ day-by-day.

“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.” (1:13–15)

These verses strongly suggest that Peter knew his death was near. He wanted to leave a strong testament to help, encourage and instruct the church before his death so that afterward “you will always be able to remember these things.” The heart of his letter (2:1-19; 3:1-4) is a warning to watch out for the character and false teachings of the heretics. Remember Jesus said in Matt. 7: 15-23 that you will know these false prophets by their fruits:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?” Matthew 7:15-16

Peter argued in this second letter that the best protection against errors was the development of **strong Christian virtues** (1:3-11) and constant growth in **God’s grace** (3:17-18). Peter’s first letter contained a call to **holy living** and his second letter continues that same theme as a defense against falling prey to heretical teachers.

Christians become frustrated with themselves and others when they forget that believers do not become “instantly sanctified.” Sanctification is a slow but steady process of growth. How long and steady that process of growth takes depends on the individual believer’s co-operation with what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through them.

Developing and strengthening these godly virtues will keep us on the right path so that we will enter into the narrow gate. When our spiritual life is on the right track, we are closer to the Holy Spirit. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). When we are close to God we have spiritual discernment and are therefore better able to understand His prophetic words spoken to us. Paul recognized the value of the Word of God to speak to believers when he wrote that all Scripture is “given by inspiration of God” (God-breathed) and is useful for teaching right doctrine, rebuking, correcting, instruction, and training in righteousness, so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

In his second letter, Peter confirmed the value and trustworthiness of the words of prophecy:

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:19-21

THE WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS (2:1-22)

Once Peter established that prophecy of Scripture” should not be interpreted according to one’s own bias, cannot be interpreted properly without the Holy Spirit, did not originate from the prophets but from God, and cannot be properly interpreted apart from the rest of Scripture, he addressed the issue of false teachers in the church.

It is no different today than it was in Peter’s day; evil men with evil intent will prey upon weak Christians who do not know what the Scriptures say or understand sound doctrine. How do we know who is true and false? Peter refers to Jesus’ teaching on this question: you shall know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20; Luke 6:43-45).

you shall know them by their fruits
2 Peter 2:1-3; 2:10-22

False Prophets and Teachers

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” 2 Peter 2:1-3

Peter was no different than Paul, James, John, and the other Apostles when addressing the problem of false teachers in the church. His description of these false teachers and his warnings parallel those of the other Apostles:

- **They deny Christ as the only way to salvation** (v. 2:1)

- **They lead others away from the truth** (v. 2:2)
- **They destroy the lives of the weak** (v. 2:3)

Peter assured the church that all those false teachers who deny Christ are destined for destruction like:

- The fallen angels, “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...” (v. 2:4)
- Those who perished in the flood and “did not spare the ancient world...bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...” (v. 2:5)
- AND Sodom and Gomorrah “...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly...” (v. 2:6)

At the same time, God is able to save His righteous ones like Noah and his family and Lot): “...the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...” (v. 2:9).

It is unfortunate that in our 21st century world, anyone with a keyboard and internet connection can set themselves up as an authority or judge over any and all other Christians. Some will accuse of heresy anyone who does not share their exact beliefs. On the other hand, there are those who have deliberately or ignorantly abandoned a biblical, Christ-centered theology in favor of their own interpretation of Scriptures. 2 Peter 2:10-11 gives us clear markers to identify false prophets and teachers:

- They “**walk according to the flesh** in the lust of uncleanness.” All Christians will struggle with sins of the flesh and temptations at times, but false Christians are those who let their lives be dominated by the lusts of the flesh. They often live double-lives or will twist the Scriptures to justify their sinful behaviors.
- They **despise authority**. 1 Sam 15:23 says it clearly: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.” False teachers and prophets scorn anyone who attempts to correct them, no matter how gently or kindly they do it. They knowingly defy the will of God and refuse to recognize any other authority over their life.
- They are **arrogant and self-willed**. False teachers and prophets stubbornly cling to their belief that they are always in the right. No logic, no

commonsense argument, or appeal from Scripture will move them from their fixed opinions. They will say and do what they want as they demand their own right to their own opinions. Often, they will quote Scripture to insist no one has the right to judge them or challenge what they think.

- They are **not afraid to speak evil** of God's ministering angels who are greater in power and might." On the one hand there are those who are bound by this world. Because they do not believe heaven exists, they turn a deaf ear to heavenly messengers and a blind eye to divine revelation. On the other hand, there are those who believe in angels, but treat them as if they are servants to be commanded by human masters.

Peter shows no sympathy for the wolves in sheep's clothing who endanger God's flock. He rebukes in the strongest terms those who will not submit to God's standards of righteousness in Christ Jesus.

- They Are Like **Brute Beasts in Their Comprehension** of the Things of God (2:12). Like animals found in nature, they are destined to be captured and destroyed. "If people dedicate themselves to these fleshly pleasures, in the end they so ruin themselves in physical health and in spiritual and mental character that these pleasures become no longer pleasurable. In the end, gluttons destroy their appetite, drunkards their health, and those who live for physical pleasure their bodies, and the self-indulgent their character and peace of mind." William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, © 2009, p.381
- They are **Dominated by Lust and Greed** (2:13-17). Peter assures the church that those who shamelessly engage in sexual sins while they feast with the faithful believers in communal meals will receive "the wages of unrighteousness." Idolators like Balaam incorporate sexual perversions in the worship of their fertility gods and goddesses. Those believers who came out of idolatry, but brought their evil practices with them were "enticing unstable souls" from the way of holiness that the Lord requires of those who worship Him. False teachers are also like Baalam in that they love money and are willing to compromise their own principles and circumvent the Lord's clear instructions not to harm His people.
- They **falsely Claim to Know Jesus** (2:18-22). These false teachers tempt Christians "through the lusts of the flesh" to turn away from "the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." They especially target new converts to Christianity who have only recently "escaped the pollutions of the world."

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

These liars and deceivers are themselves slaves to corruption, but they promise unsuspecting Christians that they are free to indulge the flesh without being entangled in sin or overcome by the devil. Peter reveals the truth that "...it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'" (2:21-22).

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE END OF THE AGE (3:1-18)

But The Faithful Should Not Be Fearful

Peter reminded the church that in the Last Days scoffers will come who will flaunt before us every wrong they can think of and mock our God. They will taunt us with "scientific" arguments, saying everything has remained exactly as it was since life on earth evolved millions of years ago. They deny God created the heavens and the earth and all living things. They deny Noah existed and that there was ever Great Flood that devastated the world. "If Jesus promised to come back, where is he? If he has not come back by now, he will ever come back" they say. Finally, they deny that God's command that the earth and the heavens be stored away for a great, consuming fire at the Judgment Day, when all godless men will perish. (2 Peter 3:1-7)

"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." 2 Peter 3:8-13

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

God's plan shows His patience. His timing is not our timing. Therefore we trust God to act at precisely at the right time to fulfill His promises. God does not want anyone to perish; His apparent delay is not apathy but is patience and means salvation for many. But when Christ finally does return, it will be sudden and those who are not keeping watch with their lamps trimmed and burning will be caught unaware. There will be no time then to make amends and get your life right with God. Therefore we must make every effort now to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him so we will be ready whenever He returns.

God's Patience
2 Peter 3:9
Exodus 34:6

He passed in front of Moses and said, "I am the Lord, I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness."

Numbers 14:18

The Lord is slow to anger and rich in unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Even so he does not leave sin unpunished, but he punishes the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations.

Psalms 86:15

But you, O Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to get angry, full of unfailing love and truth.

Jeremiah 15:15

Then I said, "Lord, you know I am suffering for your sake. Punish my persecutors! Don't let them kill me! Be merciful to me and give them what they deserve!"

Ezekiel 18:23

Do you think, asks the Sovereign Lord, that I like to see wicked people die? Of course not! I only want them to turn from their wicked ways and live.

Jonah 4:2

So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God,

slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people."

Romans 2:4

Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?

Romans 9:22

God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power, but he also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of his judgment and are fit only for destruction.

Romans 11:32

God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone.

1 Timothy 2:4

He wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

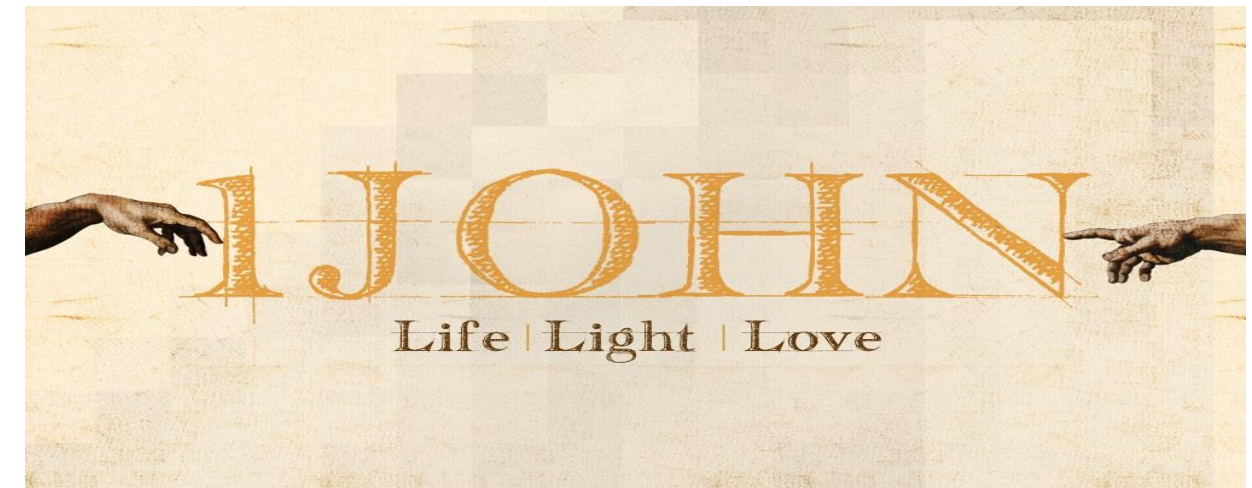
Neil Wilson and Linda Taylor, *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 547–548.

Peter closes his letter encouraging believers to remain faithful, diligent in their pursuit of peace and live "without spot and blameless." Believers should not be too anxious for the Second Coming because the patience of our Lord is salvation for all those who have yet to hear the gospel.

Peter mentioned "our beloved brother Paul" to emphasize that they shared the same teachings he was communicating to them. There were no disagreements between the Apostles over anything that Jesus did or taught during His earthly ministry. Peter noted that Paul's letters contain some things that are difficult for people to understand. It is true today as it was true back then that "untaught and unstable people" take advantage of those who are new believers or those who will not do their due diligence to study and know the Bible. The most dangerous false teachers are those who know the Scriptures but deliberately distort and twist them for their own selfish purposes and to their own destruction. "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (3:17-18).

Questions for Lesson Five

1. Peter's primary motivation for his letters was his concern over the encroaching influence of heretical teachers in the church. What are the effective strategies Peter gives the church to fight and defeat heresies?
2. Explain why Christians cannot wait passively for God to do all the work concerning their spiritual growth?
3. Although Peter and the other apostles taught that works have nothing to do with saving us, they all taught about the importance of good works in the lives of believers. If a person truly belongs to the Lord, what is the purpose of good works?
4. How does Peter describe false teachers and how we can identify them?
5. How does our belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ affect our Christian walk and faith?

**SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES
NT 203-6**
**Lesson Outline for the Student**

- I. John's Description of Jesus Christ (1:1-10)
 - a. He is the Life of Believers
 - b. He is the Light of Believers
- II. John's Description of Our Salvation (2:1 – 3:24)
 - a. Jesus is Our Savior from Sin
 - b. Jesus Saves us from a Sinful World
- III. John's Description of False Prophets and True Believers (4:1 – 5:21)
 - a. Test to Identify False Prophets
 - b. Proofs of True Believers

Author: John. Although John never names himself as the author of three letters that bear his name, the internal evidence suggests that this is the same person who wrote the gospel of John (See HANDOUT “The Gospel of John and the First Letter of John”).

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 85-90

Original and Primary Audiences: to the church at large

Purpose: To assure Christians in their faith and to encourage them to counter false teachings

Context: The apostle John was perhaps the only surviving apostle at the time he wrote this letter. He used his authority as an eyewitness of Christ to assure the next generation of disciples that their faith in Christ, whom they had not seen, was

genuine. John is sometimes called “the Apostle of love” and in this letter, John recognizes love as a powerful, motivating force in the Christian as well as a proof of a genuine faith. In this letter, John declares that:

1. God is light (1:1-2:29)
2. God is love (3:1-4:21)
3. God is life (5:1-21)

JOHN’S DESCRIPTION OF JESUS CHRIST (1:1-10)

This first letter of John can be presented in three sections – each one framed around a statement that describes a major attribute of God:

1. **God is light.** 1 John 1:5
“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”
2. **God is love.** 1 John 4:16
“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”
3. **God is life.** 1 John 5:20
“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”
(NOTE also 1 John 1:2 “...the light was manifested...”)

John’s Opening Statement perfectly reflects the theological foundations upon which the early church established the Canon of the New Testament. (HANDOUT “Criteria for Selecting the Canon of NT Scripture”):

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” (1:1-4).

John’s opening statement immediately establishes (1) his Apostolic authority and his authorship of the letter; (2) The intended universal acceptance and application of his letter by the church; and (3) that the contents of his letter is consistent with apostles’ teachings for the church.

God Is Light (1:1 – 2:27)

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5). John states clearly that to engage in fellowship with Christ, we must walk in light and not in darkness (1:6). As we walk in the light, we regularly confess our sins and allow the blood of Christ to continually cleanse us.

A Christian cannot claim to be in fellowship with Christ and yet walk in the darkness of sin. John’s message to believers is simple and direct: if we keep on sinning, we lie to **God, ourselves, and others**. No one can live a lie for long, sooner or later, they will depart from the truth all together or the lie will be exposed for all to see. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1:7).

If we claim there is no such thing as sin or that we are somehow perfect and without sin, we are only deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. The only way to eternal life that is open to us is to confess our sins, knowing that He is faithful, just, and will forgive us our sins. Only the atoning **blood of Jesus** is able to purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1:6-10).

JOHN’S DESCRIPTION OF OUR SALVATION (2:1 – 3:24)

Jesus is Our Savior from Sin. There are those who act as if Jesus saves them TO sin and not FROM sin. They have bought into what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace”:

“Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before... That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” Copyright © 1959 by SCM Press Ltd., Touchstone Pub., NY, pp. 43, 44-45

However, Jesus came to save us from a sinful world. He is our only defense before the Father (2:1-2). John wrote to the church so that they would turn away from the false teachers who were telling them it was alright to keep on sinning because God’s abundant grace was more than sufficient to save them. Jesus is our advocate – the one who speaks to the Father in our defense not our buffer or cushion from God’s discipline. We stand before the Father guilty, but Jesus Christ “the Righteous One” is the atoning sacrifice for our sins “and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” The proof of our salvation is that we “**walk in the light,**” keeping the commandments of God, and replacing any hatred we have toward our brother with love (2:3-11).

The Apostles were all on the same page concerning faith and works. Obedience to the Lord’s commands are not the ways and means to salvation, but they are the fruit of a life lived for Christ:

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” (2:3-6)

Anyone who harbors hatred for their brother in their heart will be walking around in darkness; they do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them (2:9-11). Jesus taught about the dangers of holding onto hate and anger (Matthew 5:21-24). Two major factors feed the burning fires of hate inside the heart: **falling in love with the world** (“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” 2:15); and second is **falling for the attractive lies of false teachers.** (18-27).

Christians know the truth and that “no lie is of the truth.” Therefore anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ does not have the Father or the Holy Spirit either. This is the foundational truth that abides in all true believers. John and all the other apostles wrote to them with this in mind. “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but

as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” (2:26-27).

John sums up his description of salvation by affirming the grace of God and the righteousness it produces as evidence of a truly transformed life: “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” (2:28-29)

John transitions from a discussion of faith and works in the Christian’s salvation to a description of God’s great love for His people (2:28 – 4:21). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (3:1). Christ’s love fulfilled the qualities of righteousness, and when His love characterizes us, we will practice righteousness, will be free of self-condemnation, and will experience confidence before God. (3:1-10).

Everyone who has the hope of their salvation will **purifies himself**, just as Christ is pure.” (3:3) The process of becoming more and more like Christ should be motivated by our hope that one day we will see our Lord and Savior face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6) and knowing that it is our ultimate destiny to be in the presence of God should humbly motivate us to purify ourselves like a spotless bride (Revelation 21:2).

“To keep pure means to keep morally straight, free from the corruption of sin. God also purifies us, but there is action we must take to remain morally fit (see 1 Timothy 5:22; James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22).” (*Life Application Bible Notes*, Tyndale, 2007, 2149).

John continued, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” (3:9) This presents a problem for some since John already said in 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Therefore, some translators of verse 3:9 choose to correct the apparent contradiction by translating the verse from the Greek to read “continue to sin” and “go on sinning.” (That translation may be correct in capturing the spirit of John’s words here if not the letters.) We all know that Christians are not immune from temptations to sin and will at times fall into sin. A Christian is someone who possesses **God’s nature (seed)** – His power, love, and other godly characteristics. Therefore, a born-again Christian does not sin in the sense that he cannot keep on sinning because it is against his nature. The desire of the born-again Christian is never to sin, but if they stumble and fall, they will confess their sin, turn away (repent), and be forgiven. Matthew Henry commented, “...he cannot sin comparatively, as he did before he was born of God, and as others do that are not

so. And the reason is because he is born of God, which will amount to all this inhibition and impediment.”

The essence of what John wrote is that:

- God is light; therefore those who walk with God must walk in the light.
- God is love; therefore those who walk with God must walk in love.
- And God is life; therefore those who walk with God have the life of God in them.

“This is the message you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (3:11)

So those who walk in light, in love, and in life cannot sin. And those who willfully persist in sinful lifestyles without repentance will sufficiently demonstrate that they are not truly born of God. Since we are his children, we must walk in love; if we do not love, we do not know God. (3:11-16)

The world around us is filled with hate and violence. Cain was jealous of his brother because Cain had been doing wrong and he knew very well that his brother was doing right and pleasing God by worshiping Him in spirit and truth. So we should not be surprised if the world hates us for the same reason. So, John as said, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (3:14-15).

John was an eyewitness to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and heard His Master say:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Matthew 5:21-24

Jesus taught that the issue in the Old Testament law of murder was not so much the act of violence as the anger that led to it. The Jews were concerned about the outward performance of religious law, but in His sermons, Jesus taught that

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

what concerns God is the **inward attitude of the heart** that leads to sin. So when we love others, it proves that we have been delivered from hell and given eternal life. The person who hates is really a murderer; and you know that no one who has murder in their heart is walking in the Life. True, unconditional love was demonstrated by Christ’s example of dying for us. And so we also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (3:16).

Our love needs to be practical. Agape is more than just an emotion or words; **it is action.** Agape love is giving not getting. The love described by John is unconditional in its nature. It is a love that loves even if it is not reciprocated.

“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” 3:17-24

Once again, John expresses the essential truth of another one of Jesus’ teachings. In His “Parable of the Sheep and Goats” (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus tells of the Final Judgment and the basis upon which the righteous and unrighteous will be judged: “inasmuch as you did it [or did it not] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

JOHN’S DESCRIPTION OF FALSE PROPHETS AND TRUE BELIEVERS (4:1 – 5:21)

In verses 4:1-21, John calls on all believers to test and identify false prophets. Christians know God through His love. His Spirit abides in those who abide in His love and love keeps us from being deceived by evil spirits.

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (4:1-8)

Spiritual discernment and possessing wisdom necessary to sort out false teachings do not seem to be fit subjects for a lesson on love. But John makes the point that “everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” False teachers and those under the influence of deceiving spirits do not love God and therefore cannot know Him. God’s children – those who walk in the light, love one another, and have the life of God abiding in them – know the truth and therefore, will overcome them. Apart from the love of God abiding in them, people are easily deceived and cannot know whether a message is really from God. Even if a message is genuine, the worldly will not understand or listen to it. Remember Jesus’ teaching in “The Parable of the Soils” (Matthew 13:1-23): He told His disciples, “For to him who has will more be given, and he will have great plenty; but from him who has not, even the little he has will be taken away. That is why I use these illustrations, so people will hear and see but not understand.”

This is the test for those who are genuine Christians: those who truly love God, know Him and will know and understand the truth when it is spoken to them. Those who do not love God are on the wayside, and what little truth they hear, the devil comes and snatches away before it can take root in their hearts.

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so

loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” (4:9–14)

John described the proofs of true believers. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, **love is made complete** among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love, John said, because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (9-21)

What is love? Since the dawn of human civilization, philosophers, theologians, scholars, poets, and artists have attempted to give a satisfactory answer that question. John’s answer is simple and profound: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Jesus, hung on a cross for the sins of the world, is the greatest expression of love the world has ever known. “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (TLB) Now that we know God’s love, the only possible response is to return that love to God and, at the same time, pass it on to others.

In his final verses, John declares that God is life (5:1 – 21).

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (5:13). In this section of the letter, John reveals his primary reason for writing this letter. False teachers and deceiving spirits are out to destroy the faith of believers and convince them that there is no power in the Son of God to save them and grant them abundant life in this world or in the world to come. John, the faithful and beloved disciple of Jesus, is writing so that we will be encouraged by his words and our faith will not fail.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.” (5:1)

Spiritual life begins with spiritual birth. Spiritual birth occurs through faith in Jesus Christ.

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (5:2-5)

There are many who claim to know God and love Him. But John asks, how can anyone say they love God and not love His Son? And how can anyone truly love God and not love His children born of God through His Son, Jesus Christ? How can anyone love God and not obey His commands? Those who have faith will fellowship with Him, and not only possess His quality of life, but will also love all those who are born of God. It is not by the force of our will or by obeying religious creeds or codes that gives us the victory; only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God will overcome the world.

Faith in Jesus Christ infuses us with God’s life. And the life-giving Spirit of God bears witness in our spirit that we have received eternal life. Therefore, whoever believes in God’s Son has eternal life.

Peter and Paul challenged the Gnostic heresy in their letters, and now it is John’s turn:

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.” (5:7-9)

Some false teachers taught that Jesus was not fully human, but only had the appearance of humanity. Others taught that Jesus was not the begotten Son of God, but at some point, was adopted or given a special anointing from God, making Him fully human and not divine. John answers that the heavenly testimonies of the Spirit of God, the water of baptism and the cross confirm the testimonies of those who believe.

“He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (5:10-12)

John tells them, “I have written this to you who believe in the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life.” (5:13 TLB) Spiritual life gives us confidence in prayer because we know God and abide in Him. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” (5:14-15)

Spiritual life gives us compassion towards others; we can help those who are struggling with sin and pray for them. Therefore, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” (5:16-19)

There are many thoughts about this “sin that leads to death” and the “sin that does not lead to death.” John may be talking about un-repentant or unconfessed sin that leads to condemnation and death as opposed to sin that is forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Our prayers should always be that any brother or sister lost in sin would repent and believe the Gospel so they can have the life of God in them.

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” (5:20-21)

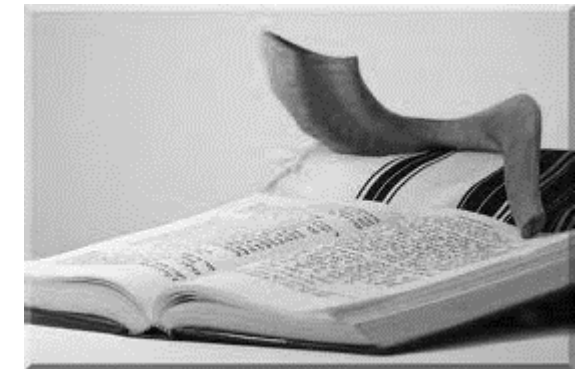
Jesus Christ came into this world to save all who would come to Him for life. God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Abiding in the life of God keeps us in the truth. Therefore, one who walks in fellowship with God will walk in light, walk in love, and have eternal life. “Christians must never be lost in the illusions of idolatrous religion; they must never set up in their hearts an idol which will take the place of God; they must keep themselves from the infections of all false faiths; and they can do only that only when they walk with Christ.” (William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Copyright © the William Barclay Estate 2009, p.141)

Questions for Lesson Six

1. What are the theological foundations found in the opening of 1 John?
2. Compare 1 John 2:3-6 with James 2:14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5; and John 6:28-29. What do these verses of Scripture tell us about the Apostles' teachings on faith and works?
3. How does John describe our salvation in 2:1 – 3:24?
4. John's letter implies that our love needs to be more than emotions and words; it needs to be love in action. How does John's letter describe love in action?
5. What are the proofs false prophets and true believers that John describes in 4:1 – 5:21?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES**NT 203-7****2 & 3 John****Jude****Lesson Outline for the Student**

- I. The Letter of 2 John
 - a. Watch for False Teachers
- II. The Letter of 3 John
 - a. True and False Leaders
- III. The Letter of Jude
 - a. False Teachers are Dangerous
 - b. Christian Duty to Fight For the Truth

**2 JOHN**

Author: John the Apostle

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 90

Original and Primary Audiences: To "the chosen lady" and her children (possibly to a local church), and to all believers

Purpose: To emphasize the basics of following Christ—truth and love—and to warn against false teachers

Context: Since a specific woman and her children were never identified, much speculation has gone into whom John might have been addressing. Was it a woman and her children involved in one of the churches that John was overseeing? Was it a specific church? Or was "the chosen lady" code language for the church, the Bride of Christ? No one really knows. All that is known for sure is that John was warning her of the false teachers who were becoming prevalent in some of the churches.

In 1 John, the Apostle describes false teachers and gives ten tests for professing Christians to know they are truly saved:

1. If we walk in the light. 1 John 1:7
2. If we confess our sins. 1 John 1:8-10
3. If we keep His commandments. 1 John 2:3-6
4. If we do not love the world. 1 John 2:15-16
5. If we confess (acknowledge) the Son of God. 1 John 2:23

6. If we long for the return of Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:2-3
7. If we are not practicing sin. 1 John 3:7-9
8. If we love the brethren. 1 John 3:14-18
9. If we listen to the Apostles' teachings. 1 John 4:6
10. If we confess that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:13

In his second and third letters, John continues his descriptions of false teachers and **warns believers to stay clear of them.**

“The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” 2 John 1–3.

John addresses this letter from “The Elder,” expressing **his authority** to write instructions to them.

ELDER, IN THE NT (πρεσβύτερος, presbúteros):

- (1) The word is used adjectivally to denote seniority (Lk 15:25; 1 Tim 5:2).
- (2) Referring to the Jewish elders of the synagogue, usually associated with the scribes and Pharisees, and NT passages cited in the previous article.
- (3) It denotes certain persons appointed to hold office in the Christian church, and to exercise spiritual oversight over the flock intrusted to them. From the references in Acts (14:23; 20:17) it may be inferred that the churches generally had elders appointed over them. That “elders” and “bishops” were in apostolic and sub-apostolic times the same, is now almost universally admitted; in all NT references their functions are identical. The most probable explanation of the difference of names is that “elder” refers mainly to the person, and “bishop” to the office; the name “elder” emphasizes what he is, while “bishop,” that is “overseer,” emphasizes what the elder or presbyter does.

A. C. Grant, “Elder, in the NT,” ed. James Orr et al., The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 924.

The letter is addressed to “the elect lady and her children.” There is more than one interpretation for who or what is “the elect lady”. Some believe it is an unidentified woman; others are convinced that the elect lady is the church, and her children are believers in the church. Either way it is interpreted, the meaning of the body of the letter does not change and it is applicable to all Christians.

This brief letter has much in common with 1 John:

MESSAGE	1 JOHN	2 JOHN
Admonition to walk in God’s commandments	1 John 2:3-63 “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”	2 John 4 “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received a commandment from the Father.”
Encouragement to walk in love	1 John 3:10-11 “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...”	2 John 5-6 “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”
Warning About the Dangers of False Teachers	1 John 4:1-3 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone	2 John 7–11 “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver

	<p>out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”</p>	<p>and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”</p>
--	--	--

3 JOHN

Author: John the Apostle

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 90

Original and Primary Audiences: Gaius, evidently an important Christian in one of the churches known to John

Purpose: To applaud Gaius for his hospitality and to encourage him in his Christian walk

Context: At this time, numerous Church leaders (missionaries, evangelists, preachers, teachers, etc.) traveled from town to town encouraging believers in existing churches or helping to establish new congregations. They often had to depend on the hospitality of fellow believers. Gaius was recognized and praised as one who welcomed these leaders into his home.

TRUE AND FALSE LEADERS

This letter by John is typical of the many examples we have of personal letters written in the time that all the New Testament epistles were written. There is the opening greeting, followed by the prayer for good health. Following the introduction, the main body of the letter contains the news and information that are the main reasons for the letter. Final greetings are given, and the letter ends. 3 John is the Apostle’s **personal letter** to a friend called Gaius; it the kind of letter which people wrote to each other every day but it gives us special insight into the relationships of the early church – particularly the importance of **showing hospitality** to itinerant evangelists, missionaries, and ministers of the gospel.

“The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (1-4).

Exactly who Gaius was and what his connection was with the Apostle and the early church is lost to history. What we do know from this brief letter is that John “The Elder”, had a deep brotherly affection for Gaius, and that he was someone that the Apostle wrote at least one personal letter. It is the only one we have because it was considered worthy of inclusion in the New Testament Canon of Scripture.

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” (5-8).

From John’s commendation of Gaius for his generosity, we understand how important it is for Christians to show genuine hospitality for traveling ministers even today. Faithful evangelists, missionaries, pastors, preachers, teachers, etc. need our support. Whenever possible, Christians should extend hospitality to others; in this way, those who stay at home can become partners with those who are being sent:

“Those who go and those who serve as senders merge their callings and talents and giftings to form the cross-cultural outreach team. All are equally important. All are vitally involved in the fulfillment of the

Great Commission. All are dynamically integrated and moving toward the same goal. And all are assured success, for those in God's work are on the winning team!" Neal Piolo, *Serving as Senders* © 2012, Emmaus Road International, Inc. pp.4-5

The actions of Diotrephes and Demetrius are compared (9–12).

Diotrephes is like so many people who fill our churches today. He refused to offer any help or assistance to those who labored in the Lord's harvest. He set himself up as being too important to be bothered by needy missionaries passing through. His belief that his own needs were more vital than the Apostles' caused him to talk stupidly about his unimportant position and used his influence to forbid others from contributing to the missionaries. "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." (11).

On the other hand, Demetrius had a good testimony from everyone. He did not promote himself or inflate his own importance, but his faithful example testified to his genuine godly character. "And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true." (12).

John closed his letter with a farewell greeting, hoping to see his beloved friend again soon.

OVERVIEW OF JOHN'S LETTERS

1 John	The Apostle describes fellowship with God.
2 John	The Apostle forbids fellowship with false teachers.
3 John	The Apostle encourages fellowship with Christian brothers.

JUDE

Author: Jude, the brother of Jesus and James

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 65

Original and Primary Audiences: Jewish Christians and all believers

Purpose: Jude wrote to remind the church of the need for constant vigilance against those who teach heresies and to keep strong in the faith.

Context: Almost from the beginning, the church has been threatened by heresy and false teaching; Jude wrote to remind the church that we must always be on our guard.

"Fight! Contend! Do battle! When apostasy arises, when false teachers emerge, when the truth of God is attacked, it is time to fight for the faith!" – Talk Thru the Bible

Jude, the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus is the likely author of this letter. Who was Jude?

- After Jesus' resurrection, Jude became a believer.
- Like his brother, James, Jude was a leader in the early church.
- The letter was accepted by the early church as being from Jude, the brother of Jesus and was widely circulated throughout the church.

KEY TO JUDE – 1:3

Jude stated his first intention was to write about the salvation we share. However, he felt compelled to write and urge those who read his letter to **contend for the faith:**

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (1:3)

Jude was intensely concerned with the threat of **heretical teachers** in the church and what should be the believer's proper response to that threat. Although Jude never names the specific apostasy he is addressing, from the content of the letter that the false teachers he is talking about are Gnostics. Gnostics opposed two of the basic tenets of Christianity:

- **The incarnation of Christ**
- **The call to Christian ethics and holiness**

"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (4)

Jude reminds us that God will judge all those who rebel against Him and fall into apostasy. It makes no difference:

- Jew or Gentile
- Angel or Human
- Old or New

All apostates will be judged by the Lord in the end.

Jude cites examples from the Scriptures of those who were punished for their rebellion:

- Jews saved out of Egypt who did not believe
- Angels who rebelled and left their proper place in heaven
- Gentiles in Sodom and Gomorrah

Using a series of Hebrew *word pictures*, Jude describes these false Christians:

“These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (12-13).

Jude compares these new apostates to three men in the Old Testament Scriptures who did not obey the Lord and fell under God’s judgment:

“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” (1:11)

- Cain – murdered his own brother out of **envy and jealousy** (Gen. 4:1-16)
- Balaam – prophesied against God’s people out of **greed** (Numbers 22 – 24)
- Korah – **rebelled** against God’s divinely appointed leaders, wanting the power for himself (Numbers 16)

“False teachers divide the church; they cause hurt and pain in the hearts of true believers because their Lord and His church are being shamed. In addition, false teachers cause cleavage between mature believers and the followers of the false teacher. True believers cannot go along with false teaching. In fact, Christ and the apostle declared emphatically that true believers must oppose false teaching and do all they can to rid the church of false teachers. Therefore, false teachers

always cause division between those who follow their teaching and mature believers who are grounded in the truth of Christ and of God’s Word.” *Preachers Outline and Sermon Bible Volume 3: 1 Thessalonians – Revelation* (New International Version), Copyright © 2000 by ALPHA-OMEGA MINISTRIES, INC., p.962

These men were typical of the false teachers that are in the church because even to this day: they are full of:

- **Pride**
- **Selfishness**
- **Jealousy**
- **Greed**
- **Lust for personal power**
- **Disregard God’s Word**

Why is Jude so important for Christians today? The church in the 21st century is more divided than ever before. The church is filled with teachers who are exposing believers to every kind of doctrine found under the sun. Missionaries and evangelists often compromise the fundamental doctrines of the faith in order to find common ground with those to whom they are witnessing. Although these workers in the harvest fields of the world may have good intentions, they will end up buried in the sinking sand of compromise.

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” (20–23).

Being rooted and grounded in sound biblical doctrines based on the Scriptures is essential when reaching out to those who do not know the way, truth, and life that Jesus gave to the world. Compromise with false teachers leads to a watered-down gospel that no one can see why they should leave their old religion and lifestyle to follow. If they are going to influence the world around them and not allow worldly influences to lead them astray, Christians must be unbending in their beliefs.

Jude’s letter is a reminder to all of us that there will always be those who will creep into the church and try to lead Christians astray; it is our duty to give

glory to God, fight for God’s truth in the church, and expose those who spread false doctrines.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen.” (24–25).

Questions for Lesson 7

1. Describe the similarities between 2 & 3 John.
2. Why does John warn believers to stay clear of false teachers?
3. Why were the actions of Diotrephes condemned?
4. Why were the actions of Demetrius commended?
5. What are the dangers of false teachers described by Jude?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES

NT 203-8

Introduction to the Book of Revelation

(Note: This Lesson is taken entirely from chapter nineteen “Christ’s Coming Kingdom” of *Exploring the New Testament* by Frederick Osborn © 2010, 2015)

Lesson Outline for the Student

- I. Literary Style
- II. Four Major Interpretations of Revelation
 - a. Historicist Interpretation
 - b. Preterist Interpretation
 - c. Futurist Interpretation
 - d. Spiritual (or Idealist) Interpretation
- III. Examples of How the Four Views Are Applied to Specific Passages of Revelation

REVELATION

Author: John the Apostle

Approximate Date Written: A.D. 95

Original and Primary Audiences: The seven churches in Asia and all believers

Purpose: John the Apostle wrote Revelation to reveal the full identity of Christ as Lord and to give prophetic warnings and hope for the future to believers

Context: At the time this was written, John was in exile on the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor in the Mediterranean Sea. Most scholars believe at the time this was written Christians were being persecuted under the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 90-95) and John wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor that were experiencing persecution at the time. John, who had been an eyewitness of the incarnate Christ, had an apocalyptic vision of the glorified risen Christ in heaven. God also revealed to John what would take place in the future – the final judgment and the ultimate triumph of God over evil.

Christ’s Coming Kingdom

It can be argued easily that no book of the Bible has stirred up more controversy in the church than has the Book of Revelation. It can also be argued that no book of the Bible has had more written about it than this Book. Yet, for many Christians, John’s Revelation of Jesus Christ remains a mystery. Its powerful yet bizarre visions of beasts, dragons, heavenly epiphanies, and terrible earthly

tribulations have fascinated and troubled readers for centuries. Many modern Christians put down the Book of Revelation, believing the archaic language is too obscure and the mysterious visions too difficult to interpret for Revelation to be relevant to our sophisticated, modern scientific age. This misunderstanding is due largely to a lack of familiarity with the style of the Old Testament prophetic writings that provide a foundation for 278 of the 404 verses of the book. The almost total ignorance of Jewish apocalyptic writings by modern-day Christians, added to the fact that few Christians make a serious study the historical setting of the book, are largely responsible for the gross misunderstandings and often wildly speculative interpretations of John's book. The original meaning of the book is lost on modern readers when interpreters attempt to inject contemporary Western connotations into a work of ancient Middle Eastern apocalyptic literature.

LITERARY STYLE – *Apocalypse*

The book of Revelation is the only work of its kind in the New Testament, but its literary style was well known in the ancient world (See HANDOUT “Understanding Apocalyptic Literature”). Used especially by Jewish authors, it was only natural that some Christians would adopt the apocalyptic literary style when they started writing. The best example we have of apocalypse in the Old Testament is found in the book of **Daniel chapters 10 - 12**, which became the template for subsequent apocalyptic writings. Apocalyptic prophecy helped those righteous servants of God suffering in this present evil age to cope by giving them a revelation of the future vindication of all present evils at the final consummation of all things. The righteous nation would possess the earth, either by way of an eternal Messianic kingdom on the earth, or in the resurrection and eternal blessedness hereafter. The primary motives of such works were:

- To **keep alive the flame of faith** in times of trial and tribulation,
- To **maintain hope** in the coming of the Day of the Lord, and
- To **help the reader see the kingdom of God** working in their immediate circumstances.

Other Examples of Apocalypse in the Old Testament:

- Ezekiel 38 – 39
- Isaiah 25 – 37
- Isaiah 40 – 55 (Excerpts)
- Zechariah 9 – 14

FOUR APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING REVELATION

Over the centuries, four traditional methods of interpreting the book of Revelation have emerged. Each one has sometimes gained and sometimes lost in popularity, but each one has its share of proponents to this day. Most modern, conservative, Evangelical Christians interpret Revelation from the *Historicist* or *Futurist* perspectives. The popularity of such works as Hal Lindsey's “Late Great Planet Earth” and the eschatological novels of the “Left Behind” series have made the *Futurist* view enormously popular.

1. ***Historicist*** – traditional Protestant interpretation of the book. This interpretation understands the Book of Revelation as a prewritten record of the course of history from the time of the apostle to the end of the world. Fulfillment is thus considered to be in process in the present and has been unfolding for nearly two thousand years.
2. ***Preterist*** (Eng. “bygone” or “former”) – the Preterist interprets prophecies in John's Revelation as already having occurred during or shortly after the author's own time; in what is now our ancient past. The Book of Revelation is prophecy in the sense that its fulfillment was in the future from the point of view of John's immediate audience, but it is the past from our vantage point in history. Although some Preterists believe that the final chapters of Revelation look forward to the second coming of Christ, most think that everything in the book reached its culmination in the past.
3. ***Futurist*** – this approach to interpreting the Book of Revelation understands everything after chapter four as not yet having been fulfilled. The Futurist idea is that most of Revelation awaits fulfillment in a relatively brief period before the return of Christ at the end of this Age.
4. ***Spiritual or Idealist*** – those who interpret the verses of the Book of Revelation as Symbolic do not attempt to find specific fulfillments of John's visions but understand Revelation to be a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities. The “fulfillment” of Revelation is found in historical events of every age that parallel the symbolic events described in the book. Therefore, the Book has equal spiritual application to all Christians of any age.

A brief study of the history of how theologians interpreted Revelation will allow us to make some general observations about the different views of the Book of Revelation.

FUTURIST

The early church was predominately **futurist and premillennial** in its theology. We can conclude from their works that have survived, that they took a somewhat literal eschatological (of or relating to the end of the world) approach to the Book of Revelation. However, it would be too extreme to say that the earliest Christian theologians were uniformly premillennial. (See HANDOUT “The Millennial Controversy”)

We do not have enough surviving manuscripts from the first four centuries of the church to know what other interpretations may have been held for which no documentation has survived. However, we do have this quote from Justin Martyr, an early church theologian and premillennialist:

“I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion [Premillennialism], and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”

SPIRITUAL or IDEALIST

The **allegorical method** of interpretation, which did away with the expectation of specific historical fulfillments of John’s apocalyptic visions, eventually displaced the eschatological approach. The allegorical method of interpretation dominated Christian commentaries on Revelation beginning with Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – 215), continuing on through Augustine (c. 354 – 430) and well into the 12th century. Again, the allegorical approach was not absolute and uniform. A number of well-respected Bible scholars combined the mystical with the historical interpretation (Revelation was interpreted as covering the whole course of human history).

HISTORICIST

A more **“concrete historicism”** can be seen emerging in the church after the 12th Century. Martin Luther (c.1500) was one of the first commentators to see Revelation from chapter 4 onwards as a prophetic survey of church history. Many during this period who followed this system began to find in Revelation’s first beast a symbol of the Roman papacy. It was this method of interpretation that galvanized the Reformers in their resistance to Rome and was followed by virtually all of Protestant theologians well into the 19th century.

PRETERIST

Responding to the historicist attacks upon the Roman Catholic Church, a Jesuit scholar, Luiz de Alcazar (1554 – 1613), introduced a *Preterist* approach to Revelation:

Chapters 4-11 = the church’s early struggle against Judaism, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD)

Chapters 12-19 = the church’s struggle with paganism, ending in the fall of Rome in 476

Chapters 20-22 = the triumph of the church in Papal Rome

In fact, Bible scholars have come up with more than four ways to interpret the Book of Revelation, but for our study we will only look at the four traditional views and how they are presented in the vast majority of Bible commentaries used today.

1. HISTORICIST– traditional Protestant interpretation of the book.

This interpretation understands the Book of Revelation as a prewritten record of the course of history from the time of the Apostle John to the end of the world.

Chapters 2-3 are interpreted as the panorama of church history:

Rev. 2:1-7 Ephesus = Apostolic church

Rev. 2:8-11 Smyrna = Pagan Rome (A.D. 160)

Chapters 2:12-17 Pergamos = Constantine & State Religion (A.D. 313)

Rev. 2:18-19 Thyatira = Romanism (Dark Ages)

Rev. 3:1-6 Sardis = The Great Reformation (A.D. 1517)

Chapters 3:7-13 Philadelphia = Worldwide Evangelism (A.D. 1750)

Rev. 3:14-22 Laodicea = Compromised Church (Last Days)

Chapters 4 – 22 “The Things Which Shall Be”

Fulfillment of the prophecies in the book is considered to be in process in the present and has been unfolding for nearly two thousand years; its ultimate fulfillment will be in the future. (Note: this particular view has fallen out of favor with almost all mainstream Protestant New Testament scholars today.)

Problems With the Historicist Approach

The advocates of this approach fail to reach any consensus upon the specific fulfillments of the prophecies. Numerous, incompatible systems of interpretation for Revelation have arisen from the historical view. The scroll, seals, trumpets, bowls, etc. are given different meanings by different

Historicists at different times depending upon what system they used. IF the meanings of Revelation's prophecies cannot be identified with certainty (even after their fulfillment), the value of the Book to the readers of any period of history is greatly diminished. This method makes it too easy for interpreters to project their own times as the culmination of history. They all-too-often interpret Revelation in some sense climaxing in their own generation.

The Historicist view is too Euro-centric and fails to recognize the worldwide development of the church in the last 2,000 years. Today, most of the church is outside of the narrow confines of Europe and the Historicist commentaries have little to say to the churches of Asia where the vision was first directed.

2. PRETERIST (Eng. "bygone" or "former") – the *Preterist* interprets prophecies in John's Revelation as events occurring during or shortly after the author's own lifetime – in what is now our ancient past. The *Preterist* approach has experienced a recent resurgence in favor in the writings of some modern Christian theologians that have successfully shaken off its attachments to Catholic theology.

Problems With the Preterist Approach

Many modern liberal theologians use the Preterist approach. They believe John was expressing his desire for a soon vindication of the church in the idea of the coming of the kingdom, but it was unfulfilled in John's time. These theologians do not accept the divine inspiration of the Scriptures nor do they believe in Bible prophecy. They must date the Book after 70 AD and will ascribe a much later date to when it was written.

Conservative theologians who take the Preterist approach hold to the classical view of centuries past. This classical view holds parallels between Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Mark 13; Matthew 24; and Luke 17 & 21) and John's prophetic vision. This conservative view relies upon the pre-70 AD date for when it was written. The prophecies they understand as relating specifically to the fall of Jerusalem would have to have been written before the events occurred. The 70 AD date is arguable, but it is by no means certain.

3. FUTURIST – this approach to interpreting the Book of Revelation understands everything after chapter four as having not yet been fulfilled. The *Futurist* idea is that most of Revelation awaits fulfillment in a relatively brief period before the return of Christ at the end of this Age. This view has gained a wide acceptance with modern evangelicals thanks to Hal Lindsey who wrote "The

Late Great Planet Earth", and thanks also to the "Left Behind" series of books and videos by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins that have become a staple of American pop Christianity.

Futurists include many sound Bible scholars, but all too often, there are others who interpret the Book of Revelation from this point of view that include wild speculations, unsound theology, and personal interpretations in their commentaries. (Especially watch out for cult groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and others like them who have their own unique visions of the future with their group as the only true church and all other Christians as the apostate church). So anyone who uses commentaries written by *Futurists* should be careful not to get caught up in any speculations that are contrary to sound biblical exegesis and orthodox Christian theology.

Problems With the Futurist Approach

Futurists rely heavily upon a Literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation. The Book is filled with fantastic images and earth-shattering events that capture the imaginations of modern readers, but at the same time, seem impossible by modern rational science. However, most Futurists do interpret certain things as symbolic, but which verses are interpreted as literal, and which are symbolic are left wide open for discussion.

Unlike the *Historicist* and *Preterist* approaches, the *Futurist* approach cannot be tested from history. One can evaluate the other approaches on the basis of their claims that actual historical events have occurred that correspond to their interpretations of John's prophetic visions in Revelation. Events that have yet to occur cannot be proven to be true or false. Therefore, the futurist is able to make all kinds of wild assertions and fanciful speculations, arguing that any number of things can take place to fulfill the futurist's claims.

Dispensationalists, who rely heavily upon the *futurist* approach to interpreting Revelation, do not risk being embarrassed by future developments, since they believe that they will be Raptured out before any of the predicted events occur. (See HANDOUT "Dispensationalism")

Futurists render about 90% of the Book as irrelevant to the original readers who lived 2,000 years removed from its fulfillment. If you accept the futurist interpretation of the Rapture coming in Revelation 4:1, then the Book becomes largely irrelevant to Christians of any age because the church will be in heaven when the rest of Revelation unfolds.

4. SPIRITUAL or IDEALIST – those who interpret the verses of the Book of Revelation as *Symbolic* or coded language do not attempt to find specific

fulfillments of John's visions but understand Revelation to be a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities. Therefore, the spiritual "fulfillment" of Revelation is found in historical events of every age. The modern *Spiritual* or *Idealist* commentaries on the Book of Revelation will describe the transcendent principles and recurrent themes found in Revelation and then seek to explain the spiritual application of these principles and themes to individual Christians of any age.

Problems With the Symbolic or Idealist Approach

This kind of approach is often associated with theological liberalism. However, there are many commentaries by theological conservatives who believe that John had inspired visions revealed to him from the Lord, exactly as he claims. They accept the Book of Revelation as embracing the whole period of the Christian dispensation, but as great principles and inward spiritual struggles and not as special historical events and wars between nations.

The greatest disadvantage of the *spiritual* approach is that John's own words claim to be predicting events that must shortly come to pass:

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John..." Revelation 1:1 (NKJV)

Therefore, to take a purely symbolic approach to Revelation is to deny its prophetic claim. But most modern commentators have no difficulty mixing some of the ideas of the *Symbolic* approach with one of the other historically based approaches. The symbolism of Revelation combines readily with those of the *Preterists*, the *Historicists*, or the *Futurists* because there can be seen in its verses certain epic events patterns, types, and signs that are universal.

EXAMPLES OF HOW THE FOUR VIEWS ARE APPLIED TO SPECIFIC PASSAGES OF REVELATION

Revelation 1 – 3

The Commission of John and the Seven Letters

- *Historicist*
John received a vision from Jesus Christ instructing him to write of things that would soon take place. These events would extend through the entire church age and take us through the end of the age. The seven churches in

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

Asia Minor represent seven periods of church history that will be characterized by the special features described for the respective church.

- *Preterist*
Christ appears to John on the isle of Patmos and commissions him to write things that were about to happen. These events were concluded with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The letters described the conditions that existed in the seven churches mentioned in Asia Minor prior to the Jewish Revolt against Rome from 66 – 70 A.D.
- *Futurist*
While he was held captive on the isle of Patmos, John has a vision of Jesus Christ. In the vision, Christ commands him to write of events that would be fulfilled at the end of the present age, just prior to the Second Coming. Futurists can interpret the letters to the seven churches in the same way as the *Preterist* or *Idealist*, but most often take the *Historicist* approach.
- *Spiritual or Idealist* – John's vision of Christ reveals His glorious character and His absolute authority over the world. The scenes in Revelation are not actual historical events, but communicate in symbolic language:
 - 1- Christ's sovereign involvement in the affairs of this world
 - 2- Christ is the Head and Judge of over His church
 - 3- Christ is intimately concerned for all those who suffer in this world for His name's sake

The churches are symbolic representations of churches that exist at any time throughout church history. The letters speak to any churches that might share the conditions described in them.

Revelation 4 – 7

The Seven-Sealed Scroll

- *Historicist*
The unsealing of the scroll represents the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire. *Historicists* differ on the specific events represented by the seal-sequence, but one popular view is:

The seal-sequence begins with the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (d. 96 A.D.) and follows through the barbarian invasions until the decline and fall of Rome in the 5th Century.

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

- *Preterist*
The unsealing of the scroll represents the judgment of God upon Jerusalem (66 – 70 A.D.).
The 144,000 are Judean Christians that escaped the Roman army and fled to Pella.
The four horsemen represent the Roman Legions sent to Israel to quell the Jewish Revolt (66 A.D.); they punished Israel with bloodshed, civil war, famine, death, and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D.
- *Futurist*
Dispensationalists interpret the scroll and its unsealing as the Rapture of the church and the beginning of the Great Tribulation.
The 144,000 Jews of the end times are sealed (saved).
The one released at this time to ride forth as a conqueror is the Antichrist; he unleashes upon the earth war, famine, and cosmic disturbances
- *Spiritual*
The scroll and its unsealing represent the redemptive plan of God and the execution of divine justice that will surely come upon those who refuse the grace of God (NOTE Colossians 2:13-15 & Hebrews 12:25).

The opening of the seals points to God's sovereignty over the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms. Through it all, God will protect his people – even in the midst of war, famine, and political upheavals.

Revelation 8 – 10 **The Seven Trumpet Judgments**

- *Historicist*
The trumpets speak of a series of Barbarian invasions against the Roman Empire (Vandals, Huns, Saracens, and Turks).
The sixth trumpet brings the fall of Constantinople – Rome's capitol in the East – to the Turks (1453 A.D.).
The "little book" represents the Bible being made available to the masses of Europe after the invention of the printing press.
- *Preterist*

The first four trumpets correspond to the disaster inflicted by the Romans on the Jews during the Jewish Revolt (66 – 70 A.D.).

The fifth trumpet may depict the demonic spirits rendering the besieged Jews irrational and self-destructive.

The sixth trumpet refers to the Roman armies who slaughtered the Jews when they captured Jerusalem; those who were not killed were deported to other parts of the Roman Empire.

- *Futurist*
The trumpets represent the calamities that will come upon the inhabitants of the earth during the seven-year period of the Great Tribulation. (Those who accept the Pre-tribulation Rapture theology believe the saints of God will not be on the earth during this time.)
These events may be supernatural judgments direct from the hand of God or the disastrous effects of sinful man's improper stewardship of the earth combined with the abuse of technologies (i.e. nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction).
- *Spiritual*
Catastrophes like the plagues that struck Egypt in Exodus 7 – 11, befall sinful humanity many times throughout history. These terrible events are signs from God that demonstrate His displeasure. To the spiritually aware ("let him who has ears to hear"), they are like the sounds of trumpet blasts warning the unrepentant of worse things to come if they do not repent. Sinful humanity will absorb these disasters with defiance and determination to overcome them on their own and will not repent and turn to God for deliverance.

Taking More Than One Approach

NOT all commentaries completely take one approach or the other when interpreting the Book of Revelation. For example, in their introduction to the book of Revelation, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* by Thomas Hale and Stephen Thorson take a *Futurist* in approach to Revelation, but they include some of the other approaches we have discussed.

"... even though John's revelation refers in part to events of his own time, it particularly refers to events which will take place at the end of the world. Just as in John's time the church was facing great persecution, so in the final

conflict at the end of the world the church will face even greater persecution.”

Some examples of how commentaries will explain certain verses using a combination of these views in order to give a fuller or deeper understanding of the verses being examined:

Revelation 12:15-17 (FUTURIST/PRETERIST)

“...notice how the events described can refer both to events which have already taken place and also to events that will take place at the end of the world. First, the vision can be interpreted as a commentary on the past: Christ has already been born, and has defeated Satan on the cross; and Satan, ever since, has been persecuting Christ’s church. Second, the vision can be interpreted as a commentary on the future: at the end of the world, the final struggle between Satan and God will take place, and at the time Satan will again be hurled out of heaven to earth, where he will fiercely persecute Christ’s church for the short time remaining to him before he is finally destroyed forever.” *Applied New Testament Commentary*

Revelation 6:1-2 (FUTURIST/PRETERIST/HISTORICIST)

“Thus the rider on the white horse may also point to the attacks of the false Jews (2:9; 3:9), to the assault on Christians by pagan religionists, to the persecutions by Rome, as well as to all future, limited victories over the church by Satan (cf. 2:13; 12:17).”
Revelation by Alan F. Johnson

Revelation 6:3-4 (FUTURIST/IDEALIST)

A Rider on a Red Horse – “At the coming of Christ we are given hope of ‘peace on earth,’ but at the coming of the false Christ peace is taken from the earth. The Messiah is called the ‘Prince of Peace’ in Isaiah 9:6, but the false Christ takes peace away.

Jesus Christ offers us real peace, not the world’s kind, merely suggesting a cessation of hostilities, a signing of a paper to lay down arms for a time. The peace Jesus offers is the peace of heart, no matter what tribulation goes on all around us (John 14:27; 16:33). His peace is

settling the greatest hostility of all – the hostility between ourselves and God!”

The Coming World Leader: Understanding the Book of Revelation by David Hocking, Pub. Multnomah, 1988

Questions for Lesson 8

1. Describe the four major ways in which the book of Revelation may be interpreted.
2. What are some of the problems with the Historicist method of interpretation?
3. What are some of the problems with the Preterist method of interpretation?
4. What are some of the problems with the Futurist method of interpretation?
5. What are some of the problems with the Idealist method of interpretation?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES

NT 203-9

Interpreting the Book of Revelation



(Note: Part of this Lesson is taken from the Introduction to *From Genesis to Revelation: Interpreting the Book of Revelation Through the Old Testament Scriptures* by Frederick Osborn © 2016, BfA Books, U.S.A. Part of this lesson is from chapter nineteen “Christ’s Coming Kingdom” of *Exploring the New Testament* by Frederick Osborn © 2010, 2015)

Lesson Outline for the Student

- I. Which Approach is the Correct One?
- II. Interpreting the Book of Revelation Through the Old Testament

WHICH APPROACH IS THE CORRECT ONE?

To answer the question, “Which of the four most popular methods of interpreting the book of Revelation is the correct one?” We must first ask: “Correct for what purpose?”

A careful study of the apocalyptic literature that flourished in Judaism in the two centuries before Christ shows that all such books were constructed on a particular view of history – as a series of events, progressing from beginning to end, preordained by God. The powerful and mysterious images that characterize apocalyptic works are intentionally eschatological: they are intended to portray **future history**. The book of Revelation opens with the words, “The Revelation (Gr. *apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ that God gave him.” John continues in verse three: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy.”

If Revelation is rightly classified as prophetic, apocalyptic literature (and clearly it was so stated by John and accepted as such by the early church) then it must be interpreted from the standpoint of **the futurist**. But if you grasp the futurist view and run headlong with it, you may well find yourself treading the worn-out rabbit trails of theologians past by filling up graphs and charts intended to map out future events that are nothing like anything anyone has ever seen; or it may lead the student to construct outlines of history with dates and times never imagined by John. An inflexible futuristic interpretation may also cause the student to try forcing into the supernatural images of an ancient vision, the current events and notable leaders of their own place and time. There is no indication that John – or any of the other apocalyptic writers – ever intended the genre to be used in such a way.

The full meaning of John’s Revelation cannot be pressed into a single mold. As Lawrence O. Richards wrote in his *Exposition on Revelation*, “...the visions which John saw, and records fulfill the function ascribed to this great work by the Idealist. In reading Revelation, in absorbing its imagery, you and I are lifted up with John and overwhelmed by the realization that God is history’s Lord. No matter what our circumstances may be today, Christ will triumph. Evil will be judged, the wicked punished, and God’s righteousness will be fully vindicated in the end.” (*The Victory Background Commentary: New Testament*, Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc.)

INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

Because New Testament apocalyptic literature is Hebrew in origin, to fully understand the book of Revelation, the Bible student must return to the roots where it all began. So, everyone should begin their survey of the Bible by **“Thinking Hebrew.”** The Hebrew model of thinking and understanding relies upon:

- **Pictures and Metaphors**
- **Meanings** of names, places, and structures
- Emphasis is on **concepts** instead of telling a coherent story
- Appeals to **“eye speech”** – for example, God is described as a Shepherd, a Rock, Living Water, etc.
- Jewish thinking emphasizes the **corporate mindset**: what effects the individual effects the whole community
- Jewish thought is comfortable with **the mysterious** and does not seek an explanation for everything
- Jewish thought is more concerned with the **“why” of things** than **the “how”**

For this reason, while the Futurist interpretation may be the most appropriate approach, a rigid, linear approach that does not take into account the fact that the book was written in **Jewish apocalyptic** literary style will fail to do justice to the original intent and style of the author. So in the end, it is best not to become too fixed or immovable in any one way of interpreting the Book of Revelation.

In the same way that a painter uses height, width and depth to add perspective and realism to a portrait, the student of the Bible can use the different views of commentators to add depth and perspective to how they interpret John's Revelation. We must not be afraid to allow our particular point of view to be challenged by others because no one can say with any absolute certainty what will take place when the Lord returns. As long as we stay within the boundaries of the sound principles of Bible interpretation and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us and inform us, we will never stray too far from the truth.

Remember, it is the Lord's desire that we know and understand His Word... all of it. God is *not* the author of confusion, so we need not be confused about anything that is in His Word. From Genesis to Revelation, the Lord is speaking to all those who have ears to hear. Honest disagreements about the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture will always exist between believers, but what is essential is that we do not allow these disagreements to disrupt the overall unity of the church. Trust God to work all things together in the end for the good of those who put their faith in Him.

Revelation Gives Believers Hope for the Future

The future is that vast uncharted sea of time and space that is the great unknown. No one can truly say that they know what the future has in store for us. Will it be full of love, joy, wonders and new discoveries? Or will it bring only sorrow, confusion, terror, and emptiness? Some philosophers and theologians have played upon people's fears for the worst in the days ahead, while others have promised the next "Golden Age" is just around the corner for us. The fear of what horrors might lie in wait just over the next horizon or the need for reassurance that life for them will only get better have driven many to seek out seers, soothsayers, false prophets, and charlatans of all kinds who promise that they and they alone have the answers for what lies ahead. But the truth is, only the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God revealed to us in the pages of the Bible knows what is in store for us – even until the end of time itself. God will reveal only those things about the future that are necessary for us to know; and He reveals them only to those special messengers, His prophets to whom God has given a slight glimpse of things to come.

It is very human to want all the answers to who, what, how, where, and when of future events, but that ignores the fact that apocalyptic literature (like all Bible prophecy) is not particularly concerned with giving all the answers to us. Our Western mindset demands to know in particular the "how" and "when" of things to come, but that runs 180° out of sync with the Hebrew mindset of the Bible which is concerned primarily with the "why" of things. The Hebrew mindset is also comfortable with the mysterious and does not demand that all the details be worked out in a reasonable way in order to be comfortable (we call that "faith"; note Heb. 11:1-3). This friction between the Western scientific mindset and the Hebrew spiritual mindset is clearly seen in the modern conflict over how the first few chapters of Genesis and the final chapters of the New Testament in John's Apocalypse should be interpreted.

The modern interpreter of Revelation must face the fact that they can never really know the complete picture of tomorrow's story because it is known only to God; and even those special messengers called "prophets" know little more than a small chapter or two. And in many cases the prophets of God did not grasp the full implications of what they were prophesying at the time. The 21st century readers of the Bible often forget that a prophet's primary task was (and still is) to proclaim the word of the Lord, pointing out sin, explaining its consequences, and calling God's people to repentance and obedience; it is not to gaze into the crystal ball of the future to predict it (or worse yet, try to shape it by pronouncing a vision of the future and proclaiming it "done" in Jesus' name). The Apostle John stands with Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and all of the other true prophets of God who faithfully delivered God's message despite rejection, ridicule, and sometimes imprisonment or death. Yes, Revelation gives prophetic visions foretelling coming events, but the heart and soul of prophecy in the Bible is "inspired speaking" or forth-telling, not foretelling. We will miss a great deal of God's message to us in the here and now if we study Revelation only looking for what lies ahead in some unknown time.

The Old Testament in the New Testament

The thought of using the Old Testament to enhance our understanding of the New Testament is nothing new or astounding. The fact that the New Testament is indebted to the Old Testament is made apparent from the very first page of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's genealogy is taken directly from the pages of the Old Testament's histories; the names mentioned have meaning only to those who are fully aware of the people and the events related to them. As the pages of the Gospel stories unfold before the reader, it becomes clear that the time, place, people, and events leading up to the book of Acts are saturated in Jewish history

and tradition. Without at least some basic understanding of the Old Testament, Christians miss much of the subtext and significance of Jesus' mission on the earth from the moment of His birth until His final words with His disciples before His Ascension.

The casual reader of the New Testament is often totally unaware of its total dependence on the Old Testament. It is easy to find the almost 350 direct quotes of the Old Testament Scriptures in the writings of the New Testament; any good study or reference Bible will note them for us. However, what escapes most Christians when they read the New Testament are the more than 2,300 allusions and verbal parallels of the Hebrew Scriptures found in the New Testament's 27 canonical books. The books most often cited are Psalms (79 quotations, 333 allusions), and Isaiah (66 quotations, 348 allusions). Although the Book of Revelation contains no direct or formal quotations of the Old Testament, it contains no fewer than 620 allusions to the ancient Hebrew Texts. (Source: *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*)

The authors of the New Testament sometimes employed the accepted techniques of quoting Scripture that were common among the first-century Jewish rabbis. These include a style of expanded narrative with interpretive comments inserted (*midrash*); a style in which Old Testament texts are connected with specific contemporary events (*peshet*); and a style in which two or more verses that use the same word, but in different parts of the Bible are interpreted in the light of each other (*gezerah shawa*).

DEFINITION OF MIDRASH

<http://judaism.about.com/od/glossary/g/midrash.htm>

Midrash is a form of rabbinic literature. There are two types of midrash: midrash *Aggadah* and midrash *halakha*.

Midrash *Aggadah* can best be described as a form of storytelling that explores ethics and values in biblical texts. ("*Aggadah*" literally means "story" or "telling" in Hebrew.) It can take any biblical word or verse and interpret it to answer a question or explain something in the text. For instance, a midrash may attempt to explain why Adam didn't stop Eve from eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. One of the best-known midrashim (plural of midrash) deals with Abraham's childhood in early Mesopotamia, where he is said to have smashed the idols in his father's shop because even at that age, he knew there was only One God.

Midrash *Aggadah* can be found in both *Talmuds* (the collections of ancient Jewish writings that form the basis of Jewish religious law), in Midrashic collections and in Midrash Rabbah, which means "Great Midrash."

Whereas midrash *Aggadah* focuses on biblical characters as they pertain to values and ideas, midrash *halakha* focuses on Jewish law and practice. Midrash *halakha* attempts to take biblical texts that are either general or unclear and to clarify what they mean. A midrash of this nature may explain why, for instance, tefillin are used during prayer and how they should be worn.

Virtually all New Testament scholars agree that the authors of those texts were creative in the way they interpreted the Old Testament. John and the other Apostles who were with Jesus from the very beginning were not like Paul who was trained in the rabbinical schools. Because they were missionaries who were given the task of convincing their audience that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, they wrote from a different theological perspective. All the Apostles – including Paul – were led by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Old Testament in a radically new way in order to convey the idea that the true meaning of the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and not necessarily in the rabbinical interpretations of Mosaic Law.

Although John does not use a single direct quote from the Hebrew Scriptures in Revelation, the Old Testament saturates his work. Of the 404 verses of Revelation, almost 70 percent of them allude in one way or another to the Old Testament. The ideas, words, and symbols found in the Revelation bind it heart and soul to the Hebrew Scriptures. When we study the important parallels between the Old Testament's prophetic passages and Revelation, they will enhance our understanding of John's book.

John refers to a wide range of books from the Old Testament's law (Torah), history, poetry and the prophets. However, almost half of the references in Revelation are from the prophets Isaiah (46), Ezekiel (29), and Daniel (31). The fact that Revelation is apocalyptic in literary style should make it no surprise that prophetic books should be those most frequently alluded to. "Jewish prophets, of whom we are the heirs, had produced a rich harvest of sightings of God intervening to destroy the wicked, both Israelites and their enemies, and to set up his kingdom on earth in spectacularly horrid circumstances... Christ and his apostles were heirs of this tradition. Peter, the senior apostle, made it clear that 'the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night...' The true heir of the fire-and-brimstone

prophets was another John, writing from exile on the barren isle of Patmos toward the end of the first century. His revelations echo the images of other angry exiles: Daniel, Zachariah, Ezekiel, and the rest.” (*Apocalypses*, Eugen Weber, Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto, © 1999, pp 29-30)

Christians readily accept the idea that the true interpretation of the Old Testament is achieved by studying those writings in light of the incarnation of Christ and His eventual 2nd Coming. The Old Testament texts are searched often by Christians for types and shadows of Jesus, the promised Messiah. Even before Christ, many of those Hebrew texts had been accepted as messianic for a long time. However the New Testament writers were able to discover far more messianic verses hidden in the Old Testament texts after witnessing Jesus’ life, death, burial, resurrection, and Ascension. The writers of the New Testament used the only inspired, authorized canon they had available to them (the Hebrew Scriptures) and used them to the fullest to demonstrate how God’s plans and purposes for mankind’s redemption had been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

The authors of the New Testament may not have known at the time that they were writing inspired Scripture, but it was clear to them that the Holy Spirit was allowing a great deal of latitude for them to work out entirely new ways of understanding the inspired Scriptures of the past. Paul and the other Apostles had experienced transformational, and some might say, revolutionary encounters with the resurrected Lord and Savior, which led them to boldly shape an entirely new way of interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul’s dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus completely overturned everything he had been instructed about the Law. The Law was everything for the young rabbi, Saul. His zeal for the Law led him to persecute the only One who ever perfectly kept and fulfilled the Law. Paul wrote to the Romans:

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (3:21-26)

In Revelation we see an assumption by John that the readers of his book understood the Old Testament context from which his visions were drawn. He gave

no direct quotes, nor offered any guides to the Old Testament’s signs, symbols, or images contained within the context of his apocalyptic writing. This, of course, fits with the pattern and structure of Jewish apocalyptic writing, which is intended to communicate with and convince fellow Jews. Deliberately written in a mysterious language, it was intended to be understood only by those who were “initiated” into the same faith. This does not mean, however, that Revelation is not for Gentile believers (as is indicated by the series of messages to the seven churches in chapters 2 – 3). Revelation is for all those who worship Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Any attempt to understand the book of Revelation apart from its Jewish symbolism can lead to all kinds of misunderstandings and bizarre interpretations. This fact was lost on much of the church for centuries after the great schism developed between the church and the Jews shortly after the church became predominately a Gentile church. By the time Christianity in the West came under the absolute authority of the Roman Popes starting with Pope Leo I (440-461), Latin had replaced Greek and Hebrew as the language of the church, and all things Jewish were systematically purged out of Christian theology. During this same period the book of Revelation remained buried for the most part and was rarely mentioned outside of theological classrooms.

It was not until after the Great Protestant Reformation took hold and expanded that the effort to develop a distinct Protestant theology opened new doors to fresh interpretations of the Scriptures. Modern interpreters of the New Testament writings benefit from these fresh interpretations of the Scriptures and no longer have to shy away from the Jewish context of the book of Revelation. Cut off from its Jewish context as apocalyptic literature, Revelation does little more than feed the appetites of those hungry for the sensational and often paranoid visions of the immediate future. The book can nurture the private faith of those who embrace its broad themes (God’s sovereignty, Christ’s return, encouragement for God’s people to remain faithful, the imminent judgment of God, and hope in the future). However, by re-grafting our interpretation of the book of Revelation to its Jewish roots we can begin to understand how the Word spoken through ancient prophets of Israel related to the new Word being revealed by the resurrected Christ through His Apostles.

Injecting New Testament theology into the Old Testament as a means of bringing into focus the whole “story” of mankind’s redemption from Genesis forward has been and remains a respected and accepted method of understanding the Old Testament’s prophetic passages. Working backwards from the Gospels, Old Testament prophecy is made to serve Christian theology by filling in the blanks from Jesus’ birth, life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection.

The writers of the New Testament believed that their faith in Jesus as the risen Messiah enabled them to make better sense of the Old Testament than their

non-believing Jewish counterparts. Scholars of the New Testament quickly recognized the pattern employed by its authors of using the Old Testament to explain Jesus and in turn using Jesus to explain the Old Testament – a circular process in which each is informed and clarified by the other. This pattern works because none of the key elements that bind the two Testaments together are violated:

- The authority of the Old Testament was never **called into question or undermined**
- The New Testament authors were careful to select **relevant prophecies** from the Old Testament and were discriminating in **how they applied them** – especially those prophecies concerning the Messiah
- **Old Testament History** is recognized as possessing forward-looking and predictive qualities that function as “types” – a representation by one thing of another. Adam was a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14) and so was Isaac (Heb. 11:19). The Passover was a type of Christ (1 Cor. 5:7). Types in the Bible are too extensive and deep to be listed here
- The Elect people of the Old Testament are expanded to include **the Gentile believers**. The exclusivism of those who were Abraham’s children by race only, was opened to include all those who were **Abraham’s children by faith** (Rom 4:9-17, 22-25; Gal 3:6-9). The inclusion of the Gentiles into the community of faith is justified in the same way that Abraham was justified: by faith.
- The New Testament is the Old Testament religion **revived not replaced**. The New Testament builds upon the prophetic calling in the Old to worship God in spirit and truth (Pr. 20:27-28; Jn. 4:24). Only prophets and a select few other leaders were anointed in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the Jewish worship of God was being killed by a system of programs and ritual (2 Cor. 3:6).
- The entire church possesses a **prophetic calling** so that all can fulfill the Lord’s desire to be worshiped in spirit and truth. “The worship of the Old Testament is focused on a physical temple on earth. New Testament worship focuses on its heavenly counterpart by the Spirit the heavenly temple where God truly dwells and Christ has gone before.” Stephen Motyer

The application of the key elements that bind the book of Revelation to the Old Testament Scriptures allows the Old Testament prophecies to inform, define, and give deeper meaning to this essential book of the New Testament. In doing so, none of the key elements will be violated and the sound principles of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics will be respected by the student of Revelation. So,

whether the reader interprets John’s book as Historical, Preterist, Futurist, or Idealist they should be able to benefit from the proper application of the Hebrew Scriptures to help them understand the structure, images, signs, and symbols of John’s Apocalypse.

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Revelation 1:3

May God bless those who read and study Revelation.

Questions for Lesson Eight

1. What may be the result of an inflexible futuristic interpretation of Revelation?
2. What does it mean to “Think Hebrew” and why is it important when studying the New Testament?
3. Why should the New Testament scholars know and understand the relationship between the Jewish Scriptures and the book of Revelation?
4. John assumed that the readers of his book understood the Old Testament context from which his visions were drawn. Is that assumption valid for believers today?
5. List the key elements that bind the two Testaments together. Why is it so important to apply these elements when interpreting the book of Revelation?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES

NT 203-10

The Mission of the Church in the New Testament

Lesson Outline for the Student

- I. The Church is a People
 - a. The Church is Born, Nurtured, and Sustained by God
 - b. The Church Has a Mission and Purpose in This World: to Proclaim the Gospel Message of Salvation
- II. The Church is a Servant People
 - a. Servant People Model Their Lifestyle After Jesus Christ
 - b. Christ, the Head of the Church
- III. The Church is Looking Ahead to the Second Coming
 - a. The Church is a People Walking in the Light, Love, and Life of Christ While They Wait for His Return
 - b. The Church is Called to Reconcile the Scattered and the Separated People of the Earth and to Make Them One in Christ

THE CHURCH IS A PEOPLE

It is true that the church is a people, but it is more than a human invention. The great Christian theologian, C.S. Lewis described the church as a spiritual entity "...spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners... But invisible to humans."

In the New Testament, the word "Church" or "churches" comes from the Greek Word: ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia). The word never refers to a physical building or meeting place; it always refers to a congregation or assembly of people. Ekklēsia is distinguished from the words *hageon* or *hieron*, (translated "temple", "sanctuary", or "holy place") which are used for temple buildings as in Acts 19:37.



THE CHURCH IS BORN, NURTURED, AND SUSTAINED BY GOD

The New Testament church is distinguished from any other assembly of people in the world because the church is a body of believers that recognizes its creation is **by the will of God**: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13; also note Ephesians 1:5-6). Since it has been born of God, the members of the church understand that they must be nurtured and sustained by God to be effective witnesses in the world: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." (John 15:16; also note, Ephesians 3:20; and 2 Corinthians 9:8).

The book of Acts makes it clear that not only has the church has been born, nurtured, and sustained by God but it is also intended to be populated by **a diverse group of people** (Acts 11:19-24; 14:21-28) who have been ordained by God to "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." (Colossians 4:15).

The Church Has a Mission and Purpose in This World: to Proclaim the Gospel of Salvation to all People.

The mission of the church is not a new one; it is a shared mission with the ancient Abrahamic Community:

"Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1-3)

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when the church was officially inaugurated, the mantle passed from Abraham and his descendants to the church. When the church came into being, it was intended to be a **new community**, born of the old; it was commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit to carry on the Abrahamic mission to seek and save the lost, make disciples, and glorify the Father (Yahweh) to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 17:20-26; Acts 1:7-8). Although the Church has its roots Judaism, it was never to be treated as an extension of Judaism:

"We may say that Christianity was born out to Judaism as 'the mother', but it is still the new child of promise and is not as the mother. Realizing this fact will help us to realize that all Mosaic

Covenant economy things are fulfilled and abolished. The sacrifices, the priesthood, the temple, the rituals and festivals all find their spiritual fulfilment in Christ and His Church. These things of the Old Covenant were abolished at the cross and cannot be brought into New Testament Christianity or the New Testament Church. It is a 'new man'." Keven J. Connor, *The Church in the New Testament*. City Bible Publishing, Portland, © 1982, p.11

Beginning with Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-39), the Church's purpose and mission appears to be the **fulfillment of the covenant** God made with all Israel. Quoting from the Prophets Joel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and from Psalms, Peter convinced around 3,000 people in the crowd that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament's messianic prophecies for their Messiah. However, because of the resurrection, the church's mission had been expanded beyond the borders of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to include all the nations of the world. As the story told in Acts unfolds, it becomes clear that Jesus is not only the promised Messiah of the Jews but is the Messiah of the Gentiles also.

THE CHURCH IS A SERVANT PEOPLE THAT MODELS ITS LIFESTYLE AFTER JESUS, ITS LORD

Jesus taught His disciples to be a **Servant People** who model their lifestyle after Him. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master..." Matthew 10:24-25^a.

From the beginning the members of the church used what they received to give to those in need. (Acts 2:42-47. See also Matthew 25:34-40). They not only devoted themselves to the Lord's teachings through His apostles, but they also maintained a close fellowship with one another "breaking bread" and praying together. The Lord's anointing was upon the apostles so that "many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The members of the church daily modeled the kind of selflessness that their Master Jesus Christ had taught them when He was with them (Luke 22:24-27).

Many times in the Old Testament, God called His chosen people Israel, His servant. "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.'" (Isaiah 49:3). And the Son of God picked up on that theme and applied

it to His followers (Mark 9:35; 10:43). The idea of servanthood was continued in the New Testament church:

- Moses was called a servant in Hebrews 3:5
- James called himself a servant in James 1:1
- Peter identified himself as a servant in 2 Peter 1:1
- Jude called himself a servant Jude 1:1
- The angel in Revelation identified himself as a servant (Revelation 19:9-10)

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14)

Christ, the Head of the Church

Christ is supreme over His Church. It was created to be a people that takes its directives from Christ, its Head. Ephesians 1:20-22 states that the Father put all things under the feet of Jesus the Son and gave Him to be the Head over the church, which is His body. Jesus' resurrection from the dead as the firstfruits of all who would come after Him **confirmed His Lordship** (1 Cor. 15:20-23). The church lives by the creed that Christ is not only the Head of the church, but He is the ultimate power and authority over this world (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 17:14).

Jesus, God's anointed one, was the Messiah Israel longed for – the one they believed would set all things right. They believed the Messiah would sit in judgment over the nations, restore their broken world and make it right once again. The primary reason why the Jews rejected Jesus was because He was **not the Messiah they expected**. Rather than coming as the conquering king riding at the head of a mighty army, He came as a humble sacrificial lamb, riding on a donkey with his followers waving palm branches instead of swords and spears.

The church was established to carry on the mission of the Lamb of God. We have become the "body of Christ", the instrument through which Christ carries on His work of seeking and saving the lost to the ends of the earth until He returns. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:15-16 ESV).

The Church cannot exist **independently from Christ**. It was created for a purpose and that purpose requires us to trust him daily to keep us from all harm, to care for us as a shepherd cares for His sheep and build us up until we all are

transformed into His image and likeness. The Church is composed of all who trust in Christ. And because we believe in Him, we believe we will also defeat death and rise again to live eternally with him (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Because Christ is the head of the Church, we should strive to always give him first place in all our thoughts and activities.

THE CHURCH IS LOOKING AHEAD TO THE SECOND COMING

The church is not to be idle as we wait for the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11). **The Church is a People Walking in the Light, Love, and Life of Christ While They Wait for His Return.** The church is a people enabled to love others by the love they have received from their Lord and Savior. The church is called to be **“imitators of God”** and as beloved children, “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” The sacrificial love that Jesus poured out on the cross is called “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” that the church is called to imitate (Ephesians 5:1-2). We love God because he showed His love for us first: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The church was created to be a community of believers that seeks to love others as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35).

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:9–12).

The love that Jesus Christ modeled for us as He walked this earth compels us to **witness with Christlike compassion** (Acts 26:15-18), to **share our testimony** without being strident or coercive (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), and to **conduct our outreaches** without any contrived or artificial hidden agendas as we wait patiently for His return.

The church is a people of two worlds: we walk in the Light of Christ’s resurrection in this world as we keep looking ahead for a second world (The Kingdom of heaven) to be revealed. The kingdom of heaven (or God) is defined as “...the reign and rule of God over the universe and all creatures therein, angelic and human.” There always has been but one kingdom of God, but the instruments God chose to express the presence of this one Kingdom have varied. The final instrument for the expression and manifestation and demonstration of the Kingdom

of God on earth is His church. (See HANDOUT “The Church in the New Testament”).

The church and the kingdom should not be confused: although they are related, they are distinct from each other. The kingdom is **the universal reign of God over all creation**. The Church is part of God’s creation and is composed of those human beings who have been redeemed out of every ethnos (people group and culture) in the earth. The Kingdom is eternal and unlimited; it is all encompassing. The Church is temporal and material; it is the **instrument created by God** to demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom on earth until God establishes his full rule and reign over the earth at the end of the Age. Therefore, the redeemed of the Church are a part of the Kingdom, but the Church is not all there is to the Kingdom because the realm of the Kingdom extends far beyond the boundaries of the Church.

It is essential that Christians understand the difference between the church and the Kingdom to avoid confusing the real issues involved in both. We do not pray ‘Thy Church come’ but the Church prays ‘Thy Kingdom come’ (Matthew 6:6-10). Nor do we preach ‘The Gospel of the Church’, but the church preaches the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14) until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Church owes its existence to the fact that **Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead** (John 6:40; Romans 6:5). In 1 Corinthians 15:20-24, Paul calls Christ’s resurrection “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The promise of the resurrection of all who have died (John 6:51) is the hope of eternal life that the church proclaims. Because our resurrection from the dead is assured by Christ, we are confident that all who belong to Christ shall all be made alive when Christ returns. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1–3).

The Church exists to **continue the work on earth that Jesus began**: “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power...” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Matthew 16:18-19 reveals the relationship between the church and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus declared, “Upon this Rock I will build My church, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus was saying that in this present age, His church is entrusted with the **administration and authority** of the Kingdom (symbolized by the ‘Keys of the Kingdom’ given to it).

The responsibility of taking the good news of salvation and reconciliation in Christ to the world has passed from the nation of Israel to the Church. The church

proclaims that in Him “all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell” and that it is God’s intention to “reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

The Church is Called to Reconcile the Scattered and the Separated People of the Earth and to Make Them One in Christ

The Church was created to **complete the task** that Israel failed to do. (God’s election of Israel for service to the nations has been given to the church. The Church, which is the body of Christ, has been “grafted into spiritual Israel” (Romans 9 – 11), and has been selected to take the Gospel of the Kingdom to the nations (Acts 28:28). By the end of the Book of Acts Paul no longer feels under obligation to go to the Jews first. The church had been transformed into **one body of believers**, no longer segregated between Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free (1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 2:14-18). The mission of the church was fully realized: to take the Gospel of Salvation directly to the nations in order that in the end, all who believe in the Son of God will be saved. And so it has been throughout the Church’s history: missionary efforts have gone out into the world to preach salvation in Christ Jesus to the nations.

The continuation of the work that Christ began also means that the Church is called to be a *redemptive agency* in the world that is perishing:

- “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...’” (Mark 16:15)
- “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:14–15).
- “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16)

So, whether individually (lamps) or collectively as the church (the city on the hill) Christians are Gods “temple house” ... His dwelling-place upon the earth (Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 6:16b) for Him to work through His church “both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). The members of Christ’s body (the church) are called:

- **Royal Priests** (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6a). Christians are called “living stones” that are being built up as a “spiritual house,” and a “holy priesthood.” New Testament royal priests offer “spiritual sacrifices” acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- **Workers For God** (Luke 10:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:9; Philippians 4:3; and Colossians 4:11). In His earthly ministry, the Lord appointed others to go ahead of Him and announce the Kingdom of heaven. At one point He said to them “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The apostles appointed other “fellow workers” from God’s household, Paul called them, “God’s field, God’s building.”

“The use of private homes for Christian gatherings was sensible and pragmatic and had a formative influence on early Christian identity. The image of the church as a family or household was more than just a productive metaphor; it became a defining paradigm for Christian relationships and ethics.” Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World*, p. 199

- **Ambassadors For Christ:** (2 Corinthians 5:20). The members of the church function today as Christ’s “ambassadors.” Individually, Christians are official envoys, who represent the kingdom of God in this world. We make our appeal to those outside of God’s kingdom to be reconciled to God on behalf of our sovereign Lord
- **The Aroma of Christ** (2 Corinthians 2:15). By “aroma” Paul meant, that the church is the subtle impression or quality)– The fragrance or pleasant, sweet smell of Christ in this world of decay and death. We are to love as we have been loved; forgive as we have been forgiven; and embody in our natures the very nature of God who gave us life.

The Redemptive Activities of the Church Makes the Church:

- **The Supplier Of God’s Compassion for lost and hurting people.** It has been said many times that we are the “hands and feet of God” in this present age, and as such we cannot ignore the sufferings of those around us. The church fails to meet its destiny whenever it turns a blind eye to the suffering around us (Matthew 25:31-46).
- **The Model of God’s Forgiveness.** Colossians 3:13 repeats the Lord’s commandment that His followers forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you. Because the Lord loves us without condition, and forgives us freely, so, Christians also must forgive (Luke 23:34, John. 8:3-11). Before Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, His Father showed His patience and forgiveness towards Israel: “Their heart was not steadfast with Him; nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned

His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh.” (Psalm 78:37-39).

- **The Mediator of God’s Love.** (John 13:34-35; John 15:12, 16-17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 1:3:11). The Church, like Israel before it, is a covenant people called to deliver God’s message of salvation to the rest of the world. This is only possible when we live by the “Greatest Commandment” to love God, and others: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40).
- **The Glorifier of God on the Earth.** In John 14:12-14, Jesus tells His disciples that the greater works they will do after Jesus has gone to the Father will glorify the Father and the Son. The “greater works than these” that Jesus spoke of here does not mean that every individual believer will do greater miracles than Christ did. The Church, which is the body of Christ, works corporately in the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore those works will be “greater” in number and will be done to the ends of the earth, which will amount to more than what Jesus did in His short time on earth in His physical body.
- **The Expression of God’s Justice for the Oppressed.** The church is called to do more than sympathize with the needs of the destitute, the afflicted, the poor, and the oppressed. We are called to apply divine justice upon their plight. Peter said, “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...” (2 Peter 2:9). Therefore, the church will always find itself at war with the prevailing cultures of this fallen world.

Whether it is the “might makes right” mentality of the rich and powerful who oppress others in order to make themselves even more rich and powerful... Or the petty tyrannies of the politically correct... or the superior attitudes of the intellectual elitists that want to silence everyone that disagrees with them and make everyone conform to their understanding of human knowledge and science... Or the leaders of false religions who use their traditions and rituals to control the masses and keep them in submission to their superstitions, the Church must be prepared to enter into battle with every human scheme which fosters injustice for the oppressed.

Jesus made it clear that He intended to liberate the meek of the earth. He said on one occasion, that “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He

has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” (Luke 4:18–19).

Incorporated into the Gospel of Salvation is the idea that the Church is to be God’s warriors against those who exploit the poor and oppressed of this world. There is a long, long list of Christian social reformers that saw it as their duty to not only release the spiritual sufferings of the lost, but to make life on this earth better for those less fortunate.

Almost from the beginning, the Church applied Christ’s teachings to a set of Christian ethics designed to address various to social problems – especially issues of social justice such as:

- economic inequality – slums and poverty
- alcoholism, drug abuse, and crime
- racial tensions
- unclean environments
- child labor and poor schools
- And the dangers of war.

In summary:

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:12-17)

The Church is called to be the instrument through which the compassion, forgiveness, love, and justice of God are manifested to this sin-stained and fallen world. People who are hurting, wounded, downtrodden, and confused need the “tender mercies” of God’s compassion shown to them. Sinners who are suffering with guilt and shame over their wrong-doing need the forgiveness of God extended

to them. This world can be cruel and unforgiving. The fallen condition of the human soul means most people are longing to be loved and accepted for who they truly are; they need the love of God extended to them. When the rich and powerful use their position to oppress the poor and powerless around them, the justice of God is needed to restore fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way people are treated, and decisions are made. When the church comes together as one body, teaching one another the word of God, singing psalms and spiritual songs to the Lord with thanksgiving, it is fulfilling its purpose in this world and staying on mission with the work it has been called to do. The true character and nature of God is manifested by God's people when they are truly walking in the light, love, and truth in this dark and fallen world.

Questions for Lesson 10

1. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Galatians 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:16-17; and Romans 1:1. What do these verses say about the church being members of a servant community?
2. Read Matthew 12:18; John 13:1-20; and 1 John 13:14. In what ways does Jesus model servant leadership for us?
3. Read Acts 26:15-18; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; and 1 Corinthians 4:4-5? How do these verses instruct us to witness, give our testimony, and conduct our outreach?
4. When Jesus entrusted with the administration and authority of the Kingdom to His church, symbolized by the 'Keys of the Kingdom' given to it (Matthew 16:19), what does it mean for the continuation of the work that Jesus Christ began in His first Incarnation?
5. How does the identity of the church as God's *redemptive agency* in the world that is perishing, His royal priesthood, workers, ambassadors, and "the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" help to define the mission of the church in the world today?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES

NT 203-11

Early Church History: Golden Age of the Apostolic Fathers

Lesson Outline for the Students

- I. Who Were the Apostolic Fathers?
 - a. The Golden Age of the Apostolic Fathers
- II. The Apostolic Fathers
 - a. Clement Bishop of Rome
 - b. Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna
 - c. Ignatius Bishop of Antioch

WHO WERE THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS?

The story of the Gospels and the Book of Acts is largely a story of the infant church. It was formed in the womb between Jesus' birth and resurrection and was born on the first Pentecost after Jesus ascended to His heavenly kingdom. The church took its baby steps out of its cradle in Jerusalem and went out into the larger world around it seeking to fulfill its destiny. In the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul and the other Apostles, we discover the struggles of the young church to remain true to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Most of the New Testament's letters were written to (1) encourage believers to **keep good order in the church** and in their personal lives, (2) to remain united with **Christ and with each other** in the bond of love, and (3) to expel all **false teachers and false prophets** from the church.

The biblical part of the story of the church ended with Paul the Apostle in Rome, prophetically proclaiming the future of the church: "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves." (Acts 28:28-29). As we all know, the story of the church did not end there, but has continued for two thousand years – and will continue until the Lord's Second Coming, as promised.

"Christianity is no mere historical relic to be studied for curiosity's sake. It remains a vibrant movement that attracts millions of new adherents each year, and it grows exponentially in places such as China, Africa, and the Developing World. It is a movement that will

not die or allow itself to be ignored. And it is a movement from which our own culture has drawn wisdom and courage – even when we have not been aware of it. ‘We are like a dwarf,’ wrote Bernard of Chartres, ‘seated on the shoulders of giants. We see more things than the ancients and things more distant, but it is due neither to sharpness of our sight nor the greatness of our stature. It is simply because they have lent us their own.’” Mark Galli, Editor, *Christian History*.

The Golden Age of the Apostolic Fathers

By the time the first Apostles had passed, following their Master into His heavenly kingdom, they had given the church a clearly defined way to worship the Lord in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Even before the last Apostle, John, ended his earthly journey, the church was growing exponentially in all directions. By far, the church was growing fastest in the territory controlled by the Roman Empire. The Roman world turned out to be fertile soil for the propagation of the gospel. This was due in large part to the excellent means of transportation on land and sea, the widespread use of Greek throughout the Empire, and the general societal decay accelerated by a lack of religious morals.

A second generation of apostles, disciples by Jesus’ chosen apostles, started taking the places of leadership vacated by their mentors. The most notable of these post-apostolic leaders would be called *Apostolic Fathers* because of their proximity to the first apostles and their fidelity to the doctrines those apostles taught in person. The first Apostles wrote their teachings on scrolls to be distributed among all the churches for their instruction and edification.

The “Golden Age” of the Apostolic Fathers began around **95 AD** and lasted until **460 AD** (See HANDOUT “The Apostolic Fathers”).

The Apostolic Fathers were characterized by their view of the church and its worship, which was given to them directly from Jesus’ chosen Apostles. Christians were to be **one united body** under the rule of bishops. Their most important writings that survived, urged the church to be focused on baptism, Communion, prayer, and study of the Scriptures. The Apostolic Fathers urged believers to avoid meaningless disputes that only cause divisions. There are three common themes that appear in apostolic writings:

1. **Encourage Good Behavior**
2. **Remain Unified**
3. **Reject Heresy**

One of the earliest writings we have from the time of the Apostolic Fathers is the *Didache* or *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. It is in part, a summation of some of Jesus’ key teachings. The other parts of this small book are concerned with proper Christian behavior and the conduct of baptism, fasting and prayer, the Eucharist, and church assembly. Other sections of the *Didache* address, how to honor true prophets, and reject false prophets in the church; The appointment of Bishops and Deacons; Christian Reproof; and encouragement for the church to be watchful for the Coming of the Lord: “Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come. But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you are not made perfect in the last time.”

Although the authors of some early Christian non-apostolic writings (like the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*) remain anonymous, their general acceptance by the church indicated their importance for instruction and guidance during the time of the Apostolic Fathers. In this lesson, we will look at the ministry and writings of the three most important, recognized, early Apostolic Church Fathers: Clement Bishop of Rome, Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna, and Ignatius Bishop of Antioch.

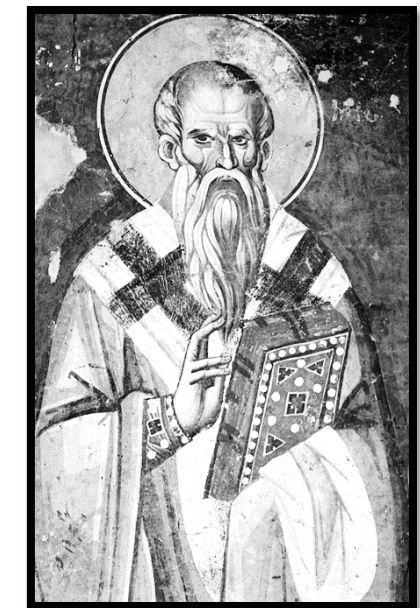
Clement Bishop of Rome (ca. 30-100)

Clement is noteworthy because he was the first of the Apostolic Fathers and his letter to the church at Corinth is earliest known Christian writing apart from the canon of the New Testament. Early church historians associate Clement with the Apostles Peter and Paul, while the Roman Catholic church lists Clement as the fourth bishop of Rome, holding office at the very end of the 1st century.

About the year 95 another serious conflict arose within the ranks of the church at Corinth. A faction in the church was unhappy with its leaders and revolted against the authority of the elders. Clement, exercising his authority as Peter’s chosen successor, wrote to the church at Corinth (*1 Clement*)

to urge an end to the dispute in which certain presbyters of the Corinthian church had been deposed. Clement begins by reminding the church of their former good reputation:

“For who that had sojourned among you did not approve your most



virtuous and steadfast faith? Who did not admire your sober and forbearing piety in Christ? Who did not publish abroad your magnificent disposition of hospitality? Who did not congratulate you on your perfect and sound knowledge?
For ye did all things without respect of persons, and ye walked after the ordinances of God, submitting yourselves to your rulers and rendering to the older men among you the honor which is their due.”
1Clement 1:2-3_a

Clement continued his letter praising the Christian virtues of love, obedience to the ordinances of God, humility, and penitence to God even if “unwillingly ye had committed any sin.” Clement introduced the idea of apostolic succession being connected to duties performed “in fear of Him” noting that “The commandments and the ordinances of the Lord were written on the tablets of your hearts.” Clement noted that God Himself “had asserted the authority of the presbyters as rulers of the church because they had been appointed by the Apostles.” (2:8).

Quoting generously from the Old Testament, Clement called the church to turn away from the temptations not allow jealousy and selfish ambition to divide them and cause them rebel against their God-appointed leaders:

“So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order.

Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come.”

1 Clement 42:2-3

This letter to the church at Corinth was the earliest affirmation of the principle of apostolic succession. Clement urged the church to obey their appointed leaders, noting that “our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office” (1 Clement 44:1). Elders and deacons were appointed by the apostles for the church to provide a continuance so “approved men should succeed to their ministration.”

Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered unblamably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration.

1Clement 44:2_b

After making his appeal to the church to accept their leaders without jealousy or strife, Clement followed with a long prayer for unity of the church... “that we may set our hope on Thy Name which is the primal source of all creation, and open the eyes of our hearts, that we may know Thee...”

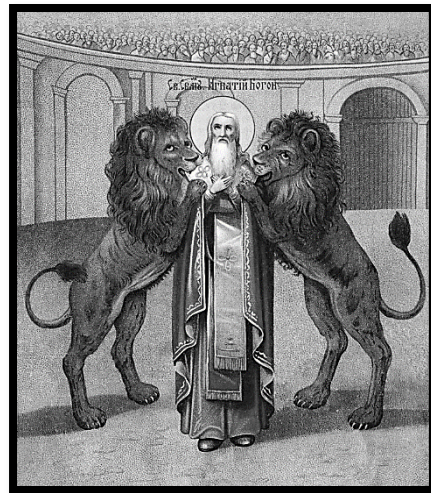
Clement’s leadership is valuable to the church to this day.

- He affirmed the important positions of the **bishops or elders** as appointed leaders in the church.
- He urged the church to **obey the bishop** in order to keep Christian unity.
- He separated the **clergy from laity**: To the clergy “proper services have been assigned, and to the priests their proper office is appointed... The layman is bound by the layman's ordinances.” (1 Clement 40:5)
- He quoted faithfully from the **Old Testament**, affirming its relevance to Christian theology. (His letter quoted the Old Testament about 150 times).
- He exalted **Paul’s contribution** to Christian theology, often referencing Paul’s letters, and pointed to Paul’s “patient endurance” which won him the “noble renown which was the reward of his faith...” (1 Clement 5:5-6)
- Clement strengthened the Christian belief in the **blood of Jesus shed for the remission of sins**: “Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation it won for the whole world the grace of repentance.” (1Clement 7:4)

Although Clement may have believed he possessed a special responsibility to intervene in the crisis at Corinth, there is no evidence from any of his writings that he believed he was the supreme head of all the churches. His steps to influence the Corinthian church may have stemmed from the fact that as the Bishop of Rome, he was considered the successor of the Apostles Peter and Paul. There is no indication that Clement or any other early Christian Bishop of Rome believed they were the spiritual head over all Christians everywhere. It would take several centuries and a gradual consolidation of the wealth and power of the Roman Bishops before a strong doctrine of Papal primacy would be adopted by the Western Church.

Ignatius Bishop of Antioch (Died, c.110)

Not much is known about Ignatius’ early life. Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Origen all refer to him or his epistles in their writings, confirming many of the traditions concerning him.



Most of what we know about him is revealed in his writings. Ignatius, a disciple of the Apostle John, was the bishop of the church in Antioch, Syria, but was martyred in Rome under Emperor Trajan after declaring his unwavering faith in Jesus Christ.

After his arrest and trial, Ignatius was sent to Rome to be publicly executed. While on his long journey from Antioch to Rome, he was given time to visit Christians at the stops along the way. In response to those visits, Ignatius wrote seven letters which have survived to this day. These letters contain warnings to the churches about

certain heresies that threatened the peace and unity of the church. He also addressed points of ecclesiastical order. His letters help Christians to understand how the early church functioned as the body of Christ.

In chapter four of his letter to the Romans, he said about his coming execution,

“I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless ye hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments(2) I may be found a sacrifice [to God]. I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man: they were free, (3) while I am, even until now, a servant. But when I suffer, I shall be the freedman of Jesus, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.”

In the early stages of the Christian faith, a huge struggle was taking place between the Apostles of Jesus and their successors and the false prophets and teachers that were leading believers astray. From the canonical Epistles of the New Testament, we learn that one of the consistent themes of these letters to the churches was the warning to **reject all false teachers and prophets** and purge

their teachings from the church. Failure to do so would lead to a divided church being led down different paths to destruction by “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” Two of the heresies that Ignatius of Antioch confronted were **Gnosticism and Docetism**.

Most of the early Christian heresies sprang out of the struggle many were having trying to reconcile Jesus’ full humanity with His full divinity as Lord and Savior. Some Christians reconciled the dual nature of Jesus Christ by denying His full humanity, while others thought it best to strip Jesus of His full divinity. The Docetists answered this dilemma by undermining His humanity: “For some, the answer was that Christ had only the appearance of a man on earth – he was, in fact, a phantom. Christ was a Spirit, not a man. This line of thought became known as Docetism, which is not the name of a heretical sect but a tendency that was to appear in many schools of thought and types of heresy in succeeding centuries. Docetism is found in all systems which regard Christ primarily as a symbol, or as a mythological explanation of man’s relation to divinity.” (Joan O’Grady, *Early Christian Heresies*, © 1985, pub. 1994, Barnes & Noble, Inc., p.11)

Gnosticism is a complex mix of Eastern mystical beliefs and Western Pagan religions. In their writings, early Christian theologians usually referred to an individual Gnostic sect by the name of its founder or leader. The foundation of these heretical teachings was the pagan belief in **dualism**: spirit is good, flesh is evil. They saw an eternal conflict between good and evil, mind and matter, idea and object that could only be overcome by a true revelation of divine knowledge that completely severed the physical from the spiritual. This belief led the Gnostics to deny the human nature of Christ and reject His suffering on the cross. Ignatius forcefully argued against any heresy that separated the divine Christ from the human Jesus. He opposed those who taught that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at His baptism, or any other time, but departed just before His death to avoid suffering and death. He responded in chapter eighteen of his letter to the Ephesians:

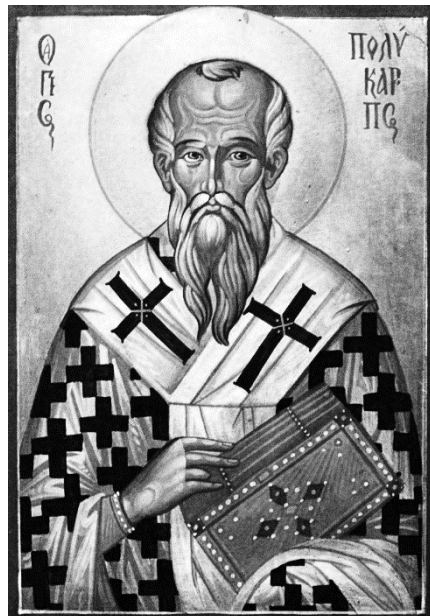
“The cross of Christ is indeed a stumbling-block to those that do not believe, but to the believing it is salvation and life eternal. ‘Where is the wise man? where the disputer?’ Where is the boasting of those who are called mighty? For the Son of God, who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost. For says [the Scripture], ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and He shall be called Immanuel.’ He was born and

was baptized by John, that He might ratify the institution committed to that prophet.”

In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius repeats a common theme in his writings: encouraging and praising **the bond of Christian unity in the church**. Key to the unity among believers is the respect for and obedience to God’s chosen bishop over them. He went so far as to write in chapter VI, that the believers should have respect to the bishop as to Christ Himself:

“Now the more any one sees the bishop keeping silence, [10] the more ought he to revere him. For we ought to receive every one whom the Master of the house sends to be over His household, [11] as we would do Him that sent him. It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself.”

By the time of Ignatius, many churches had come to the reasonable conclusion that there ought to be one “senior” pastor, who was called the bishop. Elders, or presbyters, were ranked under the bishop in authority and standing. In his letters Ignatius acknowledged that the bishop was not to be chosen simply because he was the oldest among the elders, but he should be one whom **God called** to that position. Ignatius argued further that there should be **one bishop in charge of each congregation** in order to prevent splits and ensure correct beliefs were preserved.



Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna (69 AD – 155 AD)

Polycarp, known as a junior colleague of Ignatius, died a similar martyr’s death. According to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, he was bound and burned at the stake; but when the fire failed to consume his body he was stabbed to death.

According to Irenaeus (c.130 – 202), Polycarp was a companion of Papias, another “hearer of John”, and was a correspondent of Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius addressed a letter to him and mentioned him in two of his other letters. In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius, “Having obtained good proof that thy mind is fixed in God as upon an immovable rock...” encouraged him to:

- Press forward in his ministry
- Exhort, encourage, and urge forward believers so that they may be saved

- Maintain his position as a bishop with all care, both in the flesh and spirit
- Above all else, promote, protect, and preserve the unity of believers
- Be patient with all, even as the Lord is with him
- Handle all with love
- Give himself to prayer without ceasing
- Ask for additional understanding to what he already had
- Be watchful, “possessing a sleepless spirit” (be alert)
- Speak to every man separately, as God enables him
- Bear the infirmities of all, knowing like a perfect athlete, that where the labor is great, the gain is all the more.

Both Irenaeus and Tertullian said that Polycarp had been one of the disciples of **John the Apostle**. Later, Saint Jerome (c. 342 – 420) wrote that Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle, was also ordained by him as a bishop of Smyrna. Irenaeus remembered Polycarp as a **link to the apostolic past**. In his letter to Florinus, a fellow student of Polycarp, He said of him, “I could tell you the place where the blessed Polycarp sat to preach the Word of God. It is yet present to my mind with what gravity he everywhere came in and went out; what was the sanctity of his deportment, the majesty of his countenance; and what were his holy exhortations to the people. I seem to hear him now relate how he conversed with John and many others who had seen Jesus Christ, the words he had heard from their mouths.”

Polycarp, along with Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, form a direct link to the teachings of Jesus through His chosen Apostles. Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians* is the only writing of his that has survived. His letter to the Philippians gives us some insights to how the early church used the Gospels and letters of the Apostles that would eventually become the canon of the New Testament. In the opening chapter of his letter, Polycarp wrote:

“Wherefore, girding up your loins,” [1 Peter 1:13; Ephesians 6:14] “serve the Lord in fear” and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and “believed in Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave Him glory,” [1 Peter 1:21] and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things [1 Peter 3:22; Philippians 2:10] in heaven and on earth are subject. Him every spirit serves. He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead. [Acts 17:31] His blood will God require of those who do not believe in Him. But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise us up also, if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness; “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing,” [1 Peter 3:9] or

blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching: "Judge not, that you be not judged; [Matthew 7:1] forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you; be merciful, that you may obtain mercy; [Luke 6:36] with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you again;" [Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:38] and once more, "Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God." (NOTE: Chapter and verse divisions did not appear in the original texts of Jewish or Christian Bibles; such divisions did not appear until the early 13th century when Bibles were printed for wider distribution. Chapter and verse were added to this quote from Polycarp's letter).

Polycarp occupies an important and valuable place in the history of the early Christian Church. He was an elder of an important congregation in the territory that made a significant contribution to the founding of the Christian Church. His influence on Christian theology is recognized by Catholics in the West and the ancient Orthodox Churches in the East. Irenaeus said he was known by his contemporaries as "a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics."

In the age after the deaths of the Apostles of Jesus, the influence of the Apostolic Fathers like Polycarp cannot be underestimated. When a variety of interpretations of the sayings of Jesus were being circulated around the churches by spoken and written word, the Holy Spirit led them to **authenticate orthodox teachings** through their connection with the Apostles who knew Jesus personally.

The early church valued the witness Polycarp gave to the genuine doctrine of the Apostles. On Polycarp's visit to Rome, his preaching turned many of the disciples of Marcion and Valentinus back to genuine Christianity.

In his letter, Polycarp identified Jesus as the "son of God" and the "eternal high priest" and affirmed what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians (1:15-18): "to him all heavenly and earthly things were subjected, whom every breath worships, who comes as a judge of the living and the dead".

Polycarp's letter also declared the sinlessness of Jesus, defended the doctrine of the Incarnation, the death of Christ on the cross, and clearly denounced the Docetæ. Upon meeting Marcion in Rome, Polycarp called him "the offspring of Satan" to his face. In chapter seven of his letter, Polycarp stated:

"For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;" ^{1 John 4:3} and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan. Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to

the word which has been handed down to us from ^{Jude 3} the beginning; "watching unto prayer," ^{1 Peter 4:7} and persevering in fasting; beseeching in our supplications the all-seeing God "not to lead us into temptation," ^{Matthew 6:13; Matthew 26:41} as the Lord has said: "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." ^{Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38} (NOTE: Chapter and verse divisions did not appear in the original texts of Jewish or Christian Bibles; such divisions did not appear until the early 13th century when Bibles were printed for wider distribution. Chapter and verse were added to this quote from Polycarp's letter).

Men like Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna followed in the footsteps of Jesus' chosen Apostles and formed the second generation of church leaders. The heresies and problems they addressed in their ministries still face us today, and we can learn much from their writings. (See HANDOUT for the Bibliography of Lessons 11 & 12 of this study material).

Questions for Lesson Eleven

1. How did the Apostolic Fathers encourage believers to keep good order in the church and in their personal lives?
2. Explain why it was important for the Apostolic Fathers to call the early church to remain united with Christ and with each other in the bond of love?
3. Why were the Apostolic Fathers so forceful in their calls for the church to expel all false teachers and false prophets from their ranks?
4. How can the witness of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna concerning their martyrdom encourage Christians today?
5. What is the importance of the direct link between the teachings of Jesus through His chosen Apostles and the Apostolic Fathers?

SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES NT 203-12

Early Church History: The First Seven Ecumenical Councils

Lesson Outline for the Students

- I. First Council of Nicaea: 325 A.D.
 - a. Affirmed the deity of Christ
 - b. Led to the creation of the Nicene Creed
- II. First Council of Constantinople: 381 A.D.
- III. Council of Ephesus: 431 A.D.
 - a. Clarified the nature of Christ's personhood
 - b. Proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God
- IV. Council of Chalcedon: 451 A.D.
 - a. Affirmed that Jesus has two distinct natures in one person
 - b. Led to the creation of the Chalcedonian Creed
- V. Second Council of Constantinople: 553 A.D.
- VI. Third Council of Constantinople: 680–681 A.D.
 - a. Condemned Monothelism
 - b. Condemned the idea that Christ had one will, rather than two
- VII. Second Council of Nicaea: 787 A.D.
 - a. Restored the veneration of icons after a period of iconoclasm
- VIII. Assessment of the Ecumenical Councils

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICEA 325 A.D.

The precedent for calling together the recognized leaders of the church to settle important issues regarding the Christian faith was set in Scripture. Acts 15:6-29 describes **the Council of Jerusalem** called to decide the issue: should Gentile Christians be circumcised and obey Mosaic Law. After seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a letter was written to circulate among the churches:

“The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,

To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings.

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment—it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” **Acts 15:23–29**

The Apostolic Fathers wrote letters and consulted with the Bishops and Elders of the churches as the need arose, but it would be a long time before another council would be called. The leaders of the church would turn to the Book of Acts for instructions on how to deal with controversies in the church.

As the church grew and expanded rapidly throughout the Roman world, Christians were challenged to define and defend their faith in Jesus Christ as the unique Son of God and Savior of the world. Pagans, Gnostics, and Roman philosophers forced Christian apologists to defend their beliefs.

The church itself was suffering from growing pains. Questions and disagreements over many issues threatened to fracture the church. The primary motivation for calling the Council of Nicaea was a theological dispute among the Christian clergy of Alexandria concerning the nature of Jesus, his origin, and relation to God the Father. The Archbishop Alexander of Alexandria and the presbyter Arius were promoting opposing ideas that threatened to divide the church.

The Christian Emperor Constantine exercised his authority over the new State Religion and summoned bishops from every region of the Empire to Nicaea, the city where he administered the affairs of the church. Three hundred and eighteen bishops were able to make the journey and were present at the start. The greatest issue threatening the unity of the church was the debate over the **person of Christ and the Trinity**. “The council lasted two months and covered many issues confronting the church. Approximately twenty distinct ‘canons,’ or decrees, were issued by the emperor and bishops about subjects ranging from deposing lapsed bishops to the ordination of eunuchs.” (Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian*

Theology: Twenty Centuries of Reform, Copyright © 1999, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, p.152)

In the end, the Council rejected Arius' and his followers' teaching that the Father alone was eternal, that His Son was created by the Father, and was therefore inferior to the Father. The Council of Nicaea wrote a clear statement to define the Church's faith that Jesus Christ is "of one substance with the Father." Therefore, Jesus Christ is "true God" as God the Father is "true God" – they are of one substance. The statement, known as the **Nicene Creed**, affirmed what the Gospels and the Apostles' letters to the churches said about Jesus Christ. It read as follows:

“We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
begotten from the Father, only-begotten,
that is, from the substance of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God, begotten not made,
of one substance with the Father,
through Whom all things came into being,
things in heaven and things on earth,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down,
and became incarnate and became man, and suffered,
and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens,
and will come to judge the living and dead,
And in the Holy Spirit.
But as for those who say, There was when He was not,
and, Before being born He was not,
and that He came into existence out of nothing,
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance,
or created, or is subject to alteration or change
– these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.”

FIRST COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE: 381 A.D.

The First Council of Nicaea brought an end to **the errors of Arius**; but the end did not come suddenly. Although the bishops were required to conform their teachings to the Nicene Creed or risk being labeled heretics, the proponents of Arianism fought bitterly against the idea of the full humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. It would take another ecumenical council – the First Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. for the orthodox view of the true deity of Christ to prevail.

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

Another splinter group that formed during same period as the Arian controversy was The Montanists. The Montanist movement was a reaction against the increasing dependence upon the structure and organization of the church hierarchy: “It represented the perennial protest that occurs in the church when there is overelaboration of machinery and lack of dependence on the Spirit of God. The Montanist movement was and is a warning to the church not to forget that its organization and its formulation of doctrine must never be divorced from the satisfaction of the emotional side of man's nature and the human craving for immediate spiritual contact with God.” Cairns, Earle E., *Christianity Through The Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Copyright © 1954, 1981, The Zondervan Corp., Grand Rapids, MI, p.102

Once they unhitched themselves from the orthodoxy of the Apostolic Fathers, the Montanist movement quickly ran off the rails and fell into serious errors. Montanus rejected the growing authority of the bishops. He dismissed the writings of the apostles, and criticized those who would not join his “new prophecy” with all signs and wonders following as spiritually dead leaders. He declared himself to be the paraclete or advocate through whom the Holy Spirit prophesied to the church. Montanus was joined by two prophetesses named Prisca and Maximilla and the three started to prophesy that Christ would return soon to their commune at Papuza, a town in Phrygia.

The Montanists represented only one of the movements that struggled with understanding the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father. Like those who denied the full deity of Christ, others denied the full deity of the Holy Spirit and considered Him to be a created being subordinate to the Father. Proponents of Monarchianism were **denying the separate persons** of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Cappadocian Fathers, a trio of Byzantine Christian bishops, led the group of bishops, theologians, and monks that fought for the orthodox cause and against those who were teaching bad theology. The Cappadocians advanced the cause of **Christian orthodoxy**, especially on the doctrine of the Trinity. Before the end of the century, it became necessary to call another ecumenical council.

The Council of Constantinople affirmed the efforts of the Cappadocians to defeat once and for all the full deity and co-eternal persons of the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The crowning achievement of the Council was rewriting the Nicene Creed so that it included a “third article” about the Holy Spirit and the church. The finished Creed is still known as the Nicene Creed today:

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all this is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

Copyright © 2024 School of Global Missions. This material is not to be copied for any purpose without written permission of Dr. Frederick Osborn and the School of Global Missions. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

Through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son).

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

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

The Nicene Creed has become the basic universal statement of faith shared by all Christian clergy. After the First Council of Constantinople, Emperor Theodosius decreed that it was to be binding for all bishops and elders throughout his empire. “Other creeds and confessions of faith were written later, but all of them in the Orthodox, Catholic and magisterial, or mainline, Protestant traditions are meant to be elaborations and interpretations of this one. It is the universal creed of Christendom.” (Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Reform*, Copyright © 1999, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL p.196).

COUNCIL OF EPHESUS: 431 A.D.

The Council of Ephesus was called by St. Cyril of Alexandria, the successor to the great Cappadocian defender of the faith, Athanasius. The Council was called for one primary purpose: to **settle the growing dispute over the titles** of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Nestorius and his followers preferred the term “Mother of Christ” over the term “Mother of God”, preaching that Mary gave birth only to Christ’s human nature.

On the surface, it may seem a trivial matter concerning a preferred way of addressing Mary, but the implications for each term indicated the theology behind them. By affirming that Mary could be called rightfully, “Mother of God” (or in

Greek, *Theotokos*, literally “God bearer”), the bishops upheld the apostolic doctrine that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the eternal Word (John 1:1-5) – that Jesus Christ was, is, and always will be God (one Person with two natures). Born as a human by the “Mother of Christ”, meant He would have to take on the nature of God at some point after a completely natural birth (two distinct natures – one human and one divine).

COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON: 451 A.D.

The great dilemma facing the bishops at Chalcedon was how to solve the insolvable **mystery of the incarnation**. Before Chalcedon, factions divided along lines of emphasizing either the full humanity of Christ at the expense of His full divinity or emphasizing the full deity of Christ at the expense of His full humanity. “The Council of Chalcedon went on to promulgate a Christology that would be in accord with the Scriptures. The council held that Christ was ‘complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man.’ Having ‘two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.’ These two natures were brought together harmoniously in one person with one essence by the Incarnation. This formulation has been the view of the orthodox on this point since the time of the council.” Cairns, Earle E., *Christianity Through The Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Copyright © 1954, 1981, The Zondervan Corp., Grand Rapids, MI, p.136

SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE: 553 A.D.

Chalcedon may have settled on a clear Christology, but not all bishops were willing to fall in line. There were still those who insisted that God did not become a man, but that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, became a god. This idea still exists in New Age and Eastern Cults that promote “Christ consciousness” – that all people have the essence of God in them and therefore, anyone who is “worthy” may have the same “indwelling” presence and power of Christ.

Nestorius (ca. 381 – ca. 452) was another one of those who disliked the term *theotokos* (God bearer) for the name of Mary. Nestorius was troubled rightfully over the increasing **eneration of the Virgin Mary** creeping into the church’s worship. Nestorius and his followers feared that Mary would be treated by Christians as a goddess, which would signal a backsliding into paganism.

Cyril, the powerful bishop of Alexandria, was a formidable opponent of the Nestorians. “Cyril’s Christology was theocentric, and the divinity of Christ had prime place in all his teaching. But he held that, in Christ, there was an indissoluble union between God and man. The Logos, incarnate in Christ, had

taken on the characteristics of Man. This meant that Christ had the qualities of humanity in general, rather than those of an individual man.” (O’Grady, Joan, *Early Christian Heresies*, Copyright © 1985, Barnes & Noble, Inc., U.S.A., p.103).

Unable to settle their differences, both Nestorius and Cyril turned to Pope Celestine in Rome for help. However, when the Pope sided with Cyril, Nestorius refused to retract and persuaded the Emperor Theodosius to call another Council. The Council at Ephesus in 431 was a total disaster. Mob violence broke out against the opponents of those who used “Mother of God” to describe Mary. At one point, Theodosius had to imprison both Cyril and Nestorius in an attempt to quiet the mobs on both sides. Finally, Theodosius had to admit the complete failure of the Council to solve anything and dismissed them. In the months and years following the Council at Ephesus, the Emperor used his influence to gain mutual concessions between the supporters of Cyril and Nestorius. John of Antioch, a supporter of Nestorius consented to the condemnation of Nestorianism, while Cyril agreed to allow part of creed written by John to be used by the church.

The Nestorianism was dealt a severe blow by the failure at Ephesus, and many of the proponents of that theology fled to the East to practice their beliefs away from those that called them heretics. If Nestorius had prevailed, the teaching that Jesus was a normal human being with the special indwelling of divine *Logos*, may have become Christian orthodoxy.

An extreme reaction to the Nestorian heresy led some theologians to explain that at the Incarnation, “One incarnate nature of God the Word” blended into one divine nature. This idea, known as *Monophysitism*, taught that Jesus was fully divine (Jesus was *homoousion* with the Father: Gr. “of the same substance” or “same in essence”), and denied His full humanity.

In 553 A.D. the Emperor Justinian and Eutychus, the patriarch of Constantinople assembled the fifth ecumenical council, known as the Second Council of Constantinople. (for months, Pope Vigilius of Rome refused to accept the conclusions of the Council, but eventually accepted the verdicts and ratified them). The Second Council of Constantinople issued fourteen condemnations of the false teachers who refused to accept the essential biblical teachings surrounding the person and nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Council confirmed Apostles’ teachings that Jesus was fully God (John 1:1; 8:58) and fully man (John 1:14). The doctrine of the dual nature of Christ in one person is known as the *hypostatic union* was settled. Therefore, the Council declared that to deny Jesus’ divine nature is heretical and to deny His human nature is equally heretical.

The Second Council of Constantinople effectively dismissed the heresies of the Montanists’ “new revelations” believed to have been given to their leader from the Holy Spirit; the Nestorian’s false teaching that Christ had two separate persons,

one human and one divine; and the Monophysites’ belief that Jesus Christ had only one divine nature.

“In the end, erroneous teachings surrounding the person and nature of the Lord Jesus were condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople. Quite possibly, Emperor Justinian’s motives for calling the council were as political as they were theological, but the assembly stood firm against heretical teachings. Some may consider the disagreements among the various factions in Constantinople as theological hair-splitting, but the subject of Christology is hardly a peripheral issue. Every cult and ism, past and present, begins with a false understanding of the person and nature of God. Our finite minds cannot completely fathom the depth of Christ’s character, but the plain teaching of Scripture is that He is fully God and fully man. Ultimately, the fourteen anathemas issued by the Second Council of Constantinople were justified and necessary.”

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/Second-Council-of-Constantinople.html>)

THIRD COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE: 680–681 A.D.

Although the ecumenical councils accomplished the task of developing a unified Christology for the church, they could not stop the growing schism between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire. Separate Emperors ruled East and West from 395, and from that time forward, the church was dragged into conflicts that became increasingly more political than theological. Between 484 and 519 the schism between Constantinople and Rome turned ugly. Popes were imprisoned by rivals and anti-Popes were put in their places. At the same time, rival bishops quarreled over doctrines, some refusing to submit to the decisions of previous ecumenical councils.

“With great patience one may follow the church’s train of thought up to and through the christological decisions of the fifth council at Constantinople in 553. Few modern Protestant Christians, at least, can happily or without great frustration move on with the Eastern church from there to the christological decisions of the sixth ecumenical council, the council that is known in church history as the Third Council of Constantinople or Constantinople III. It was held in the Byzantine capital in 681 to settle a controversy of great importance to Eastern Orthodox Christians but virtually ignored by Western Christians.” (Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology*:

Twenty Centuries of Reform, Copyright © 1999, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL p.246).

Similar to the earlier debate over Christ having only one divine nature or two – one human and one divine – the Eastern bishops debated over Christ having only one will (*monothelism*) or two wills (*dyothelism*). The sixth ecumenical council meeting in Constantinople rejected the arguments of those who believed Christ could only have a single divine will and dealt a final defeat to the Christology of a purely divine Jesus.

SECOND COUNCIL OF NICAIA: 787 A.D.

The First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) issued statements on the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. The Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) was called to settle the dispute over the use of **images in worship**. Nicaea II is the last of the seven councils recognized as authoritative by both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.

The dispute over the use of images in Christian worship had been building for centuries, but did not threaten the unity of the church until 726 when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III issued a decree against the worship of icons (religious images of Christ and the saints). For centuries Christians insisted that the veneration of was not the same as worship. They argued that it was not the images themselves that were being worshiped, nor were they worshiping personages that the images represented – Mary, the angels, and various saints, etc. – but they were bowing before and venerating (*proskynesis*) to a personage that represents God and accepts worship on His behalf. They argued, and the bishops attending the Council agreed that the adoration and worship reserved for God alone (*latria*) was different and of a higher level than veneration. The council concluded that icons deserve reverence, and it was acceptable veneration but not adoration, which is reserved for God.

“The Second Council of Nicaea developed a category of lesser worship that is not found in Scripture. Even if the Angel of the Lord is not an appearance of God Himself but rather a messenger who accepts worship on behalf of God, that is quite a different thing from people crafting images and then worshiping them or, through them, worshiping other created beings such as saints and angels. Today, the Catholic Church teaches three levels of honor or worship: *dulia*, *hyperdulia*, and *latria*.” <https://www.gotquestions.org/Second-Council-of-Nicaea.html>

Protestant Denominations thoroughly reject the extrabiblical distinctions in worship that the Second Council of Nicaea declared. Protestant theologians eliminate the use of any images in the worship of God and also forbid prayers and any kind of worship directed to Mary, saints, or angels – with or without images.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

From the beginning, the church has fought battles against their opponents on two fronts: from without and from within. Acts describes the violent opposition the church faced from the Jewish authorities first, then from the Roman officials, and from the Greeks. The letters of Paul and the other Apostles contain numerous verses instructing believers to stay on course and reject the false teachers and prophets that acted like wolves in sheep’s clothing in their meetings.

With the passing of the eleven Apostles chosen by Jesus, plus Paul, and Matthias chosen by the eleven before Pentecost (Acts 1:15-26), a second generation of Apostolic Fathers that were personally chosen by and trained by the first Apostles of the church led the church. In this early phase of the church, believers were still a persecuted minority throughout the Roman world. The Apostolic Fathers, following the pattern set by Jesus’ chosen Apostles, wrote letters and preached to the growing numbers of Christians coming into the church from Pagan backgrounds. The Apostolic Fathers urged Christians to keep the unity of the church in love (John 17:20-23); to live holy and righteous lives (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 1:16); and to reject false prophets and teachers (Matthew 24:24; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

After Christians overcame the Greco-Roman world and was made the State religion (380 A.D.), the church exploded in growth. Although the church still faced attacks from the Barbarians invading the borders of the slowly collapsing Roman Empire, its greatest threats during the Dark Ages of Europe (375 – 1066) came from within the ranks of the church itself. Sometimes well-meaning, but sometimes deliberately deceptive, false teachers and prophets worked themselves into the leadership of the most powerful and wealthiest religion in the world at the time. Some of them became bishops and elders, and were teaching doctrines contrary to Apostolic teachings. No individual bishop had the power or authority to enforce doctrines over another bishop. So, the biblical solution was to call all bishops in one place and work out a single credo for all believers.

At first, these Councils made progress, but as the Eastern and Western Empires split, the leaders of the churches started to split along with them. Theological conflicts between the Eastern churches affiliated with Constantinople and the Western churches affiliated with Rome reached a breaking point in 1054.

After the Great Schism (also known as the Schism of 1054), a truly ecumenical council including representatives from East and West became impossible. The Orthodox Church has no central doctrinal or governmental authority analogous to the head of the Catholic Church (the pope). The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is their recognized spiritual leader, but he has real authority to enforce doctrinal compliance.

After the triumph of the Great Reformation over Roman Catholicism, Protestant churches quickly fractured orthodox Christian theology. Apart from any controlling authority in the church, Christian theology has become splintered to pieces; today Christianity can mean practically anything to anyone. The great theological issues that were once settled by the Apostolic Fathers or the grand Ecumenical Councils attended by the anointed bishops of churches from East and West are gone now.

Fortunately, with the advent of the printing press, and with modern technology, every Christian in the world today has access to the Word of God at their fingertips. It takes time and effort, but anyone who wants to know and understand the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation can do it.

Questions for Lesson Twelve

1. Why was it important for the Ecumenical Councils to settle the issue of the deity of Christ?
2. Why was it important for the Ecumenical Councils to settle the issue of Christ's personhood?
3. Why was it important for the Ecumenical Councils to proclaim the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and not just the Mother of Jesus?
4. Why was it important for the Ecumenical Councils to settle the issue of the veneration of icons?
5. In your assessment did the Ecumenical Councils succeed in their mission to unify Christians with a one orthodox theology?



Rev. Dr. Frederick Osborn traveled the world teaching and preaching the Word of God. His first trip to South Asia was in 2001, and since 2005 he has been fully involved in ministry. Currently he volunteers his time on the mission fields of South Asia and around the world as a speaker and lecturer, distributing Bibles and biblical resources to pastors, evangelists, and ministry leaders. His books and study guides have been used in classrooms by hundreds of students.

In 2013 he earned his M.Div. from Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad, India and in that same year was officially ordained into the ministry in a holy convocation administered by Indian pastors representing AG, CSA, and other independent ministries. In 2017 he completed his D.Min. from Covenant Bible College & Seminary, Florida, USA. He and his wife, Deena, now live near Atlanta, GA where he continues to preach, teach, write, and publish his books and study guides.

Books Written by Frederick Osborn

1. *Church Planting Movements – India*
2. *Daniel: Kingdoms in Conflict*
3. *Deceived! Overcoming the Age of Mass Deception*
4. *Disciple-to-Disciple: Making Disciples Like Jesus*
5. *Disciple- to-Disciple: Making Disciples Like Jesus, Study Guide*
6. *Exploring the New Testament*
7. *Exploring the Old Testament: Vol. One – The Pentateuch*
8. *Following Christ on the Indian Road: A Missionary's Story of Discipleship*
9. *From Genesis to Revelation: Interpreting the Book of Revelation Through the Old Testament Scriptures*
10. *Healing Miracles of the Bible*
11. *Jesus Over India: A 52 Week Spiritual Journey Through the Heart of India*
12. *Judges: A 21st Century Prophetic Commentary*
13. *Keys to Effective Faith: Living by a Faith that Can Move Mountains*
14. *Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming Like Jesus*

15. *Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming a Disciple Like Jesus, Study Guide*
16. *Kingdom Economics*
17. *Living in Dystopia: A Christian Guide Victory in an Orwellian World*
18. *Messiah: The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth*
19. *One Holy Passion: A Daily Devotional Guide for 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting for the 1040 Nations*
20. *Our Jehovah Rapha: A Christ Centered Holistic Approach to Wellness*
21. *Reviving A Nation*
22. *Seven Laws of Dying to Self*
23. *Spiritual Lessons for the Grafted-In*
24. *The Apocalyptic Vision: Understanding the Apocalyptic Writings of the Bible*
25. *The Blood*
26. *The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements*
27. *The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements- Study Guide*
28. *The Gospel of John: Speaking Truth to Power*
29. *The Gospel of Salvation*
30. *The Gospel of Salvation: Study Guide*
31. *The Healthy Heart*
32. *The Holy Spirit in You: Nourishing the Life of Holiness and power in You*
33. *The Keys to Effective Prayer*
34. *The LGBTQI Community and the Church*
35. *The Legacy of Women in the Bible – Study Guide*
36. *The New Reformation: An Assessment of the New Apostolic Reformation from Toronto to Redding*
37. *The Physics of Heaven: The Theology of the New Apostolic Reformation*
38. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: John the Apostle's Heavenly Vision of Christ the King*
39. *The Spirit of Religion*
40. *The Way, the Truth, and the Life: the Teachings and Ministry of Jesus the Messiah*
41. *This Gospel of the Kingdom*
42. *This Gospel of the Kingdom – Study Guide*
43. *To the Heart of the Nations – Prayer Journal*
44. *Twelve Woes*

Supplemental Handout Material

HANDOUT NT 203-1

The Non-Pauline Epistles

Hebrews - This beautifully styled epistle was written to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over all that preceded Him. The readers were evidently in danger of slipping back into Judaism because of growing opposition to their faith. The author presents the superiority of Christ's person, priesthood, and power.

James - James wrote this incisive and practical catalog of the characteristics of true faith to exhort his Hebrew-Christian readers to examine the reality of their own faith. If it does not produce a qualitative change in character or control (1 - 3), its genuineness must be questioned. James also rebukes those who succumb to the pursuit of worldly pleasure and wealth rather than God, and encourages a patient endurance in light of the coming of the Lord.

First Peter - The recipients of this letter were being maligned for their faith in Christ and needed Peter's words of comfort and counsel. He begins by giving them a fresh perspective on the riches of their salvation and their need for holy lives. He then encourages them to develop an attitude of submission in view of their suffering. Undeserved suffering for the name of Christ must be met by an attitude of humble dependence on God.

Second Peter - Unlike First Peter, which dealt with external opposition, Second Peter copes with the problem of internal opposition, in the dangerous form of false teachers who would entice believers into their errors of belief and conduct. Peter counters this peril with an appeal for growth in the true knowledge of Christ as the best way to overcome the seduction of heresy.

First John - John's first epistle explores the dimensions of fellowship between redeemed people and God. He is a God of light, and believers must walk in integrity before Him; He is a God of love, and believers must manifest love for one another; and He is a God of life, and believers can be assured of eternal life in Christ.

Second John - This note was written to commend the teachers for remaining steadfast in apostolic truth and to remind them to walk in love in obedience to the Lord's commandment. John also urged them not to show hospitality to any teachers whose doctrine about Christ is unsound.

Third John – John had received a report from the traveling teachers he commissioned, telling of Gaius’ warm hospitality on their behalf. The apostle personally thanks Gaius for his walk and the truth and support of these missionaries, in contrast to Diotrephes, who rejected them and told others to do the same.

Jude – In spite of its brevity, this is the most intense expose` of false teachers in the New Testament. Jude reveals their conduct and character and makes liberal use of the Old Testament to predict their judgment. On the positive side, Jude encourages his readers to build themselves up in the truth and contend earnestly for the faith.

FROM:

Talk Thru the Bible by Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa
Thomas Nelson Pub.

**HANOUT
NT 203-1**

Called To Suffer

Jesus taught His disciples to expect suffering, “If they persecuted Me,” He said, “they will persecute you also.” But those who suffered for righteousness sake would be blessed. The New Testament letters are filled with references to the hardships Christians must endure in this world if they are going to follow Jesus with a whole heart and without compromise. But so often, those statements are not highlighted because for the Apostles, suffering was just a natural part of being a Christian and did not need special mention. But once all that Jesus and the Apostles said about suffering for our faith are added together, it becomes clear that we must be prepared to suffer in this world when we follow Jesus with a whole heart and without compromise

<u>SPEAKER</u>	<u>REFERENCE</u>	<u>WORDS ABOUT SUFFERING</u>
Jesus	Matthew 5:10-12	Those who are persecuted because of Jesus are called “blessed”
Jesus	Luke 21:27, 28	Only after the Son of Man returns will all suffering come to an end
Jesus	John 15:20	No one is above his master. Jesus was persecuted and so will we
The Apostles	Acts 5:41	We can rejoice at being worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ
Jesus	Acts 9:16	Paul was called to suffer for Jesus’ name
Paul	Romans 8:17	If we share in His glory, we will also share in Jesus’ suffering
Paul	2 Corinthians 1:3-7	God comforts and strengthens us in our suffering
Paul	2 Corinthians 4:7-12	We suffer so that others might be saved
Paul	2 Corinthians 6:4-5 and 6:9-10	We suffer and face hardships for our faith yet we rejoice in the Lord
Paul	Ephesians 3:13	We suffer for the sake of other believers
Paul	Philippians 1:29	It is a privilege to suffer for Christ

Paul	2 Timothy 1:12	We must not be ashamed of suffering for Christ
Paul	2 Timothy 2:10	Paul suffered so that others might believe
Paul	2 Timothy 3:11	God will rescue us from suffering
Paul	2 Timothy 4:5	Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord
Unknown	Hebrews 10:32-34	We can joyfully face suffering here knowing we have an inheritance in heaven
James	James 1:2, 3	We can consider it joy to face trials because trials produce perseverance
Peter	1 Peter 1:6, 7	Our suffering refines our faith
Peter	1 Peter 2:21	We suffer because Christ suffered.
Peter	1 Peter 3:13-14	We are blessed if we suffer for what is right
Peter	1 Peter 4:1, 13	Have the same attitude of Christ in suffering
Peter	1 Peter 4:16	It is no shame to suffer for being a Christian
Peter	1 Peter 5:8-10	Resist the devil, stand firm, God will give you strength to overcome
Jesus	Revelation 2:10	Those who are faithful through persecution will receive the crown of life

**HANDOUT
NT 203 – 2**

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HEBREWS

Hebrews Text	OT Text	Subject
1:5	Ps. 2:7	You are my Son
1:5	2 Sa 7:14 1 Ch 17:13	Father and Son
1:6	Dt 32:43	Rejoice, O nations
1:7	Ps 104:4	Angels and winds
1:8	Ps 45:6-7	God's eternal throne
1:10-12	Ps 102:25-27	The unchangeable God
1:13	Ps 110:1	At God's right hand
2:6-8	Ps 8:4-6	Lower than the angels
2:12	Ps 22:22	Declaring God's name
2:13	Isa 8:17	Trust in God
2:13	Isa 8:18	God's children
3:2, 5	Nu 12:7	Faithful Moses
3:7-11, 15	Ps 95:7-11	No rest for the wicked
4:3, 5, 7	Ps 95:7-11	No rest for the wicked
4:4	Ge 2:2	God rested the seventh day
5:5	Ps 2:7	You are my Son
5:6	Ps 110:4	Melchizedek
6:14	Ge 22:17	God's oath to Abraham
7:17, 21	Ps 110:4	Melchizedek
8:5	Ex 25:40	Pattern of the Tabernacle
8:8-12	Jer 31:31-34	The new covenant
9:20	Ex 24:8	The blood of the covenant
10:5-9	Ps 40:6-8	Offerings and obedience
10:16-17	Jer 31:33-34	The new covenant
10:28	Dr 17:6	Two or three witnesses
10:30	Dt 32:35	God avenges sins
10:30	Dt 32:36 Ps 135:14	God judges His people
10:37-38	Hab 2:3-4	Persevere in faith
11:18	Ge 21:12	God's choice of Isaac
12:5-6	Pr 3:11-12	Love and discipline
12:13	Pr 4:26	Level paths for your feet
12:15	Dt 29:18	No root of bitterness
12:20	Ex 19:12-13	Not touching the mountain
12:21	Dt 9:19	Moses' fear
12:26	Hag 2:6	One more shaking
12:29	Dt 4:24	God is a consuming fire
13:5	Dt 31:6	Faithfulness of God
13:6	Ps 118:6-7	The Lord is my helper

Source: *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament*, © 1994 by the Zondervan Corp., Grand Rapids, MI

HANDOUT
NT 203 - 2**The Septuagint (LXX)**

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (with a few chapters in Aramaic). As the Jews spread out through the ancient world in the Diaspora they began to speak other languages. At the same time a movement known as Hellenism began to spread as a result of Alexander the Great's conquests. Hellenistic Jews wanted the Hebrew Scriptures translated into the Greek and around 285 B.C. the Hebrew Bible, along with a number of non-canonical works known by Protestant Christians as the *Apocrypha* were translated into the Greek language. This translation, called the *Septuagint* (Latin for *seventy*) derives its name from the number of scholars who worked on the translation. Because most of the early Christians understood Greek, the *Septuagint* was frequently quoted in the New Testament canon and by the early church fathers.

Our modern translations are organized in the same order as the Septuagint: first the Pentateuch, followed by the historical, poetic, wisdom and prophetic books. The Greek Septuagint translation is similar to the Hebrew Masoretic Text; when translated into English, many parts are almost identical. Yet the two are sometimes very different. The fact that some English translations are from the Hebrew Masoretic Text and some are from the Greek Septuagint accounts for many of the differences in wording between the modern translations.

The Septuagint is a valuable translation to help Bible scholars establish the original Old Testament text because it is the earliest translation of the entire New Testament from the Hebrew. The numerous manuscripts in existence easily authenticate the accuracy of the Septuagint. Although the Septuagint differs from the Masoretic Text in a number of important places, these differences are not contradictory and provide alternative renderings that can help determine the intended meaning of the original Hebrew.

HANDOUT
NT 203-2**MIDRASH: "Thinking Hebrew"**

MIDRASH: The Hebrew word corresponding to the King James Version "story" and the Revised Version (British and American) "commentary" – as in "The commentary of the prophet Iddo" (2 Chron. 13:22), "the commentary of the book of the kings" (2 Chron. 24:27). However, in these passages the word is not used exactly in its modern sense. A Midrash is properly, "a story developed for purposes of edification"; or "an investigation."

It comes from Hebrew root, *dārash*, which means, "to search," "inquire," or, "explore". The Hebrew term is used to express, "an imaginative development of a thought or theme suggested by Scripture, especially a *didactic* (instructive narrative) or *homiletic* (short sermon) exposition, or an edifying religious story".

The practice of commenting upon and explaining the meaning of the Scriptures originated in the synagogues in the time of Ezra from the necessity of explaining an exposition of the Law to a congregation (many of whom did not or might not understand the meaning of what was read). Such commentaries, however, were oral and given without notes or texts; not until much later did they assume a definite form. By the time the Rabbis finally wrote them down in a formal, written shape, the name *Midrash* was given.

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews incorporated the Midrashic treatment of many of Old Testament passages cited. (NOTE: Psalm 110:4 & Hebrews 5:1-10; also, Genesis 14:17-20 & Hebrews 7:1-10, for examples).

Source: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*

HANDOUT
NT 203-3

Think Hebrew in James

“Word Pictures on the Importance of Our Speech” – James 3:2-12

In James 3, several word pictures are used to show the importance of mature speech.

<u>WORD</u>	<u>PICTURE</u>	<u>APPLICATION</u>
Bit	A small bit controls a large animal.	Can we control the use of the tongue?
Rudder	A small piece of wood steers a huge ship in a heavy wind.	The tongue, though small, Can create grave consequences.
Fire	A small spark unleashes a destructive force.	Do we recognize the destructive force our words can have?
Animals	People can tame animals.	Can we tame our speech and our impulsive thoughts?
Poison	The venom of a snake kills its prey.	Can we keep our words from poisoning us and others?
Spring	A spring can produce only one kind of water.	Is our speech a spring that is good or foul?
Fig Tree	A tree bears just one kind of fruit.	Is our speech bearing good fruit, or is it mixed with bad?
Tongue	The tongue can be used for good or evil.	Does our speech reflect our Christian maturity?

Neil Wilson and Linda Taylor, Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps, The Tyndale Reference Library (Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 533.

HANDOUT
NT 203-3

Church Wars

James 4:2

Weapons and strategies are used in church fights and quarrels. James tells us the exact location of the manufacturing plants for all these weapons. The trouble begins in ourselves.

Missiles	Attacking church members from long range.
Guerrilla tactics	Ambushing the unsuspecting.
Snipers	Well-aimed criticisms.
Terrorism	No one is immune from being hurt.
Mines	Ensuring that others will fail in their efforts to serve God.
Espionage	Using friendships to get potentially damaging information about others.
Propaganda	Using gossip to spread damaging information about others.
Cold War	Freezing out an opponent by withdrawing or refusing to talk to him or her.
Nuclear Attack	Being willing to sacrifice the church if the goals of my group are not met.

Neil Wilson and Linda Taylor, Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps, The Tyndale Reference Library (Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 534–535.

HANDOUT
NT 203-4

COMMENTARIES ON 1 PETER 4:6

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the spirit.”

“The interpretation of this verse is often linked to 3:19, but the vocabulary of the text and its context differ. There are four main interpretations of the ‘dead’ in this passage...

- (1) Christ, while in his three-day death, went and preached salvation to all the dead, offering salvation to those who lived in pre-Christian times.
- (2) Christ, while in his three-day death, went and preached salvation to the just of OT times.
- (3) The apostles and others on this earth preached the Gospel to those who were spiritually dead.
- (4) The dead are Christians, who had the Gospel preached to them and who then died (or were put to death). Our interpretation falls in line with this fourth option.

‘For this is the reason’ points ahead to the rest of the sentence rather than looks back to vv.1-5. The coming judgment will not only bring sinners into account (v.5) but will also reverse the judgments of human beings (v.6). The Good News had been proclaimed to those (Christians) who are now dead. Even though pagans might condemn Christians and put them to death in the realm of the flesh, yet in God’s judgment there will be a reversal. Christians will live in a new realm, the spiritual realm.”

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament, Copyright © 1994 by the Zondervan Corporation, pp.1055-1056

“The **gospel was preached** to men so that their sin might be judged in this life, and so that the penalty for their sin might be removed through faith in Christ – that is, so that their punishment might fall on Christ. This is Peter’s meaning when he says here: **so that they** (men) **might be judged according to men in regard to the body**. The bodies of believers die like the bodies of other men (because the judgment of sin is death), but their spirits do not die. Through faith in Christ, believers receive new spiritual life, which begins now in this life and lasts forever. That is, they **live according to God in regard to the spirit**.

Therefore, even though their bodies die, believers in Christ receive eternal life (John 5:24; 11:25-26). But those who do not accept Christ will, after death, receive the eternal judgment of God. They will receive eternal punishment.”

The Applied New Testament Commentary, Copyright © 1996 by Thomas Hale and Stephen Thorson, Kingsway Publications, UK, p.963

HANDOUT
NT 203-6

The Gospel of John and the First Letter of John

There is a remarkable similarity of language and them between the gospel of John and the first letter of John. The following chart outlines where these parallels are:

Theme	1 John	Gospel of John
Word was from the beginning and became flesh, and we saw it	1:1; 2:14	1:1-2, 14
We could touch the “Word of life”	1:1	20:27, 29
The Word as “the life”	1:2; 5:20	1:4; 11:25; 14:6
The Word was “with the Father”	1:2	1:1; 18
We must testify to the Word	1:2	15:27
Complete joy available through Christ	1:4	3:29; 16:24; 17:13
Light from God dispels darkness	1:5-7	1:4-5; 3:19-21
Life through the blood of God’s Son	1:7	6:53-56
The word has no place in unbelievers	1:10	5:38
Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world	2:2; 3:5; 4:10	1:29; 3:16-17; 11:51
Loving God involves obeying his commands	2:3, 5; 3:22; 5:2-3	14:15, 21; 15:10
Jesus as our example	2:6	12:15
Jesus’ command to love on another	2:73:11, 23; 4:7, 11	13:34; 15:12, 17
Jesus as the true shining light	2:8	1:9; 8:12; 9:5
Walking in darkness and stumbling	2:11	11:9-10; 12:35
Word of God living in us	2:14	5:38
Those who do not have the love of God in them	2:15	5:42
Knowledge gained through the Holy Spirit	2:20, 27	14:16
Knowing the truth	2:21	8:32
Knowing the Father involves knowing the Son	2:23	8:19; 14:7
Remaining in the Father and the Son	2:24, 27; 3:24	15:4
God’s love that makes us his children	3:1-2	1:12; 3:16
Those who do not know God	3:1	15:21; 16:3
The Son of God is sinless	3:5	8:46
The devil has been sinning from the beginning	3:8	8:44
Being born of God	3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18	1:13; 3:3, 6
Hatred from the world	3:13	15:18-19; 17:14
Crossing from death to life	3:14	5:24
Jesus laid down his life for us	3:16	10:11
Laying down our lives for others	3:16	15:13
The truth is found in the Son of God	3:19	14:6; 18:37

God knows all things	3:21	21:17
Receiving from God what we ask	3:22; 5:14-15	14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23
The command to believe in God's Son	3:23	6:29
Jesus has come in the flesh	4:2	1:14
Overcoming the world	4:4; 5:4-5	16:33
The world loves those of the world	4:5	15:19
Those who are not from God do not listen to him	4:6	8:47
The Spirit of truth	4:6; 5:6	14:17; 15:26; 16:13
God sent his one and only Son so we can live	4:9, 14; 5:11-12	1:18; 3:16-17, 36; 20:31
No one has seen God	4:12, 20	1:18
Jesus is the Savior of the world	4:14	3:17; 4:42; 12:47
We are in God and God is in us	4:16	15:4-5; 17:21
Jesus and the water and the blood	5:6-8	19:34-35
Human testimony and divine testimony	5:9-10	5:32-37; 8:14-17
How to know we have eternal a life	5:13	20:30-31
Believing on the name of God's Son	5:13	1:12
Satan as the prince of this world	5:19	12:31; 14:30
Knowing the true God	5:20	17:3
Jesus is true God	5:20	1:1; 20:28

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament, Copyright © 1994 by the Zondervan Corporation, p.p.1080, 1081

HANDOUT NT 203-6

Criteria for Selecting the Canon of NT Scripture

- The canon sought to include the earliest, most accurate accounts about Jesus and about the early church by selecting texts that had been written either by the apostles themselves or by those who were closely associated with them. Texts claiming apostolic authorship were critically inspected, and if the authorship claim was suspect, they were rejected. The Gospels of Mark and Luke received canonical status because a companion of Peter and a coworker of Paul wrote them, respectively. The book of Acts – also written by Luke – was readily accepted as canonical. The other two gospels, the Epistles and the book of Revelation all have clear apostolic connections.
- Texts that were popular in only one region were viewed as doubtful, while those that had found widespread acceptance, both in the east and in Rome, were included in the canon. The writings chosen for the canon were understood to have universal application. For instance, although Paul addressed his letters to specific communities, others quickly acknowledged that his teaching was relevant to them as well. Writings in the canon had to reflect orthodox teaching. Texts that were determined to contain teaching inconsistent with that of the earliest Christians were not to be included.

SOURCE: *The Archaeological Study Bible* – Pub. Zondervan

HANDOUT
NT 203-8

Understanding Apocalyptic Literature

To understand Revelation, we must recognize that John, the author, wrote in a specific genre – apocalyptic literature. From 200 B.C. to A.D. 100, certain groups of Jews and Christians used this writing style to describe the end of the world and God’s judgment. Apocalyptic literature uses fantastic imagery to remind readers of the invisible, supernatural battle occurring behind the events of human history. Within the Bible, in addition to Revelation, the clearest examples of apocalyptic literature are Daniel 10 – 12 and Mark 13. Outside of Scripture, there are *The Assumption of Moses*, *The Apocalypses of Ezra*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and *Baruch*. Non-canonical apocalypses usually name no author but are written as though prominent Old Testament figures, such as Moses or Ezra, were seeing the future. There are three key characteristics of apocalyptic literature.

1. All apocalyptic literature claims to be a revelation from God. The Greek word for “apocalypse” (*apokalupsis*) actually means “revelation.” Thus, in the book of Revelation, God gives a glimpse into the future. Revelation consists of four vision, each introduced by an invitation to see what the future holds (1:11; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9). In these visions world history is portrayed as a great war between God and Satan. In the end God defeats Satan and emerges as the winner of this great struggle. As you read Revelation, keep in mind the big picture – the cosmic warfare between good and evil.
2. Apocalypses are symbolic. Mysterious imagery, numerology, cosmic journeys, supernatural beings, and strange beasts fill the pages of apocalyptic works. This type of literature attempts to describe invisible, supernatural events in human terms. By their very nature, these images go beyond what is known, as apocalyptic writers point to supernatural realities through striking symbols. At his point it is important to note that in order to understand the symbols in Revelation, we must consider their meaning to the *first-century* readers and not impose cotemporary events and people on the text. Apocalyptic writers never intended for the symbols to be interpreted as literal photographs of the future. Instead, they wanted their graphic and disturbing images to symbolize events, beings, or traits in the supernatural realm. For example, 1:16 describes Christ as having a sharp, double-edged sword in his mouth. By comparing this image to Hebrews 4:12-13 (which describes the Word of God as a double-edged sword that penetrates the soul and judges every thought), it becomes clear that this sword is a symbol for Christ’s words. Christ’s words are so full of truth that they can cleanly separate good from evil, truth from falsehood. Christ with his words of truth will be the ultimate Judge of all people.
3. Apocalyptic literature highlights God’s supernatural intervention in history – the times when God decisively acts in ways that transcend natural laws. Revelation doesn’t try to encourage people to discover God’s workings within the natural laws that people take for granted. Instead, the visions in this book picture God acting purposefully to end the way

things have always been. Revelation describes God defeating evil in this world once and for all and establishing peace and justice forever. In the end God will interrupt the natural world so dramatically that the earth and sky will flee from his presence (20:11). God will replace the old world with a radically new one (21:1). On the new earth, for example, neither sun nor moon will be needed (21:23).

Though most of this book is apocalyptic, not all of it is. Revelation also contains straightforward prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19) and seven letters of admonition from Jesus Christ (1:4-3:22). As prophecy, it focuses on believers’ responsibilities in this world and their relationships to an eternal future spent with God. As an epistle to seven churches, it gives advice and encouragement to believers in seven separate churches. This is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those who listen to its words and do what it says (1:3).

Revelation is a hybrid of apocalypse and prophecy written within the framework of an ancient Greek letter. The purpose of this letter was to inspire believers to overcome all obstacles by steadfastly holding on to their faith (2:7, 17, 25-26; 3:5, 11-12, 21). Despite the many strange images and mysterious symbols, the central message of Revelation is clear: God controls all of history, and Christ will return to earth to judge it and to reward those who have joined his side in the fight against evil and who have remained faithful to him (22:7; 12-13, 20).

From Life Application Bible Commentary: Revelation
Pg. xv – xvii
Tyndale House Pub., Inc.
Series Editor: Philip W. Comfort, Ph.D., D.Litt. et Phil

HANDOUT
NT-203-8

The Millennium Controversy In Revelation

In many ways the Book of Revelation is considered the most controversial book in the entire Bible. From the earliest times to the present day, scholars and theologians have debated the content and meaning of the Book. In modern times the debate over Revelation has become even more intense as popular theories, bold predictions, and wild speculations abound in the church about the 2nd Coming and the end of the Age. Theologians of every generation have theorized on the identity of the 144,000 (chapter 7), the two witnesses (chapter 11), the beasts and the number 666 (chapter 13), and the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Great Tribulation. Practically every generation has had its candidate for the “anti-Christ” and every historical upheaval was considered the “end of the world” for the believers who were living through it.

The one controversy that has remained a crucial dividing factor for Bible commentators throughout church history is what John meant by the “thousand years” in Revelation 20. The term “Millennium” (from Latin: *mille* = thousand, and *annus* = years) has been generally adopted to refer to the thousand-year reign of the saints with Christ described near the end of the Book of Revelation. Some theologians have gone so far as to call this the most controversial chapter in the whole Bible. The questions surrounding the Millennium, its timing, and its relation to Christ’s Second Coming have never been answered with unanimity by the church. To this day, Christians from different denominational backgrounds have had to “agree to disagree” on which of the three Christian views on the Millennium is the correct one.

The following definitions are from Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary, Pub. Thomas Nelson, Edited by Steve Gregg:

1. Premillennialism – is the belief that the second coming of Christ will precede the millennial kingdom. Taking a mostly literal approach, premillennialists expect a period of one thousand years’ duration, during which Christ will reign with his saints here on earth prior to the establishment of the eternal new heavens and new earth. The millennial reign will be characterized by international peace and justice resulting from the universal enforced rule of Christ over saved and unsaved alike. At the end of this time, Satan’s brief period of freedom will put humanity to one final test just before the final judgment.

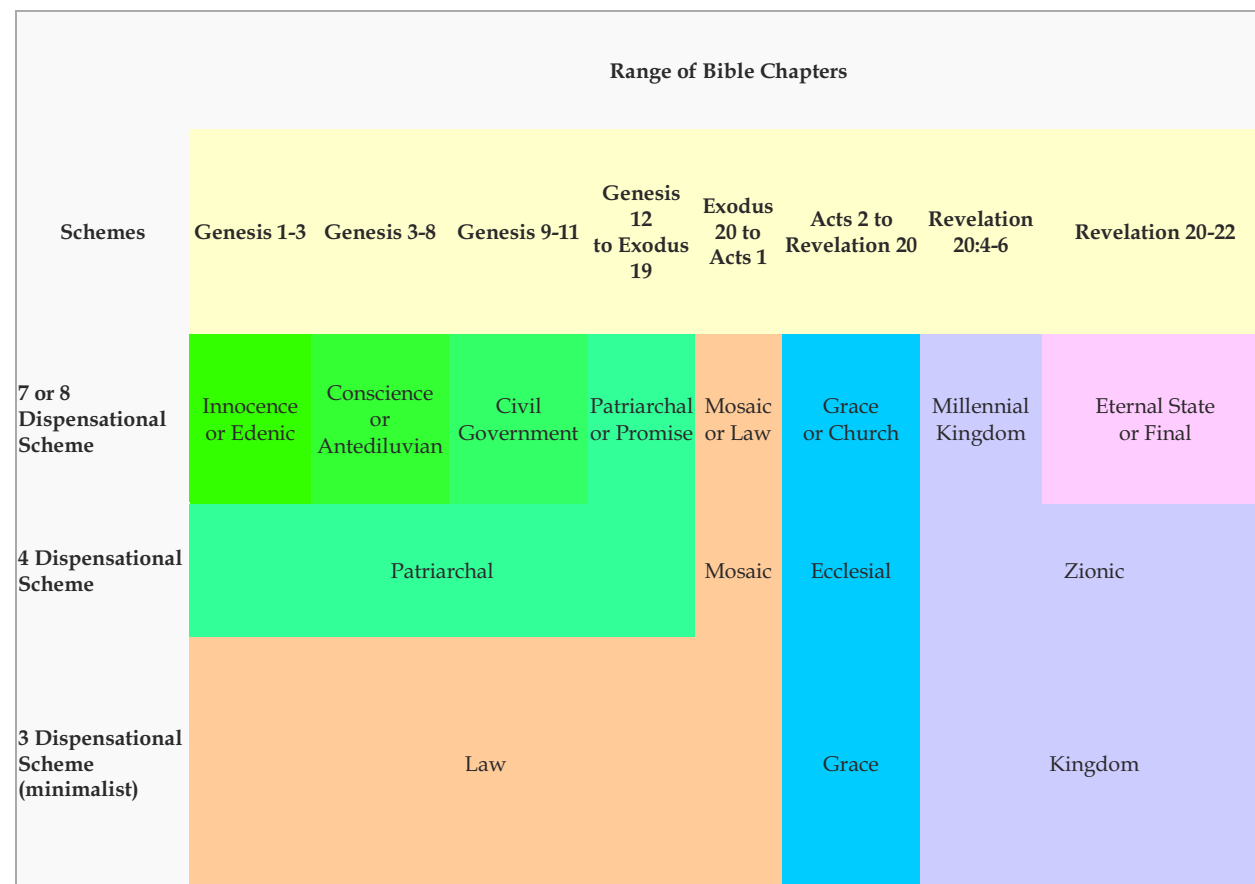
1. Postmillennialism – teaches that Christ returns after the millennial period. According to this camp, the millennial kingdom will be established through the evangelistic mission of the church. This enterprise will be so successful that all or most people will become Christians, resulting in a thousand years of peace on earth before Christ’s second coming.
2. Amillennialism – understands the thousand years of Revelation 20 to symbolize an indefinitely long period of time, which happens to correspond to the entire span of time from the first coming of Christ until his second coming. Most aspects of chapter 20 (like most of the rest of Revelation) are believed to be symbolic. The binding of Satan happened spiritually at the Cross; the reign of the saints is the present age; the loosing of Satan is a final period of deception coming on the world in the end of the age; the fire from heaven that devours the wicked is the second coming of Christ.

It should be noted that the various approaches to interpreting Revelation are not absolutely linked to any particular millennial view; therefore, one’s theology about the end times and the return of Christ does not necessarily dictate which approach to Revelation one has to follow.

HANDOUT
NT 203-8

Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a Protestant evangelical tradition and theology based on a biblical hermeneutic that sees a series of chronologically successive "dispensations" or periods in history in which God relates to human beings in different ways under different Biblical covenants. As a system dispensationalism is rooted in the writings of John Nelson Darby and the Brethren Movement. The theology of dispensationalism consists of a distinctive eschatological "end times" perspective, as all dispensationalists hold to premillennialism and most hold to a pretribulation rapture. Dispensationalists believe that the nation of Israel is distinct from the Church, and that God will fulfill His promises to national Israel. These promises include the land promises, which in the future result in a millennial kingdom where Christ, upon His return, will rule the world from Jerusalem for a thousand years. In other areas of theology, dispensationalists hold to a wide range of beliefs within the evangelical and fundamentalist spectrum.



Source: <http://www.wikipedia.org>

HANDOUT
NT 203-10

MAJOR TRUTHS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM

By Kevin J. Connor

A study of the Book of Acts, along with other major Scriptures from the Gospels shows that the early Church was indeed the channel, the instrument, the vehicle and vessel for the expression of the Kingdom of God. It was through the Church that the Kingdom of God was extended in the earth in the hearts of men. We note some of the major truths concerning the Kingdom in these verses:

- Christ would build His Church and give her the keys of the Kingdom (Mt. 16:18-19)
- Repentance and faith are the doorway into the Kingdom (Mt. 3:2; 4:17, 23)
- The Kingdom is at hand (Mk. 1:14, 15; Heb. 6:1; Acts 2:34-42)
- One must be born again from above by spiritual and heavenly birth to enter the Kingdom (Jn. 3:1-5). If the Kingdom was postponed, then it means that none could be born again until then!
- Regeneration is a translation out of the Kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of Light and love (Col. 1:13, 14)
- The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit (Ro. 14:17; Matt. 6:33)
- The Kingdom of God is not of this world system (Jn. 18:36; Mt. 6:9, 10; Lk. 17:20, 21)
- The Gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations before the end comes (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15-20)
- The Law and the Prophets were until John, since that time the Kingdom is preached (Lk. 16:16; Mt. 5:17, 18; 11:13; 12:28)
- The Kingdom was taken from Jewry and given to the holy nation, which is the Church (Mt. 21:42-46; 1 Pet. 2:5-9)
- Believers are the good seed of the Kingdom in the Kingdom in its mystery form (Mt. 13:37, 38; Mk 4:11; Mt. 8:11; Lk 13:28, 29)
- We are to seek first the Kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33; Lk 21:31).
- The Kingdom of God is within the heart (Lk 17:20)
- The Church taught and preached and demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God in the Book of Acts.
 - a) Jesus spoke to the disciples of the Kingdom of God (1:3-6)

- b) Philip, from the Church at Jerusalem, preached the Kingdom of God, as an evangelist (8:1, 12)
- c) Paul preached the Kingdom of God (14:22; 19:8; 20:25), as an apostle from the Church
- d) John and Paul, apostles of the New Testament Church, believed they were then in the Kingdom (Rev. 1:9; Col. 4:11; Acts 28:23, 31).
- e) Jesus Christ is the King-Priest after the order of Melchisedek (Heb. 7:1, 2; Rev. 15:3; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15; Rev. 19:16), and the Church is also a Royal Priesthood after the same order (Rev. 1:6; 5:9, 10; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rom. 5:17, 21).
- f) Believers were born into the Kingdom as subjects of the Kingdom (Jn. 3:1-5), and they were added as members to the church (Acts 11:24; 2:41-47).
- g) The Church preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, for there is only one Gospel for Jew and Gentile. It is spoken of as:
 - 1) The Gospel of the Kingdom (Mk. 1:14, 15; Matt. 24:14)
 - 2) The Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:1)
 - 3) The Gospel of God (Rom. 1:1)
 - 4) The Gospel of His Son (Rom. 1:9)
 - 5) The Gospel of the Grace of God (Acts 20:24)
 - 6) The Glorious Gospel (1 Tim. 1:11)
 - 7) The Everlasting Gospel (Rev. 14:6)
 - 8) The Gospel of the Circumcision (Gal. 2:7)
 - 9) The Gospel of the Uncircumcision (Gal. 2:7)
 - 10) The Gospel (Mk. 16:15-20)
 - 11) The Gospel of Paul (Gal. 1:6-9; Rom. 2:16; 16:25)

THE CHURCH today is the agent for the demonstration of THE KINGDOM of God in the earth. Though the Church and the Kingdom are distinguishable, they are indivisible in God’s eternal purpose!

The Church in the New Testament © 1982 by Kevin J. Conner, City Bible Publishing, Portland OR, pp.34-36

HANDOUT
NT 203-11

THE CHURCH FATHERS

“The title ‘father of the church’ has its origin in the use of the title ‘father,’ which was given to bishops, especially in the West, to express affectionate loyalty. It was increasingly used from the third century on to describe the orthodox champions of the church and exponents of its faith. These men were usually bishops. The Patrology or patristics is the name of the study of the life and works of these men, most of whom lived in the period between the end of the apostolic age and the Council of Chalcedon (452).”

The chart below will give some indication of who the Church Fathers were, their period, their major works, and the most important characteristics of their writings.

THE CHURCH FATHERS	
WEST	EAST
The First Century (95-ca. 150) Apostolic Fathers – To Edify – Typological Interpretation	
EDIFICATION	
Clement of Rome	Ignatius Polycarp Pseudo-Barnabas The Epistle to Diognetus The Second Epistle of Clement Papias <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i> (apocalyptic) <i>Didache</i> (catechetical manual)
Second Century (120 – 220) Apologists – To Defend Christianity	
EXPLANATION	
Tertullian	Aristides Justin Martyr Tatian Athenagoras Theophilus

Third Century (180 – 250) Polemicists – To Fight False Doctrine		
REFUTATION		
Irenaeus vs. Gnostics	<i>Alexandrian School</i> (Allegorical and speculative)	<i>Antiochene School</i> (Grammatico-historical)
Tertullian – Founder of Western theology, “Trinity,” vs. Praxeas	Pantaenus Clement	
Cyprian on Episcopacy and primacy of honor of Roman bishop	Origen – <i>Hexapla</i> (text of Old Testament)	
	<i>De Principiis</i> (first systematic theology - used allegorical method of interpretation)	
Fourth Century (325 – 460) Golden Age of Scientific Bible Study		
EXPOSITION		
Jerome – translator of Bible Ambrose – preacher Augustine – philosophy of history in <i>City of God</i> ; theologian	Athanasius Basil of Caesarea	Chrysostom – preacher (Christian conduct) Theodore (use of context)

Christianity Through the Centuries, by Earle E. Cairns
Copyright © 1954, 1981 by the Zondervan Corporation
Grand Rapids, MI (pp.71-72)

HANDOUT NT 203-11

Bibliography for Lessons Eleven and Twelve

Aquilina, Mike, *The Fathers of the Church, 3rd Edition, An Introduction to the First Christian Teachers*, Copyright © 1999, 2006, 2013, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, IN

Cairns, Earle E., *Christianity Through The Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Copyright © 1954, 1981, The Zondervan Corp., Grand Rapids, MI

Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters to the Churches*, Public Domain

Kelly, John Norman Davidson, *Early Christian Doctrines, Revised Edition*, Copyright © 1960, 1965, 1968, 1978, Prince Press, Peabody, MA

Kerr, Hugh T., editor, *Readings in Christian Thought*, Twelfth Printing 1989, Copyright © 1966, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN

O’Grady, Joan, *Early Christian Heresies*, Copyright © 1985, Barnes & Noble, Inc., U.S.A.

Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Reform*, Copyright © 1999, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL

Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, 1. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 – 600)*, Copyright © 1971, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL

Price, Matthew A., Collins, Michael, *The Story of Christianity*, Copyright © 1999, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL

Roberts, Alexander, Donaldson, James, and Coxe, Cleveland A., Editors, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1.*, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY: 1885. (Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight) <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0136.htm>>

BfA
Books, U.S.A.

Proof