



New Testament Survey

The Apostolic Witness
to Jesus Christ



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

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to Jesus Christ*

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SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

New Testament Survey: The Apostolic Witness to Jesus Christ is a 12-week course surveying the message of the New Testament, both at the individual book level and at the canonical level. This course is an attempt to present, book-by-book, the message of Jesus Christ through his Apostles. That is, students will grasp the main message of each individual book of the New Testament as it bears witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Emphasis will be given to considering the author, audience, structure, and major themes of each New Testament book. Students will be able to show how the entire New Testament bears witness to Jesus the Messiah as the Lord of the universe, the fulfillment of all of God's promises, and the Savior and Satisfier of his people.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to

- ▷ magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of racial harmony— more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of each New Testament book.
- ▷ explain the central theme(s) of each individual book of the New Testament.
- ▷ summarize each New Testament book in one sentence.
- ▷ articulate the centrality of the person and work of Jesus in the New Testament.
- ▷ discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.

🔗 REQUIRED TEXTS

- ▷ *ESV (English Standard Version) Study Bible* (all quotes in this curriculum will come from the *English Standard Version* [ESV] unless otherwise noted). Other English versions of the Bible are acceptable for this course, but not recommended, as some questions and reading are from notes found in the ESV Study Bible.
- ▷ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message*, ed. Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010)

🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students should expect to spend approximately 2.5-3 hours per week on homework outside of class. Homework will include the following:

1. Reading:
 - a. Prayerfully read the assigned Bible reading for each day.
 - b. Read the Required Reading in the Carson and Moo text.
2. Writing:
 - a. Answer questions found throughout the study.
 - b. Write a one-sentence summary of each New Testament book.
 - c. Explain your one sentence summary in one short paragraph.

Students will pass this course if they attend at least 10 class sessions and complete all the assignments. Please contact the instructor with any problems or concerns.

 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Introduction and the Gospel of Matthew
2		The Gospel of Mark
3		The Gospel of Luke
4		The Gospel of John
5		The Book of Acts
6		The Book of Romans
7		1 & 2 Corinthians
8		The Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon
9		1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus
10		Hebrews and James
11		1 & 2 Peter, 1-3 John
12		Jude and Revelation

The Gospel of Matthew

1

§ INTRODUCTION

Our first four lessons will look at the Gospels. The first three Gospels are traditionally labeled the Synoptic Gospels. They present the life and ministry of Jesus from different, though complementary, vantage points. Taken together, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us a robust picture of the life of Jesus.

Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. The author aims to show that in fulfillment of Old Testament promises, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah-King. His coming ushers in the “Kingdom of Heaven.” Because he is the Messiah, his people should follow and worship him.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Matthew.
- grasp the fulfillment of God’s purposes as recorded in Matthew.
- be familiar with the various responses to Jesus and his ministry.
- understand the relationship between the “Kingdom of Heaven” and the “Kingdom of God.”



Day 1

CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: Matthew 1–7*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: Chapter 3: “Matthew”*

Preliminary Definitions:

- *Synoptic Gospels:* A term used to describe the first three Gospels in the New Testament. The term “synoptic” is used to convey the similarities in content, structure, and tone between the three books.
- *Internal Evidence:* Evidence found *within* the book in question that helps the reader answer questions.
- *External Evidence:* Evidence found *outside* of the book in question that helps the reader answer questions.

Author and Recipients

In contrast to Paul’s letters, the Gospels never identify their own authors. We must rely instead on the testimony of the early church (external evidence). There is ample evidence from the early church attesting to Matthew as the author.

1. According to *Introducing the New Testament*, _____ is the author of Matthew, who was writing to _____.

An important question to ask is, who is Matthew? Many believe Matthew to be the tax collector mentioned in Matthew 9:9–13. He is identified as Levi in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27. Thus, it is likely that Matthew the Tax Collector wrote one of the Gospel accounts.

Tax collectors were not popular individuals among the Jewish people. They were often Jews who had taken positions within the Roman administration and were charged with collecting taxes from their own countrymen. The feeling of the Jews toward such people is easily discernable when we read Matthew 9:11. The religious leaders were appalled that Jesus would dine with “tax collectors and sinners.”

Thus, it is significant that Jesus calls as an apostle a person that the Jews would have despised. Jesus demonstrates from the outset that he came to call the sick (sinful) (cf. Matt 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). The opening of our English New Testament teaches us that Jesus has exalted the lowly and the despised. He befriended sinful people and even employs them to share the gospel with a lost and dying world (cf. Matt. 11:19).

The Structure of Matthew

Understanding how a book fits together helps us to follow the story in the way the author intended. Gaining insight into the structure can serve as a table of contents as you read the book. Carson and Moo (in their unabridged *An Introduction to the New Testament*) list several approaches to understanding the structure of Matthew.¹ Before we offer a detailed outline, we will note the two discussed by Carson and Moo.

1. *Geographic Structure*: The geographic progression shows Jesus moving from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south. Noting Jesus’ clear march towards Jerusalem helps us appreciate the resolve that Jesus exhibited as he submitted to the will of his Father (cf. Luke 22:42). Though this seems to be a legitimate way to structure all the Gospel accounts, it does not seem to explain the purpose of the Gospel.
2. *Five Discourses*: Matthew uses a formula that marks five distinct discourses in the book: “And it happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that...” (7:28–29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This formula does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament and is evidence that Matthew may have used such a literary marker to develop the structure of his Gospel.

¹ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 134-136.

1. Book I—Narrative: Ch. 3–4; Discourse: Ch. 5–7
2. Book II—Narrative: Ch. 8–9; Discourse: Ch. 10
3. Book III—Narrative: Ch. 11–12; Discourse: Ch. 13
4. Book IV—Narrative Ch. 14–17; Discourse: Ch. 18
5. Book V—Narrative: Ch. 19–22; Discourse: Ch. 23–25

Two sections of Matthew are left out of these five “Books” listed above—Chapters 1–2 and 26–28. What purpose do they serve? Carson and Moo argue that Chapters 1–2 should be considered an introduction to the main, synoptic, content of the book. Matthew 26–28 may have been written as the climax of the narrative, with the intent that the disciples would continue to teach.

Day 1 Summary

Scholars have proposed various structures of the Gospel of Matthew in the past. In this section you have surveyed two structural proposals. First, we looked at the Geographical proposal. Though it offers us an important glimpse into Jesus’ march towards Jerusalem, we conclude that it is not significant enough, or unique enough to Matthew, to be the most plausible structural proposal. It simply does not tell us anything about Matthew’s purpose for writing. The second proposal was that the Gospel of Matthew is structured around the formula, “And it happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that...” This formula is significant literarily and should not be dismissed. Following this formula we are left with two introductory chapters (Ch. 1–2) and three concluding chapters (Ch. 26–28). In the middle we have five books, each made up of a section of narrative, *stories about Jesus*, and a section of discourse, *teachings from Jesus*.

Day 2

THEMES IN MATTHEW

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Matthew 8–14

Further Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Abrahamic Covenant—Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–17
 - ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Davidic Covenant—2 Samuel 7:8–16
- As you read, consider how Jesus fulfills the promises that are made to both Abraham and David.*

For the next two sections this study looks at particular themes in Matthew. In order to trace how Matthew develops these themes, we will survey numerous texts. The themes we consider should help you to understand Matthew’s purpose in writing and to have a firmer grasp of the overall message of the book.

THEME 1—FULFILLMENT

The fulfillment of Old Testament promises is a major theme in the Gospel of Matthew. The opening sentence of Matthew ties the message to the Old Testament. We can trace this theme of fulfillment by looking at Old Testament texts and Old Testament titles that Matthew uses.

Old Testament Texts

Though we cannot survey each text that emphasizes the theme of fulfillment, we will look at a few that illustrate the point. We begin with the opening genealogy. This genealogy ties Jesus to the Jewish patriarchal line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the kingly line of David.

In this genealogy, 42 total generations are mentioned. The inclusion of Rahab and Ruth is important to note. Not only are they women (while men dominate the list), but Rahab was a prostitute and Ruth a Gentile. Rahab’s inclusion points

out to us that Jesus not only calls sinners to be his disciples, but his very lineage is made up of the outcasts of society. Ruth's inclusion is likewise significant because God used a woman who was not an ethnic Israelite to continue the genealogy of the Messiah.

2. Who would be concerned with this type of genealogy? What purpose does the genealogy serve?

The Gospel of Matthew is packed with references to the Old Testament (over 50 direct quotations!). The careful reader is wise to pay attention to both the Old Testament and New Testament context of the quoted passages.

In the passages listed in the table below, note how many direct quotations from the Old Testament.

Passage	Number of Quotations
Matthew 2	
Matthew 4	
Matthew 21	
Total Quotations	

Matthew uses the word “fulfill” 16 times. The Greek word the writer uses means to “cause something to be full.” Matthew uses this term to show that the promises of the Old Testament surrounding the coming of the Messiah were brought to fruition in the person and work of Jesus.

“Fulfillment” language is found throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises. The promises, predictions, types, etc., were coming to fruition. *The shadows in the Old Testament were fading away under the light of Christ in the New Testament* (cf. Heb. 10:1).

3. Read the following passages, and list what is being fulfilled in the passage (Example: Matthew 1:22–23—Virgin birth was predicted and fulfilled in the birth of Jesus).

Matthew Passage	Old Testament Prophecy
2:15	
2:17-18	
8:16-17	
13:34-35	
21:4-5	
27:9	

One more Old Testament citation deserves our attention. In Matthew 2:15, Matthew references Hosea 11:1. Initially, in its Old Testament context this verse seems to reference the nation of Israel and the exodus. Yahweh is recounting how he loved Israel (“his son”), and yet they have gone astray (Hos. 11:2).

Matthew notes that Jesus fulfills this Old Testament passage because of the time he spent in Egypt due to the intentions of Herod to kill Jesus, as foretold by the angel (2:13). Joseph and his family fled to Egypt, and when the danger had passed, God called Joseph (2:19–20) and his family to return to Israel.

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Day 2 Summary

In this section we have started to explain the theme of fulfillment as seen in Matthew. This theme is obvious, as Matthew frequently quotes from the Old Testament and employs Old Testament titles to Jesus. The opening genealogy introduces this theme and it is carried forward throughout the Gospel of Matthew.

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Day 3

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Matthew 15–19

THEME 1 CONT.—FULFILLMENT

In the last section we looked at specific Old Testament texts that were quoted in the New Testament to illustrate the theme of fulfillment. It is also important to notice the titles various authors use to identify Jesus. These titles are important because they once again tie Jesus to the Old Testament. In Matthew, Jesus is the Promised Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man, and Son of God.

The Old Testament uses various titles to point to one who would come as the Sovereign, Savior, and Satisfier of God's people. As early as Genesis 3:15, we are pointed toward someone who would come and crush the head of the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Many have understood the promised seed ("offspring") to refer to Jesus. It is Jesus who comes and delivers the crushing blow to the head of the serpent as he defeats death and strips the devil of his power. The point is that the Old Testament has always looked forward to one who would come and bring God's plan to completion. This one who is to come is known by various titles. These titles have applied to various people in the Old Testament record but find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Messiah

This term means "anointed one" and is used of a number of different people in the Old Testament. Priests are referred to as "anointed" (Exodus 28:41; 29:7; Leviticus 4:3, 5; Numbers 3:3), prophets were "anointed" (1 Kings 19:15), and pagan kings are described in this way (Isaiah 45:4–5). It is important to note, then, that the term Messiah does not automatically mean that someone is God, king, or savior.

Yet, New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner states, "... by the New Testament period there was a general expectation of Messiah, even though the Old Testament does not emphasize a coming Messiah..."²

Is Jesus the Messiah, or the Christ, or both? The word "Christ" is the Greek word that New Testament authors use in place of the Hebrew word for Messiah. When we say Jesus Christ, we are not saying that his first name is Jesus and his last name is Christ. We are saying that Jesus is *the* Christ. He is the "anointed one" that Israel longed to see.

To understand more fully why Jesus is considered "the" Messiah, we need to consider another title: the Son of David.

Son of David

This title occurs at the opening of Matthew (1:1) and identifies Jesus as one who comes from the Davidic line (cf. 1:20). Jesus is the "anointed" Son of David. This is significant because of the promises God made to King David in the Old Testament. A descendant of David would always occupy the throne of Israel (2 Samuel 7:5–16). The prophet Isaiah foretold of a "son" who would reign "forever" on the throne of David.

"Son of David" is an important designation in Matthew. Not only does David become a turning point in the genealogy (1:6, 17), but the title recurs throughout the Gospel... God swore covenant love to David (Ps. 89:29) and promised that one of his immediate descendants would establish the kingdom—even more, that David's kingdom and throne would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Isaiah foresaw that a "son" would be given, a son with the most extravagant titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace: "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (Isa. 9:6–7).³

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008), 198.

³ D. A. Carson. "Matthew," in *Matthew–Mark* (2nd ed. Expositor's Bible Commentary 9. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 87.

Thus, Jesus is identified in Matthew as the anointed “Son of David.” As pastor Mark Dever notes, “Another shepherd had arisen in Israel, one even greater than David, or as the hymn says, ‘Great David’s greater son.’”⁴

4. In Matthew 22:41–45 there is an exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. He asked them a question about the “Christ” which prompts the Pharisees to state that he is the “Son of David.” Jesus then quotes Psalm 110:1 and asks how David can call someone who is not Yahweh, and is one of the descendants of David, “Lord.” How would you answer that question?

Son of Man

This is the favorite designation that Jesus uses of himself. This phrase occurs numerous times in the Old Testament (93 times in Ezekiel alone!) and is often simply a reference to a human being. However, it also occurs in Daniel 7, a passage in which the “son of man” does not seem to be a mere man. The “Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is a highly exalted figure that rules over the kingdoms of the earth.

Consider the following passages where Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man: Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:40; 13:41; 16:13–16; 20:18; 26:64.

These titles (Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man) give evidence that Jesus fulfills the promises of God. Matthew goes to great lengths to show that the coming of Jesus is massively significant. He is not simply another prophet, wise man, or religious leader. He is the promised Messiah, who stands in the line of David, and is the exalted Son of Man.

⁴ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 50. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Day 3 Summary

In this section we have continued looking at the themes Matthew develops as he writes his Gospel. One of the most important thematic considerations is how the life and ministry of Jesus brings to fulfillment much of what the Old Testament had anticipated. We see this fulfillment in New Testament texts that speak of “fulfillment,” a word that Matthew uses 16 times in his Gospel. We also read about how the different titles (Messiah/Christ; Son of David; Son of Man) are used of Jesus by Matthew to identify him as the one that many in Israel longed to see.

Day 4

THEMES IN MATTHEW CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Matthew 20–28

THEME 2—REJECTION AND ACCEPTANCE: THE RESPONSE TO JESUS

In the last section, we spent time looking at some of the massive amount of evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel's hopes. He stood in the line of Abraham and was the anointed (Messiah) Son of David and exalted Son of Man the Jews were waiting for. Yet, despite all the texts that Jesus brought to fulfillment, and all the titles that were used of him, not everyone bowed their knee to King Jesus. Matthew tells us a story in which many of the Jewish people, especially the Jewish leaders, rejected their Messiah. On the other hand, while some rejected Jesus, there were many who believed and followed him.

Rejection

Even as Jesus worked miracles among the people, the religious leaders rejected him. In one instance, as Jesus cast out a demon, the religious leaders accused him of doing so “by the prince of demons” (9:34).

5. In Matthew 12:22–29 Jesus responds to a similar accusation made by the Pharisees as that of 9:34. What do you think of Jesus' response? Does his response make sense? How would you respond, taking Matthew 12:22–29 into account?

In Matthew 10 the twelve disciples are named and commissioned. They were to travel throughout the region healing, casting out demons, and proclaiming the message of the kingdom (10:7). Yet, just as some rejected Jesus, there would be those who rejected his disciples.

6. With such miraculous ministry, why do you think the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders, still rejected Jesus, his disciples, their ministry, and their message (consider Matthew 11:25, 13:13-23)?

The rejection illustrated above deals with those who were not disciples and rejected Jesus as the Messiah. However, there were instances when even his own disciples challenged him. Consider the following passages:

- ▷ 26:21-25, 49-50
- ▷ 26:33-34, 69-75
- ▷ 26:54-56

7. What are reasons that many still reject Jesus today? In what ways do you “reject” Jesus in your own life? Have you accepted the claims of Jesus and believed in him? Do you reject or submit to the commands of Jesus that are contained in the Bible?

Acceptance

Though rejection surrounded the ministry of Jesus, it was not the only response to his coming. In the Gospel of Matthew we also find those who had ears to hear and eyes to see. We end this thematic consideration by reading a number of passages where individuals and groups believed in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ. Record the setting of the events as you read.

2:2-11	
14:33	
16:16	
21:32	
28:9	

There are two people in the Gospel of Matthew that illicit a positive response from Jesus because of their faith. These two people are the Roman centurion in 8:8–9 and the Canaanite woman in 15:27–28. They believed in Jesus and “accepted without question Jesus’ authority and mission as he defined it.”⁵

It is important to note that these two people praised so highly for their faith were both Gentiles (outside of the Jewish people). This is evidence that the mission of Jesus was to seek and save people from every nation (cf. 28:19–20).

To sum up, as we read the Gospel of Matthew it becomes clear that Matthew gives us an honest depiction of the response to Jesus from the people. Even though the Old Testament was fulfilled before the eyes of all, there was nonetheless widespread rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. The religious leaders and the people take their rejection to its ultimate end as they crucify Jesus. At the same time, there were those that were given eyes to see and ears to hear. By God’s grace we read stories about those who did believe: the disciples leaving everything to follow Jesus, the Roman centurion exercising great faith, and the Canaanite woman humbling herself under the authority of Christ. Furthermore, just as many rejected Jesus during his earthly ministry, there are those who reject Jesus in our own time. However, in the same way that the rejection was not total during the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, there is not total rejection today. God still gives people eyes to see and ears to hear.

THEME 3—THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

If you have been around Christianity and the Bible very long then you have probably heard the phrases “*Kingdom of God*” and “*Kingdom of Heaven*.” Indeed, as you read Matthew’s Gospel, the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” should not escape your notice. In this section we will consider this unique phrase, comparing it to the “Kingdom of God” while trying to discern what Matthew emphasizes by its use.

In Matthew 3:1–2, John the Baptist proclaims, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” In 4:12, when Jesus begins preaching, his message is the same as John’s. Jesus says, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Jesus opens his famous Beatitudes by saying that those who are “poor in spirit” possess “the Kingdom of Heaven” (5:3). But what is this “Kingdom of Heaven”?

In some theological traditions, the phrases “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” were said to refer to two separate realities. But do they?

⁵ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 50. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

8. What do you think is the relationship between the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of Heaven”? Compare the following two passages. After comparing them, write down your thoughts about their relationship. Are they distinct realities?

Matthew 4:17 —

Mark 1:14 —

9. There are 32 uses of “Kingdom of Heaven” in the book of Matthew. Why do you think Matthew uses this phrase more than “Kingdom of God?”

The Kingdom of Heaven has broken into the present world. And when the kingdom is consummated in the end, judgment will come upon those who have rejected Jesus. In contrast, when Jesus comes again, those who have trusted in him will enter into the joy of their Master. In Matthew 25:31-46, it is the “Son of Man” that is seated on his throne with the “nations” gathered before him. Each nation is made up of individuals that fall into two categories: sheep and goats. The sheep are placed on the right of the Son of Man and told to enter into the kingdom that had been prepared for them, while the goats are placed on his left and sent into eternal fire.

Day 4 Summary

What we have seen in this section is that the Messiah had come onto the scene and proclaimed that his kingdom was at hand (3:2; 4:17). The king had come to announce the arrival of his kingdom. Tom Schreiner writes, “As the Messiah, he is the one who announces the kingdom, for the kingdom cannot be separated from its king.”⁶ Yet, as the Messiah Jesus announced his arrival, there were various responses to him. Some rejected Jesus and sought to have him killed (the religious leaders). Others followed Jesus for a time, only to betray him (Judas). Despite this, there were those who believed in Jesus and followed him. The disciples left everything to follow him, and even Gentiles such as the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman exercised faith in Jesus.

6 Ibid., 205.



Day 5

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At this point, we step back and consider the whole book of Matthew and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into the book of Matthew and allow you to work through the overarching message of Matthew for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of Matthew. What do you think Matthew is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What passages are central to his Gospel account? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the Gospel of Matthew in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary of Matthew:

One-Paragraph Summary of Matthew:

The Gospel of Mark

2

📖 INTRODUCTION

As the eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry began to pass away, it was necessary to write down the events surrounding Jesus' life. These written records would serve to preserve and to pass on the good news of Jesus. Mark is thought to have been the first Gospel written. It was likely written close to the passing of the apostle Peter, who relayed what he witnessed concerning the life of Jesus to Mark, who then took on the task of recording and preserving it.

The Gospel of Mark reads like an action-packed, fast-moving, dramatic narrative. Carson and Moo note, "Mark's story of Jesus' ministry is action oriented. Recounting little extended teaching of Jesus, Mark shifts scenes rapidly..."⁷ It is the shortest of the Gospel accounts and moves the reader quickly through the ministry of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the Son of God-Son of Man who reigns over creation and suffers to save a people who are called to follow him. This summary of Mark's account attempts to capture significant themes like Jesus' son-ship, his divinity and humanity, discipleship, as well as his service through suffering. All these themes will be surveyed in our study.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Mark.
- understand what Mark intends to communicate by the use of "Son of God" in reference to Jesus.
- understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.
- be familiar with a significant textual issue at the end of Mark.

⁷ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 169.



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Mark 1:1—3:6
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 4: “Mark”

Author

The traditional understanding is that John Mark, a follower of Peter, is the author. Though the Gospel is anonymous, it has been recognized since the days of the early church that Mark wrote this account. The testimony of the early church includes the voices of men such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, and others. Of particular importance is the testimony of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia of Asian Minor (A.D. 130). The writings of the early church historian Eusebius (circa A.D. 300) also suggest Mark is the author.

1. According to the assigned reading in Carson and Moo, what three important claims did Papias make concerning Mark as the author of this Gospel?

This brief survey of the beginning and ending of Matthew and Mark prepares us to encounter this fast paced book. We are now ready to move into the overall structure of Mark.

7. From your reading of Carson and Moo use bullet points to create an outline of Mark:

As you can see, there are some places within the outline that seem to skip over verses. For instance, when the outline moves from Galilean Ministry Pt. 1 to Pt. 2, there are seven verses that are missing in the outline. Again, when the outline transitions from Pt. 2 to Pt. 3, there are six verses unaccounted for.

THINK: Skim six transitional paragraphs or statements identified by Carson and Moo: Mark 14-15; 3:7-12; 6:1-6; 8:27-30; 11:1-11; 14:1-2.

Many commentators break Mark down into two halves. Mark 1:1-8:26 would comprise the first half while 8:27-16:20 would comprise the second. In Mark 8:27-30, we read the famous confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ. This seems to mark *the* major transition of the Gospel.

8. What seems to change in Mark's Gospel after Mark 8:27-30? What characterizes the ministry of Jesus before this paragraph?

When looking at the book this way, it is often noted that these two halves of Mark present the ministry of Jesus in two different, but complementary ways. In the first half Jesus displays his power as he heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind, and exercises complete control over creation. Yet in the second half of Mark Jesus' suffering is highlighted. He is opposed, betrayed, and finally

crucified. The two parts of Mark present the reader with a Jesus who rules over creation and yet suffers to save his people. The two basic parts of Mark could be titled:

1. Mark 1:1–8:26—The Powerful Ministry of Jesus
2. Mark 8:27–16:20—The Suffering Ministry of Jesus

Day 1 Summary

The apostle Peter had relayed the events surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus to John Mark. Mark took the time to write down an account of Jesus' life, thus producing the first Gospel. Mark's Gospel is fast-paced and rarely pauses to describe the details of an event. Instead the Gospel of Mark moves the reader rather quickly through the life of Jesus. As Mark writes, he introduces the reader to the powerful ministry and suffering of Jesus.

Day 2

THEMES

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Mark 3:7—8:26

THEME 1—SON OF GOD

From the outset it seems that Mark desires to highlight the reality that Jesus is the Son of God. Though this title does not occur often in the Gospel (only three occurrences), it occurs at important points in the book. Combined with other elements of Mark's Gospel, this understanding of Jesus' identity is a major theme of the book of Mark.

In the opening verse of Mark, the title "Son of God" appears for the first time. This seems to set the trajectory for how Mark will present Jesus throughout his account. Not only does Mark introduce the reader to Jesus in this way, he records the words of the centurion, who upon seeing Jesus take his last breath, confesses that Jesus "was the Son of God" (15:39). And in Chapter 3 it is significant that Jesus is recognized to be the Son of God by the unclean spirits (3:11).

9. Read Mark 1:1, Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:1–4, and John 1:1–5. How does each of the Gospel accounts identify Jesus?

As mentioned above, Mark only uses the title "Son of God" in three places, but they are significant ones. Two uses serve as bookends to the Gospel of Mark: at the beginning of the Gospel (1:1) and at the death of Jesus (15:39).

10. Read Mark 15:33–41 slowly, noting the growing tension leading to the climax of Jesus’ death. In your own words, and with as much detail as you can glean from the text, record below the events of 15:33–40. Then explain in your own words why the centurion would have been moved to confess Jesus as the Son of God.

The one other occurrence of “Son of God” in Mark is in 3:11. This is a significant use of the title, as it comes not from the mouth of a Roman official, Jewish leader or Mark himself. Instead, the “unclean spirits” acknowledge Jesus as the “Son of God.”

11. Read Mark 3:7–12. In your own words describe the ministry of Jesus up to this point and the significance of the unclean spirits words.

Though the title “Son of God” is only used three times, there are other passages that allude to this special relationship that Jesus enjoys with the Father. These other passages show Mark’s concern for presenting Jesus as God’s Son in his Gospel.

Read the following passages and record how Jesus is identified:

Text	Identification
1:11	
1:24	
5:7	
9:2-7	
12:1-2	
14:61-62	

When the reader combines the three uses of “Son of God” with the last several passages surveyed, it becomes clear that Jesus was someone very special. As Mark develops the first Gospel, he is eager to present Jesus as the Son of God.

12. It is clear that Mark identifies Jesus as the Son of God. But what does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God?

THEME 2—THE SUFFERING SON OF GOD

One of the interesting aspects of this Gospel is that Mark presents a picture of Jesus that includes both strength and weakness. That is, Jesus is presented as a powerful teacher *and* a suffering servant.

Mark 10:45 is a significant verse for understanding the suffering element of Christ’s ministry. While the disciples are busy jockeying for positions of prominence (10:35–45), Jesus is on his way to suffer. He rebukes their self-centeredness and pride by pointing out that the greatest in the kingdom is the

one who serves (10:43–44). Even Jesus did not come “to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). Jesus shows himself to be great by serving. And the way he serves is by laying down his life to purchase a people for God. As we noted above, after Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ (8:27–30), the road turns finally towards Jerusalem and the cross.

13. Notice the emphasis on suffering that Mark records in three different passages. Read the following passages and describe the events that led up to Jesus’ prediction of his impending death and resurrection.

- Mark 8:31–38
- Mark 9:30–37
- Mark 10:32–34

14. In the three passages where Jesus predicts his death, are the disciples characterized as those who understand what Jesus is saying or as those who fail to understand? Compare the second prediction (9:30–37) with the first (8:31–38) and record your thoughts on why they were afraid to ask Jesus to explain further in 9:32.

Not only did Mark record Jesus talking about the suffering that was to come, we are also told of the challenges that Jesus faced from the religious leaders. The priests and scribes challenge Jesus, as does the sect of the Sadducees. The challenges and opposition come to a climax as his enemies plot to kill him.

The passages below refer to places in Mark where the Jewish leaders challenged or opposed Jesus.

Passage	Who Challenges?
Mark 11:27-33	The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders
Mark 12:18-27	The Sadducees
Mark 12:28-34	A scribe
Mark 14:1-2	The rising opposition to Jesus eventually boils over and the religious leaders seek to put Jesus to death.

It is important to consider that the suffering of Jesus did not simply come from the hands of the religious leaders that were outside his circle. One of the saddest details of the Gospel accounts is that betrayal and denial came from those closest to him. Peter would deny Jesus before being restored. Judas Iscariot would betray Jesus before killing himself. All the disciples of Jesus would “fall away” while Jesus was facing his darkest hour (14:27).

The passages below refer to places in Mark where Jesus’ own followers fall away.

Passage	Who Falls Away?
Mark 14:27	Jesus predicts that his disciples will fall away.
Mark 14:29-31; 66-72	Peter
Mark 14:43-50	Judas

15. How do we “deny” Jesus in our own lives? Consider the passages you just read. Are there ways in which we “deny” Jesus in our day-to-day life? In what ways do you deny Jesus in your life?

The Passion Narratives of Jesus are the most poignant pictures of the sufferings of Jesus. These are the narrative stories of Jesus enduring physical suffering at the hands of the Romans and spiritual suffering as the Father exercises wrath upon his Son (Matthew 26–28; Mark 14:53–15:41; Luke 22:47–24:12; John 18:1–20:10).

16. Read 14:53–15:41. In the space provided below, consider Mark 1:1–8:26 and the ministry of Jesus. Given Jesus’ ministry of healing, miracle-working, and teaching, discuss why, in the face of such a powerful ministry, so many people still failed to believe in Jesus.

As we can see, though Mark presents Jesus as powerful, he is also presented as one who suffers. This likely hearkens back to Isaiah 53 and the Suffering Servant text. The Servant of the Lord would come and be crushed in order to save his people from their sins!

Day 2 Summary

Mark delivers a fast-moving account of Jesus’ life that clearly identifies Jesus as the Son of God. Mark declares from the opening that Jesus is God’s Son, the unclean spirits identify Jesus as God’s Son, and the Roman centurion confesses Jesus as God’s Son. However, completely contrary to what one might think, the Son of God suffers. He is challenged by the religious leaders of his day, his own disciples flee from him, with one even betraying him, and the Roman government crucifies him. Yet, through suffering the Son of God pays a ransom for many.

Day 3

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Mark 8:27—10:52

THEME 3—DISCIPLESHIP

Not only does Mark present the reader with the life and ministry of Jesus, but he also gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of Jesus' followers. Christians have often noted the theme of discipleship that is present in the Gospel of Mark. Today our study will focus exclusively on this theme. Tomorrow we turn to a final theme and a closing discussion on the textual issue concerning the end of Mark.

Knowing the Disciples

First, who are the disciples? In the Bible, a disciple was one who followed someone else. No, this doesn't mean they simply walked behind them—it means that they followed their way of life, their teaching, and tried to imitate them. Anyone who followed Jesus in this way was considered a disciple of Jesus. Yet the Bible also uses the term more formally. There were twelve men that Jesus called to himself that are considered the "Twelve Disciples."

17. Can you list the names of the twelve disciples? In the space provided, list as many as you can and anything you know about them. (See Mark 3:16–19 *after you attempt to write down their names on your own*).

It doesn't take Jesus very long to call the first disciples (1:16–20). And when Jesus calls them, the disciples are prepared to drop everything and follow him (1:18; cf. 2:14; Luke 5:11; John 1:35–51). We might expect that these men who are so eager to follow Christ would display great faith and immovable commitment throughout his ministry. It would also make sense to think that those who were quick to follow Jesus would have had a great understanding of his identity and his mission. Yet, as the narrative unfolds Mark does not hesitate to show the failures of these disciples.

The Weaknesses of the Disciples

At this point we should highlight the failures of the disciples. Carson and Moo note, “Mark portrays the disciples as hard of heart (e.g., 6:52), spiritually weak (e.g., 14:32–42), and incredibly dim-witted (e.g., 8:14–21).”⁸

18. Read Mark 6:30–44 and 6:45–52. Why does Mark reference the story of the loaves and fish in 6:52?

In 8:21 Jesus tells the disciples that they still “do not yet understand.” They have witnessed Jesus feed the five thousand, then the four thousand, and are now worried about the fact that they had “forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat” (8:14). This is utterly perplexing! Why were they concerned about food when the one who had multiplied food before their eyes was sitting in the boat? This leads Jesus to ask if their hearts were “hardened” (8:17) and if they lacked “understanding” (8:21).

19. How often have we “seen” God do amazing things in our lives and in the lives of others and yet, at a later point, fail to trust him? Can you list three “amazing” things God has done in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

8 D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 194.

The following passages point to situations in which the disciples were slow of understanding:

Mark 4:40-41

⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

After seeing Jesus perform a number of miracles and the unclean spirits falling at his feet (3:11), Jesus rebukes them for their continued lack of faith. Even now they do not understand the power of Jesus.

Mark 6:37, 52

³⁷But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"

⁵²for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Again, a seemingly impossible opportunity (feeding the multitude) is presented to Jesus and the disciples. Still the disciples do not trust that Jesus can work a miracle to provide for their current need.

Mark 7:18

⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him.

The disciples have spent much time with Jesus. They have heard his numerous teachings, and yet they are still "without understanding."

Mark 9:10

So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

Jesus tells them not to mention his transfiguration "until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." They are happy to oblige, since they don't understand this idea of rising from the dead anyway!

Mark 10:22–27

²²Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him. “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.

Jesus teaches that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. He states that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The disciples are confused, as evidenced by their response in v. 26.

20. Read Mark 8:22–26. How does the story of this blind man illustrate the point that the disciples have eyes but “do not see” (8:18)? What is the significance of this story being placed at this point?

Mark 8:22–26

²²And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” ²⁴ And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”

The disciples are hard of heart and slow of understanding. At times they are not exactly models of faith and trust. And to make matters even worse, they were spiritually weak!

21. Read the passages below. Reflect on each passage and choose one to record how you might have responded in that situation.

- Mark 4:35–41
- Mark 14:17–21
- Mark 14:26–31
- Mark 14:51–52
- Mark 14:66–72

The Cost of Discipleship

The last point we need to consider is the cost of discipleship. The Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone (John 3:16). We pay no money and we offer no sacrifice in order to be justified (Rom. 3:28; 5:1). We are saved by grace through faith alone. Yet, following Jesus is costly.

The following passages help us begin to understand what the “cost” of following Jesus seems to be:

Mark 1:16–20

¹⁶Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Leaving an occupation and a family member (fishing and father).

Mark 2:13–17

¹⁷He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

¹⁷And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Again, an occupation and becoming a political enemy of the prevailing power (i.e., Rome).

Mark 8:34–9:1

³⁴And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” ^{9:1}And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Carrying a cross, giving up the right to one’s own life, but gaining Christ.

Mark 10:17–31

¹⁷And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” ²¹And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

²²Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Counting Christ as more valuable than all your earthly possessions.

- 22. What are the “costs” of following Jesus in our culture? Are the costs greater in other parts of the world?

Day 3 Summary

In Mark’s Gospel, the disciples of Jesus are not always models of faith and trust. Yet, for all their faults they are a group of men that God would use to accomplish his purposes. Besides Judas, we have no record of any of the other eleven disciples falling away. Peter would return and become a leader in the Church, James and John would lead the way in many respects, and others would travel and take the gospel of Jesus Christ to far-off lands. What they teach us is that God does not call the strong, but the weak. And through the weakness of his people, he is shown to be strong (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). Finally, we know that following Jesus is a high calling and carries a high price.

Day 4

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Mark 11:1—16:8

THEME 4—JESUS ON THE MOVE

In *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Aslan is introduced with the words, “They say Aslan is on the move.” The great lion was working and the excitement of what he might do was palpable. In a sense this is a good way of understanding the ministry of Jesus as presented in Mark. As we have already noted, Mark moves the reader quickly along. He rarely stops for a great length of time at one scene (e.g., the temptation of Jesus receives two verses!). Instead, Mark is eager to present the good news of Jesus in a clear, concise and captivating way.

The quick movement of the story is felt as Mark uses the word “immediately” 42 times. This is a massive amount of usage when compared to the rest of the New Testament. Let’s consider some of the passages where the word occurs.

23. Read at least four of the following passages and note what happens “immediately.”

- 1:10
- 1:18
- 1:42
- 2:12
- 5:2
- 6:54
- 8:10
- 10:15
- 14:72

24. Why do you think Mark choose to keep the narrative moving at such a quick pace? What is the benefit of moving action along from scene to scene in a rapid manner?

25. Explain why you think it is significant (if it is) that when Jesus healed someone or cast out a demon in Mark that the effect was immediate?

This theme seems to suggest that the mission of Jesus was unstoppable. It moves forward without any impediment. The demons must immediately heed the words of Jesus; the sicknesses that Jesus encounters must bow to the wishes of the Lord; and nothing in the story seems to slow advancement to the cross. Jesus comes to give his life, and the story quickly gets us to that point and goal.

A Brief Discussion of Mark 16:9–20

As noted in your reading, Mark 16:9–20 is a passage that many do not believe is original. It was most likely added later by an editor and subsequently made its way into a good number of manuscripts. Though many commentators do not treat the text-critical issues surrounding the apparent discrepancy, we find it necessary to at least mention the issue since you will at some point come to that section of your Bible and have questions regarding its often-bracketed inclusion.

26. Read Mark 16:9–20. Are there any passages that create theological problems? Are there any parts of this section that contradict other passages of Scripture?

Mark 16:9-20

⁹ Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

¹² After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

¹⁴ Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

27. Read the *ESVSB* note on Mark 16:9–20. Summarize the content of that note in the space provided. Then record any further questions that you might have regarding this issue.



Day 5

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Today we step back and consider the whole book of Mark and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into the book of Mark and allow you to work through the overarching message of Mark for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of Mark. What do you think Mark is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his Gospel account? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the Gospel of Mark in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary of Mark:

One-Paragraph Summary of Mark:

The Gospel of Luke

3

📖 INTRODUCTION

The last of the Synoptic Gospels is the Gospel of Luke. Part of a two volume set, The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. The purpose of the book is to put into an “orderly account” (1:3) the life and ministry of Jesus. This carefully ordered and researched account of the life of Jesus was meant to assure his readers of the truth about Jesus and the gospel.

Luke presents Jesus as the Savior and Lord who fulfills God’s plan by bringing salvation to those in need. As you walk through the story of Luke you should notice the theme of salvation and how God is bringing his plan to fruition. The recipients of God’s grace are not the proud and elite, but the outcasts of society. These themes, and more, will be touched on in this lesson.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Luke.
- be familiar with the relationship between Luke and Acts.
- understand the scope of salvation through Jesus.
- understand the Lordship of Jesus and his place in the unfolding plan of God.



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Luke 1–9:50
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 5: “Luke”

Author

As with the other Gospels, the authorship of the book is technically anonymous. However, relying on the testimony of the early church, we believe Luke is the author.

1. From your reading of Carson and Moo for today, summarize their support of Lukan authorship.

But who is Luke? Our information about Luke comes from the New Testament itself. Luke is mentioned in a number of passages by name, and is present in the narrative of a few passages in Acts. Let’s look at some of these passages here (we will look at Acts in a couple of weeks).

2. Read the following passages and write down what you learn about Luke from each text:

Colossians 4:14

Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.

- “Beloved”—this is the same terms that is used of Jesus in Matthew 3:17; 12:18; 17:5. Paul also refers to Tychicus in this way in Colossians 4:7. It seems that this term of endearments is used to communicate the idea of close personal relationship.
- “Physician”—he was a doctor. Thus, we can infer that he was likely well-educated and would have been a helpful traveling companion, as one could meet injury or illness quite frequently while traversing the Mediterranean world.

2 Timothy 4:11

¹¹ *Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*

- “I have finished the race...” (4:7)—it seems that when Paul comes to the end of his life, Luke is by his side.
- “Luke alone is with me...” (4:11)—when all others had deserted him, Luke had stayed by his side.

Philemon 23–24

²³ *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.*

All these texts give us some insight into the identity of Luke. He is not an obscure character in the Bible. Luke figures prominently in the biblical story and because of his travels with Paul, his educational background, and his desire to pass on the faith, we receive both the Gospel of Luke and Acts from his pen.

Recipient(s)

The opening of Luke and the opening of Acts both record Theophilus as the recipient of the letter. It could be that Theophilus is simply a friend of Luke that had questions about the Christian faith. Theophilus may have been someone who bore the financial burden of publishing what Luke wrote. That is, it would certainly cost money to have these things published for a larger audience, and Theophilus may have financed the project. There have also been attempts to argue that the name *Theophilus* referred to a class of people (*friends of God*) and not an actual person. Robert Stein responds, “It is far more likely...that Theophilus was a real person. The adjective ‘most excellent’ (Luke 1:3) used to describe him is found three other times in the New Testament and is used in addressing the Roman governors Felix (Acts 23:26; 24:2) and Festus (26:25).”⁹

It seems that Luke desired to write to a specific person in order to provide him with an orderly account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Combined with Acts, the book of Luke also presents the earliest account of the advance of the church in the Mediterranean world.

Relationship Between Luke and Acts

3. After reading the required chapter in *Introducing the New Testament*, state in your own words how Luke and Acts are related to each other.

Day 1 Summary

Today you read a major section of Luke. You learned that the author of Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, likely a medical doctor, and a friend till the end of Paul’s ministry. Luke writes to his friend, Theophilus. The Gospel of Luke is the first installment of a two-part work that resumes in the book of Acts. Though Acts and Luke are closely related, and each should inform how you read the other, it is wise to respect their canonical status and treat each book separately.

⁹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (The New American commentary v. 24; Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1992), 26.

Day 2

STRUCTURE

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Luke 9:51–19:44

To begin, we must admit that discerning the structure of Luke is not nearly as easy as discerning a structure in Matthew or Mark. However, from your reading of Carson and Moo you should be able to summarize a structure of Luke.

4. From your reading of Carson and Moo use bullet points to create an outline of Luke:

5. There are 10 chapters devoted to Jesus' travel towards Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–18:34). That same bit of travel receives much less attention in Matthew (two chapters; Matthew 19–20) and Mark (one chapter; Mark 10). Why do you think Luke focuses attention on this part of Jesus' earthly ministry?

The movement away from Jerusalem in Acts matches the movement toward Jerusalem in Luke. In Luke, Jesus moves from Galilee, through Samaria, to Judea and the cross. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Spirit-empowered disciples (witnesses) of Jesus take the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:19–20).

6. How does the resolute nature of Jesus' move toward Jerusalem instruct us as we seek to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) and fulfill the command to be witnesses (Acts 1:8)?

Day 2 Summary

Today you have read another major section of Luke. This section highlights a unique portion of Luke and introduces you to stories that you have not found in Matthew or Mark. We have noted that Luke goes to great lengths to show Jesus moving resolutely towards Jerusalem. In Luke Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, and in Acts the gospel moves away from Jerusalem to the nations. As we consider this overall structure of Luke, we are encouraged to follow Jesus' example of commitment to his mission and display the same commitment in our task to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Day 3

THEMES IN LUKE

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Luke 19:45–22:46

THEME 1—JESUS: THE ONE WHO BRINGS SALVATION TO THE WORLD

Salvation from sin and reconciliation to God are the greatest needs of mankind. Every individual born into this world is born sinful and separated from God (see Psalm 51:5). We are all “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) and enemies of God (Romans 5:10). We are in desperate need of a Savior. Luke demonstrates for his readers that Jesus is the one through whom salvation comes.

The idea that Jesus is the Savior is not unique to Luke, but it is prominent in Luke’s Gospel. Furthermore, Jesus is not simply the Savior of the Jewish people; he is the Savior of the whole world. Let us consider “salvation” as a theme in Luke.

The Use of “Salvation,” “Savior” and “Save”

Carson and Moo point out that Luke “is the only synoptic evangelist to use the noun ‘salvation’...and ‘savior.’” Furthermore they write, “he uses the verb ‘save’...more than any other book in the New Testament (although this is mainly because of Luke’s greater length).”¹⁰

7. Read the following passages, noting the context of each usage of “savior,” “salvation,” or “save”: Luke 1:47; 2:11; 3:1–6; 19:9–10; 24:46–47

¹⁰ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 220.

8. In Luke 1:47–55 we read Mary’s Magnificent Song of Praise. She begins by speaking about her spirit rejoicing “in God [her] savior.” Read the rest of the song of praise and note what “God [her] savior” does for his people.

Luke 1:46b–55

^{46b}“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

9. In Luke 2:11 there is born a “Savior.” Is this good news for the Jews only, or for all people? Look at the verse’s context to find the answer.

Luke 2:9–11

⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

10. Read Isaiah 42:6–7; 52:10. Now read Luke 2:29–32 and explain why Simeon was ready to depart in peace.

Luke 2:29–32

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Another reason to ponder this theme is that the whole life of Jesus is bracketed by references to salvation. The angels announce the birth of Jesus who is born in the “city of David, a Savior” (Luke 2:11). Furthermore, in his last appearance on earth Jesus is presented as the only one who can save people from their sins (Luke 24:46–47).

11. “Salvation,” “savior,” or “save” do not occur in Luke 24:46–47. Is it legitimate to speak of this passage acting as a bookend for the theme of salvation? Why or why not?

Luke 24:46–47

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The Testimony of Other Evangelicals

Salvation as a theme in Luke is warranted in part because it is well attested by other Christians. As stated in your reading, Carson and Moo identify salvation as a major theme in Luke (see *Introducing the New Testament*, 42). Mark Dever agrees, as seen below. Read the following passage from Mark Dever asserting salvation as a theme.

“How did Jesus bring salvation? He told his disciples at the Last Supper, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God’ (22:15–16). Bringing salvation means Jesus had to suffer. Breaking the bread and pouring the wine, he said, this is ‘my body given for you’ and ‘my blood...poured out for you’ (22:19–20). He then quoted from Isaiah, who prophesied, ‘he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors’ (Isa. 53:12). Jesus observed, ‘Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment’ (Luke 22:37). Jesus then offered his body as the sacrifice for the sins of many that Isaiah promised, making intercession for the transgressors.

Forgiveness of sins. The prophet Jeremiah had promised the forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34; Luke 1:77), and now Jesus fulfilled that promise (5:20–24; 7:47–49). So Jesus taught his disciples to proclaim this message: ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem’ (24:47).

The great message is that we, who were made to know God, have separated ourselves from God by our sin; we deserve his judgment by the way we live; but God, by his great love in Christ, has come and lived a life deserving no punishment. He has taken our sins on his body on the cross—the sins of all those from every nation who repent and believe in him. He calls us now to repent and believe.”¹¹

¹¹ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 96. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Salvation to the Gentiles

Finally, we must note that salvation is provided for both Jew and Gentile alike in Luke. As noted above, salvation is for “all people” (Luke 2:10). This is a noteworthy aspect of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The salvation that Jesus brings is not only for the house of Israel, but is also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:29–32).

12. Read the following passages. Note the recipients of God’s favor in each passage.

3:4–6

4:25–27

7:1–10

17:16

13. Why is it significant that a Samaritan is the hero of the story in Luke 10:30–37 and is “made well” in Luke 17:16?

Carson and Moo conclude, “[t]hese hints of the extension of God’s grace to Gentiles in the gospel prepare the way, of course, for the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s people that Luke is so concerned to emphasize in the book of Acts.”¹²

¹² D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 221.

14. Was there any benefit to being a Jew? Were the Jews favored more highly than Gentiles?

Day 3 Summary

Today we have seen that Jesus is the Savior of the world. The usages of the words for “savior,” “salvation” and “save” clearly convey this theme in Luke. Jesus brings salvation from the Jews, but it is salvation that is meant for both Jews and Gentiles. God is no respecter of persons when it comes to the gospel. It is for people from every tribe and tongue. This theme has not been missed by other evangelicals throughout the centuries and should not escape our notice.

Day 4

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Luke 22:47–24:53

THEME 2—JESUS: THE SAVIOR OF THE OUTCASTS

Jesus was countercultural in numerous ways. He did not “go with the flow,” or operate according to the status quo. He was a radical. He upset the culture of his day and upsets our culture as well. One of the ways that Jesus upset the culture was by caring for those whom society had rejected. There were certain persons that the society of Israel considered to be “outcasts,” or at least lower members of the general population. But Jesus casts aside those ideas and cares for the weak and the sick, the poor and the needy, and all those whom the prevailing culture would not have considered to be worthy of the Messiah’s time and energy.

15. Read the following passages and record the groups of people that are highlighted in the Gospel of Luke. Why is this an important aspect of Jesus’ ministry to notice?
 - Luke 4:18; 5:12–16; 5:27–32; 6:20–23; 7:22; 10:38–42; 14:13; 18:9–14; 21:1–4

Read the following from Mark Dever concerning Jesus’ concern for the “Disreputable”:

“Interestingly, Jesus spent most of his time with people who were not well regarded in his society. He surrounded himself with sinners and tax collectors...Jesus ate in tax collectors’ homes. And they accompanied him into the homes of the respectable class. The respectable class responded predictably: ‘Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (15:1–2).

This was Jesus' pattern. He kept company with the outcasts, from Zaccheus the tax collector to the blind man whom Jesus ordered brought to him (18:39–40).

Consider also what the shepherds represented in Jesus' day, and the fact that they were the first to hear the announcement of his birth. We think of shepherds in terms of charming Christmas pageants, with cute children dressed in nicely pressed robes. Yet in the ancient world, shepherds were thought of as shifty, untrustworthy, even thieving migrant-workers. Yet, they were some of the first to greet Jesus! That was typical, I think, of Jesus' whole ministry.

The nineteenth-century English preacher Charles Spurgeon once said to his hearers in London, 'You are the same sort of person as those whom Jesus used to welcome. They were good-for-nothing bodies; they were persons that were full of need, and could not possibly bring a price with which to purchase his favour. Are you not just like them? Are you a very special sinner? I am sure I could find another special sinner like you whom Jesus has received. I will not go into detail; but I will venture to ask you—Are you a thief? The dying thief rejoiced to see in Christ salvation full and free. Have you been unchaste? David was an adulterer and was pardoned; and Jesus forgave a woman that was a sinner, who therefore loved him much. The untruthful, the unclean, the ungodly, are the sort of people that Jesus came to seek and save.'

In the first century, the nineteenth century, and today, Jesus builds his kingdom not upon the reputation people have when they enter the kingdom but on the change that occurs in their lives once they are there. And that gave Jesus—and it gives us—all the more reason to have a concern for the disreputable.”¹³

One particular group of people whom Luke highlighted is women. We live in a society that is increasingly hostile to the idea of complementarianism.¹⁴ There are many who consider Christianity to promote masculinity to the neglect of femininity. That is, there are those who think and teach that the Christian religion marginalizes, even oppresses, women. But far from marginalizing or oppressing women, the founder of Christianity, Jesus himself, shows amazing concern for women. The Gospel of Luke portrays this aspect of Jesus' ministry more so than any other New Testament book.

¹³ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 92. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

¹⁴ For a full definition and explanation of the term “complementarianism,” see John Piper, *God Created Man Male and Female: What Does It Mean To Be Complementarian*, on desiringGod.org.

In sum, Jesus is presented to us as a Savior for the needy. And we are all needy people. We are poor, broken, sinful human beings who are in need of a Savior. It is Jesus who comes for those who are in need. The Savior of the world comes for men and women, for the blind and the lame, and for those who are humble and broken.

THEME 3—JESUS AND THE PLAN OF GOD

As we studied in Matthew, Jesus is bringing the plan of God to fruition. Like Matthew, Luke ties the story of Jesus back to the Old Testament. Carson and Moo note, “What happens in the ministry of Jesus happens because God is working out a program that he had set in place long ago.”¹⁵ The story of the Bible is the story of the unfolding of God’s plan. Luke portrays the life and ministry of Jesus as bringing this plan “to its decisive point.”¹⁶

16. Skim Luke 1:46–56, 67–79. How do these passages develop the theme of God’s Plan?

One of the ways that we can trace this theme through the book of Luke is by noting the places where the phrase “it is necessary” occurs in the Gospel. What is happening in the life of Jesus “is necessary” as it is part of the larger plan that God is bringing to pass. Not one plan of God can be thwarted (Job 42:2), and thus God’s Word “must” (Luke 24:44) be fulfilled.

¹⁵ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 219.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 219

17. Pick four of the following passages and summarize what “must” (or is “necessary”) in each: Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7; 24:44

Luke 2:49

Luke 4:43

Luke 9:22

Luke 13:33

Luke 17:25

Luke 21:9

Luke 22:37

Luke 24:7

Luke 24:44

It is clear from these passages that Jesus saw his work on earth as carrying forward the plan of his Father. The Scriptures “must” be fulfilled and the Son of Man “must be delivered over to sinful men.” The reason it was necessary for those things to happen is that they were all part of the plan of God (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:23–28).

18. How does tracing the theme of God’s plan help you trust him more and persevere through hard times?

THEME 4—JESUS: THE LORD OF ALL

The word for Lord (*kyrios*) is used 252 times within the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. Of those 252 occurrences, 104 of those are found in Luke (41%). The remaining 148 occur in Matthew, Mark, and John. The theme of Jesus’ Lordship in Luke’s Gospel is clear. Indeed, if Luke were writing to reassure Theophilus, then reminding Theophilus that Jesus is truly the resurrected Lord would be a helpful way to encourage his reader (cf. 1:43; 2:11).

It is true that the title “Lord” is not always in reference to Jesus. However, the idea of Lordship permeates the book as both Jesus and the Father (cf. 1:6; 10:21) are presented as Lord.

Read the following sample passages: Luke 3:4; 5:5, 8; 10:17; 10:40; 17:5; 20:44.

19. What is the significance of calling someone Lord in your mind? If Jesus is our “Lord,” then what does that mean for us?

Day 4 Summary

Today we have surveyed how Jesus came as the Savior of the world, which included the outcasts of society. Christ Jesus embraced those who were marginalized and unwelcome in the prevailing culture. And this was all part of God’s plan. The Old Testament promises came to fruition in the life of Jesus, which is why the Scriptures “must be fulfilled.” As Jesus fulfills God’s plan he does so as one who is Lord. He is not a mere prophet, nor a mere man, but he is Christ Jesus the Lord. We bow our knees to our Lord and serve him and enjoy him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.



Day 5

Today we step back and consider the whole book of Luke and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into the book of Luke and allow you to work through the overarching message of Luke for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of Luke. What do you think Luke is *mainly* trying to get across to his reader(s)? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his Gospel account? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the Gospel of Luke in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary of Luke:

One-Paragraph Summary of Luke:

The Gospel of John

4

🔗 INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John is a favorite among Christians. It contains what is probably the most famous and often-quoted verse in the Bible (John 3:16) and describes the incarnation of Jesus in unique terms (1:14). The Gospel of John is both a profound and simple book.

The Gospel of John seeks to convey that Jesus is the Divine Son of God who gives life to all who believe in him. Unique among the canonical Gospels, John sets Jesus forth as the one in whom all people must believe in order to be brought into a relationship with their heavenly Father.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of John.
- see how John explains the divinity of Jesus.
- understand what it means to believe in Jesus and the results (both now and future) of that belief.
- be familiar with how John develops the idea of the Trinity in his Gospel.



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: John 1–5
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 6: “John”

Author

Though much has been written debating the author of the Gospel of John, there is a long history of attributing authorship to John the son of Zebedee. This is the same John who wrote 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation. The reason for asserting this particular John as the author is based upon both internal and external evidence.

1. According to *Introducing the New Testament*, who wrote the Gospel of John?

Internal Evidence

Craig Blomberg notes, “the internal evidence points to an individual to whom five passages refer as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).”¹⁷ It is this disciple who apparently wrote the Gospel account (21:20, 24). Traditionally, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is believed to be John the son of Zebedee.

External Evidence

The early church gives overwhelming support to this conclusion. Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and others all understand John the son of Zebedee to be the author. Of particular importance is the testimony of Irenaeus, who obtains

¹⁷ Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 170.

his information from Polycarp, a disciple of John! Irenaeus recounts that in his conversations with Polycarp, he came to learn that Polycarp “had received them [the words of John and others ‘concerning the Lord’] from the eyewitnesses of the word of life, and reported all things in agreement with the Scriptures.”¹⁸

Conclusion

There seems to be no convincing reason to reject the testimony of the early church on the point of authorship. On the other hand, whether it was in fact John the son of Zebedee or some other person who wrote the book does not undermine the authority of the book itself. As Leon Morris states, “The book is authoritative whoever wrote it.”¹⁹

Recipients

John likely writes this Gospel to Christians “expecting [the contents] to reach his unbelieving audience via Christian readers.”²⁰ Since discussions of recipients, or “destination,” are speculative, we simply state that John likely wanted his writing to reach a wide audience that included both Christians and others.

2. Why would John want this account to have the widest possible circulation? Read John 20:31 as you consider the question.

18 Walter A. Elwell, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (2nd ed.; Encountering biblical studies; Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 109.

19 Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 4.

20 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004), 8.

STRUCTURE

When discussing the structure of John, we should remember that it continues to be studied and discussed by many scholars. This should caution us from being too hasty in our structural analysis of the fourth Gospel. Yet, this does not mean that we are unable to discern a macrostructure of the book.

3. Review *Introducing the New Testament* (44–46). Use bullet points to reflect the structure offered in your reading.

Two Large Sections

In this structure there are two large blocks that are noted. According to some, the first large block (John 1:19–10:42) is meant to capture the “sign” element that is prevalent in Jesus’ ministry as portrayed by John.²¹ The second part of the book (John 13:1–20:31) focuses on the exaltation of Jesus (his passion or glory) in his cross and resurrection.

A Transitional Section

According to your textbook, a transitional section is located in Chapters 11 and 12.

4. How does the story of Lazarus in Chapter 11 foreshadow what is anticipated in 12:1–11? How does this transitional section prepare the reader for the second major section of John’s Gospel?

²¹ Mark Dever writes, “John has been called the book of signs because he uses this word and because he gives careful attention to showing how those signs demonstrate Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God” (Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament*, 111).

Rising Opposition to Jesus

In John 11:45–54 the opposition to Jesus increases dramatically. From this point on, “[the Jewish leaders] made plans to put [Jesus] to death” (11:53). Thus, Jesus “no longer walked openly among the Jews...” (11:54).

In John 8:12–10:42 we find continuing signs and works, but also growing confrontation. Skim John 11:45–54 and note the rise in opposition.

Observing the growing opposition to the ministry of Jesus should serve to remind us that even though Jesus was initially welcomed by the multitudes, his ministry would have an increasingly polarizing effect. Some would love Jesus and follow him; others would hate him and ultimately cry for his blood (cf. John 19:15).

Day 1 Summary

John the son of Zebedee is most likely the author of the fourth Gospel. He writes a unique account of the life of Jesus, likely seeking to evangelize Jewish readers. Because of the evangelistic overtones of the Gospel, it is certain that John hoped for the widest possible circulation of his letter. The Gospel can be broken down into two main sections, a Book of Signs and a Book of Glory (or Passion). Though this is simplistic, it is nonetheless pedagogically helpful as we seek to keep the flow of John’s Gospel in mind. As the story unfolds in John, Jesus is increasingly opposed, and like the climax of a symphony, the story finds its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Day 2

THEMES

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, John 6–10

THEME 1—JESUS: GOD IN THE FLESH

The canonical Gospels are all concerned with presenting Jesus and his ministry to the world. They are a type of biography that means to preserve and pass on the good news of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel presents Jesus in similar, but unique ways. Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of Man who ushered in the “Kingdom of Heaven”; Mark describes Jesus as the Son of God who gives his life as a ransom; and Luke lays out a carefully crafted historical account of the ministry of Jesus and his mission to save the world. John gives a complementary picture of Jesus that highlights similar themes while adding needed depth. One theme that John highlights, like that of Mark, is that Jesus is the Son of God. John, however, makes it more explicit that as the Son of God, Jesus is of the same *essence* as God. Thus, the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is developed in John to a degree not found in the other Gospel accounts.

We begin today by noticing how Jesus is described in divine terms within the Gospel of John. He is not simply another man; he is *God in the flesh*.

5. If someone asked if you believed Jesus was God, what would you say? Using your current knowledge of John’s Gospel (and the Bible in general), what texts would you use to assert that Jesus was God?

The Use of Theos—One way to show that John taught that Jesus is God is to notice how he identifies Jesus in certain passages. There are times within John’s Gospel that he employs the Greek term “theos” in reference to Jesus! This is the Greek word that means “God.” It is explicitly used of Jesus in John’s Gospel.

6. Read the following passages and record your thoughts concerning what each passage teaches us about the identity of Jesus:

John 1:1–4

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:18

⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

John 20:28

⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

The Authority of Jesus—Not only does John use the term for “God” to refer to Jesus, but he also records (as do all the Gospel writers) how Jesus exercises authority over nature. As the one who stands as God’s agent of creation, Jesus has absolute authority over the natural world.

7. Read the following passages and record what element(s) Jesus exercised his authority over.

John 2:1–11

¹On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John 4:46–54

⁴⁶So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵²So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

John 6:16–21

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

John 11:1–44

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” ¹²The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”

¹³Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

¹⁷Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here,

my brother would not have died.²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.³⁴ And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”³⁵ Jesus wept.³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

By themselves these miracles are not enough to prove that Jesus was God. However, when combined with the use of *theos* (“God”) to refer to Jesus, and that “I Am” statements in John, these miracles provide powerful evidence that Jesus is God in the flesh. It is to the previously mentioned “I Am” statements that we now turn.

The “I AM” Statements—The “I Am” statements are significant as they identify Jesus with Yahweh. In Exodus 3:14 the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates the Hebrew “I Am” with the exact construction we find in the “I Am” statements in John. In their Old Testament context these statements are used with reference to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the great “I Am.” In the New Testament, Jesus says he is “I Am.”

The “I Am” statements can be broken down into two basic categories: *Absolute* and *Metaphorical*. The absolute statements probably reflect the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 43:10; 47:8, etc.) and more plainly are used to assert the identity of Jesus. The metaphorical statements are less clear and harder to understand (cf. 6:60; 10:19).

THINK: Read a few of the following passages and notice the usage of the absolute, “I Am.” John 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 18:5

8. The statement in John 8:58 is perhaps the most significant “I Am” statement in John. What happens immediately following John 8:58 that tells us this statement should be understood as a specific claim to be God?

John 8:58–59

⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Below are the metaphorical statements in John. These statements are *figures of speech* that are meant to help the reader understand the true identity of Jesus.

9. Read at least three of the following passages and identify the metaphor. Use the *ESV Study Bible* notes and cross references to glean insight into the Old Testament context and theological significance of each statement.

John 6:35, 48, 51

John 8:12; 9:5

John 10:7, 9

John 10:11, 14

John 11:25

John 14:6

John 15:1

Day 2 Summary

Today we have surveyed a major theme of John's Gospel, and a central tenet of the Christian faith. That is, we have looked at John's presentation of Jesus as the divine Son of God. John makes this point in a number of different ways. First, he refers to Jesus as *theos*, which is the Greek term for God. Second, John demonstrates through his storytelling that Jesus has complete control over the natural world. And third, John records the use of the "I Am" statements by Jesus. These things combine to develop more fully than any other Gospel the truth that Jesus is God in the flesh.

Day 3

THEMES CONTINUED

THEME 2— SON OF GOD

The Gospel of John does not present Jesus as anything less than divine. But it does present him in more ways than this. For instance, he is God, and he is God's Son. These two truths come together to elevate the person of Jesus in the mind of the reader.

As we saw in the study of Mark, the title Son of God does not necessarily refer to divinity. In the Old Testament the term "son of God" can simply refer to the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:22; c.f. 31:9; Hosea 11:1). Thus, Israel is known often as the "son of God." The Davidic king is also spoken of as God's son (Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 89:26–27). These two examples should lead us to think carefully about how we understand the "Son of God" language in the New Testament, and John specifically. So just what does the phrase "Son of God" mean?

Intimacy—One thing this title does display is the intimate relationship that the Father and the Son enjoyed. The Father-Son relationship that existed between Jesus and God the Father is one of closeness.

10. Read at least four of the following passages and notice the intimate relationship that Jesus enjoyed with the Father.

1:18

3:16

5:19–29

8:54

10:22–30

15:1–17

16:28

17:5

Functional Submission—This intimate relationship involved submission and perfect obedience to the Father on part of the Son. This does not mean that the Son was inferior to the Father in terms of their essential nature. Both the Father and Son are divine. Functionally, however, the Son submitted himself to the will of the Father to carry out the plan of redemption. This can be seen in John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38–39, each of which speaks of Jesus coming to do the will of his Father.

11. How does the submission of Jesus to the will of the Father instruct us as we submit to the authority figures in our own lives?

Son of God and Messiah—John’s use of the title “Son of God” (9 times) does more than simply speak of intimacy and submission. Thomas R. Schreiner has written:

“There is some evidence in John...that ‘Son of God’ is equivalent to ‘Messiah.’ I suggested earlier that when Nathaniel exclaimed that Jesus was the ‘Son of God’ and ‘the King of Israel’ (John 1:49), he did not mean by ‘Son of God’ that Jesus is divine. ‘Son of God’ in this instance is simply another way of saying that Jesus is the Messiah.”²²

12. In the quote above Schreiner asserts that Nathaniel likely meant to identify Jesus as the Messiah by combining the titles “Son of God” and “King of Israel.” Likewise, in John 11:27 Martha uses “Christ” and “Son of God” in what appears to be synonymous ways. Why does “Son of God” combined with “Christ” or “King of Israel” lead one to believe that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah?

The “Son of God” language in John’s Gospel gives us a magnificent glimpse into the person and ministry of Jesus. This language serves to highlight the close and intimate relationship that the Father had with the Son. It also reminds us that the Son submitted to the will of God while not sacrificing equality with God in terms of essence. Lastly, in John the “Son of God” is the Messiah, the Davidic King, which the people of Israel had longed for.

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008), 241.

THEME 3—BELIEF

Once John has established that Jesus is God, and the Son of God, he expects the reader to “believe” in him. This is the stated purpose of the Gospel. In John 20:31 John says he has written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Belief is an important and obvious theme in the Gospel of John. The verb form of “belief” occurs ninety-eight times in John (other forms also occur frequently). The frequent usage, as well as the significant contextual occurrences, alerts the reader to one of John’s biggest concerns. The Apostle very much desires that the readers of his Gospel would “believe” in Jesus and have abundant life (John 10:10). To trace this theme within John we can first look at the evidence meant to inculcate belief. Then we will turn our attention to various images of belief. Finally the content and results of belief must be mentioned.

Reasons for Believing—As the reader moves through John’s account they are confronted with numerous signs (or miracles) that Jesus performs. These signs are meant to lead to belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

13. What was the first “sign” that Jesus performed according to John?

14. Why do you believe in Jesus? What “sign” in John’s Gospel has impacted your view of Jesus the most?

Images of Belief—In John’s Gospel there are various images that are used to describe belief in Jesus. Each of these images serves to help the reader understand what John means by “belief” in Christ. Belief is not *mere* mental assent to facts about who Jesus is, or even what he did on the cross. For John, believing in Jesus means relying on him for life; trusting in him for salvation like you trust in water or food to sustain you.

15. Look up several of the passages below and record the image used to describe belief in John.

John 4:10–14; 7:37–38

John 6:35, 47–48, 50–51, 53–58

John 6:53–56

John 6:56; 8:31; 15:7

Content of Belief—What exactly are we supposed to “believe”? Once we have seen that the “signs” in John are meant to lead us to believe, and we understand a little bit about the nature of belief from the various images in John, we need to understand a more about the content of belief. New Testament theologians Walter Elwell and Robert Yarbrough write, “...often John defines what Christ calls people to believe in. It is an impressive list.”²³ They then give a list of things that make up the content of belief according to John. Readers are to believe in:

- God (14:1)
- God as the one who sent Jesus (12:44)
- What the Old Testament says (2:22; 5:46–47)
- Jesus as the one sent by God (6:29)
- Jesus’ name (2:23)
- Jesus himself (3:18; 4:39; 10:42; 12:42, etc)
- Jesus as the Son of Man (9:35–38)
- Jesus Miracles (10:38)
- Jesus as the Messiah (11:27; 20:31)
- What Jesus says (8:45–46; 14:11)²⁴

²³ Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 113.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

16. If someone asked you what he or she had to “believe” in order to be saved, what would you say?

Result of Belief—If someone believes in Jesus, what happens? This is the ultimate reason that John writes, to call people to believe. And the good news is that when someone believes in Jesus something amazing happens!

17. What is the result of believing in Jesus? Use at least one passage from John to support your answer.

Day 3 Summary

Today we have studied how John presents Jesus as the Son of God. That is, there was an intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Yet, even though there was intimacy, there was also submission. The Son submitted to the will of the Father, while never sacrificing equality in terms of essence. Both the Father and the Son are completely divine. Furthermore, the Son of God language is tied to promise and expectation of a coming Messiah. Jesus was the “anointed” Son of God who has arrived. Given that the Messiah has arrived, the people of the world should believe in him. Upon believing in Jesus men and women would not perish but have everlasting life.

Day 4

THEMES CONTINUED

Today will be highlighting a number of themes that are present within the Gospel of John. Each theme will receive the briefest of descriptions along with relevant passages.

THEME 4—REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY

John has a distinct emphasis on the present reality that those who have believed in Jesus can enjoy eternal life in the present. On the other hand, those who have failed are condemned in the present. The results of believing, or failing to believe, are not merely future-oriented. Believing in Jesus has present implications! In this sense, the end of the ages is in our midst.

18. Read the following passages and note the whether the orientation is future or present:

John 3:18

¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:36

³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 4:23

³ *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*

John 5:24

²⁴ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

19. How does the fact that the believer already possesses eternal life serve as fuel for taking the gospel to the hardest places on the planet?

THEME 5—THE TRINITY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Trinity—the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to the Christian faith. Though the term “trinity” is never used in the Bible, it nonetheless captures a core doctrine that Christians have affirmed since the inception of Christianity. According to Carson and Moo, “The elements of what came to be called the doctrine of the Trinity find their clearest articulation, within the New Testament, in the Gospel of John” (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, 278).

What is the doctrine of the Trinity? Read this definition from Wayne Grudem:

“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”²⁵

²⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England : Grand Rapids, Mich: Inter-Varsity Press ; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 226.

Though this is a difficult doctrine to comprehend (and comprehending fully may be impossible), it seems to be the clear teaching of the New Testament. The Gospel of John presents this doctrine in clear terms and warrants our inclusion here.

20. Read the following passages. Can you identify the persons of the God-head (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in each passage?

John 1:14

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:32

³²And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

John 10:30

³⁰I and the Father are one."

John 14:15–17

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit—the person of the Holy Spirit is given a good deal of attention in John’s Gospel. Below are two places where the Spirit is emphasized:

21. Read the following passages and record as much as you can about what each passage teaches about the of the Spirit.

John 14:15–31

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

²⁵“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

John 16:4–15

⁴But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”

THEME 6—MISUNDERSTANDINGS

As Jesus teaches he is frequently misunderstood. The author frequently highlights these misunderstandings with the use of irony within the Gospel. No Gospel better preserves the ways in which Jesus’ contemporaries (including his own disciples) misunderstood him until after his exaltation.

22. Read at least two of the following passages and notice the misunderstandings:

2:19–22

4:7-30

7:32-36

10:1-6

14:1-6

23. Even the disciples of Jesus misunderstood at times. Are there times when you misunderstand something the Bible says? According to John, who guides?

Day 4 Summary

Today we have seen that the blessings of salvation are not merely future oriented. If you are a believer in Jesus today you already have eternal life and are awaiting the full realization of that life at the return of Jesus. One of the present blessings is that the promised Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, currently dwells in the believer. The Spirit convicts the world and leads the believer into truth, while glorifying Jesus. However, there is much misunderstanding on the part of those Jesus encountered. He often spoke and taught in ways that confused his hearers and left them perplexed. Thankfully, as we believe in Jesus and the Spirit takes up residence within us, we are led into all truth.



Day 5

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Today we step back and consider the whole book of John and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is intended to send you back into the book of John and allow you to work through the overarching message of John for yourself.

Begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of John. What do you think John is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his Gospel account? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the Gospel of John in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One Sentence Summary:

One Paragraph Summary:

The Book of Acts

5

📖 INTRODUCTION

The life of Jesus is partially recorded in the four canonical Gospels. In our English Bibles the Book of Acts follows the Gospel accounts. The Book of Acts captures for us the movement of the gospel of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The work and words of Jesus are entrusted to faithful disciples who, upon receiving the Holy Spirit, are empowered to preach the news of Christ to the world.

The Book of Acts could be titled *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, or *The Book of the Spirit*, or *The First Christian History Book Ever Written*. It is the earliest selective²⁶ account of the expansion of the Christian Church after the ascension of Jesus. Reading through the book leaves us appreciating the fortitude and resiliency of early believers, as well as appreciating the power of the Spirit who works through the saints for the salvation of sinners.

The Book of Acts is a concise history of the advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of earth through Spirit-empowered disciples. Proclaimed first in Jerusalem, the good news of Jesus then moves into the surrounding regions of Samaria and Galilee. Finally, the gospel arrives with Paul in Rome, the end of the known world.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- ▶ have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Acts.
- ▶ begin to understand prescriptive and descriptive interpretative challenges in Acts.
- ▶ understand how Acts contributes to our understanding of God's unfolding plan.
- ▶ understand how the message of salvation comes through Spirit-empowered witnesses in Acts.

²⁶ It is selective because we know that a complete history could not fit into a mere twenty-eight chapters. It is obvious that Luke chose to focus on specific events, places, and people. Jerusalem, Peter, the conversion of Paul, etc., are all strategic stories that Luke relates that best communicate his message.



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: Acts 1–8*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: Acts*

Author

Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, is also the author of Acts. This was the testimony of the earliest Christians and is held to be true today by most scholars. It seems to be the second volume of a two-volume work presented to Theophilus. We studied a bit about Luke a few weeks ago, but we should pause at this point and note the presence of Luke in the story of Acts.

When you read Acts there are times when the narrator seems to be present in the story itself. That is, he isn't simply telling the story after hearing about it from another person. The narrator was physically present in the scene being described and is telling the story as he remembers it. This is evident from what has traditionally been understood as the "we" passages in Acts.

In the narrative of Acts there are times when the author uses a 3rd person plural pronoun ("they" or "their") to describe an event. There are other times, however, when he switches to the 1st person plural ("we"). In those instances it is clear that the author is part of the scene, or group, being described.

THINK: Read the following passages and notice the presence of the first person pronoun, "we."

Acts 16:10–17

¹⁰And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

¹⁶As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

As Paul receives the Macedonian Call, Luke includes himself in the group as they depart for Macedonia.

Acts 20:5–21:18

^{20:5}These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, ⁶but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. ⁸There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. ⁹And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” ¹¹And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹²And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

¹³But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴And when

he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. ¹⁵ And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

^{21:1} And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

An extended narrative, including Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, in which it is clear that Luke is present with Paul.

Acts 27:1–28:16—*Luke is present during the dangerous voyage to Rome.*

Recipients

The opening of Luke and the opening of Acts both record Theophilus as the recipient of the letter. It could be that Theophilus is simply a friend of Luke that had questions about the Christian faith. Theophilus may have also been someone who bore the financial burden of publishing what Luke wrote. That is, it certainly would cost money to have these things published for a larger audience and Theophilus may have financed the project.

1. In your reading of *Introducing the New Testament*, the authors claim Theophilus was the recipient. However, they also claim there was a wider audience in mind. This leads them to note several purposes for the Book of Acts. What purposes do the authors list?

Interpretative Issues:

Literary Genre and Prescription versus Description

Literary Genre—Before moving into discussions of the structure of Acts, it is helpful to pause and consider two important issues concerning this book. First, we need to discern what type of literature we are reading whenever we come to the study of individual biblical books. We believe that we should interpret the Bible in its historical and literary context. That is, we believe that individual books of the Bible should be interpreted in light of their historical setting and according to their specific genres.

Consider the following excerpt concerning historical and literary context.

“There are two basic kinds of questions one should ask of every biblical passage: those that relate to context and those that relate to content. The questions of context are also of two kinds: historical and literary... The historical context, which will differ from book to book, has to do with several things: the time and culture of the author and his readers, that is, the geographical, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author’s setting; and the occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre. All such matters are especially important

for understanding...Essentially, literary context means first that words only have meaning in sentences, and second that biblical sentences for the most part only have clear meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences. The most important contextual question you will ever ask—and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph—is, ‘What’s the point?’ We must try to trace the author’s train of thought. What is the author saying, and why does he or she say it right here? Have made that point, hat is he or she saying next, and why?”²⁷

2. Review the section, “What Style of Literature is Acts” in *Introducing the New Testament*. What style of literature is Acts?

Description vs. Prescription—When we understand that we are reading “theological history,” we are better prepared to ask questions of interpretation. We know that Luke is not *merely* concerned with recounting history. Luke also intends to teach the reader important theological truths as he writes. This is where a bit of confusion could possibly emerge. As Luke writes Acts, and later readers encounter what Luke has written, the question of *description versus prescription* arises.

Do you know the difference between *description* and *prescription*? This is a massively important distinction to keep in mind. At certain points a writer may simply be describing an event. In describing an event, or a speech, a writer may not be giving his or her approval to what has transpired and *is not necessarily* calling for the same type of action or speech for those who live in a different time.

Consider the following example of a *descriptive* story that is simply descriptive.

“On Sunday afternoon my wife and I took our two children to the park next to our home. We walked along the sidewalk until we reached the paths in the park. Then, my oldest son wanted to race. I raced him along the path until we reached the playground while my wife walked with our youngest son behind us. Once we reached the playground my two sons played on the slides while my wife sat on the park bench and watched. As I sat next to her I had the inclination to climb a nearby tree and watch the kids play.”

²⁷ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.), 26–28.

The above story is merely *descriptive* of what transpired on a Sunday afternoon. It tells you what happened (*description*) but does not tell you what do (*prescription*). The story says that “I” took my kids to the park, but does not command you to do so. It tells you “I” raced my son, but doesn’t tell you to do the same. It also tells you that “I” climbed a tree, but that is not written to urge you to climb a tree!

However, there are times when something is *described* while at the same *prescribing* an action or belief. For instance, when Jesus is proclaimed as the only name given among men by which a person can be saved (Acts 4:12), Luke seems to teach a certain theological truth. Thus, in his recounting of this speech of Peter, Luke would certainly be affirming a point of theology that is *prescriptive* for the Church at all times and in all places. That is, we are called to believe this New Testament teaching about the exclusivity of Christ. Likewise, consider the paradigmatic statement of Jesus in Acts 1:8. Though disciples today are not called to begin their missions work in Jerusalem, the call to be “witnesses” to the ends of the earth is most assuredly prescriptive (cf. Matt. 28:19–20).

Day 1 Summary

Today you have read the first seven chapters of Acts and are being introduced to the earliest record of the expansion of the gospel. Luke is picking up where his Gospel left off and is recounting for Theophilus the earliest growth of the church. As an eyewitness to much of what Luke is recounting, he is particularly able to write this *theological history*. Though it is history that he writes, Luke is concerned with teaching theological truths. Thus, much of what he writes is simply descriptive. However, the reader must remember that certain things within Acts are meant to be prescriptive throughout the ages.

Day 2

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STRUCTURE

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Acts 9–13
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Review Chapter 7 for Acts’ structure (“A. What is Acts About?”)

There is a long tradition of Acts 1:8 being paradigmatic for entirety of Acts. Jesus tells his disciples that they shall be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Others have noted that there are basically two primary individuals within the narrative and the book could be structured around them. These two individuals are Peter and Paul. The first part of Acts is said to focus on Peter (Acts 1–12) while the second part focuses on Paul and his ministry (Acts 13–28).²⁸

THINK: Skim Acts 1:8. Using your *ESV Study Bible* map on page 2075 and Map 9 in the back of the study Bible, identify the regions mentioned in 1:8. Locate each region names in 1:8.

3. Fill out the table below, using the structure of Acts given in your reading of *Introducing the New Testament*.

Structure of Acts

Section Summary	Passage
Foundations for the church and its mission; the church in Jerusalem.	
Wider horizons for the church: Stephen, Samaria, and Saul.	
	Acts 9:32-12:24
Paul Turns to the Gentiles.	
	Acts 16:6-19:20
	Acts 19:21-28:31

²⁸ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 286.

We once again need to be reminded that Acts should be considered alongside of the Gospel of Luke. We are wise to remember that Luke most likely had both volumes in mind as he was writing. Therefore it is legitimate to allow the two books to come together at various points in our study. In considering the structure of Acts we should be reminded of the apparent structural relationship that exists when combined with the Gospel of Luke.

In short, The Gospel of Luke is concerned with his readers seeing Jesus moving towards Jerusalem to accomplish the mission his Father gave him. Then, in Acts, the news of what Christ has done moves back into the world so that men and women could be saved and reconciled to God.

The end of Luke and the beginning of Acts are important as they both recount the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Luke ends his Gospel with these two events and uses those same events to introduce Acts. Thus, the whole story turns on the central event of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ. The Gospel of Luke takes us to the cross while the Book of Acts shows the good news of the cross going into the world.

4. Consider three of the the following passages and note the move of the gospel. How does Acts 1:8 seem paradigmatic in each case?

8:1–5

10:1–48

13:1–3

16:6–10

27:1

28:11-16

Day 2 Summary

Today you have finished reading what many consider to be the first part of Acts (if Acts has two large parts). You have read about the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem, through Samaria, and into places like Syria. In a very real sense, the Book of Acts continues the story where the Gospel of Luke had left off. As Luke's Gospel took the reader to the cross of Christ, the Book of Acts records the expansion of the good news of the work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. As we shall see, when Acts concludes the good news of Jesus has been taken to the furthest reaches of the known world (Rome).

Day 3

THEMES

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Acts 14–18

THEME 1—THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S PLAN

How hard is it to trust someone who never follows through? You know that type of person. It is the person who always promises to do something, offers to take care of a bit of business, but they never deliver. People like that are hard to trust. Instead, we tend to trust those who are faithful to their word. We usually put our hope in those who do what they say they will do. Those people earn our respect and garner our trust. It is the second type of person who is a reflection of the God of the Bible. Our God is faithful to keep his word. What he says he will do, he does.

In this study we have often quoted from Mark Dever’s *The Message of the New Testament*. That book is part of a two-volume set that covers the entire canon of Scripture. The first volume is *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*. The second volume is *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept*. These two titles capture the idea that God has made certain promises, or asserted that he will do specific things, and faithfully brings those promises to fulfillment. In Acts, God continues to unfold his plan through Jesus’ disciples.

How does Luke announce the unfolding of God’s plan in Acts? D.A. Carson and Doug Moo write, “The specific mechanisms by which the plan of God is announced in the gospel are continued in the book of Acts: the note of divine necessity...angelic intervention...visions...the fulfillment of Scripture” (*CM*, 322). Let’s take each “mechanism” mentioned by Carson and Moo and survey a couple of passages concerning each one.

5. Look up the passages below. These passages strike a note of “divine necessity.” That is, since God had planned certain things, they *necessarily* come to pass. In each passage, what “must” take place?

Acts 1:16

Acts 9:15–16

Acts 14:21–22

6. In two of the three passages above the theme of suffering is presented as something that “must” take place. In 9:15–16 it is Paul who “must” suffer, while in 14:21–22 it is Paul who tells other Christian that they “must” suffer. Record your thoughts on the following: Why must Christians suffer? Who do we reflect when we suffer for the sake of the gospel? How do we stand firm in the midst of suffering? What form of suffering do you see around the world and in your own life for the sake of the name of Jesus?

Another mechanism that Carson and Moo mention is that of angelic interventions. These are instances in Acts where an angel appears and plays an important role in the narrative. These interventions are a divine means of making sure the plan of God continues to move forward.

7. Read two of the the following passages and record the situation that called for the presence and activity of the angelic figure.

Acts 5:19–21

Acts 12:7-11

Acts 27:23-24

Visions also play an important role in announcing the plan of God and its ultimate fulfillment. There are a number of passages in Acts that record the visions of certain individuals. An important vision is found in 10:9–33. This passage recounts the vision of both Peter and Cornelius and sets the stage for the Spirit to fall upon the Gentiles. The plan of God for the seed of Abraham (cf. Matthew 1:1) to be a blessing to the nations (cf. Gen. 12:1–3) is coming to fruition.

As Luke announces the plan of God through these various mechanisms, he notes that the plan is being fulfilled. The reference to specific Old Testament passages clearly display that God is bringing his Word to pass. As we saw in our study of Matthew, the theme of fulfillment is also clear in Acts as Luke ties the narrative to the Old Testament.

8. Read three of the following passages and record what Old Testament passage was being fulfilled.

Acts 2:16-21

Acts 4:11

Acts 8:32-22

Acts 13:32-35

Acts 28:25-28

Two final passages to note are Acts 2:23 and 4:28. These two passages clearly teach that the most horrific event in human history did not happen outside the will of God. That is, the crucifixion of Jesus was part of God's eternal and unstoppable plan.

9. From your consideration of this theme today, are you more inclined to trust or distrust God? Explain your answer?

10. Read Job 42:2. How does it inform how you think about the plan of God in Acts and in the future?

Day 3 Summary

Today you have walked through various passages of Acts where Luke develops the theme of *The Fulfillment of God's Plan*. Luke uses various mechanisms to announce the plan of God and show that it is coming to fruition. Through notes of divine necessity, angelic interventions, visions, and the frequent quotation of Scripture, the audience clearly perceives that God is keeping his promises. Even the most tragic event in all of history, the crucifixion of Jesus, was part of the plan of God. Because God keeps his Word, we are able to place our trust in him as we live in this world awaiting the return of King Jesus.

Day 4

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Acts 19–28

THEME 2—SALVATION

The Gospels present Jesus as the one who came to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21) by giving his life “as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Since Jesus is the only one who did, or could, accomplish everything needed to redeem his people, “there is no other name given among men” by which men and women can be saved (Acts 4:11–12). Luke has presented the work of Jesus in his Gospel and now in Acts he begins to trace the movement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. As the gospel moves out from Jerusalem, men and women repent of their sins, trust in Jesus, and take hold of salvation.

The theme of salvation “is considered by most scholars to be the central theological theme in both Luke and Acts” (Introduction to the New Testament, 322). This is the reason that the disciples are empowered by the Spirit in Acts 2 at Pentecost. At Pentecost they “receive power” (1:8) and are now ready to be the “witnesses” that Jesus had called them to be. As they witness to the death, burial, and especially the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples call for repentance and belief. This is the response that should follow the preaching of the gospel (cf. 2:37–38).

Notice some key passages in Acts that display this theme within the book of Acts.

11. Read at least four of the following passages. How do they display the theme of salvation?

2:21

2:47

4:12

5:31

13:23

13:26

13:47

16:31

28:28

12. Luke focuses on Jesus as the “Savior” and a “message” of salvation. Can you describe why mankind needed a savior? What is the content of the “message”?

THEME 3—THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is named forty-one times within the book itself (not counting the references of just the “Spirit”). From the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, to empowering Paul for ministry, the early church was a Spirit-empowered church.

Pentecost and The Coming of The Holy Spirit—The first thing to notice is the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. In Acts 2 there is a watershed moment in the history of Christianity. God has always been with his people. In the Old Testament he was with Adam and Eve in the Garden. After he chose Israel, he was with them in the Tabernacle. In the New Testament he was with his people in the person of Jesus. And now, Jesus has sent the Spirit to take up residence within us. God is with us and in us! While he resides within his people he empowers them for ministry.

In Acts 1:4–8 Jesus tells the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. As we move into Acts 2 the promise that Jesus makes (cf. John 15:26; 16:7) concerning sending the Spirit becomes a reality. Notice the progression:

Promise Made (John 15:26) ▶ Patience Required (1:4–8) ▶ Promise Kept (2:1–4)

Believers were now “filled with the Holy Spirit.” This phrase occurs five times in Acts and three times in the Gospel of Luke. It occurs nowhere else in the Bible.

13. Have you ever thought of what it means to have the Spirit of God dwelling in you? Take a moment and meditate on this truth and thank God for redeeming you by the blood of his Son and sending his Spirit to dwell in you. Record your thoughts below.

Spirit-Empowered Disciples—When the Spirit of God comes upon people in Acts, one result is that people become powerful preachers. The *ESV Study Bible* notes “believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ” (*ESV Study Bible*, 2074). Men like Stephen, Peter, and even Paul are empowered to herald the message of the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances. This is an important theme of Acts as speeches or sermons make up about a third of the total text of Acts!

If you remember towards the end of Jesus' earthly ministry Peter had denied Jesus three times. He was afraid of being associated with Jesus during his trial. Peter was broken over his failure to stand by Jesus during his darkest hour and wept as a result. Yet, the Spirit would dwell in Peter and transform him into one of the most powerful preachers of the gospel the world has ever known. It is important for our purposes here to note that Peter preached as he did because he was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4).

Two other characters are "filled with Spirit" and proclaim the message of salvation despite hostile circumstances. Stephen is "full of the Holy Spirit" (7:55) and delivers a Christocentric Old Testament sermon (7:1–53) that cuts the hearers to the heart. As a result of his preaching Stephen is stoned to death. One of the onlookers to this stoning is Saul, who later becomes Paul. Paul would himself receive the Holy Spirit (9:17) and be empowered to preach the gospel as far as Rome.

God has sent the Holy Spirit just as Jesus had promised. And as the Spirit has come, he has empowered the Church to be "witnesses" for Christ.

THEME 4—WITNESS

The term "witness" occurs eleven times in Acts. The early believers were "witnesses" for Jesus (1:8). They had been told to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come, and through his empowerment they would carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The term itself is important. This term simply meant that the disciples were to be those who testified to what they had seen and heard. It is also where our English term "martyr" comes from. Today we use this term to refer to someone who gives their life for their belief, or faith. But it didn't originally mean that someone died for his or her faith. After years of Christians giving their lives for what they believed, the term would bear connotations of death.

Skim the passages below, where Luke uses the term "witness" and note the context.

Acts 1:22

beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

Acts 2:40

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

Acts 7:44

Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.

Acts 10:43

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Acts 14:3

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 14:17

Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Acts 15:8

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,

Acts 22:5

As the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

Acts 22:15

For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

Acts 22:20

And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’

Acts 26:16

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.

On Day 1, we read about the interpretative question of *description versus prescription*. It is our belief that when Luke develops the theme of “witness” he is not simply describing the activity of the early church. Instead, this is a prescription for Christians at all times and in all places. We are to tell of what we have seen and heard. Namely, we are to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

14. What does being a witness look like in your own life? Take a moment and record how you can be a witness for Jesus.

15. Consider five people in your life to whom you are able to witness. Write their names in the spaces provided. Commit to praying for them and sharing the gospel when you are able.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Thankfully, we are not left to our own devices in what we are to say in witnessing about Jesus. We have been given the Word of God and are able to simply tell others what it says. It is the Word of God that we share with those who are in need of Jesus and are confident that his Word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

Day 4 Summary

In this lesson we have surveyed Luke’s theme of salvation that we find prominently in Acts. Jesus is proclaimed as Savior, and there is no other name by which we can be saved. This message of salvation is proclaimed through Spirit empowered disciples from Jerusalem to Rome. These disciples are witnesses for Christ. They move from place to place recounting what they have seen and heard. As the Word of God is proclaimed, God saves those who repent and believe. The Book of Acts traces the powerful working of God’s Word throughout the ancient world.



Day 5

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Today we step back and consider the whole book of Acts and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into the text and allow you to work through the overarching message for yourself.

In the space provided begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of Acts. What do you think Luke is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to this book? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize Acts in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary:

One-Paragraph Summary:

The Book of Romans

6

§ INTRODUCTION

This week we turn to the writings of the Apostle Paul. Paul, whom we met in Acts 7, wrote thirteen letters of the New Testament. This is an amazing feat considering who Paul was before his conversion. God met a young man named Saul on the road to Damascus, knocked him to the ground, opened his eyes to the truth, and transformed him into the greatest church planter and theologian the world has ever known. The letters of Paul will receive our attention for the next few weeks.

Today we begin working through Romans. This book is considered by many to be the greatest theological work ever written. We can only begin to plumb the depths of this letter. Consider the words of Martin Luther in reference to Romans:

“This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression. Not only is it well worth a Christian’s while to know it word for word by heart, but also to meditate on it day by day. It is the soul’s daily bread, and can never be read too often, or studied too much. The more you probe into it the more precious it becomes, and the better its flavor.”²⁹

Benjamin L. Merkle has written, “No other letter in the history of the world has received as much attention or has been given as much consideration as Paul’s letter to the church at Rome.”³⁰ There is no doubt that this letter is one of the most significant documents in the New Testament and in our entire Bible.

29 John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* [New York: Anchor, 1962], 19.

30 Benjamin L. Merkle, “Is Romans Really The Greatest Letter Ever Written?” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 3 (2007), 31.

The message of Romans seems to be that the gospel of justification by faith brings about obedience for the glory of God. As Calvin noted, “when any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”³¹

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- ▷ have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Acts.
- ▷ understand how Paul defines the gospel in Romans.
- ▷ understand the biblical idea of justification by faith alone and how it applies to both Jew and Gentile.
- ▷ think about how the gospel connects consistently to the Christian life.

31 John Calvin, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Jean Calvin, Thomas Myers, and Calvin Translation Society, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003) xxix. .



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible*: Romans 1–11
- *Introducing the New Testament*: Romans

Author

It is generally accepted that Paul is the author of Romans. The *ESV Study Bible* notes, “Only a few scholars in history have doubted his authorship, and their doubts have been shown to be groundless.”³² Paul, who we first met as Saul (Acts 7:58), is heading to Jerusalem with a financial gift that has been gathered from the Gentile-Christian churches in other regions. After delivering his gift to the Jerusalem Church Paul plans to move from Jerusalem to Rome. From Rome Paul desires to travel to Spain in order to continue his ministry of engaging those who have never heard the gospel (Romans 15:20, 24).

1. Read Romans 1:1 and 16:22. Paul identifies himself as the author in 1:1 and yet someone named Tertius identifies himself as the author in 16:22. Is this a contradiction? How can you reconcile the two passages?

³² Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version* (ESV text ed.; Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007), 2151.

Recipients

Who is the letter to the Roman church written to? It would seem like this is obvious and that there would be no debate. At one level, this is true. Romans is written “to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” (1:7). Yet, the issues are more complex than this. Since the audience Paul has in mind will shed light on his purpose(s) and themes, we need to survey the debate.

In your assigned reading, it was noted that there are at least three possible options to the question of audience:

1. Entirely or mainly Jewish Christians
2. Entirely or mainly Gentile Christians
3. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians

The third option is most likely because it seems the text of Romans itself has both Jewish and Gentile Christians in mind.

2. Read the passages below and record your thoughts on which group Paul is seems to have in mind:

Romans 1:13–15

Romans 11:13

Romans 14:1–15:13

Romans 16:7, 11

It seems wise to agree with Carson and Moo and see Paul as having both Jewish and Gentile Christians in mind as he wrote. It would be difficult to argue for one over the other as both groups are clearly mentioned in certain portions of the text. We conclude that Paul writes Romans to a Christian community in Rome that is made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

3. Why is it significant to find both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the same congregation?

Purpose

It is helpful to stop at this point in our study and ask *why* Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church. Many of Paul's letters were *occasional*. That is, there were specific issues that had arisen in the midst of particular congregations that prompted Paul to pen a letter. Yet Romans is different in that there does not seem to be an occasion or specific problem that has moved him to write. Taking a moment to consider the purpose of the letter will help us more readily understand the work as a whole.

We must admit that this is a hotly contested issue. Scholars have debated this question at great length and it would be hard to talk about a consensus. One reason for this is that Paul does not clearly articulate a purpose. Do you remember John 20:31? In that text we have a clear purpose statement from John concerning his Gospel. Nothing like that exists in Romans. D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo instruct us to evaluate whether Paul wrote in relation to his own circumstances or that of the Christians in Rome.³³

33 D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 403.

4. In your reading, the authors mention several purposes Paul would have for writing that emerge from his “missionary situation.” What do they mean by his “missionary situation”? How does it prompt Paul to write Romans?

STRUCTURE

A Hellenistic letter would contain an introduction, thanksgiving, the body of the letter, and a closing greeting. Most would agree with this assessment and that Romans falls into this general pattern. What is debated is how the body of the Romans is structured.

It is generally agreed that there is a large section that runs from Romans 1:18 to 11:36. Chapter 12 represents a shift from the theological to the practical (this does not mean that there is not theological material in chapters 12 through 16). The first eleven chapters tend to be more theologically oriented as they deal with things like the universality of sin, justification by faith in Christ, and the ongoing battle with sin as believers are progressively sanctified. In chapter 12 Paul writes that “in view of the mercies of God” (which many scholars consider to be everything that was outlined in Romans 1–11) believers are “to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice...to God” (12:1). Paul then outlines the practical ramifications of the theology contained in the first part of his letter.

5. As we shall see in other letters in the New Testament, authors frequently begin by talking about theology before moving to practical application. Why is this order important? Do you think theology something that is best left in academia or something that is relevant to the Christian life?

6. Review today's reading, and fill in the chart below.

Structure of Romans

Section Summary	Passage
Introduction	
	Romans 1:18-4:25
	Romans 5:1-8:39
The relationship between the gospel and Israel raises a question that requires vindicating God's righteousness.	
The gospel transforms lives.	
	Romans 15:14-16:27

Day 1 Summary

Romans is possibly the greatest letter ever written. In it Paul writes to a congregation of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, possibly with several purposes in mind. These purposes have developed out of his missionary situation. As he has planted churches and dealt with issues that have arisen in these churches, he has been moved to articulate certain truths in as systematic way to the church in Rome. His desire to visit them and use them to be launched into Spain would have undoubtedly led him to desire the Roman church to have a firm footing concerning the gospel.

Day 2

THEMES

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Romans 12—14

THEME 1—THE GOSPEL

Many scholars have identified the gospel as the main theme of Romans. Let's consider the word *gospel* and its meaning before turning to the text of Romans.

7. In one or two paragraphs, define the gospel, as you understand it.

Do you know what the word “gospel” means? It simply means “good news.” That is exactly what we are doing when we share the gospel. We are telling people the good news! What good news? The good news that though we cannot earn a right standing before God, he has provided for our salvation. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). What we deserve is death (6:23). We may be tempted to try to earn the favor of God and escape our fate. But this is a fool's errand. Instead, the good news is that we do not need to try and earn God's favor. In Romans Paul shows us that we can have “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” and its available for “all who believe” (3:22). We are counted righteous by faith (5:1)! This is the news that we have for a lost and dying world. It is good news. It is the gospel.

Does the truth of the gospel make your heart sing? Do you come alive inside when you hear the story of what God has done for you in Jesus? The person who has tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ cannot help but sing the praises of the Savior.

The Bad News—before Paul outlines the good news in Romans, he first describes the bad news. In order to explain how sinful men can stand *righteous* before God, he first needs to convince men that they are sinful and stand as *unrighteous* before God. Paul does this in the first three chapters. Mark Dever states it succinctly, “Paul teaches that all of us need to be justified because all of us have sinned.”³⁵ Stating the bad news first grabs the attention of the audience, creates a need for them to listen carefully, and makes the good news all the more sweet when it follows.

Imagine that as far as you knew you were a perfectly healthy individual. You eat your fruits and vegetables, take a regular jog around the neighborhood, and have regular doctor visits. But one day a friend walks into your living room, sits down beside you while you are rocking in the recliner, and they say they have some great news. You lean forward, eager to hear what they have to say. And then they tell you that they found the one medicine in the world that can make you better.

How would you respond? For all you knew you were in tip-top shape. You feel great and the at your last doctor visit you received a clean bill of health. You wouldn’t know exactly how to respond because you were not aware that you were sick. *That piece of bad news has not been shared.* But if you knew you were sick and that there was nothing that you could do to save yourself before your friend walked in with his news, your reaction would have been much different. You would weep, and sing, and shout because you have just found out that you can be saved!

This is what Paul does in the first three chapters of Romans. He lays the whole world prostrate before God by showing them their sin. He articulates clearly the bad news that we have all sinned (3:23), “none is righteous...” and “no one does good” (3:10–11). Instead, “every mouth” is closed and we are all “accountable to God” (3:19). Paul relates the bad news and leaves us with no option but to fall on our faces and cry out to God.

35 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 151. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

THINK: Do you consider yourself a sinner? Do you consider yourself someone who deserves the wrath of God? Until you feel the weight of your own sin, the gospel will not taste as sweet as it truly is.

Consider the following passages and see if any of them *might* describe you at various points in your life:

- ▷ 1:29–32
- ▷ 2:22–24
- ▷ 3:10–18

Take some time and consider the sins of your own life. Then turn to the gospel and taste how sweet it really is.

The Good News—Why do we say that the gospel is the overarching theme of Romans? We have seen that Paul describes the dire situation that mankind is in because of sin. But what passages lead us to identify the gospel as the overarching theme?

8. Read the following verses and answer the questions listed.

Romans 1:1 — What is Paul “set apart” for?

Romans 1:8-9 — What does Paul serve?

Romans 1:15 — Where is Paul “eager to preach the gospel”?

Romans 1:16 — Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel?

In the exercise above you surveyed the usage of “gospel” in the opening chapter of Romans. Moo points out that when Paul begins to draw the letter to a close he returns to the word and essentially creates a “frame” to the letter (cf. Romans 1:1, 2, 9, 15; 15:16, 19). Therefore, one reason we identify *the gospel* as the overarching theme of the letter is because it frames the entire work.³⁶

If there is a theme verse, or verses, for Romans it has traditionally been understood to be Romans 1:16–17. Before Paul launches into the bad news, he first states that he is “eager to preach the gospel” (1:15) and that he is “not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (1:16–17).

Thus, when we consider the frame of the letter and the contents of what many understand to be the theme verse, it becomes clear why *the gospel* is suggested to be the main theme of Romans.

9. According to Romans 2:12; 3:10–18, 23; and 6:23, why is Paul so concerned with proclaiming the gospel? Are things different today?

³⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (The new international commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1996), 29.

Day 2 Summary

Today we have considered *the gospel* as the overarching theme of Romans. In recent times there has been a healthy focus on the gospel and we are prayerful that this continues. But do *you* know what the gospel is? We have considered the gospel as the good news that God has provided salvation for his people through faith in Christ. But before Paul explains the good news he first explains the bad news. Only in light of the bad news of sin and our unrighteous standing before God does the good news of God's saving work in Jesus taste as sweet as it should. It seems we are right to assert the gospel as the overarching theme because it frames the book of Romans and is prominent in the thematic statement of the book (1:16–17). Paul was eager to preach this gospel to a lost and dying world.

Day 3

THEMES CONTINUED

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Romans 15—16

THEME 2—THE GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

There is a long history of claiming that *justification by faith* is the central theme to the book of Romans. This was the belief of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Calvin claims that justification by faith is “the main subject of the whole Epistle.”³⁷ Justification is the word that Mark Dever uses “to sum up the letter.”³⁸ Though Douglas Moo does not agree, he nevertheless states, “a good case can be made” for justification by faith to be the main theme of Romans.³⁹ So is *the gospel* the main theme, as we asserted yesterday? Or is it *justification by faith*?

It seems that understanding *the gospel* as the broader theme, and thus encompassing *justification by faith*, is the best way forward. Justification by faith is critical to Romans. But it does not seem to be broad enough to capture everything that Paul says in Romans. Nevertheless, it is a critical component of the gospel and we need to understand this theme that is clearly part of Paul’s letter to the Roman church.

It will be helpful to have a good understanding of what we mean by the word “justification.”

“Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.”—Wayne Grudem⁴⁰

37 John Calvin, *The Epistle to the Romans*, xxiv.

38 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 151. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

39 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 28.

40 Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 723.

“To be justified is to be declared right before God.”—Mark Dever⁴¹

The standing of men and women before God is of crucial importance. If on the Day of Judgment, and before the throne of God, you stand in the wrong place, then hell awaits (cf. Matthews 25:31–46). Instead, we need to stand in the right place. But how can those who have worshipped creation instead of the creator (Romans 1:25) and have not feared God (3:18) stand in the right place when judgment comes? To put it another way, how can we be “declared right before God”?

The answer is that we need to be justified. We need God to legally declare us righteous in his sight. We need God to consider the righteousness of Jesus as belonging to us, and our sins belonging to Jesus, so that our sins can be forgiven. And all of this happens when we exercise faith in Jesus (5:1).

10. Consider the Romans 3:9–13 and underline each word that shows that everyone is unrighteous. In 3:14–18 underline the words that capture the nature of our unrighteousness.

Romans 3:9-18

⁹ *“What then? Are we Jews¹ any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written:*

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.”

¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

⁴¹ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 151. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org. 151.

It is clear from this passage that every person is unrighteous. The unrighteousness of mankind is evidenced in grievous patterns of life. It is clear that men and women are in desperate need of a righteous standing before God. And according to Paul, this right standing cannot be earned. That is, a righteous standing before God does not come from works (3:28).

11. Have you ever tried to earn someone's favor or approval? Do you think you can earn God's favor?

As we stated yesterday, the good news is that we do not have to try and earn the favor of God. It is impossible! What Paul tells the Romans, after humbling them under the weight and seriousness of sin, is how men and women can be righteous before God.

Paul shows that men and women are in desperate need of righteousness. The good news is that the "righteousness of God" is available to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). This does not mean that God lacks integrity because he fails to hold people accountable for sin. No, because he punishes sin and satisfies justice at the cross, God shows himself to be both "just and the justifier" (Romans 3:26).

12. Take some time to meditate on Romans 3:21–26. Underline the way in which we take hold of "righteousness." According to this passage, is justification earned or a gift?

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21-26 ESV)

13. The term justification is the theological term explained above that is meant to capture the idea of God declaring individuals righteous. According to Paul, are we justified by faith or by works?

Day 3 Summary

Though the theme of justification by faith does not seem to be the *main* theme of Romans, it is nonetheless critical to Paul's argument. The gospel that Paul is preaching, in part, is the good news that men and women can be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. This results in peace with God, access to grace, and hope in his return (5:1–2). It also results in the power of sin being broken (though the presence of sin remains) and liberates believers from the rule of sin in their lives. Believers are justified at a point in time (when they believe) and then begin to progressively grow into the image of Jesus (Rom. 6–8). The battle to fight off sin and live to the glory of God will not be an easy fight, but in the end the believer can rest assured that those whom God justifies, he will glorify (8:30).

Day 4

THEMES CONTINUED

THEME 3—JEWS, GENTILES, AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

It seems that a problem arises that Paul must address as he discusses the gospel, and specifically justification by faith in Christ. Mark Dever articulates the problem succinctly:

“The problem begins with Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. If we can be justified only by faith in Christ, and Israel has rejected Christ, then it seems that Israel will be rejected. Yet God promised Israel blessing and inheritance through Abraham. Do you see the problem?”⁴²

The problem that Paul anticipates is that God’s faithfulness to his word is at risk of being undermined (9:6a). Romans 9–11 is in large measure Paul’s defense of God’s faithfulness to keep his word and thus put the mind of his reader at ease. God’s word has not and will not fail. So hope in God and do not waiver!

Read this excerpt from John Piper on how Romans 9–11 fits into Paul’s flow of thought in Romans.

“I see the necessity of Rom 9–11 in this: the hope of the Christian, with which Rom 1–8 came to a climax, is wholly dependent on God’s faithfulness to his word, his calls (8:28, 30). But, as Gutbrod asks, ‘Can the new community trust God’s Word when it seems to have failed the Jews?’ (TDNT, III, 386). The unbelief of Israel, the chosen people, and their consequent separation from Christ (Rom 9:3) seem to call God’s word into question and thus to jeopardize not only the privileged place of Israel, but also the Christian hope as well. Therefore, in Paul’s view, the theme of Rom 9–11 assumes that Rom 9:6a (God’s word has not fallen) is the main point which Rom 9–11 was written to prove, in view of Israel’s unbelief and rejection. What is at stake ultimately in these chapters is not the fate of Israel; that is penultimate. Ultimately God’s own trustworthiness is at stake. And if God’s word of promise cannot be trusted to stand forever, then all our faith is in vain.”⁴³

42 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 159. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org. 159.

43 John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1983), 19.

The Jews—though the Jews rejected the Messiah, and were separated from Christ (9:2), the promises of God to Israel seem to be undermined. However, this is not the case. Paul explains that (1) the promises of God to the Jewish people has never been to every single ethnic Israelite, (2) the promises have always been to the children of promise (the elect) and (3) God has not rejected his people because there is now, and always has been, a remnant.

The Gentiles—Paul shows that God has not rejected his people. Furthermore, he proves that Gentiles are in view when it comes to God’s saving plan. He quotes from the Old Testament and shows that Gentile inclusion in the saving work of God is foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Consider these passages that point to inclusion of Gentiles in the saving purposes of God:

Romans 9:25–26

²⁵As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

Paul quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. Commenting on these passages Calvin says, “He proves now that the calling of the Gentiles ought not have been deemed a new thing, as it had long before been testified by the prediction of the prophet.”⁴⁴

Romans 10:11–13

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This passage is important because using quotations from the Old Testament, specifically Joel 2:32, Jews and Gentiles are shown both to be included in the saving work of God.

The People of God—when we understand that Paul brings Jew and Gentile together under the banner of God’s salvific purposes, we lay a foundation for understanding the people of God as transcending cultural and ethnic boundaries. To state it another way, in the Old Testament Israelites were

44 John Calvin, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 371.

the people of God. Yet, those outside of Israel had always been able to be incorporated into God's family. In the New Testament the people of God are not defined by ethnicity. The people of God come from both Jew and Gentile (Romans 9:11–12).

14. Read Romans 11:11–24. Are the people of Israel who believe in Jesus, and the Gentiles who believe, grafted in to two separate “olive tree(s)” or one “olive tree”?

What we have seen is that both Jews and Gentiles are sinful and are in need of being declared righteous. This can happen only through faith in Jesus. And it is available to both the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews, though rejecting the Messiah, have not been rejected. God is busy gathering his people from among the Gentiles, but one day in the future “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

THEME 4—THE GOSPEL AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

One final theme should be noted before closing. Earlier in studying the structure of Romans we said that Paul moves from theology to practice. The theology contained in the first eleven chapters should lead to a renewed mind and transformed life. Mark Dever writes, “The ‘indicative’⁴⁵ of who we are in Christ in chapters 1–11 is followed by the ‘imperatives’⁴⁶ of chapters 12–16, which describe the overall imperative, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”⁴⁷ Put simply, once you grasp the theology of Romans 1–11, then Romans 12–16 should characterize your life.

45 An indicative can be defined as a simple statement of fact.

46 An imperative can be defined as a statement of command.

47 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 163. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

15. Read Romans 12:9–21 and underline the marks of a true Christian.

⁹ *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

¹⁰ *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

¹¹ *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

¹² *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

¹³ *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*

¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

¹⁷ *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.*

¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

¹⁹ *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*

²⁰ *To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”*

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

16. According to Romans 13:1–7, how should Christians regard the governing authorities? What are practical applications for you towards those in positions of authority?

17. Read Romans 14:13–23. Record your thoughts on how you should serve those around you who may be “weaker” in the faith.

Though justification is by faith alone, the faith that justifies does not come alone. That is, the person who has been born again, and placed their trust in Jesus, is a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). The Spirit of God has taken up residence within them and certain fruit should be evident (Gal. 5:22). In Romans Paul shows that the person who has been justified should now “present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [their] spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). As they are transformed, they are given gifts that should be used to serve the body (12:3–8), be marked by certain characteristics (12:9–21), obey the authorities (13:1–7), fulfill the law through love (13:8–14), and care for each other (14:1–24). In all of this we are following the example of Jesus (15:1–7). This is the justified life that we live as we await the return of Jesus (15:8–13).

Day 4 Summary

The gospel is the broad theme that captures the contents of Romans. Part of the gospel is that men and women can be declared righteous in the sight of God by faith in Jesus Christ (*justification by faith alone*). There is no other way to gain a right standing with God other than through faith in Christ. Though the Jews have rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and thus failed to obtain the righteousness of God, God has not forsaken his people. Jew and Gentile can believe in Christ and be saved. The people of God are made up of any person that places their faith in Jesus. Once a person trusts in Jesus and is justified, a transformed life should be the result.



Day 5

.....

Today we step back and consider the whole book of Romans and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into the book of Romans and allow you to work through the overarching message of Romans for yourself.

In the space provided begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of Romans. What do you think Paul is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letter? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize Romans in one sentence. Then, explain your one sentence in one paragraph.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary:

One-Paragraph Summary:

1 & 2 Corinthians

7

§ INTRODUCTION

In today's lesson we turn our attention to Paul's letters to the church at Corinth. The Corinthian Christians did not have the best reputation and these letters are written to address the profound problems in Corinth. Paul had much to say in terms of correction.

It is precisely because the Corinthians were dealing with a number of specific problems that these letters offer wisdom for today. As we navigate today's religiously troubled times, the letters to the Christians at Corinth are particularly helpful.

In 1 Corinthians, we see the error-correcting power of the gospel. Paul writes to explain how the gospel addresses the Corinthian problems and answers their questions. The Corinthian's needed to see how the issues they faced were addressed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the problems are addressed, Paul is driving the point home that *God brings his holy people to maturity*. This is helpful for Christians today as we should look to the gospel in the midst of our troubles and seek to mature in Christ.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of 1 & 2 Corinthians.
- be familiar with the occasion behind these two letters.
- understand how the gospel addresses the sinful problems we face as believers.
- understand how the power of God is displayed in our weaknesses.



Day 1

CONTEXT

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: 1 Corinthians 1–8*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: 1–2 Corinthians*

Author

It is virtually uncontested that Paul is the author of 1 and 2 Corinthians.

We know a bit about Paul already because of our time in Acts and Romans. Yet, in 1 Corinthians (and 2 Corinthians) we see a different side of Paul. He is a man unafraid to say what needs to be said. There are problems in Corinth and Paul does not let the issues slide. In 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul says that the Corinthians are immature Christians at best. In 1 Corinthians 4:21, he threatens to visit with “a rod,” even though he’d rather come in “gentleness.” In 1 Corinthians 5:2, he calls them arrogant and says they are behaving worse than pagans. The point is that Paul does not let Christians live comfortably in their sin. He exercises his pastoral care and concern through his visits and letters.

1. In light of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, if you were to confront someone over their sin, and someone said you were being judgmental, how would you respond?

Recipients

In your reading of Carson and Moo, they refer to the “old Corinth.” This was Corinth *before* it became a Roman colony. The “old Corinth” was tremendously immoral and had garnered a pretty nasty reputation. Despite its immoral reputation, “old Corinth” was a city that rivaled Athens in both size and importance before the Romans destroyed much of it in 146 B.C.⁴⁸ It was rebuilt in 44 B.C. and populated with a great number of Roman citizens. By the time of Paul, Corinth was one of “the wealthiest [cities] in Greece.”⁴⁹

2. According to your reading, should we read the morality of old Corinth into the situation of Corinth in Paul’s day?

Because Rome rebuilt Corinth and populated Corinth with Roman citizens, Paul likely writes to Christians who are from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Since Jews and Gentiles populated the city of Corinth, the church at Corinth was likely an ethnically diverse congregation. With different religious and cultural backgrounds, coupled with the presence of immorality within the city, these Christians were trying to live out their faith in a complex cultural context.

48 Craig Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 163.

49 Ibid.

STRUCTURE (1 CORINTHIANS)

- Review your reading on 1 Corinthians and fill in the chart below.

Structure of 1 Corinthians

(All Answers found on p. 88-89 in Introducing the New Testament.)

Section Summary	Passage
Paul opens with a greeting and thanksgiving.	
	1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21
	1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20
Paul addresses six significant topics that were raised.	
Paul concludes with instructions about a special collection, personal requests, exhortations, and greetings.	

Reports and Questions—It is clear in 1 Corinthians that Paul is addressing at least two things: *reports* and *questions*. Paul has received reports from others about certain issues that needed addressing. He writes, in part, to address what has been reported. It also seems that the Corinthians had posed a number of questions to Paul. He writes (again, in part) to give answers to the questions raised.

There are certain literary keys that indicate what Paul is addressing (*reports* or *questions*).

Reports	Questions
1:10-11—"it has been reported..."	7:1—"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote..."
5:1—"it is actually reported..."	7:25—"Now concerning the betrothed..."
	8:1—"Now concerning food offered to idols..."
	12:1—"Now concerning spiritual gifts..."
	16:1—"Now concerning the collection for the saints..."
	16:12—"Now concerning our brother Apollos..."

As we trace the responses to reports and questions through the letter, it becomes clear that Paul was addressing specific situations. This was not a general letter; Paul had heard about the problems in the Church at Corinth and he would not let the issues go unaddressed. Knowing the context of Corinth and the structure of 1 Corinthians helps us understand the message and its relevance for the church today.

Day 1 Summary

Today, you have learned that Paul is the author of both 1 and 2 Corinthians. The letters are written to a congregation that is likely made up of both Jews and Gentiles who are living in a difficult culture context. Because of the troubles in and outside the church, members of Chloe's house brought reports to Paul. At the same time, the Corinthians have raised questions concerning specific issues. Paul writes to address the problems reported and answer their questions.

Day 2

THEMES (1 CORINTHIANS)

THEME 1—THE GOSPEL AND OUR PROBLEMS

Throughout the letter Paul brings the gospel to bear on the issues he is addressing. “These letters [1–2 Corinthians] show how the unchanging gospel, taught in the languages and cultures of the first century, is first applied to changing circumstances.”⁵⁰ This thematic understanding of 1 Corinthians immediately shows the relevance of this letter to the Church today. Christians must apply the gospel to the issues we are facing. What issues did Paul apply the gospel to in 1 Corinthians?

Factionalism—The first issue Paul addresses is the divisions present within the church. The Corinthians are bragging over which leader they follow (1 Corinthians 1:12–13). Some were evidently proud because one individual or another had baptized them. Yet Paul undermines their whole train of thought by saying he baptized nobody (1:14). Instead he simply preached the gospel (1:17), and not with “eloquent wisdom” (1:17). In the gospel, far from presenting one wise, God has destroyed the wisdom of the world. Through the gospel, the wise are put to shame and the foolish are exalted. In other words, don’t worry about what human personality you align with, we are all fools from the world’s point of view. The apostles were simply workers on God’s behalf (2:9).

4. Is it inherently wrong to have a favorite author, pastor, or theologian? How can you learn from your favorite pastor, author, or theologian and at the same time guard yourself from the type of factionalism that was present in Corinth?

⁵⁰ D.A. Carson and Doug Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 95.

Sexual Immorality—In chapter 5, Paul takes up the issue of sexual immorality. How does Paul address the problem? After chastening the Corinthians for failing to deal with the issue, Paul writes, “you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (6:19–20). How can you take your bodies, which are “members of Christ” (6:15), and use them in a sexually immoral way? The gospel of Jesus, who purchased us and gave us his Spirit (6:19), calls us away from sexual immorality and to holy living. A right understanding of the gospel teaches us that we have been reconciled to God and are members of his body.

5. Explain Paul’s use of the “leaven” imagery in 1 Corinthians 5: 7–13?

Paul mentions various other issues as 1 Corinthians unfolds. Paul addresses these problems and shows how the gospel should transform the life of the believer. In other words, as believers come to a greater understanding of the gospel they should mature in their faith. This will be evident in the way they live their lives.

THEME 2—FROM IMMATURITY TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Paul is specifically concerned with building up (edifying) the body of Christ. He wants sin to be dealt with (cf. 5:7) so that their growth will not be hindered and the gospel will not fall into disrepute. This theme becomes more prominent as the letter develops.

In chapters 8–9, Paul’s concern for building up the church is evident. He has a deep desire to see the church growing into maturity (cf. Colossians 1:28). Specifically, we see this concern in 9:12–13 as Paul would give up meat in order to love his brother. Again, in 9:12 and 9:19, Paul is explicit about surrendering his rights for the benefit of others. For the sake of God’s glory Paul is radically others-focused (see 10:31).

In fact, the whole discussion about spiritual gifts (chapters 12–14) is meant to guide the Corinthians to build each other up in the faith. Every gift is given “for

the common good” (12:7). Again, in 14:3 prophecy is spoken of as being given “for their up-building...” In other words, prophecy “upbuilds the church” (14:4) when used correctly. Simply, “since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church” (14:12). Even in the closing chapter, the principal of building up the church is present. There is a collection for the saints that Paul wants to deliver to Jerusalem (16:1–4). There is little doubt that this is meant to serve the needs of that body and thus edify the Jerusalem Christians.

6. What spiritual gifts do you have? How are you using your particular gifts to build up your local church and the Church universal?

As we seek to build up the church, our hope is that God’s holy people will move into deeper depths of Christian maturity. The problems at Corinth are problems stemming from immaturity (and likely the fact that there are false converts in the congregation!). When the Corinthians are involved in factionalism, they are living as immature believers at best and pagans at worst. When they are engaged in sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5–6), lawsuits with one another (6:1–7), and abusing the Lord’s Supper (11:20–34), they are behaving as infants in Christ (3:1). What the Corinthians need is movement towards maturity and to live as those who have been bought by Christ (6:20; 7:23).

THEME 3—THE RESURRECTION

Finally, Paul’s concern for the resurrection must be mentioned. A mature understanding of the gospel will mean that believers have a right understanding of the resurrection. It seems that some in Corinth may have denied this point of doctrine. Paul’s words are a stinging rebuttal of such a notion. If the resurrection is not a reality then there is no hope because we are “still in [our] sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Paul uses logic to show the necessity of the resurrection.

If the resurrection were not true, then Christ had not been raised (1 Cor 15:13). And if he was not raised, he was not the savior the Corinthians needed.

Paul reminds his readers that an essential element of the gospel is the resurrection. The future hope of the believer is the resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15:35–49). Jesus became the “firstfruits” (1 Cor 15:23) in his resurrection and at his return, “those who belong” to him (1 Cor 15:23) will also be raised. The resurrection is at the core of what the apostles and early Christians proclaimed (cf. Acts 1:22; 4:2, 33; 17:18; 23:6). It is no less central to our lives as Christians today.

Day 2 Summary

Today, we have considered how Paul brings the gospel to bear on the problems that were facing the Corinthian Christians. This is important for us today since we also need to bring the gospel to bear on our problems. In light of the gospel, we are called to live in ways that reflect who we are in Jesus. In other words, we are to be God’s holy people. Since we do not start out mature in Christ, we must continually be striving towards maturity (i.e. holiness of life). We do this on both an individual and corporate level. This means Christians must put away factionalism, flee from sexual immorality, care for each other, and do all things for God’s glory. Furthermore, a central component of the gospel is the resurrection. Mature, Christian thinking will hold fast to this doctrine. Without the resurrection, there is no gospel.

Day 3

2 CORINTHIANS

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, 2 Corinthians 1:1–7:4

Today, we begin considering 2 Corinthians. In this letter Paul shows that the power of God is displayed in weakness. Paul outlines his numerous personal weaknesses and the way in which God is glorified through them.

CONTEXT

The Situation Behind the Letter—Paul had planted the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–17). A good number of Corinthians were baptized as the church began to grow during Paul’s eighteen-month stay (Acts 18:8). After Paul departed from Corinth, he received news from those in Chloe’s house that problems persisted in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11). Paul quickly dispatched what we know as 1 Corinthians to address the reports and answer questions raised by the church. However, at some point Paul received news, likely from Timothy and Erastus (Acts 19:22; 1 Corinthians 16:10), that the problems had not been solved and had in fact worsened. Thus Paul sets out on a second visit that proved to be brief and painful. Evidently, Paul was not well received during this visit. However, Paul would not let things smolder. He wrote a “sorrowful” or “severe” letter that Titus delivered to the Corinthian Church. Titus reported back to Paul that the letter had worked to a degree and that the Corinthians had repented (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:8–13).

It is upon receiving this good report from Titus that Paul begins to write what we know as 2 Corinthians. However, it seems that this letter had taken some time to write and by the time Paul got around to writing the last four chapters (2 Corinthians 10–13) he was made aware of certain problems that still existed within the Corinthian congregation. Thus, at the end of the letter there is a shift in tone that ends an otherwise cheerful correspondence.

STRUCTURE

Second Corinthians contains a fairly simple structure, and is broken down into three main sections that deal with three main issues. The first section (2 Corinthians 1–7) is an explanation of Paul’s apostolic ministry. Section two (Ch. 8–9) addresses the collection that Paul had been gathering for the Jerusalem church. Finally, Paul defends his apostleship in contrast to the “super-apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5) who were plaguing the church (ch.10–13).

7. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of 2 Corinthians

(All Answers found on p. 88-89 in Introducing the New Testament.)

Section Summary	Passage
	2 Corinthians 1:1-11
	2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13
The nature of Christian ministry is tied to a proper estimate of end-time tensions.	
	2 Corinthians 7:5-9:15
Paul responds to a fresh outbreak of opposition at Corinth.	
Paul concludes with a final appeal, greetings, and benediction.	

Let’s briefly summarize three major sections of 2 Corinthians:

Paul’s Explanation of His Ministry (2 Corinthians 2:14–7:16)—In this section Paul seems to digress from his discussion about his travel plans. Yet, this large section seems to serve as the heart of the epistle. Paul explains the nature of his new covenant ministry (2:12–4:6); how he carries out his ministry in an earthly dwelling while longing to put on the heavenly (4:7–5:10); this ministry declares

a message of reconciliation (5:11–21); and he finishes this section by recounting characteristics that marked his ministry and his joy over the Corinthians (6:1–7:4). Paul then returns to his travel narrative (7:5) and expresses his delight as he has heard from Titus about the “godly grief” (7:10) that has produced repentance in the church (7:10).

The Collection (2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15)— Paul references the giving of other Macedonian churches (8:1) and how they gave “beyond their means, of their own accord” (8:3). Paul urges that the collection should be brought to completion and made ready for delivery to the church in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Paul hopes that their giving will be done out of a joyous heart, as “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7).

Paul’s Defense of His Ministry (2 Corinthians 10:1–13:10)—Mark Dever writes that without understanding the “basic fact” that the “new leaders in the Corinthian church had the appearance of strength,” then you “will not understand this letter.”⁵¹ It seems that the “super-apostles” (11:5; 12:11) were “real professionals—educated, certified, and degreed in rhetoric.”⁵² From a worldly perspective, these leaders were impressive. And yet Paul suffered, preached without eloquence, and was thought to be foolish (11:16). Yet, he declared that he was not “the least inferior to these super-apostles”⁵³ (11:5). Paul’s apostolic authority is proven, rather than discredited, by the fact that he is boasting not in his own strength, but in his weakness. For in his weakness, God is shown to be strong (12:9–10).

Day 3 Summary

The second letter to the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians) shows how God’s strength is manifest through weakness. There are both positive and negative tones within the letter. Paul is happy to hear that the “severe letter” was received well and that repentance had been produced. Yet, problems in Corinth still remained. It seems that the so-called super-apostles were commending themselves and undermining Paul’s ministry. Thus, Paul explains his apostolic ministry and, after two chapters that give instruction regarding the collection for the Jerusalem church, he defends his apostolic authority.

51 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 194. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

Day 4

THEMES (2 CORINTHIANS)

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, 2 Corinthians 7:5–13:14

THEME 1—THE POWER OF GOD IS DISPLAYED IN WEAKNESS

If a person were asked to commend himself or herself, they would probably do so by pointing to their strengths. For instance, in an interview a potential employer may ask an applicant to list their strengths and explain why they would be a benefit to the company. An employer may want to hear about weaknesses as well. Yet, an applicant will likely try to minimize weaknesses when trying to land a job! In 2 Corinthians Paul takes the antithetical route. In explaining and defending his apostolic ministry he does not boast in his strengths, but in his weaknesses (e.g. 12:9).

It is through the weakness of Paul specifically, and God's people generally, that the strength of God is displayed. God gets the glory when we admit that we are weak and that God is strong. In other words, we do not look to our own strength in order to live in this fallen world to the glory of God, we look to the strength that God supplies (cf. Phil 4:10–13). Fortunately, God is powerful beyond measure and strengthens those who rely on him.

8. In what areas of the Christian life do you consider yourself to be weak? How does this cause you to rely on the Lord? How do your weaknesses display the power of God?

The Power of God—throughout the letter Paul points his readers to God's power. And because God is powerful, our boast is in him and in his Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17).

THINK: Read the following passages and note how God’s power is displayed:

Passage	How is God’s power displayed?
2 Corinthians 1:9	
2 Corinthians 2:12-17	
2 Corinthians 4:6	
2 Corinthians 4:7	

The “super-apostles” (11:5) had thought it was their own power that mattered. But they were wrong. Mark Dever writes, “The point has always been the power of God.”⁵⁴ God is powerful beyond measure. His power is seen when his people operate in his strength, not their own. God’s power is manifest when his people boast in their weakness. This is true in the life of Jesus, the life of Paul, and should be true of all God’s people throughout the ages.

9. Can you think of a time when you attempted to rely on your own power, your own strength, and not the strength of the Lord in seeking to honor him with your life? What Christian “duties” might we be prone to undertake in our own strength?

The Weakness of Jesus and Paul—though Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of history, he is nonetheless crucified in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4). From a worldly perspective, Jesus looked like a weakling. He was arrested on false charges, dragged before a mock court, beaten within an inch of his life, and finally hung on a cross like a criminal. From the viewpoint of those watching,

⁵⁴ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 202. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Jesus looked like one who was anything but strong. Yet, Jesus lives “by the power of God” (13:4). God’s power is manifest as he takes the crucified Jesus and raises him from the dead. The one who appeared to be weak is shown to be strong as the grave proves unable to hold him. Through the apparent weakness of Jesus, the power of God is manifest!

Paul was putting the apparent weakness of Jesus on display as he was carrying “around in [his] body the death of Jesus” (4:10). Through his suffering Paul was representing Christ. That is, Jesus had come to suffer on behalf of his people. Yet, many did not physically see him suffer. Paul, through his own suffering, is pointing people to the Suffering Servant.

Paul will gladly boast in his weaknesses (11:30) precisely because he knows that in his weakness, he is strong. The very “thorn in the flesh” (12:7–9) that Paul is experiencing is meant to showcase the power of Jesus. Why is he strong in weakness? The answer is found in 12:10. There he boasts in his own weakness because it is then that “the power of Christ rests upon him.” Thus, when Paul admits his weakness, he ascribes glory to the one who is strong and who works in and through him.

10. Consider Isaiah 43:7.

*“...everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”*

That passage says we are created for the glory of God. How does admitting our weaknesses and boasting in the power of God help fulfill our ultimate purpose for existence?

THINK: Can you recall a time in your life when God displayed his power in and through you, despite your weakness? Record your thoughts below.

THEME 2—THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY OF PAUL

Before ending our discussion of 2 Corinthians, it is helpful to note the discussion concerning the new covenant. In chapter 3, Paul picks up the language of Jeremiah 31:33 and shows how his ministry is bringing to fruition the promises of the new covenant. If there are questions about the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry, one should look at the work of the Spirit through Paul and the apostles for answers!

11. Fill in the chart below, noting the differences in Paul’s description of the covenants.

Old Covenant		New Covenant	
Passage	Covenant Description	Passage	Covenant Description
2 Corinthians 3:6		2 Corinthians 3:3	
2 Corinthians 3:7		2 Corinthians 3:6, 8	
2 Corinthians 3:9		2 Corinthians 3:9	
2 Corinthians 3:14, 15		2 Corinthians 3:11	
		2 Corinthians 3:14-17	

From this text we are able to discern a bit of what distinguished Paul's new covenant ministry from the old covenant ministry that preceded it. You will remember that it was Jesus who ushered in the New Covenant age (see Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23). The Old Covenant had pointed towards Jesus and was now at an end. The New Covenant that Jeremiah and others had spoken of has arrived. The Old Covenant had been written on stones at Sinai (Exodus 31:18), but the New Covenant is written on human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3; cf. Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). It is the Spirit that makes this a reality (3:6, 8), removes the veil (3:18), and brings righteousness (3:9). The Old Covenant could never do these things. That is why it is inferior and transient. The New Covenant is superior and “permanent” (3:11).

Paul shows the validity of his ministry by rooting it in the promises of the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus. The reality of the New Covenant, promised in the Old Testament and inaugurated by Jesus, is being mediated through the apparent weakness of Paul and the apostles.

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Day 4 Summary

Today we have briefly surveyed two themes that are present in 2 Corinthians. The main theme seems to be that God's power is displayed through weakness. Jesus was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God. Paul boasted in his weakness that the power of Christ might rest upon him. In contrast to the supposed strength of the “super-apostles,” the weakness of God's servants highlights the strength of God. We are to rely on God's strength so that God gets the glory. Paul relied on God's strength as he carried out his new covenant ministry. The new covenant ministry brings life by the power of the Spirit and authenticated the apostolic ministry of Paul.

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Day 5

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Today we step back and consider the whole of 1 and 2 Corinthians and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into 1 and 2 Corinthians and allow you to work through the overarching message of those books for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think Paul is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of both 1 and 2 Corinthians in two sentences (one sentence per book). Then, explain your two sentences in two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary:

One-Paragraph Summary:

The Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon

8

§ INTRODUCTION

This week we will take a quick tour through five of Paul's letters. As Paul planted churches in one location, and then moved on to another, he never completely left any church behind. They remained in his thoughts and prayers while he continued his work among them through his letters and further visits. The letters we survey this week represent the ongoing pastoral and apostolic ministry of Paul to regions and cities where he had previously labored.

Though we will only scratch the surface of each book in this chapter, the goal remains the same as previous chapters. We hope that after spending this week looking at these letters you will walk away with a general understanding of the background and message of each. That is, you should be familiar with who Paul is writing to, the structure of the letter, and a theme of each book.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of these different letters.
- have a good understanding of justification by faith alone (Galatians).
- understand the need for unity within the Church (Ephesians) and living lives that are worthy of the gospel (Philippians).
- understand how Paul presents the supremacy of Christ (Colossians) and calls specific believers to be reconciled with one another as a picture of the gospel (Philemon).



Day 1

GALATIANS

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: Galatians*
- ▷ *Introduction to the New Testament: Chapter 12: Galatians*

There are certain things in this world that we should protect. Husbands should lay down their lives to protect their wives. Fathers and mothers should sacrifice to protect their children. Simply put, there are things in this life that are worth fighting for. Perhaps the most important thing for Christians to fight for is the gospel. If the gospel message is distorted, or lost, then the hope for salvation is lost.

Throughout history Christians have defended the message of the gospel. They have recognized that the eternal destinies of men and women hang in the balance. Christianity is about God reconciling sinners to himself through the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). This is good news. But the good news must be heard and believed (Romans 10:13–15).

Because the gospel is central to the Christian faith, it must be protected. In his letter to the Galatian churches Paul sets out to make sure the gospel is not distorted. As we shall see, false teachers were preaching a false gospel. Paul pulls no punches in condemning the false gospel and rebuking the Galatians for turning away from God by turning away from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The message of Galatians defends the gospel of justification by faith alone. Paul refutes the erroneous message of the false teachers and points to salvation by faith alone. Through the gospel the believer experiences freedom from the law, sin, and death.

CONTEXT

Recipients

In your reading, it was noted that there are generally two theories about the identity of the recipients. The question is whether Paul wrote to those in north Galatia or those in south Galatia? Answering this question isn't crucial for understanding the letter, but it does provide helpful background. If the south Galatian hypothesis is correct, then we can compare this letter with the specific portions of Acts where we have information about Paul's ministry in that region.

1. Summarize in your own words the arguments for both the North and South Galatian theories. Which theory do Carson and Moo suggest? Summarize their reasoning.

Paul has heard of false teachers threatening the churches in Galatia. Being a faithful shepherd and zealous defender of the gospel, Paul dispatches a letter that challenges the false message and messengers. As he challenges the false teachers he points the Galatians to the one true gospel.

2. Have you ever defended the gospel in a conversation? Is this something Christians should worry about defending today?

Structure

In the letter to the Galatians Paul defends his apostolic authority and the gospel of justification by faith. Craig Blomberg notes, “Paul is giving an *apologia* or defense of his apostolic authority and hence the correctness of the gospel as he had first preached it the Galatians.”⁵⁵ The structure of the letter confirms this as it moves from Paul’s defense of the divine origin of the gospel, to an explanation of the gospel of justification by faith, ending with a call to live out the implications of the gospel.

Think: Review your reading in *Introducing the New Testament* (pages 98-99) to fill in the chart below.

Structure of Galatians

Passage	Section Summary
Galatians 1: 1-10	
Galatians 1:11-2:21	
Galatians 3:1-4:31	
Galatians 5:1-6:10	
Galatians 6:11-18	

55 Craig Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 121.

3. Did you notice the absence of the usual thanksgiving that Paul includes in his letters? Why do you think Paul omits the thanksgiving or prayer and moves so quickly into the body of the letter?

THEME: THE GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Martin Luther has called Galatians his “Catherine von Bora.” What he meant was that he was wedded to this epistle (Catherine was his wife). Such strong language suggests that he believed that the contents of the letter were extremely important. Though it is only six chapters long, Galatians contains one of the clearest articulations and defense of the doctrine of justification. Simply put, when one considers how a sinner is justified before a holy God, the book of Galatians gives a clear and succinct answer.

The Origin of the Gospel—according to Paul, where does the gospel find its origin?

4. Fill in the chart below by reading the passages listed and fill in information that will help you identify the origin of the Gospel. Then summarize your findings.

Origin of the Gospel

Galatians 1:11-12	
Galatians 1:16-17	
Galatians 1:19	
Galatians 2:1	
Summary:	

The Content of the Gospel—But what is the content of the gospel that Paul had received? Here we find the second part of Paul’s defense of justification by faith. Once Paul has pointed out that his gospel was from God, he reminds the Galatians of the *contents* of the gospel. And at the heart of the good news (gospel) is the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

What is justification? We discussed this a bit in our study of Romans but let us define the term once more before we move forward.

*“To be justified is to be declared right before God.”*⁵⁶

That is, Paul is reminding the Galatians that the only way for them to be *declared right before God* is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. The works of the Mosaic Law, or any other “work” for that matter, have no ability to justify a person.

5. Read the following passages, and note the theme of justification by faith in the space provided.

Galatians 2:15-21

¹⁵We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

56 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 151. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Galatians 3:1-6

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

Galatians 3:6, 11

⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness . . .”

¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Galatians 3:24

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

57 ESV Study Bible, 2251.

6. Though we would not likely add the Mosaic Law to our daily life in order to be justified, what might we add to the gospel in an attempt to obtain God's favor?

The Gospel and Christian Freedom—Before closing our study of Galatians we should note that justification by faith alone leads to freedom. In fact, Galatians has been called the “Magna Carta of Christian “Liberty.” Within this letter Paul reminds the Galatians that they have been set free from the law and that if they returned to the Jewish legal code they would be “severed from Christ” (Galatians 5:4). They are not to submit to the “yoke of slavery” but are to live in freedom (5:1).

However, the call to freedom does not mean that believers can live in sin. Though the Christian will not attempt to keep a moral code in order to be justified, they will nonetheless seek to live by the Spirit (5:16–25).

7. Read Galatians 6:1–10. How does this section describe what Paul means when he says that we should “walk by the Spirit” (5:16)?

Galatians 6:1-10

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵For each will have to bear his own load.

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal

life. ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Day 1 Summary

Today we took a tour through Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. According to Carson and Moo Paul likely wrote this letter to those in the south Galatian region, which corresponds with the first missionary journey recorded in Acts. The letter breaks down into three basic parts as Paul defends his apostleship, the gospel of justification by faith alone, and the freedom that Christians have through the gospel. The major theme of the letter is the gospel of justification by faith alone. As false teachers plague the Galatian churches with a false message, Paul writes to correct the erroneous message. Contrary to the false teachers, the true gospel is that God justifies a sinner by faith alone, without any reference to works of the law. Once the true gospel is embraced, the Christian is free to "walk by the Spirit."

Day 2

EPHESIANS

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible: Ephesians*
- *Introducing the New Testament: Ephesians*

Today we survey Paul's letter to the Ephesians. As with Galatians, we will only be able to scratch the surface of this important letter. Yet, even as we scratch the surface in regard to the structure and theme of Ephesians, we pray that God would use what we learn to help us live to the praise of his glorious grace (1:6, 12, 14).

CONTEXT

Author

There are number of important discussions concerning the authorship of this letter. In your reading of Carson and Moo you have been introduced to the debate. At this point we simply want to assert that the testimony of the early church consistently holds that Paul is the author. Given the historic position of the church, and the present day defense of Pauline authorship, it seems we are warranted in affirming that Paul wrote Ephesians.

Recipients

Seemingly, the obvious answer to the question is the Ephesian church are the recipients. We shall assume such in this study. However, for the sake of transparency we acknowledge that this is debated. Did Paul write this letter to those in Ephesus? Was this a *circular letter*⁵⁸ meant for local churches spread across a larger region? Is this letter actually the letter to the Laodiceans? These are questions that scholars have tried to answer over the years.

58 A circular letter would have "circulated" among various churches in a particular region or area. Thus, it was meant to travel from congregation to congregation to receive a wider hearing.

What seems to be certain is that at some point the believers in and around Ephesus would have received this letter. Therefore, noting a few facts about the ancient city of Ephesus sheds a good bit of light on the cultural context of the original readers.

The city of Ephesus was an influential city:

- Politically—the provincial capital of the senatorial province of Asia (Asia Minor; Acts 19:38)
- Commercially—largest trading center in Asia Minor west of the Taurus and located at the mouth of the Cayster River.
- Religiously—worship of Artemis (Acts 19:28); the presence of the occult may explain some of what Paul writes in Ephesians as he talks about the power of God “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12).
- Strategic Location—because of the above influences, Ephesus was a place where ideas could be easily spread among various peoples. There was a great deal of opportunity for the gospel to spread out of this city into surrounding region with the presence of economic import and export.

The Ephesian Christians were residents of a Roman Province and surrounded by pagan religion. Many of the members of the church were probably Gentile converts, with a Jewish contingency present as well (cf. Acts 19:8, 10). Thus, with a church made up of former pagans, and both Jews and Gentiles, one can understand Paul’s focus on the power of God and the unity of the Church.

STRUCTURE

The structure of Ephesians is fairly straightforward. After an introduction, Paul launches into the body of the letter.

8. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of Ephesians

Passage	Section Summary
Ephesians 1:1-23	
Ephesians 2:1-3:21	
Ephesians 4:1-6:20	
Ephesians 6:21-24	

It seems to be helpful to note the move from doctrine to application. Paul often moves from discussions of theology to applying that theology to life. One of the clearest examples of this movement is found here in Ephesians.

9. Moving from theology to application — a trial run: In Ephesians 1:4, 5, and 11 Paul talks about election. This is an important theological point of discussion. What practical implications might the doctrine of election have?

THEMES

Theme (Ephesians) —The Unity of the Church

The unity of God’s people is not simply a theme that runs through Ephesians, it is found throughout the New Testament. The Church of Christ is made up of people from every tribe and tongue (Revelations 5:9). It seems that this point needed to be driven home to those in Ephesus. As we noted above, the Ephesian church was located in a Roman province and was probably made up of both Jews and Gentiles. At the same time those from pagan backgrounds that had come to Christ were likely members of the congregation. When you have this type of diversity within the membership of your church, unity will be a regular topic to address.

Paul addresses the unity of God’s people both implicitly and explicitly. It is implicit as both the Jewish and Gentile Christians have the same spiritual blessings and are saved in the same way. Paul makes the unity explicit in Chapters 2 and 3 before calling the one people of God to the same type of life (Chapters 4–6).

The Same Spiritual Blessings—In what makes up the second-longest sentence in the Greek New Testament, Paul sings the praises of God for his redeeming work in Christ. In this section we find that God chose the Ephesians to be “holy and blameless” (1:4), predestined them for adoption (1:5), and gave them an inheritance (1:11). The important point to note is that many of these same terms were used in relation to Israel, God’s Old Covenant people. This seems to suggest that Paul sees continuity between God’s Old Covenant people and his New Covenant people (the church).

THINK: Read at least one of the following Old Testament passages from each section below and notice the concepts applied to Israel that Paul uses in reference to the Ephesian believers:

CHOSEN:

Genesis 12:1-3:

Genesis 1–11 focuses on all of humanity. Beginning in Gen. 12 the biblical record narrows to focus in on Abram (Abraham) and his offspring. It was Abraham that God “chose” from all the peoples of the earth and through whom he will bless the nations.

Deuteronomy 7:7:

God chose Israel without condition.

Psalms 47:1:

The LORD chose the “heritage” of the people of Israel.

HOLY AND BLAMELESS:

Exodus 19:6:

The people of Israel were to be a “holy nation” (cf. Isaiah 62:10; Isaiah 62:10).

Psalms 15:2:

The one who will dwell on the hill of Yahweh is the one who is “blameless.”

ADOPTION:

Romans 9:4:

The particular privilege of adoption is said to belong to ethnic Israel. In Eph. 1:5 it is applied to the Ephesian Christians.

10. What do all of these references to the Old Testament suggest about the Ephesian Christians?

The Same Salvation—In Ephesians 2 Paul outlines the hopeless state of the Ephesians. They were “dead in their trespasses and sins” (2:1). This does not mean that they were not able to act, for they were “following the prince of the power of the air” (2:2). Instead, they were dead towards God and “were by nature children of wrath” (2:3). Both the Jews and the Gentiles stood in a hopeless situation and were in need of rescue. Rescue came when God “made [them] alive together with Christ...” (2:5). They should praise God who was

“rich in mercy” (2:4) and saved them “by grace...through faith” (2:8). The way of salvation for the Jew and Gentile alike is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12).

Although people think that, in the Old Testament, the way of salvation was in keeping the Mosaic Law, that was not the case. According to Genesis 15:6, Abraham was counted righteous based on his faith. Not to mention, Abraham preceded the giving of the law by over four hundred years! Furthermore, God had redeemed Israel and made them his people before giving the Law through Moses at Sinai. The law was given as a constitution for Israel. In other words, *the Law was given to govern Israel’s existence as God’s people but it was not the basis for becoming God’s people*. Salvation has always been by grace through faith

The Same Body—In Ephesians Paul is not only concerned with vertical reconciliation (between God and man), but horizontal reconciliation as well (between man and man). In Ephesians 2:1–10 Paul has outlined what God has done to reconcile dead sinners to himself. In 2:11–3:13 Paul takes up the issue of horizontal reconciliation. He goes to great lengths to show that Jews and Gentiles are part of the same “body” (2:16).

11. In Ephesians 2:15 Paul says that God has created “in himself one new man in place of the two...” What do you think the “one new man” refers to?

The Same Spirit-filled Life—Lastly, the unity of Jews and Gentiles is seen implicitly from the fact that Paul gives the church one set of marching orders. As he moves from theological exposition to practical application, he speaks to the Ephesians as one group of people. They are all to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1). The church as a whole should “put off the old self...and put on the new self” (4:22, 24). The ethical exhortations found in passages such as Ephesians 4:25–32 and 5:1–14 are meant for every member of the church.

The unity of the church should be evident as believers live out the same Spirit-filled life (cf. 5:18). This should be seen in the home (5:22–33; 6:1–4), the work place (6:5–9), and as believers “wrestle against...the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12). And as the Church lives out the unity that God has created in Christ, God gets the glory and praise (1:6, 11, 15).

Day 2 Summary

Today you were introduced to the Book of Ephesians. Though this may have been a circular letter that was meant for more than one church, it is reasonable to assume that the letter made its way to the Ephesian congregation. The Ephesian church was made up of both Jew and Gentile Christians and was evidently in need of exhortation concerning unity. The letter is made up of two basic parts: part one (chapters 1–3) is mostly theological exposition while part two (chapters 4–6) contains mostly practical application. One of the overarching themes of the letter is the *Unity of the Church*. That is, both Jewish and Gentile believers make up the one body of Christ. This is seen both implicitly and explicitly in the letter.

Day 3

PHILIPPIANS

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: Philippians*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: Philippians*

When individuals become Christians and are united with the family of God, they quickly find that they are part of a commissioned people. In other words, when we are born again we are born into the church, and the church is, at its core, missional. The church is called to be a witness for Christ (Acts 1:8), making disciples throughout the world (Matt. 28:19–20).

Faithfully engaging in this mission is no easy task. The world is fallen and there are dangers at every turn. Individual Christians will soon realize that living faithfully as an ambassador for Christ cannot be done alone. Christians need each other. The individual needs the family in order to faithfully carry out the Great Commission. Furthermore, individual congregations need other congregations to partner with them to more readily advance the gospel.

God has given his people each other as one of the sweetest graces. Being part of the family of God and engaging in ministry with our brothers and sisters in Christ is meant to be a delight. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul, while tucked away in a prison cell, pens a joy-filled letter to a church that had partnered with him from the very beginning (Ephesians 4:15).

Author

The beginning of the letter names both Paul and Timothy as the authors. Did they both write the letter? Did Timothy write the letter with Paul simply giving approval? The answer seems to be that Paul wrote the letter.

12. Read Philippians 1:1 and 2:19. How does the latter verse help us decide who the author of the letter is?

Recipients

The Church at Philippi was made up of people from very different walks of life. A merchant woman named Lydia (Acts 16:14), a recently demon–possessed slave girl (16:16–18), and a jailer (16:25–35) were all converts from Paul’s first trip to Philippi. If this is any indication of what the membership roll looked like, then we can understand Paul’s appeal to unity of mind in the Philippian letter!

Yet, this diverse congregation had supported Paul from the beginning (Ephesians 4:15) and was dear to Paul’s heart (1:8). God had taken very different people from the city of Philippi and brought them together (cf. Ephesians 2:11–22) to advance the gospel.

13. Some churches seek to cater to one demographic in their ministries. There are “biker churches,” “cowboy churches,” “urban churches,” and “suburban churches.” Given the diversity of the Philippian congregation, do you think it is helpful to build our churches around one particular demographic?

STRUCTURE

The structure of Philippians is a bit hard to discern at first because it seems that Paul moves from topic to topic with some freedom. Yet, it seems Paul follows the basic pattern in his other writings.

14. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of Philippians

Passage	Section Summary
Philippians 1:1-26	
Philippians 1:27-2:18	
Philippians 2:18-19-4:1	
Philippians 4:2-4:20	
Philippians 4:21-23	

THEMES

Theme (Philippians)—Lives Worthy of the Gospel

Paul is never shy about calling Christians to a high standard of life. In Ephesians 4:1 he exhorted the church at Ephesus to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [they had been] called” (cf. Colossians 1:10). In his first letter to the church at Thessalonica Paul reminded the believers there that they were called “in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). And in the letter under consideration here, Paul urged the Philippians to “let [their] manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...” (Philippians 1:27).

15. What does Paul mean by living “worthy of the gospel of Christ”?

The Philippian Christians should live with the utmost integrity and God-centeredness *because of the worth of the gospel*. In Philippians, this gospel-worthy life is seen in Paul’s words as he mentions Gospel Partnerships, Gospel Unity, and Gospel Faithfulness.

Gospel Partnerships—the Philippian church had faithfully partnered with Paul in gospel ministry. In fact, this theme of “partnership” runs throughout the entire epistle. Partnering with others to advance the gospel is surely one aspect of a gospel-worthy life.

Philippians 1:6–7; 1:25; 2:19–30; 3:17; 4:3; 4:14–20

Gospel Unity—throughout this letter Paul urges the Philippians to be united. As they partner in ministry they must protect the unity of the congregation. Division will only hinder their efforts in spreading the good news of Jesus. Instead of being divided, they must stand firm “in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (1:27). They should have “the same mind...the same love, being in full accord and on one mind” (2:2). This type of life will only be a reality if they follow the example of Christ’s humility (2:5–11) and “count others more significant than [themselves]” (2:3). A united church is living worthy of the gospel.

16. Can you recall a time in your life, or the life of a church, organization, or within your own family, where divisiveness was a hindrance to the accomplishment of a goal or plan?

Gospel Faithfulness—what we mean by gospel faithfulness is making sure to faithfully guard the message of the gospel. Do you remember the problem plaguing the Galatian churches? False-teachers were spreading a false gospel! They were essentially saying that you had to believe in Jesus *and* keep the Mosaic Law. That same issue seems to be on Paul’s mind as he writes to the Philippians (3:1–11). A life that is worthy of the gospel will guard the gospel from being distorted and thus lost (cf. 2 Tim. 1:14).

Paul reminds his readers that his credentials were not what mattered when it came to justification (Philippians 3:1–8). He says that what matters is “not having a righteousness of [his] own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...” (3:9). Living a life worthy of the gospel certainly entails guarding the gospel that gives you life.

Day 3 Summary

Today you were introduced to Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Writing from prison, Paul joyfully thanks the Philippians for their partnership in the gospel and calls them to continuing living lives that are worthy of the gospel. A congregation that was as diverse as the Philippian church must be on guard against disunity from within and false teaching from without so that they continue to faithfully advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Day 4

COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible: Colossians and Philemon*
- *Introducing the New Testament: Colossians; Philemon*

Today we consider two of Paul's letters. These two letters are related as Philemon, the shortest of Paul's canonical letters, is addressed to a particular group within the Colossian church (Philemon 1:2). In contrast, Colossians is a letter addressed to the entire Colossian congregation. The Book of Colossians counters the false teaching that threatened Colossian Christians by reminding them that Christ was supreme. In Philemon, Paul explains what Christian forgiveness should look like in light of the forgiveness obtained by the preeminent Christ.

CONTEXT

Author

Colossians—In your reading, Carson and Moo concluded, “The objections to Paul's authorship of Colossians do not seem compelling, and his authorship is further supported by Colossians' links with Philemon.”⁵⁹

Philemon—Though Timothy is named with Paul in the opening, it becomes clear by 1:4 that one person is the author (“I”). This is generally said to be Paul. However, it is certainly not out of the question that Timothy may have been a co-author.⁶⁰

59 Carson and Moo, *Introducing the New Testament*, 112.

60 Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 277.

Recipients

Colossians—Colossae was a small and seemingly insignificant town. It was about 100 miles west of Ephesus and was situated in the Lycus Valley within the region of Phrygia. It was a city plagued by earthquakes (possibly why it was sparsely populated) and was ethnically diverse. Evidently heretical teaching threatened the Colossian church, though the exact nature of the Colossian heresy has been of intense debate.

Philemon—this letter is written to a man named Philemon, and “Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house” (vs. 2). Apparently this group lived in Colossae (cf. Col. 4:9).

STRUCTURE

Colossians—the letter is only four chapters and is the second shortest Pauline letter. The body of the letter breaks down into two general sections and a traditional closing greeting brings the letter to an end.

17. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of Colossians

Passage	Section Summary
Colossians 1:1-14	
Colossians 1:15-2:23	
Colossians 3:1-4:6	
Colossians 4:7-18	

Philemon—the shortest of the Pauline letters, it is a mere twenty-five verses long in our English Bibles. Though it is a short letter, the structure falls along the lines of a Hellenistic Letter. It contains a greeting, introduction, the body of the letter, and a closing.

Structure of Philemon

Passage	Section Summary
Philemon 1-7	
Philemon 8-11	
Philemon 12-16	
Philemon 17-19	
Philemon 20	
Philemon 20-25	

Theme (Colossians)—The Supremacy of Christ

One of the themes found throughout the entire New Testament is the supremacy of Jesus. In the Gospel accounts Jesus rules over the natural and supernatural world. In the writings of Paul, Jesus is supreme with reference to the salvation of sinners. And when the reader of the New Testament comes to the end of the Bible, it is Jesus who is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelations 19:16).

It seems there is a form of false teaching that has surrounded the Colossian church that is in some way undermining the supremacy of Christ. Paul challenges the false teaching by showing how Christ is supreme over creation (1:15–20), human philosophy (2:8), and religious ceremonialism (2:16–29). Furthermore, since Christ is supreme, the Colossians should “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (3:1).

18. Read at least four the following texts and record how the supremacy of Jesus is illustrated in each:

Passage	How is Christ Supreme?
Colossians 1:13	
Colossians 1:15-20	
Colossians 2:3	
Colossians 2:8-10	
Colossians 2:15	
Colossians 2:16-17	
Colossians 3:1	
Colossians 3:15	
Colossians 3:24	

THEMES

Theme (Philemon)—Reconciliation

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not merely that Jesus died to atone for our sins and by believing in him we can be forgiven. That is part of the news but not its totality. Forgiveness is a critical part of the good news, but it is obtained through the work of Christ *in order* to clear the way for reconciliation with God. As John Piper asks, “Why is it good news to you that your sins are forgiven?”⁶¹ If it is not *ultimately* because forgiveness clears the way for you to be reconciled to God, then you have misunderstood the gospel. Piper writes, “Propitiation, redemption, forgiveness, imputation, sanctification, liberation, healing, heaven—none of these is good news except for one reason: they bring us to God for our everlasting enjoyment of him.”⁶² Reconciliation, to the praise of God’s glory, is the goal of the gospel.

The message of Philemon takes the truth of reconciliation and shows how it should impact the horizontal relationships that we have on this earth. As our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God in Christ, we should forgive and reconcile with those who have wronged us. As Philemon offers forgiveness to Onesimus, and welcomes him back as a brother, he will put the gospel on display for all to see.

Philemon: The Offended—in this letter Paul writes to a Christian brother who has been wronged by one of his slaves. Exactly how he has been wronged is unclear. What is clear is that Philemon has been offended by Onesimus in some way. Because he has been offended, Paul appeals to Philemon to extend forgiveness.

19. What does Paul call Philemon to do upon the return of Onesimus? Make a list and cite references.

⁶¹ John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2005), 46.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 47

Extending all these things to Onesimus would no doubt stretch the character of Philemon. Forgiving those who have wronged us is not easy. But, as Christians, we are called to forgive and be reconciled to one another (cf. Matt. 6:14–15; James 2:13).

20. Think about a time when a person has wronged you. How hard was it, or is it, to extend forgiveness? According to Paul in Ephesians 4:32, on what basis are we to forgive others?

Onesimus: The Offender—Onesimus is a slave of Philemon and has apparently come to faith in Christ under the ministry of Paul (vs. 10). In some way he has wronged his master and stands in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with Philemon. For some reason he was considered “useless” (vs. 11) and “owes” something to Philemon (vs. 18). Whatever Onesimus has done, it is clear that the problem between him and Philemon was serious enough that Paul felt the need to write a short letter and personally appeal to Philemon.

21. The letter implies that Onesimus was willing to return to Philemon, confess his wrong, and ask for forgiveness. This is evidence of the genuine nature of his faith. Have you ever wronged someone? Is it easy to ask for forgiveness? How does admitting our failure and seeking forgiveness paint a picture of the gospel?

Paul: The Mediator—standing between Philemon and Onesimus is the Apostle Paul.

22. According to Philemon 10–16, what type of relationship does Paul have with Philemon and Onesimus?

What Paul desires is for these two men, formerly only known to each other as slave and master, to reconcile as brothers in Christ (vs. 16). Paul pleads to the offended to forgive the offender! And the Paul himself takes upon himself the debt that is owed (vs. 19).

23. Christian peacemaking is a tremendously undervalued and underpracticed. Mark Dever writes, “There is something particularly Christlike about peacemaking, which Paul exemplifies so well in this letter.”⁶³ Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Given these thoughts, how do you feel about getting between two people (especially Christians) and their personal problems? Should we do it? What things should we consider when deciding to get in the middle of others problems?

The Gospel in Philemon—in the story of redemption there are three key players. God is the offended, human beings are the offenders, and Jesus Christ is the mediator. The great news is that Christ, as the mediator, pleads our cause before God (1 John 2:1). And God stands ready to forgive everyone that comes to him in faith. Just as Paul has taken the debt that Onesimus owed on himself, so Christ has taken our debt on his own shoulders and satisfied its demands on the cross (1 John 2:2).

⁶³ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 406. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

When Onesimus knocked on the front door of the home of Philemon he would have handed him a letter from Paul that commended the slave as a fellow brother to his owner. When we stand before God on the Day of Judgment, we will not hand God a letter from anyone that commends us. We will point to Christ alone as our letter of recommendation. And because of our faith in Jesus God will open his arms wide and welcome us into his presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forever more (Ps. 16:11).

Day 4 Summary

Today you have been introduced to the two smallest letters from the apostle Paul. Colossians and Philemon are considered together because Philemon lives in Colossae and thus is a member (perhaps a leader) in the Colossian church. In Paul's letter to the Colossians we read about the supremacy of Christ. Jesus is supreme over such things as creation, human philosophy and wisdom, and religious ceremonialism. In Philemon Paul reminds the reader that the forgiveness and reconciliation between believers is a result of the gospel and points towards reconciliation with God.



Day 5

.....

Today we step back and consider the whole of each book and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and allow you to work through the overarching message of each for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think Paul is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of each book in one sentence (one sentence per book). Then, explain your sentences in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summaries:

One-Paragraph Summaries:

1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus

9

§ INTRODUCTION

This week we turn our attention to the last five of Paul's New Testament letters. Though the letters are relatively short, as we saw last week, considering five letters in one chapter will mean that we only have time to highlight the key points of each work.

It is important to mention at this point that once again we are glimpsing into the heart of Paul as he continues to write to various Christians. Though his stay in Thessalonica was brief, they never left his thoughts. At the same time we see that Paul had a desire to invest in others and pass on the faith. Timothy and Titus both stand as examples to us today. The Christian faith and ministry is to be embraced on a personal level and then shared with others so that the gospel continues to march forward. May God remind us through this study of the need for Christians to keep other believers close to their hearts, and to pass on the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of these different letters.
- think about the return of Jesus and the relevance to the believers' life today.
- understand how proper church order helps guard against, and address the problem of, false teaching.
- understand the importance of teaching, and defending, sound doctrine.



Day 1

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*

1. Read Acts 17. Was this Paul's first or secondary missionary journey? What caused Paul's visit to come to an end (cf. 17:9–10)?

Before the Jews could chase Paul away he had enough time to share the gospel, see people come to faith in Jesus, and establish a church. Though he was physically threatened and forced to flee, his heart remained close to the believers in the city.

The overall messages of the Thessalonian letters are that the Thessalonians should patiently wait for the return of Jesus and live worthy of God. Or, living worthy of God in the midst of persecution means patiently waiting on the return of Jesus. Paul is writing to believers whom Timothy reports are standing firm in the faith. Paul urges them to do so more and more and to live holy lives. At the return of Jesus, both those who are dead in Christ, and those who are alive in Christ, will meet the Lord and be delivered from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9).

CONTEXT

Author

2. Summarize the “three separate but related matters” concerning authorship from your reading in *Introducing to the New Testament*.

Recipients

In your reading of Carson and Moo it was noted that Thessalonica was a large and bustling city. It was a prominent place that was ethnically and religiously diverse. We know that it was a city that contained both a Jewish and Gentile population (see Acts 17:4, 5). What may be missed is the powerful presence of the occult in Thessalonica.

It seems there is warrant to suppose that within the congregation at Thessalonica a diverse set of religious backgrounds characterized the membership. These facts may also give us insight in understanding what Paul meant when he wrote that “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:10).

3. Would you characterize the society you live in as religiously diverse? Could you name several religions present in our culture besides Christianity? What challenges/opportunities does living in a religiously diverse place present?

STRUCTURE

1 Thessalonians—the first letter breaks down into basic sections. After a long section of praise (e.g. 1:3–8; 2:13–16; 3:6–13), Paul addresses ethical issues and questions about the end times before closing the book.

2 Thessalonians—This letter is shorter than Paul’s first correspondence with the Thessalonian believers. However, just as the return of Christ was the focal point of *1 Thessalonians*, it is center-stage in *2 Thessalonians*.

4. Fill in the chart below, using *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide.

Structure of *1 Thessalonians*

Passage	Section Summary
<i>1 Thessalonians</i> 1:1-10	
<i>1 Thessalonians</i> 2:10-3:13	
<i>1 Thessalonians</i> 4:1-5:11	
<i>1 Thessalonians</i> 5:12-28	

Day 1 Summary

The letters to the Thessalonians, combined with the two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, provides yet another glimpse into the pastoral heart of Paul. He writes these letters to a prominent congregation and two ministry partners because he loves them and the gospel. The Thessalonian letters are mainly concerned with calling the believers to patiently wait for the return of Jesus, while resisting false teachers. Though they are relatively short, and each contains three general sections.

Day 2

THEMES

Theme (1 Thessalonians)—The Return of Jesus Christ

A man named Harold Camping predicted the end of the world in 2011...again. In 2011 Camping had predicted that the world would end on May 21st. That day came and went and nothing happened. But Camping insisted that it wasn't a mistake, that God had saved his "elect" and that the whole world was now under final judgment until October 21, 2011. On that day, the physical world as we knew it would end. Well, as you can tell by the mere fact you are reading this, his doomsday prediction was off the mark.

However, just because various people have wrongly predicted when God would end the world, does not mean that the end is not drawing near. As Christians, we believe a day is coming when Christ will return and judge those who have failed to repent of their sins and believe in him. We believe that the end of the world as we know it is indeed coming. It will come like a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2), but it will come. Paul writes to call the Thessalonian believers to live worthy of God by patiently waiting on the return of Jesus.

I. Howard Marshall, a prominent theologian, wrote, "The major distinguishing feature of both epistles [1 and 2 Thessalonians] is the extent of the teaching about the Parousia."⁶⁴ The word for "Parousia" is a reference to the second coming of Jesus. Marshall believed the return of Christ, who would usher end the Day of the Lord, was "the major" point that Paul was driving home.

5. According to your reading of Carson and Moo, how do these two books help us understand the end times?

64 I. Howard Marshall, "Pauline Theology in the Thessalonian Correspondence" (M.D. Hooker & S.G. Wilson, eds., Paul and Paulinism. Essays In honour C.K. Barrett. London: SPCK, 1982.), 179.

It is readily apparent from the letter that the Thessalonians had suffered for their faith. Paul mentions that they “suffered the same things” that the Jewish Christians had suffered in Judea. What better way to encourage someone in the midst of their suffering than to point them towards the hope they have in Jesus? When Jesus comes he brings vengeance (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10; Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19), wipes away every tear (Revelation 2:14), and everything we have endured in this world in terms of suffering will feel like a light and momentary affliction (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Mark Dever writes, “The Christian hope in the second coming of Christ encourages us amid the difficulties, the trials, and even the end of this present life.”⁶⁵ In light of the second coming believers should persevere (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:11–13), patiently “wait” for Jesus, and “walk in a manner worthy of God” (2 Thessalonians 2:12).

6. When you think of the return of Jesus, are you frightened or hopeful? Or both? Why?

Theme (2 Thessalonians)—The Return of Jesus is Near, But Not Yet

The theme of 2 Thessalonians is the same as in 1 Thessalonians. However, there is an important difference. It seems that some in Thessalonica had misunderstood the timing of Christ’s return. They thought it had already happened! Paul writes to assure them that the Lord’s coming is sure but it hadn’t happened yet. Therefore they should continue to persevere and not become idle.

The Surety of the Lord’s Return— As we have stated above, the Thessalonians are experiencing persecution, likely at the hands of their fellow countrymen (1 Thessalonians 2:14). The tendency in the midst of persecution is to lash out and defend oneself. When people wrong us, we want to strike back, avenge ourselves, and bring justice to the offender.

65 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 315. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

7. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9. Given the surety of the return of Jesus, who would inflict vengeance and punish the wicked, how does Paul say the Thessalonians should respond to their persecutors?

However, the Day of the Lord had not come. This is evident because justice had not come upon the unbelieving world. *But that day was coming*, and justice would be without mercy. The Thessalonians should continue to stand firm, trusting that the second coming of Jesus Christ would bring vindication and relief.

8. Have you ever tried to take justice into your own hands? Using the truths found in 2 Thessalonians, can you explain why this is not a proper way to behave as Christians? Are there other New Testament passages that remind us we are not to avenge ourselves?

The Lord's Return is a Future Reality— Anchoring their future hope in the return of Jesus provided Paul the opportunity to elaborate on the doctrinal aspects of the Parousia. In chapter 2 Paul takes the time to outline in more detail what could be expected prior to Jesus' return.

9. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 and list what two primary events will precede the second coming.

10. According to 2:8–12, what are “two major guarantees” that the return of Christ will bring?

The Lord’s Return and the Problem of Idleness—Believing that Christ had already returned, idleness seems to have become a problem for the Thessalonians.

Read the following passages, and note what Paul says about how the Thessalonians were behaving, and how they should act instead.

2 Thessalonians 3:6

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.”

Idleness was so serious that if anyone claimed to be a brother and was “walking in idleness” then they church should “keep away” from that person.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. 9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

Those who were living in idleness were not imitating their spiritual father. Contrary to those who were idle, Paul “worked night and day” and they should imitate his example (3:8–9).

2 Thessalonians 3:11

11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

Paul uses play on words to show the folly of idleness. They were “not busy at work, but busybodies.” See the *ESV Study Bible* note on 3:11.

Day 2 Summary

We have seen in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians that the believers were suffering. In order to help them persevere Paul reminds them that the return of Christ was sure. However, it seems that some had misinterpreted his explanation of the *parousia*. In 2 Thessalonians Paul reaffirms the reality of Christ’s return, but makes it clear that he had not returned yet. As they waited, they should not be idle, but busy themselves with doing good.

Day 3

1 & 2 TIMOTHY

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: 1 & 2 Timothy*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: 1 & 2 Timothy*

Today we begin to consider what have traditionally been called the “Pastoral Epistles.” They are called the pastorals for two primary reasons. First, they are written to two men (Timothy and Titus) who are functioning in pastoral capacities. Second, the letters deal with matters that are overtly pastoral.⁶⁶ The letters have thus garnered a wide reading among those who have been called to vocational ministry, specifically as pastors.

However, the relevancy of these letters is not restricted to men in the ministry. The letters themselves give the Christian great insight into a number of theological and practical issues. Within the letters the reader will find issues related to Old Testament law and its relevance for today, the role of women and men within the church, what we are to do for widows, and the qualifications that Christians should look for in those they appoint to lead their churches. All these points are addressed in these three letters. Therefore they have abiding relevance for the Church today.

CONTEXT

Historically, the church has believed Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles when he was released from imprisonment in Rome. After Paul was released, he likely set out on another missionary journey (his fourth). Paul likely wrote 1 Timothy and Titus during this missionary journey. Paul presumably wrote 2 Timothy during his final imprisonment, just before his execution at the hands of Nero. Given this historical context, the personal nature of the letters and the desire to encourage and instruct his young protégé’s makes sense when we understand the works to come from a man who was nearing the end of his life.

66 Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 334.

Author

The undisputed claim of the early church was that Paul authored 1 and 2 Timothy. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that serious questions arose over Pauline authorship.

11. Paul is getting older at this point in his life. Yet, even after so many years of faithful ministry, he had not “retired.” What lessons can we learn from Paul as we consider his faithfulness up until his last days? How do you think about finishing the race set before you?

Recipients

The three pastoral letters are written to two people. Timothy receives two letters from Paul (1 & 2 Timothy) while Titus receives the letter that bears his name. We are introduced to these men in other passages of Scripture.

Timothy—who is Timothy?

12. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* and the Bible references provided, can you note a few things about Timothy? See Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:2, 3, 5; 2:2.

Titus—we do not have as much information about Titus as we do Timothy, but we do have some. Titus is first mentioned in 2 Cor. 7:6. Evidently, as Paul and his companions were suffering in Macedonia, Titus came and provided needed comfort. Part of the reason was that evidently Titus had visited the Corinthian church, had been encouraged during his visit, and that encouragement spilled over into the life of Paul (2 Corinthians 7:13). We also know that Titus was a Greek and had accompanied Paul when he made the trip to Jerusalem mentioned in Galatians 2:1. At some point Paul had left Titus in Crete to “put what remained in order” (Titus 1:5).

13. When you think of mentorship, what comes to mind? How does the life of Paul, as he invests in these two young men, set an example for believers today?

STRUCTURE

14. Using *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of 1 Timothy

Passage	Section Summary
1 Timothy 1:1-2	
1 Timothy 1:2-20	
1 Timothy 2:1-3:16	
1 Timothy 4:1-6:2	
1 Timothy 6:3-19	
1 Timothy 6:20-21	

THEME

Theme (1 Timothy)—The Problem of False Teaching and the Need for Church Order

False Teachers — False teaching is always a danger that threatens the church. Many of Paul's letters deal with some type of false teaching (e.g. Galatians and the false gospel) and all of them deal with false ways of thinking. Today false teaching confronts us on every side. Debates over doctrine are not new. Jesus had doctrinal disputes with the religious leaders and Paul wrote to confront false teaching in a number of places. Throughout the centuries Christians have been called to contend for the faith.

The problem of false teaching in Ephesus stands behind the letter to Timothy (cf. Acts 20:29). Paul knew that the young minister would need advice and encouragement, especially as opponents to orthodoxy arose. Paul writes to challenge the false teachings while calling for right order in the church. If Timothy and the Ephesian Christians were to stand firm in the midst of doctrinal error, the right ordering of the church would be one of the ways they would do so.

15. Read the passages listed below, and make notes regarding the content of the false teachings, how they have affected church members, and how Paul encourages them to react.

1 Timothy 1:3-10

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

⁸Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine...

Paul launches into a discussion about the false teachers. Evidently some of the false teaching surrounded a wrong use, or misunderstanding, of the law (1:7, 8)

1 Timothy 1:19-20

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Some have rejected the “good conscience” and thus have not waged “the good warfare” or held “the faith.”

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

Some have “seared” their conscience. They are guilty of teaching things that come from demons, including forbidding marriage, inappropriate food laws, etc (4:2).

1 Timothy 4:7

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness...

The false teachers were evidently taking hold of the attention of some as they told “silly myths.”

1 Timothy 6:3-6

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness,⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions,⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain...

Teachers espousing “a different doctrine. Paul exhorts Timothy to “teach and urge these things.” The “these things may refer to the section immediately preceding it, or possibly to the entire letter.

1 Timothy 6:20-21

²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” ²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.

Grace be with you.

Paul urges Timothy to “guard the good deposit.” He should fight for what he had been entrusted to him, which was nothing less than the gospel and all the implications for life that comes with it.

16. Are you aware of any false teachings in our world today? What steps can you take to be prepared to refute false teaching and guard sound doctrine?

17. In contrast to the false teachers, what was Timothy to focus on teaching?

The Need for Church Order—With the presence of false teachers threatening the Ephesian church, church order would be of great importance when it came to standing firm. If the church were disorganized, led by unqualified people, and served by those who were not fit to serve, then keeping the church heading in the right direction would prove difficult. Paul knows Timothy will need to order the church rightly for him to be successful in refuting false teaching and leading the church in a healthy direction.

18. Read 1 Timothy 3:1, 8-13, and list the qualifications for elders and deacons below.

19. Why do you think church members should be familiar with the qualifications of elders?

The problem of false teaching was not going away any time soon. If Timothy was going to faithfully lead the church in Ephesus, he must begin by putting the house in order. That is, the church should be ordered rightly in terms of leadership.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Timothy must teach what accords with “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:3) while guarding “the deposit entrusted to [him]” (6:20).

⁶⁷ Paul also explains what right order in terms of men and women relationships (2:8–15), slaves and masters (6:1–2), and the relationship between the church and widows was to look like (5:9–25). Disorder in any of these areas would be cause for concern.

Day 3 Summary

Today we have begun to introduce ourselves to Timothy and Titus, as well as Paul's first letter to Timothy. These two young men are introduced to us in other places in Scripture. We know that Timothy had been trained in the faith by his mother and grandmother and would begin traveling with Paul during his second missionary journey. We are introduced to Titus in 2 Corinthians as he brings encouragement to Paul. Paul writes his first letter to Timothy in order to encourage Timothy to stand firm in the face of false teaching. If Timothy was going to lead the church faithfully, then he must appoint elders and teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Day 4

2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS

As we consider 2 Timothy, we come to the last book that Paul wrote. Though Philemon is the last book in the ordering of our New Testaments, *chronologically* the book of 2 Timothy is Paul's final letter. As we read the letter we are given a glimpse into how the aged apostle is finishing his life and ministry. Then we turn to the book of Titus and close our consideration of letters from Paul.

Second Timothy—The book of 2 Timothy is likely written during Paul's final imprisonment (see 2 Timothy 1:8, 16; 2:9). Given that Paul believed the end of his life was near, it is not surprising to hear Paul talking about coming to his end, "being poured out as a drink offering," speaking of "the time of [his] departure, having "fought the good fight," and "finish[ing] the race" (4:6–7). At the end of his life Paul desire to "pass the torch of his ministry in Ephesus on to Timothy in a final charge to bold witness for the gospel."⁶⁸

Structure

20. Using your reading in *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below.

Structure of 2 Timothy

Passage	Section Summary
2 Timothy 1:1-5	
2 Timothy 1:6-18	
2 Timothy 2:1-26	

68 Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 375.

2 Timothy 3:1-4:5	
2 Timothy 4:6-22	

Theme (2 Timothy)—Unashamed Faithfulness to the Gospel and Ministry

As Paul passes the baton to Timothy he wants Timothy to be *unashamed* of the gospel of Christ. Timothy would likely be ridiculed and harassed for the doctrines he believed and taught. Despite the ridicule and harassment, Paul desires that Timothy remain faithful. To do so would mean treasuring the gospel and boldly proclaiming its message. The apostle longs for young Timothy to persevere in unashamed gospel ministry till the end, as Paul himself has done.

21. Read the following passages and make notes on Paul's mentions of being unashamed.

2 Timothy 1:8

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

2 Timothy 1:12

¹² *which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

It was mentioned in the note on 1:8 above that Timothy was to be unashamed of the gospel (“testimony of our Lord”). Throughout 2 Timothy Paul is calling his protégé to faithfully teach and guard the good news. In a place like Ephesus, with the false teaching that was always threatening, the need to teach and guard the truth was desperately needed.

22. Read the following passages. What do they say about the need to teach and guard the message?

2 Timothy 2:2

...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 2:14–15

¹⁴ *Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.* ¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:24–26

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 3:14

⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:2

...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

So, Timothy was to devote himself to gospel ministry. In contrast to those who were tempted to be ashamed of the gospel when suffering came, Timothy was to remain bold. Instead of walking away when times became hard, Timothy should remember the faithfulness of Paul and look forward to the coming of his Lord (4:8, 18). Furthermore, Timothy should be encouraged because God would guard the message and preserve him as he faithfully endured in his calling (1:12; 4:8, 17–18).

23. What does faithfulness look like in your own life? When are times when you feel “ashamed”? Record your thoughts and share with the class or a Christian friend.

TITUS

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: Titus*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: Titus*

In our English Bible ordering, Titus represents the last of the Pastoral Epistles. Paul had left Titus in Crete “to put what remained in order” (1:5). Paul, as with the letters to Timothy, desired to leave instructions to the young minister in order to set him up for success as he labored in Crete.

Relatively short when compared to the rest of Paul’s writings (only Philemon is shorter), the letter leaves instructions regarding church leadership, the relationship between older and younger believers, and takes some time to deal with false teachers. By opening with a reference to church leadership, and by relating how older and younger believers are to relate, Paul seems to imply that a right organization of the church should lead believers to live in accord with sound doctrine for God’s glory.

Structure

24. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of Titus

Passage	Section Summary
Titus 1:1-4	
Titus 1:5-16	
Titus 2:2-15	

Titus 3:1-11	
Titus 3:12-15	

Theme (Titus)—Teaching Sound Doctrine

Pastor and author Mark Dever writes, “Paul...proceeds from the introduction to present Titus with two basic challenges: first, get good teachers in place; second, teach the truth...this book is mainly about teaching.”⁶⁹ Paul is concerned that Titus he himself, as well as appointing others who would, “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1).

So what does teaching “sound doctrine” include? The contents of chapter 2 and 3 suggest that it at least includes instructing older men, older women, and younger men certain truths (2:2–8). It also includes giving instructions to “slaves” (2:9–10), though specific instruction to masters is missing (cf. Eph. 6:9). Furthermore, what Titus is to teach certainly includes instructing believers in how “the grace of God has appeared...training [them] to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (2:12). Finally, Titus must teach the believers to relate rightly to authorities (3:1), be ready for good works, and so on. The type of life he is calling them to stands in stark contrast with who they once were (3:3). They must realize that when God’s grace appeared, and they were “justified by grace” (3:7), that they were called to “good works” (3:8; cf. Eph. 2:10).

25. Read through the list of qualifications for elders. How do the qualifications of the elders contrast with those of the false teachers mentioned in 1:10–16?

69 Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 380. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

26. What category do you fall into when reading Titus 2:1–10? Are you an older or younger man or woman? Given the instructions in Titus, what things can you apply to your life?
27. It was mentioned above that “good works” are a point of contrast with the false teachers. In Ephesians 2:10 we are created for “good works.” What are some “good works” that we should be eager to do?

Day 4 Summary

The second letter that Paul writes to Timothy is likely the last letter he wrote. He was nearing the end of his life and desired to pass the torch to his young protégé. He calls Timothy to remain unashamedly faithful to the gospel and ministry. Paul had left Titus in Crete to rightly order the church and teach sound doctrine. As believers in Crete had come to faith, they were to live in a radically different way than they once did.



Day 5

.....

Today we step back and consider the whole of each book and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and allow you to work through the overarching message of each for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think the author is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of each book in one sentence (one sentence per book). Then, explain your sentences in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summaries:

One-Paragraph Summaries:

Hebrews and James

10

📖 INTRODUCTION

We have come to the end of Paul's letters in the New Testament and now begin to survey Hebrews and the General Epistles. The phrase *General Epistles* is used to describe James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude. Sometimes the General Epistles are called "catholic letters." The word "catholic" does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the universal, or general, nature of the writings. Today we will consider Hebrews and James.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- ▶ have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of Hebrews and James.
- ▶ understand how the author presents Jesus as better than Moses, angels, Old Testament laws, etc.
- ▶ be familiar with the importance of the theological concept of perseverance of the saints and how it fits into the argument of Hebrews.
- ▶ understand the relationship between faith and works in James.



Day 1

HEBREWS

Hebrews is not the easiest book in the New Testament to understand when working verse by verse through the text. The book is filled with Old Testament quotes, allusions, and imagery. This makes the book a bit difficult to grasp as the reader makes their way through the pages.

Yet, this does not mean we are unable to grasp the overall message of Hebrews. After all, what we are aiming at in our study is not a full comprehension of every passage. Our aim is more modest. We merely hope that after studying Hebrews for the next two days you will be familiar with the structure of the book and its overall message.

We suggest that the main message of Hebrews is that Jesus is supreme so Christians should remain steadfast in their faith. In other words, persevere in your faith because Jesus is better.

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Hebrews 1-8
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Hebrews

CONTEXT

Author

We do not know who wrote Hebrews. All attempts to designate an author appear to be speculative, as the author never identifies himself within the text. Hebrews is not alone, though. The four canonical Gospels were also anonymous — the text does not tell you that Matthew wrote, Matthew, or Luke wrote Luke, etc. We rely on the early church tradition for such identification. Although several theories of who wrote Hebrews have been suggested we do not know the identity of the author.

1. Does not knowing who wrote Hebrews cause you concern? If so, what specific concerns do you have? How can we trust a book if we do not know who wrote it?

What is clear from the text of Hebrews is that, whoever the author, this person had extensive knowledge of the Jewish law, held the audience dear to his heart, and had a lofty view of Jesus Christ.

Recipients

Not only is the author of Hebrews anonymous, but the recipients are as well. The author does not name the audience at any point. This, as with authorship, has been the source of various debates. It is agreed that the writer is writing to believers, but the identity of these believers is not clear.

2. Though we do not know exactly who the audience is, what can we learn about them from the letter in each of the following passages?

Hebrews 1:1

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

Hebrews 4:2

For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:32-39

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For,

*“Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith,*

*and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”*

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Hebrews 12:4

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

From this short survey of the book, then, we can see that what they yet needed was someone to remind them Jesus is better than everything, and that clinging to him was their only hope.

STRUCTURE

The structure of the book of Hebrews is often compared to a sermon. That is, both exposition and exhortation are present in the book. As the author explains important theological points, he calls for the correct ethical response. As we have stated in previous lessons (e.g. Romans and Ephesians), right thinking should lead to right living.

3. Using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide, fill in the chart below:

Structure of Hebrews

Passage	Section Summary
Hebrews 1:11-2:18	
Hebrews 3:1-4:13	
Hebrews 4:14-6:20	
Hebrews 7:1-10:18	
Hebrews 10:19-12:29	
Hebrews 13:1-25	

Day 1 Summary

Today we introduced you to Hebrews. The letter is presumably written to Jewish Christians who were suffering for the faith. Though we do not know who wrote the letter, we know that the author had a high view of the person and work of Christ. The contents of the book seem to be oriented around this high view of Jesus as the author writes about the supremacy of Jesus over people, institutions, and events.

Day 2

THEMES (HEBREWS)

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible*: Hebrews 9-13

THEME 1—JESUS IS BETTER

The writer of Hebrews continually shows that Jesus is *better*, rather than simply saying that Jesus is *best*. There are times when the use of the comparative (*better*) brings more punch to a discussion than an appeal to the superlative (*best*).⁷⁰ The writer of Hebrews is able to compare Jesus to numerous things and in each case say that Jesus is better.

The overall message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better. He is better than angels, Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, and everything else. It seems that the audience may have been tempted to return to the Jewish religious system. After all they were suffering for their faith. They endured the loss of so much (Hebrews 10:32-36) and standing firm would no doubt be difficult. But if they left Jesus and returned to the old Jewish system, they would be returning to something far inferior to Christ and his saving work. Since Jesus is better, cling to him.

Better than Angels (1:5-2:18)—In these first two chapters Jesus is shown to be superior to the angels in a number of ways. After we look at how Jesus is better than angels, we need to comment on *why* the author felt the need to elaborate on Christ's supremacy over angelic beings.

⁷⁰ See D. A. Carson, "The Book of Hebrews" in four lectures at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: <http://divinity.tiu.edu/media-resources/video/teds-lecture-series-d-a-carson/>

4. Read the passages below and write down how Jesus is shown to be better than the angels in each.

Hebrews 1:5

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

*“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”?*

Or again,

*“I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son”?*

Hebrews 1:8

But of the Son he says,

*“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.*

Hebrews 1:10-13

And,

*“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;*

*¹¹ they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,*

*¹² like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.*

*But you are the same,
and your years will have no end.”*

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said,

*“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?*

These passages come together to clearly inform the reader that when compared to angels, Jesus is better. But why focus on angels? Was there a problem with worshipping angels that needed to be addressed? Did the audience have some sense that Jesus was inferior to angelic creatures? It is more likely that this section is tied to Hebrews 2:1, where the author urges the readers not to neglect what they have heard from God through the Son (cf. 1:2). Thus, the writer argues from the lesser to the greater. If the message declared by angels was reliable, and judgment came to those who neglected the angelic message, *how much more* should they heed the revelation of the Son! So the discussion about angels sets the stage for the first warning passage in the epistle.

Better than Moses (3:1-4:13)—Not only is Jesus better than angels, he is superior to Moses! This is a huge statement from the author, as the audience may be predominately Jewish Christians. Moses was the great prophet of the Old Testament and it is through Moses God had delivered the people from Egypt. It is by Moses that Israel receives the Law. As these readers suffered for their faith, returning to their Jewish roots, and possibly escaping persecution by doing so, would be a tantalizing option. Yet, if they returned to the Jewish religion, and thus returned to following the Law of Moses, they would be turning to an inferior man and system.

5. In Hebrews 3:1-6 Moses and Jesus are contrasted. Moses was faithful as a “servant” (3:5), but Jesus was faithful as “a son.” How does the imagery of the “servant” and the “son” over the house show that Jesus is better than Moses?

Better than Other Priests (Hebrews 4:14—7:28)—This large section explains to the reader that the priesthood under the old Mosaic system is inferior to the risen Christ. Jesus is “a great high priest” who is “without sin” (4:15). Every other high priest was tainted by sin and had to offer sacrifices for his own sins before he could sacrifice on behalf of the people (5:3). The sinless Jesus offered himself once for all (7:27).

Furthermore, Jesus is not in the line of Aaron, but is a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (5:6). This is important as Melchizedek represents a superior priesthood (7:7). The Levitical priesthood was inferior to Melchizedek, as the latter received tithes from Abraham and seems to escape death. Jesus was a priest after the superior order of Melchizedek!

Better than the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:1—10:39)—The old covenant came

on tablets of stone (cf. Exodus 24:12; Deut. 9:15; 10:1). The new covenant is written on “hearts” (Heb. 10:16; Jer. 31:33). The shedding of blood ratifies both covenants (9:18).⁷¹ The major difference is the internal versus external nature of the two covenants.

The old covenant was an external covenant. That is, it gave a set of laws that governed how the Jews were to live in relation to Yahweh without doing anything to them internally. It was powerless to affect change because it was not “written on their hearts.” In contrast, the new covenant that Jesus inaugurates is better *because* it is not merely external. The new covenant acts internally (8: 10: “I will put my laws *into their minds*, and write them on their *hearts*...”) to change God’s people and cause them to walk in his ways.

Better than Other Heroes of the Faith (Hebrews 11:1—12:29)—There are certain Christians that we look to as examples of faith and devotion to God. They may be pastors, authors, other family members, or friends. We often look to them because they display personal piety, knowledge of Scripture, and zeal for God’s glory. Having those types of heroes is not necessarily wrong (cf. Philippians 3:17). Yet, all of our heroes are merely men. They are models of faith, but they are imperfect and inconsistent models.

6. In Hebrews 11 and 12, what is it about Jesus that makes him better than other “heroes” of the faith?

The writer of Hebrews compares Jesus to people, institutions, and even heavenly creatures. As each comparison is made Jesus is shown to be superior. The author of Hebrews, seeking to encourage suffering Christians, repeatedly shows that Jesus is better. Because he is better, they should cling to him.

71 See Exodus 24:8; Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22: 20.

THEME 2—PERSEVERANCE IN THE FAITH

The danger of returning to the inferior Mosaic system is no laughing matter. Heaven and hell hang in the balance as those who walk away prove to be unregenerate and not part of God's people (cf. 1 John 2:9). The author doesn't stop at showing them Jesus is better, thereby calling these believers to remain committed to Jesus. The writer also warns the readers that they "have come to share in Christ if indeed [they] hold [their] original confidence firm to the end" (3:14).

Warning Passages—There are five warning passages in Hebrews. As the author details the supremacy of Jesus over certain realities, he turns at critical junctures to warn readers of the dangers of falling away from Jesus, who is supreme, and trusting in something else.

What is the purpose of including these warnings? New Testament scholar, Thomas R. Schreiner, gives a succinct answer, "The warning passages that punctuate the letter were written so that the readers would persevere and be saved on the last day..."⁷² Thus, Dr. James Hamilton, of Southern Seminary, can say that Hebrews "is not an evangelizing letter calling for conversion but a discipling letter calling for perseverance, growth in holiness, and deeper perception of what God has done in Christ."⁷³

7. Read each of the passages below, write down the warning, and note which part of the outline they fall under:

Hebrews 2:1-4

¹Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ²For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

⁷² Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 394.

⁷³ James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 515.

Hebrews 3:12-4:13

³¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

⁴¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest,”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any

two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

^{5:11} About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

^{6:1} Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

8. We believe that true Christians will persevere till the end, by God's grace and sustaining power, those who are truly born-again will never turn from Jesus finally. If that is true, why does the writer of Hebrews include so many warnings within this letter?

Day 2 Summary

Jesus is better, so cling to him till the end. The audience had suffered greatly for their faith in Jesus. There was a strong temptation to return to the Mosaic Law, to turn back to Moses and the Old Covenant. The author writes to call his readers to remain faithful to Jesus since he is far superior to Moses and the priesthood; the new covenant that he inaugurated was better than the old covenant; and Jesus is better than all the heroes of the faith combined. Reminding the readers that Jesus was better is meant to encourage believers to stand firm till the end. The author also issues warnings. Failing to hold fast to the faith and falling away from Jesus would mean judgment at the hands of God, who is a consuming fire.

Day 3

JAMES

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible*: James 1-3
- *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 20: James

There are thousands, maybe millions, of people who verbally claim to be Christians, yet their faith does not impact their daily lives. They may attend a church, even serve in some capacity, but outside of Sunday morning, it might be impossible to recognize them as Christians. The author of James apparently knew some Christians like this, or at least a few that were struggling with such ideas. So he writes to let them know that their faith should be active. That is, the faith that they claimed to have should result in changed behaviors. If their faith didn't produce fruit, it was a dead faith.

The theological message of James seems to be that in the midst of trials, you must wisely live out your faith. James highlights the theme of trials and temptations while calling for wise living that is evidence of a genuine faith in Jesus. If that wise life is not something that characterizes a believer, if good works are not evident in his or her life, then it is questionable whether or not their faith in Jesus is real. Consequently, if their faith is not real (2:17; "dead"), then "*that faith*" cannot save.

CONTEXT

Author

In your reading of *Introducing the New Testament* you were introduced to the debates surrounding authorship of this letter. The historic claim is that James, the half-brother of Jesus, is the author. It is this James that would play a prominent role in the Jerusalem church and is the best known James in our New Testaments.

Read John 7:5. It is helpful to consider that the brothers of Jesus had failed to believe in him. We can often think of biblical figures as paragons of faith and virtue, always standing firm in their commitment to Jesus. But with James, the very (half) brother of Jesus, we see that the gift of faith must be given even to the biblical authors!

We are not sure when James comes to saving faith, we simply know that he did. It may be possible he came to faith before the crucifixion, or he may have believed after the risen Christ appears to James (1 Corinthians 15:7).

9. James was the (half) brother of Jesus and had not believed. How does his example encourage you in your evangelistic work?

Recipients

The opening of the letter identifies “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” as the audience James has in mind. So, in one sense we know generally who the audience is. Yet, on the other hand we must decide who *specifically* James is referencing by using this phrase.

10. According to your reading, who are the intended recipients of this letter?
11. Though the people of God are scattered across the globe today, there is a day coming when God will “gather his elect” (Matthew 24:31). List as many implications of this truth as you can when considering the present scattered nature of the church and the day coming when God gathers the church.

STRUCTURE

When the reader tries to develop a clear outline to James it is readily apparent that this is no easy task. Some have suggested that no logical flow of thought can be found (e.g. Martin Luther) in the book. Still others argue that James is a tightly formed letter with a discernible structure.

12. Fill in the table below, using your reading as a guide.

Structure of James

Passage	Section Summary
James 1:1	
James 1:2-18	
James 1:19-26	
James 3:1-4:12	
James 4:13-5:20	
James 5:12-20	

Day 3 Summary

The letter of James is written by the half-brother of Jesus. He did not initially believe that Jesus was the Christ. Yet, he eventually comes to faith and God uses him in powerful ways. Though we are uncertain as to who the recipients are exactly, it is clear that the letter is addressed to a dispersed body of believers. This fact reminds us that the Church is not at home in this world and we are longing for the day when God gathers his people. Though the structure of the letter is of intense debate, noting the contents of the letter provides a helpful outline.

Day 4

THEMES (JAMES)

THEME—FAITH IN ACTION

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, James 4-5

James uses a fair number of imperatives in the letter. James is exhorting his readers that they must not simply claim to have faith, but their faith must be active. This means resisting worldliness, having a distinctly Christian worldview, and a host of other things.

A workless faith is a worthless and dead faith. It cannot save. It is a faith like that of the demons who believed, but shuddered (James 2:19). The writer of James calls believers to be “doers of the word” (1:22) and to fulfill the royal law (2:8). Followers of Jesus should put their faith on display through their works (2:17), or else their faith proves “dead” (2:26). All this combines to challenge the Christian to put their faith into action.

13. In the passages below, what is the call to Christians? How should they live? Record your thoughts on each section.

James 1:22-25

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

James 2:14-26

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

James 3:1-12

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come

blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

James 4:1-12

¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

In all of this it is clear that the audience needed to be exhorted to put their faith into action. They claimed to be Christians but their actions did not match their confession. Mark Dever writes, “The point of hearing God’s Word is not to simply know it; the point of hearing God’s Word is to do it.”⁷⁴ James is writing, in

⁷⁴ Taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever, ©2005, pp. 50. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

a style that is reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets, to rebuke his hearers and call them to faithfulness.

14. Is it possible, given what we have read in James, for someone to claim to have “faith” in Jesus and yet be cast into hell? What is the difference between belief that does not save and true belief?

THEME 2—SUFFERING

We should briefly mention the theme of trials that both opens and closes James (1:2-4; 5:13-18). The audience that James was writing to apparently had undergone, or was undergoing, trials of various sorts. Mistreatment came from the outside and possibly even the inside. Yet, in all their trials they needed to understand that God had a purpose. As the writer states, “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (1:3). Coming to grips with God’s purposes behind our suffering helps us persevere.

15. In James 2:1-7 we read about the sin of partiality. Evidently some were showing favoritism to the rich and powerful while mistreating the poor and needy. What was strange about this, based on how the rich treated them? Can you think of any examples where we might be tempted to show preference to someone base on their socio-economic status?

16. Read James 4:1-11. What was causing suffering within their midst?

James closes the letter by asking if anyone is suffering among them (James 5:13). Given his references to trials at the opening of the book, it seems this is a rhetorical question.

17. What does James call them to in 5:13-16?

When this theme is combined with the theme of putting your faith into action, we are reminded of how difficult it is to live the Christian life. We are called to live out our faith in the midst of a fallen world. We will suffer, sometimes at the hands of other Christians. We must patiently endure, prayerful waiting on the Lord, while simultaneously putting our faith into action.

Day 4 Summary

Today we have considered the difference between a living faith and a dead faith. A living faith is an active faith. Those who have a genuine saving faith will put their faith on display through their works. A faith that lacks worth is a dead faith that cannot save. It is also apparent that James is writing to a suffering community. By telling the believers that the suffering is not outside of God's control, but has a good purpose, they are encouraged to persevere.



Day 5

.....

Today we step back and consider the whole of each book and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and allow you to work through the overarching message of each for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think the author is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of each book in one sentence (one sentence per book). Then, explain your sentences in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary for Hebrews:

One-Paragraph Summary for Hebrews:

One-Sentence Summary for James:

One-Paragraph Summary for James:

1 & 2 Peter, 1–3 John

11

📖 INTRODUCTION

These five letters come from the hands of two of the most important figures in the New Testament. Peter is the apostle on whom Christ said he'd build his church (Matthew 16:18) and was the spokesmen among the apostles. John was one of the original twelve (as was Peter) and was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26). Thus, in reading these five letters we are reading the thoughts of men who knew Jesus intimately and had followed him from the beginning.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should

- ▶ have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of these different letters.
- ▶ understand the importance of standing firm in the faith (i.e. persevering) as discussed in 1 Peter.
- ▶ understand how growth in Christian maturity fits into the argument of 2 Peter.
- ▶ be able to articulate how the three tests of faith in 1 John are reinforced in 2 and 3 John.



Day 1

FIRST PETER

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: 1 Peter
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 21: 1 Peter

If you watch the news, surf the Internet for a few minutes, or go anywhere in public, you are sure to catch a glimpse of some strange people. People have strange habits, strange clothes, strange hairstyles, and strange beliefs. *Strange-ness* characterizes most of us. And yet, Christians may be the strangest people of all.

Consider what we believe as Christians. We believe that God created the universe out of nothing. We believe that God created man and woman from dust and that the whole human race can trace their existence back to two original people. We confess that God became a human being, brought into this world by a young virgin girl. We believe that Jesus, as God, died for his enemies. We believe that a dead man was raised, is now alive, sits at the right hand of God, and rules the universe. We believe that Christians, regardless of ethnicity or geography, make up one family. And we believe that our King will return one day, riding a horse, and crush all his enemies while ushering his people into his kingdom!

Non-Christians find out we believe these things and they think that we are strange. And, they are right! We are “strangers” (1:1) to this world (cf. 4:4). And because of our *strange-ness*, because we believe and act in ways different from them, they often mock and persecute us. This seems to be the case for Peter’s audience. They have come under attack (1 Peter 1:6; 2:20–21; etc.) for their beliefs and their corresponding way of life. Peter writes to call his brothers and sisters to stand firm in God’s grace (5:12).

In other words, despite suffering, Christians are to be holy as God is holy as they await their coming salvation.

CONTEXT

Author

1. Who do Carson and Moo claim wrote 1 Peter? Summarize their reasons in your own words.
2. Peter is a tremendously helpful biblical character to think about. In Luke 22:54–62 we read the account of Peter denying Jesus three times. Given that Peter was an apostle, a powerful preacher, an evangelist, and a biblical author, how does his failure encourage you?

Recipients

3. To whom is Peter writing, according to Carson and Moo?

STRUCTURE

4. Use your reading in *Introducing the New Testament* to fill in the chart below:

Structure of 1 Peter

Passage	Section Summary
1 Peter 1:1-2	
1 Peter 1:3-2:10	
1 Peter 2:11-4:11	
1 Peter 4:12-5:11	
1 Peter 5:12-14	

THEMES

*Theme—Stand Firm in God’s Grace*⁷⁵

It is possible that 1 Peter 5:12 is the thesis of the entire book:

1 Peter 5:12

“...I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.”

He has declared to them the unmerited favor of God that they have in Jesus, and must plant their feet on this solid ground. In the face of suffering, trials, and persecution they must keep their feet firmly planted on the rock of God’s grace that “will be brought to [them] at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13).

The Encouragement to Stand Firm—if Christians in any generation are going to persevere in the midst of suffering, they will need encouragement. Peter writes and offers a great deal of encouragement as he reminds the readers what God has done in Christ. He also points to the future as they await the return of Jesus.

Reflection: Read the following passages and record how you think these passages offer Christians, especially those who are suffering, hope and encouragement.

1 Peter 1:3-5

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time

⁷⁵ This theme borrowed from Bethlehem College & Seminary professor, Dr. Andrew D. Naselli as articulated in his course, New Testament Background and Message.

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:20-21

²⁰ *For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.* ²¹ *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

1 Peter 3:17-18

¹⁷ *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

¹⁸ *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...*

1 Peter 1:5

⁵ *who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

1 Peter 1:13

¹³ *Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 4:7

⁷The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

1 Peter 5:10

¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

The Life of One Who is Standing Firm—it is probably the case that the ethical exhortations in 1 Peter are descriptions of what standing firm looks like. After setting the trajectory in 1:3–12, referencing the trials as the testing of one's faith (1:7), and reminding the readers to remember the salvation they have obtained, Peter says, “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). He then calls the readers to “be holy” (1 Peter 1:16), “love one another” (1 Peter 1:22), and to “put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander” (1 Peter 2:1). Throughout the letter Peter mixes exhortational material into his theology.

5. Use your reading in 1 Peter to describe what it means to be:

Holy:

Witnesses:

Loving:

In short, the audience is suffering at the hands of those around them. These Christians need to be encouraged to stand firm in the midst of their trials. They are encouraged to do so by pointing towards the inheritance they have, the salvation that is coming soon.

Day 1 Summary

Today you were introduced to 1 Peter. The apostle Peter, one of the original twelve disciples, has historically been identified as the author. Though he was an imperfect follower of Jesus, beset by weakness, he was used by God to accomplish great things. His letter is written to those who are suffering because of their faith in Jesus. Therefore, Peter writes his letter to encourage them to stand firm till the end by remembering the grace that God has shown them in Christ. If they are standing firm, it will mean that they are living holy lives as God's witnesses who love one another.

Day 2

SECOND PETER

Peter had already written one letter to his audience and now felt the need to pen another. Apparently false teachers had crept into the church and threatened to stunt the growth of the believers. Peter wanted his audience to grow in their faith and to do that they needed to resist the false teachers. Thus, 2 Peter is a letter that is meant to call his readers to withstand the error of false teaching by remembering the truth that they have.

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible: 2 Peter*
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament: Chapter 22: 2 Peter*

CONTEXT

Author

6. According to *Introducing the New Testament*, who is the author of 2 Peter, and how do Carson and Moo draw their conclusion?

Recipients

7. According to 2 Peter, who are the recipients of the letter?

STRUCTURE

8. Fill in the chart below, using your reading from *Introducing the New Testament* as a guide.

Structure of 2 Peter

Passage	Section Summary
2 Peter 1:1-15	
2 Peter 1:16-21	
2 Peter 2:1-22	
2 Peter 3:1-13	
2 Peter 3:14-18	

THEMES

Theme 1—Growing in Faith

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) gives the church a mandate to go into the world and make disciples. This call implies sharing the gospel and baptizing those who come to faith in Jesus. At the same time, the call also involves “teaching them [those who believe and are baptized] to obey all” that Jesus commanded. The implication is that Christians are not meant to believe, be baptized, and then coast through the rest of their spiritual life as infant Christians. They should grow in their faith.

That Peter is concerned with his readers growing in their faith is further emphasized by his return to the idea at the close of the letter. In his closing words Peter once again calls the readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18).

12. What are you currently doing in an effort to grow in your Christian faith?

Theme 2—False Teachers

It seems fairly obvious throughout the letter that false teachers were troubling the audience that Peter had in mind and Peter wants to squelch their influence.

13. How does Peter describe the false teachers? Read 2 Peter 2 and record as many characteristics of the false teachers as you can find.

14. According to 2 Peter 2:4-9, what is the final destination of false teachers?

15. What are a few safeguards against false teaching for an individual Christian? For a church?

Day 2 Summary

Today we have considered two themes that are found in 2 Peter. Peter has written to believers and urged them to grow in their faith. By growing in the grace and knowledge of God they would make their calling and election sure. However, the presence of false teachers threatened to stunt their growth. Therefore Peter characterizes the false teachers and shows that their end was destruction. Thus, the believers should not pay attention to their destructive heresies and be established in the truth they have received (1:12).

Day 3

FIRST JOHN

First John brings us back to a familiar author: John, the son of Zebedee. We first encountered John's writing in The Gospel of John. In that book we were introduced to some of the most famous Christian teachings found in the New Testament, and possibly the most often quoted verse in the Bible (John 3:16). Now John gives us three letters that represent his ongoing pastoral concern for those who have believed in Jesus.

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: 1 John
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 23: 1–3 John

CONTEXT

Author

16. Summarize the discussion of authorship from your reading *Introducing the New Testament*:

Recipients

17. Summarize the discussion of recipients of 1-3 John from your reading in *Introducing the New Testament*.

THEMES

Theme—Assurance

We are all enemies of God when we enter the world (Romans 5:10; cf. Psalm 51:5). When you stand before God on that Day of Judgment, you want to be certain that the war between you and the Lord is over. You want to be certain that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, his propitiating work, is something that has been applied to your soul. For it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

First John is a letter that is written for this purpose. John wants his readers to “know that [they] have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Throughout the letter John is concerned with his readers knowing certain things. Eleven times he uses the phrase, “by this” and goes on to say things like, “we know,” or “you know,” or “it is evident.” One thing he wants his readers to know is that they are in Christ because “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (5:11).

To help the reader “know” that he or she has eternal life John offers three “tests of life.” These three “tests of life” should help produce assurance in the life of a professing Christian. And we all want to be assured that when we are called to the judgment seat, we will be welcomed as a friend rather than an enemy.

Test #1: The Doctrinal Test—the first test we consider is sometimes called the “doctrinal test.” The test is whether or not you believe the right things about Jesus. That is, do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who has come in the flesh?

What you believe about Jesus makes all the difference in the world. If you deny Jesus, you do not have a relationship with the Father (2 John 2:23). If you do not think Jesus has come in the flesh (being truly human), then you believe something Satanic (4:1–3).

18. According to 1 John, how should we think about Jesus? Cite references to back up your answer.

The first test of life is what you believe about Jesus. Some denied he was truly human (Docetism), others may have denied that he was the Messiah (1 John 2:22), and others may have walked away amidst all the confusion (2:19). John writes to let his readers know that if they want to be sure that eternal life is theirs, then they need to think rightly about Jesus.

Test #2: The Moral Test—One of the most important teachings in the Bible is that true Christians strive towards holiness. In John’s Gospel he stated plainly that those who love God will obey God (John 14:15, 21, 23). The same idea is present in 1 John. Those who are born of God do not make “a practice of sinning” (1 John 3:9). Consider 1 John 1:5-2:6, 2:28-3:10, and 5:2-3.

The first test asked if you believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world to save those who believe in him. The second test asks if you are seeking to “walk in the same way in which he walked” (1:2). If both of these are true in your life, then you should be encouraged about the reality of your salvation.

Test #3: The Love Test—the final test that commentators have noted in John is the “love test.” Do you love other Christians? This is often the hardest test to pass. We will likely admit that we believe right things about Jesus, and we generally want to honor God with our lives. But are we really expected to love these crazy people in our churches? That seems too much!

19. What does it mean to love the people of God? Can you give practical examples of how you have loved the Church? Can you give practical examples of how the Church has loved you?

John is clear in his letter that those who do not love other Christians are “still in the darkness” (2:9). The very assurance that “we have passed out of death into life” is that “we love the brothers” (3:14). And the ground for our loving each other is “not that we have 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 out to love one another” (4:10).

20. Without looking back, summarize the three tests given in 1 John.

Day 3 Summary

This has been a brief introduction to 1 John. In this letter we encounter again John, the son of Zebedee. Though we are uncertain as to the exact identity of the recipients, we are sure that John exercised a great deal of influence over these Christians. He writes out of deep concern for them, as they are troubled with false teaching. Central to his purpose is helping his fellow believers know for certain that they had eternal life. If they believed in Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God who had come in the flesh; if they were seeking to be obedient to the commands of God; and if they loved each other, then they could be assured that they had eternal life.

Day 4

2–3 JOHN

Most people need to hear things more than once before believing it. Repeating certain truths throughout a course, or a lesson, or in life generally is generally a good idea. In 2 and 3 John certain themes that we noticed in our study of 1 John are repeated. In 1 John we learned that John is concerned for his fellow believers. They were in danger of being deceived by false teachers. Some had already walked away, proving to have never been truly part of the church (1 John 2:19). Those who remained in the church likely had questions about the surety of their own salvation given other members walking away. If others can walk away, and thus prove to be false converts, is it possible for me to walk away? How do I know that I truly have eternal life? John's stated purpose is to write so that they "may know" (1 John 5:13) that they are truly Christians.

John offers three tests that are meant to help the believers know their spiritual condition. If they (1) believe in the biblical Jesus, (2) are striving to be obedient to the commands of God, and (3) love other Christians then they should be assured that that "have the Son" and thus "have life" (1 John 5:11–12). It seems that these ideas are then reinforced in 2 and 3 John.

Required Reading:

- *ESV Study Bible: 2–3 John*

2 JOHN

CONTEXT

Recipients

21. According to your reading, who are the recipients of 2 John?

Theme—Walking in Truth and Love

Notice the thematic connections between 2 John and 1 John:

1 JOHN

2 JOHN

“By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (2:5b–6)

What common theme is found in vv. 4, 6?

“I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.” (2:26)

What common theme is found in v. 7?

What common theme is found in 4:7?

“And now I ask you, dear lady...that we love one another.” (v. 5)

Both the themes of truth and love are present in 2 John. These two themes are held together. When John calls his readers to love one another in 1 John he connects it to the idea of obeying the commandments of God (1 John 5:2). Once again, in the life of this congregation, John explicitly defines what he means by loving other Christians. We love them by walking in truth, which means obeying the commandments of God.

This stands in stark contrast to the false teachers. They do not love anyone by spreading heretical ideas. When they reject the humanity of Jesus (2 John 7), they are spreading damning teachings. Loving other Christians means we do not allow these deceivers to come into our churches and spread their lies (vs. 10). Instead, we walk in truth and by doing, we love other Christians specifically, and other people generally.

22. The prohibition in 2 John 10–11 seems odd given the New Testament teaching about being hospitable (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9). How can you reconcile what John says here with those passages?

3 JOHN

CONTEXT

Recipients

The letter specifically states that “Gaius” is the recipient of the letter. Information about this person is scarce, but it is clear that he is showing hospitality to other Christians. It also seems to be the case that he is dealing with an opponent, Diotrephes.

Theme—Love the Brothers by Walking in Truth

The letter clearly uses Gaius as a positive example of loving other Christians. John received reports that Gaius was “walking in the truth” (vs. 3). This gives John great joy (vs. 4). When Gaius walked in the truth he was showing his “love” for these “brothers.” (vv. 5, 6). Even though they were “strangers,” they were “brothers” (fellow Christians), and Gaius supported their efforts (vv. 5, 8). His support of the ministry efforts of these believers was an example of what it meant to walk in the truth and love other Christians.

23. Verse 8 says, “we ought to support people like these” [those who had gone out for the sake of the name, vs. 7). How can you support those who have gone out (missionaries, pastors, etc.) for the sake of ministry?

John includes in his letter a negative example and opponent that needs to be rebuked. Diotrephes is self-centered and does not submit to authority (vs. 9). He does not “welcome the brothers” (vs. 10) and thus is an example of “evil” (vs. 11). Instead of following his example, Gaius should follow the example of Demetrius. This man “has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself” (vs. 12).

Day 4 Summary

Today you were introduced to 2 and 3 John. They are rather short letters with 2 John being addressed to a particular congregation and 3 John to a specific individual. They both break down into a basic three part outline and are generally easy to follow. The letter of 2 John develops the themes of loving other Christians walking according to the truth. This means false teachers must be resisted. And 3 John develops the same themes by putting Gaius forth as a positive example and Diotrephes as a negative example.



Day 5

Today we step back and consider the whole of each book and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and allow you to work through the overarching message of each for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think the author is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of each book in one sentence (one sentence per book). Then, explain your sentences in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summaries:

One Paragraph Summaries:

Jude and Revelation

12

📖 INTRODUCTION

As we come to the final chapter of our study we consider two final books. One book is by an author that we have not yet encountered. The other book has traditionally been difficult to interpret. The book of Jude is Jude's only contribution to the New Testament. Yet, even though this is the only letter from Jude, it is packed with important Old Testament references and teaching about false teachers. And when we turn to the Revelation of John, despite the difficulties in interpreting the letter, Revelation encourages Christians as they await the return of their King.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to

- have a general understanding of the author, recipients, and structure of these two letters.
- understand the importance of contending for the faith.
- understand the central themes that run through Revelation and how these themes relate to the overarching message of the book.
- identify the central figure in the New Testament, articulate the most important message of the New Testament, and understand who the people of God are in the New Testament.



Day 1

JUDE

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Jude
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 24: Jude

False teaching simply will not go away. When Jesus begins his ministry he denounces the Jewish religious leaders for their errant ways. As the Apostles and disciples begin preaching the gospel they run into opponents and heretics. As we have seen, it isn't long after Paul plants a few churches that he writes letters in order to combat false ideas. Peter has to do the same thing. Even John, at his elderly age, had to refute harmful teachers. Now, Jude combats more false teaching.

False teaching is a constant danger. Paul warned Timothy about the “last days” (2 Timothy 3:1) when people “will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:3–4). We now see this prediction is coming true early in the life of the church as we still see it today with false teachers littering the television, radio, Internet, and bookshelves.

The constant threat of false teaching means we must be ready to heed the call found in Jude 3. Christians must “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

CONTEXT

Author

1. Who do the authors of your textbook believe is the author of Jude? What are their reasons?

Recipients

The opening of the letter is one of the most general openings in the New Testament. The reference to “those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ,” can be applied to all Christians. What seems clear is that Jude had a specific audience in mind. The reference to the false teachers that have “crept in unnoticed,” and the specific descriptions that Jude gives of these heretics, are so specific that they don’t seem to fit a general letter.

However, which group of Christians Jude is specifically writing to is seemingly impossible to know. We do know that they were a group of believers that had a “common salvation” (vs. 3) and knew the “predictions of the apostles” (vs. 17). They were believers in Jesus who needed encouragement to “contend for the faith” (vs. 3).

STRUCTURE

First and Second John were only comprised of one chapter apiece. Jude is yet another letter that has one chapter. Yet, this small book is packed with information. The letter skips the traditional thanksgiving and quickly turns to the heart of the matter.

2. Using your textbook as a guide, fill in the table below.

Structure of Jude

Passage	Section Summary
Jude 1-2	
Jude 3-16	
Jude 17-23	
Jude 24-35	

THEME—CONTENDING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS FOR THE FAITH

As we stated in our study of Galatians, there are things worth fighting for. Freedom is worth fighting for. Your wife, children, the unborn, and a million other things are worth protecting. Though it isn't popular today, biblical truth is worth fighting for. That doesn't mean we should start throwing literal punches towards the face of those who contradict the Bible. It does mean that we should open our mouths and defend the truth delivered to us through the Scriptures.

Jude is calling Christians to fight for the faith that “was once for all delivered to the saints” (vs. 3). According to John Piper, “it is the duty of every genuine believer to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”⁷⁶ God has preserved for us, and delivered to us, through the faithful efforts of Christians in the past a body of doctrine that contains the only message of salvation. It is our duty, for our own good, for the good of future generations, and for the glory of God, to guard what we received (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14).

76 John Piper, *Contend for the Faith* (<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/contend-for-the-faith>).

3. When you read “contend for the faith,” what comes to mind? What are ways we can contend for the faith?

This is especially important as false teachers threaten the church. If false teachers are able to infiltrate our ranks and distort the truth, then salvation is in danger of being lost.

4. Read Jude carefully for descriptions of the false teachers. Does their behavior sound enticing?

Jude begins to end his letter by saying, “keep yourselves in the love God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (vs. 21).

5. When, if ever, is it right to denounce false teachers with such scathing remarks?

6. Do we keep ourselves in God's love, or does God keep us? Compare verse 21 with verse 24. How do we hold these two verses together?

Day 1 Summary

The letter from Jude is the only writing that we have from his hand. In John 7:5 we are told that none of Jesus' brothers believed in him. Yet, Jude, his half-brother, comes to faith later and is used to accomplish great things. God uses imperfect people for his glory. Jude writes his letter to fellow Christians that are battling false teachers. In light of the danger of false teachers, who are described with lucid imagery, Jude exhorts the believers to contend for the faith.

Day 2

REVELATION

Required Reading:

- ▷ *ESV Study Bible*: Revelation 1–11
- ▷ *Introducing the New Testament*: Chapter 25: Revelation

If you had any superpower, what would it be? One superpower that would be pretty helpful to have is the ability to know the future. You could predict who would win the next World Series, offer sound advice to those playing the stock market, and even escape potentially deadly situations. Knowing how things will turn out in the future is something people are generally interested in when it comes to making money or staying alive.

Still, other people are interested in the future because they think things will be better when it arrives. “Next year I’ll go on a diet and finally get into shape.” Or, “In the future I’ll have a great job, healthy family, and plenty of money to pay my bills.” For these people the future offers hope, as it seems we can make it what we want in a few easy steps.

People are often curious and eager to know the future. Whatever your outlook on the future, John reveals a few things that we can be certain about. The future, according to John, is bright and dark. It is bright for those who have believed in Jesus Christ. It is dark for those who have refused to trust in him for their salvation. Depending on what you do with Jesus, the future can either be something you long for, or something you hope never comes. One other thing is certain, if your outlook on the future is shaped by what John writes in Revelation, it will have an impact on your living today.

CONTEXT

Author

7. According to the authors of *Introducing the New Testament*, who was most likely the author of Revelation?

God's Self-Disclosure—an important feature of the opening of Revelation is that the contents of the book are rooted in the self-disclosure of God. The author opens by stating, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw” (Revelation 1:1–2). Thus, the revelation is of divine origin.

Recipients

8. Though the initial recipients of this letter are the seven churches named in chapter 1 and addressed in chapters 2 and 3, what significance do you think it might have for us today?

Other Important Issues

The Book of Revelation is a difficult book to interpret. Because of the difficulties that surround the book, Christians often neglect it. This is understandable. There has been a long history of confusion even among the brightest commentators. So we enter into the study of this letter with humility. Our goal over the next two days is simply to give you a basic introduction to the book. To do so, it is probably wise to highlight some of the basic interpretative challenges.

Literary Genre— An important aspect of biblical interpretation is understanding what genre of literature you are reading.

9. What three styles does *Introducing the New Testament* identify within Revelation?

Major Approaches to Revelation—Carson and Moo list four major approaches to understanding Revelation. These approaches affect whether or not you see the events of Revelation as future, past, symbolic, or something else. Again, this has an effect on the interpretation of the book.

10. List the four approaches listed in *Introducing the New Testament* and summarize them in your own words.

Millennial Views—it seems wise to mention the various understandings of what has been called the “Millennium.” That is, a thousand-year reign is mentioned in Revelation (20:1–6). Is this a literal thousand-year reign? Is it symbolic for a long period of unspecified time? Is it future, or present, or past? These are questions that Christians have raised through the centuries. Though we do not pretend to be able to answer the questions today, it is helpful to introduce the issue here.

11. In the section, *Millennial Views* (page 2458) of your *ESV Study Bible*, the discussion of the various views begins. List the four positions that are described. Have you heard of all of them? Do you think any of them sound either wrong or right at first glance?

Though the preceding discussion illustrates the difficulties that surround interpreting Revelation, it is not meant to discourage. In fact, John clearly states, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). We can be confident that God, who loves us and desires to communicate with us, has not given us something impossible to comprehend. And, as the writer states, there is blessing that awaits the person who digs into this book.

STRUCTURE

12. Using the textbook, *Introducing the New Testament*, create a bullet list that outlines the structure.

Day 2 Summary

The Book of Revelation has much to tell us about the future that should impact how we live in the present. John writes to the churches in Asia and relays a message of divine origin. If the churches will read, hear, and keep what they find in this book they will be blessed. Though there are interpretative challenges to understanding Revelation, we must remember that God desires to communicate with his people and has not given us something that is impossible to comprehend.

Day 3

THEMES

Required Reading: *ESV Study Bible*, Revelation 12–22

Theme 1—The Sovereignty of God

One of the most encouraging and comforting truths of the Bible is that God is in control. The God who spoke the worlds into existence (Genesis 1:1) is also the God who controls every turn of dice (Proverbs 16:33). The Book of Revelation encourages the Christian because it reminds us that God is in control of history and everything will come to an end as he has determined. In the opening of the Bible we find that things have gone wrong (Genesis 3). But when we come to the end of the story, we find that God has made all things right (Revelation 22).

Chapters 4–5 of Revelation show God sitting on his throne receiving worship. Four living creatures cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is to come” (4:8; cf. Is. 6:3). He is an eternal God (4:9) who has created all things (4:10). In chapter 5 the Lamb is “standing, as though it had been slain” (5:6). This is an obvious reference to Jesus, who also receives worship as the elders fall at his feet (5:14).

13. It is likely that the original audience of Revelation were experiencing persecution at the hands of the Roman Emperor, Domitian (A.D. 81–96). How would the vision of the throne room in Revelation 4–5 encourage these Christians? How can it encourage us today?

The theme of the Sovereignty of God is found throughout the book. Over and over again John focuses on God's control of history. The world is not spinning out of control, but is moving steadily towards the end that God has ordained.

Read the following passages and write down what you notice about God's sovereign control:

Revelation 6:12-17

¹²When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The reference to the elite and powerful in the passage, and their hiding themselves from Jesus, clearly shows that Jesus is sovereign over them.

Revelation 7:1-3

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ²Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

The only ones that can stand are those who have the seal of God. God is bringing judgment upon those who have rejected his Son, but will save his people. Judgment and salvation are in his sovereign hands.

Revelation 11:15-19

¹⁵Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God,¹⁷ saying,

*"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.*

¹⁸ *The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

¹⁹ Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Though the details can be debated in terms of what exactly the imagery refers to, what is clear is that God is in control, in his reigning and wrath.

Revelation 20:1-10

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their

hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

God is sovereign over the devil and all his evil ones.

Believing in the sovereignty of God is not an irrelevant theological concept. The sovereignty of God connects with every day life.

14. How does the truth of God's sovereignty encourage you today?

Theme 2—Salvation Through Jesus

Though the cross is never mentioned in Revelation, the atoning work of Jesus is present in numerous places. “Through his sacrificial death, Jesus Christ has conquered Satan, the accuser, and has ransomed people from every nation to become a kingdom of priests, gladly serving in God’s presence.”⁷⁷

77 *ESV Study Bible*, 2455.

15. Read the following passages and consider their connection with the cross of Christ: Revelation 1:5; 1:18; 5:9-10; 19:6-10. What stands out to you? Does this change the way you think of the events described in Revelation?

Theme 3—The End Times

This is probably the most famous theme in Revelation. Throughout the years, John's perspective on the end-times has garnered the attention of many. Some have given the study of eschatology a bad name as they have become infatuated with various positions. But, rightly understood, eschatology reminds the Christian that Christ will return and vindicate his people.

16. Read the following passages and take note of what the day will be like:

Revelation 1:7-8

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Revelation 3:10

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

Revelation 16:15

(“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”)

Revelation 20:1

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

17. Read Revelation 21. What are your thoughts when you read about the New Heaven and the New Earth?

Day 3 Summary

Today you have considered three themes in Revelation. Though the book is filled with difficult passages, the sovereignty of God is clearly displayed throughout the book. God is sovereign in salvation, judgment, over kings and powerful people, and over Satan and his demons. Though the cross of Christ is not explicitly mentioned, the work of Jesus is not absent. And finally, Revelation gives the Christian a picture of a glorious future in the new heaven and the new earth.



Day 4

.....

Today we step back and consider the whole of each book and try to summarize what we have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and “give you space” to work through the overarching message of each for yourself. Though we usually reserve this for the fifth day, tomorrow we will step back and consider the message of the entire New Testament.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message of these books. What do you think the author is *mainly* trying to get across to his readers? What are his biggest concerns? What passages are central to his letters? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of each book in one sentence (one sentence per book). Then, explain your sentences in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summaries:

One-Paragraph Summaries:



Day 5

Jesus, the Gospel, and the Church

Today we step back and consider the message of the entire New Testament. It is helpful to think about the central figure of the New Testament (Jesus), the most important message of the New Testament (the gospel), and the people of God as found in the New Testament (the church).

Jesus—the message of the New Testament centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Gospels introduce us to the birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Acts records the earliest history of the early church and the initial spread of the good news about Jesus. Paul’s writings address both specific circumstances (e.g. 1 Cor.) and general issues (e.g. Romans) as he calls for right belief in Christ and right living for Jesus. The other writings of the New Testament are written to encourage the faint-hearted, to address heretical teaching, and call God’s people to holiness of life as they await Jesus’ return on the last day.

18. What things have you learned about Jesus as you have worked through this course?

The Gospel— The gospel is the message that Jesus is God’s Messiah and has lived, died, and rose again to save his people from their sins. Through faith in Christ men and women are justified. As people turn from sin and trust in the finished work of Jesus they are reconciled to God. This gospel message is the only message of salvation and must not be compromised (cf. Galatians 1:6–10).

19. Has your study of the New Testament impacted your perspective or feelings regarding the gospel? How?

An aspect of the gospel that is sometimes overlooked is the return of Jesus on the last day. The good news found in the New Testament is not simply that we are justified and are destined for heaven. It is that we are reconciled to God and are destined for an eternity at his side. Through faith in Jesus we enter into an eternal relationship with our heavenly Father. And some day in the future, the Father will once again send the Son to this earth. The Son will return in power and glory and gather his people and usher them into his everlasting kingdom.

20. The New Testament frequently reminds Christians that Jesus will one day return. How does this biblical truth encourage you? How does it challenge you?

The Church—God has taken the record of debt that stood against his people and nailed it to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14). Through the blood of Jesus, God has redeemed a people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9). The people are known in the New Testament as the church. The church is the blood-bought people of God and is the *means* by which God plans to save his elect and glorify his name.

21. How has your understanding of and affection for the church been impacted through this study?

God's people are his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). As Christians share the gospel, God makes his appeal through them to call unbelievers to himself. This is the *means* through which God plans to save his elect that are scattered around the world. The church, therefore, is *the* plan to reach the lost. It is in the context of local church membership that God's people are cared for and disciplined. And, it is in the context of the church that we partner with other believers to share the gospel.

In sum, the whole Bible is about Jesus (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament points God's people towards a coming Messiah who will save his people. The New Testament is the story of the Messiah who has come. His name is Jesus. He lived a perfect life and died a substitutionary and atoning death for his people. This message of Jesus' redeeming work is meant to resound throughout the world as God's people share the story. As the message goes forth, the goal is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

ONE FINAL EXERCISE

Try to summarize what you have learned. This section is designed to send you back into each book and allow you to work through the overarching message of the New Testament for yourself.

In the space provided, begin writing down your thoughts about the overarching message. What do you think is the main idea that God is trying to get across? What are the biggest concerns? What passages are central? After spending some time writing and brainstorming, attempt to summarize the message of the New Testament in one sentence. Then, explain your sentence in one or two paragraphs.

Brainstorming:

One-Sentence Summary:

One-Paragraph Summary:

Supplemental Material



Appendix A

LESSON 1: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

“The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew”

—Jonathan T. Pennington

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One does not have to read very far in the Gospel of Matthew before noticing that the Evangelist has a distinctive way of speaking about the Kingdom of God—by using the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν). This phrase is not only frequent in Matthew (thirty-two occurrences), but is also unique compared to the other Gospels, the rest of the New Testament, and all literature preceding Matthew. It is not until writings that post-date the New Testament that we begin to encounter this Matthean way of talking about God’s kingdom. Indeed, in the second-century and beyond, this phrase becomes a dominant mode of expression in Christian writings, undoubtedly due to the great influence that the First Gospel had on subsequent Christianity.

This article will explore the meaning of Matthew’s distinctive expression “the Kingdom of Heaven” and suggest that Matthew’s careful choice of words has great theological import and practical application for the ongoing mission of the church.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE KINGDOM

In recent years there has been a spiked increase in talk about the Kingdom of God—in the academy, from the pulpit, and in the pews. The issue of the journal you are holding is evidence of the same. This trend to think about the Bible’s message in terms of the kingdom is a helpful and important move because there is no doubt that the kingdom is the central message of Jesus’ teaching. Moreover, a good argument can be made that the same is true for the rest of the Scriptures, Old and New.¹ Of course, there is nothing new under the sun, including in theological discussion, and we would be both ignorant and shortsighted to think that we are the first generation to discover the centrality of the kingdom in Scripture. Nevertheless, each age does have its blind spots, and it seems that our recent predecessors—especially our evangelical forerunners—have not frequently spoken of the kingdom nor seen it as the unifying theme of Scripture. Each generation has its own theological battles to fight, views to articulate, and contributions to make. We can be thankful to be living in time when the beauty and power of the message of God’s kingdom is again becoming a central point of discussion and reflection.

I asserted above that the message of the kingdom is the central theme in Jesus’ ministry. This understanding is widely accepted by students of the Gospels and can even be said to be a rare example of a truth that is held as a consensus among all Gospels scholars. Each of the Synoptics clearly portrays Jesus’ ministry as one that focuses on the kingdom, but Matthew stands out among the Evangelists. At the basic level of vocabulary, we see that Matthew uses βασιλεία some fifty-five times in a wide variety of phrases, including “Kingdom of Heaven,” “Kingdom of God,” “the Father’s kingdom,” and simply, “the kingdom.” This is more often than any of the other Gospels. It is also more frequent than the rest of the New Testament documents combined.² Additionally, we see that throughout Matthew the kingdom appears at crucial points in the story, such as at the introduction of John the Baptist (3:2) and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (4:17). In both cases, the message preached is that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. And when Jesus subsequently sends his own disciples out they are told to preach the same message: “As you go, preach, saying, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is near.’” (10:7). Similarly, at several of the structural seams in Matthew, we encounter another of Matthew’s unique and intriguing phrases, “the gospel of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). Additionally, much of Jesus’ teaching repeats the kingdom theme. The Beatitudes are framed

with reference to the Kingdom of Heaven (5:3,10). Entering the kingdom is what Jesus exhorts people to do (5:19-20; 7:21; 18:3; 21:31; 23:13). The great Christian prayer—the Lord’s Prayer—has at its heart the request for God’s kingdom to come to earth (6:10). And Jesus gives a whole series of parables in chapter 13 (and then again in chapters 20 and 22) which describe what the kingdom is like. The point is clear. Over and over again, in a variety of ways, Matthew (along with his fellow Evangelists) makes the reader aware of the central message of Jesus: the coming Kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN—NOT A REVERENTIAL CIRCUMLOCUTION

As stated above, Matthew’s typical way of describing the kingdom—as “the Kingdom of Heaven”—is also unique to him. Not until sometime later do we find this expression used in other literature, and often those places are dependent on Matthew. This striking fact has led many scholars to ask why Matthew speaks in this unexpected way. The common understanding for at least a century has been that Matthew uses “Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “Kingdom of God” out of a desire to avoid using the word “God”— what we might call a reverential circumlocution.³ The argument is that when one compares Matthew’s use of “kingdom” with the other Synoptic Gospels, it appears that he has simply replaced the original “Kingdom of God” sayings with his favorite “Kingdom of Heaven.” This understanding is combined with the fact that there certainly was a tendency in Judaism to avoid pronouncing and writing the divine name. This avoidance was accomplished through a variety of techniques such as using “divine passive” verb forms and substituting other names for God such as “The Name,” “Adonai,” and “The Most High.”

I do not have space here to elaborate upon the many problems with this common view, but suffice it to say that this reverential circumlocution explanation for Matthew’s “Kingdom of Heaven” proves indefensible. To put the argument succinctly, it is clear that Matthew is *not* studiously avoiding the use of “God” (θεός) by employing the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν because he does indeed use ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43)⁴ and in fact uses θεός freely all throughout the Gospels (fifty-one times). Additionally, while circumlocutionary techniques are undoubtedly in use in the first century, there is no evidence that “heaven” was being used for this purpose during that time.⁵

So, if Matthew’s phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” is not used simply to avoid the word “God,” then what is its purpose? The answer is found in recognizing that Matthew’s “Kingdom of Heaven” language is but one part of an elaborate theme of “heaven and earth” woven all throughout the First Gospel. Recognizing this theme sheds light on Matthew’s choice to speak of the kingdom in this unique way, and it also reveals a deep and powerful theological point—the apocalyptic and eschatological contrast between heaven and earth.

THE FOUR-FOLD “HEAVEN AND EARTH” THEME IN MATTHEW

When one begins to recognize the language of heaven and “heaven and earth” in Matthew, it is striking to see how frequent and important this theme is. Not only does Matthew use “heaven” (οὐρανός) and “heavenly” (οὐράνιος) very frequently,⁶ he employs this language in a variety of key formulas and at crucial points in the narrative and teaching discourses. Closer examination reveals that Matthew develops the theme of “heaven and earth” in four important ways. I will review these briefly.

(1) Singular Versus Plural Pattern of Heaven (Οὐρανός)

The first way in which Matthew develops the theme of heaven and earth is through an intentional use of the word “heaven” with different nuances in the singular and plural forms. In addition to his frequent use of the word, one of the unexpected things about Matthew’s employment of οὐρανός is that he prefers to use plural forms of the word over the singular (fifty-five and twenty-seven, respectively). This may not at first seem odd until one understands that plural forms of οὐρανός are quite rare in ancient Greek, and even in the Greek version of the Old Testament they are quite uncommon (8 – 9 percent). Plural forms are becoming more frequent in the time of the New Testament, but they are still not the normal parlance for this word. In fact, Matthew’s uses comprise 61 percent of the plural forms in the New Testament. Now all of this may still seem to be irrelevant data or simply coincidence until one begins to see that there is an intentional pattern at play here. That pattern functions in this way: Matthew generally uses οὐρανός in the singular to refer to the visible (earthly) world and in “heaven and earth” pairs, and he uses the plural to refer to the invisible

(divine) realm. This plural notably includes Matthew's expressions "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Father in heaven." We can begin to see that there is much thought going on behind Matthew's use of the word "heaven" and that it hinges on a heavenly realm versus earthly realm distinction.

(2) *Heaven and Earth Pairs*

"Heaven and earth" is a very important biblical phrase, from its first appearance in Gen 1:1 throughout to its use at the end of John's Revelation. Of all the New Testament authors, no one uses this phrase more often than Matthew. And he *particularly* develops it into a theme in his Gospel. Heaven and earth are connected over twenty times in some form in Matthew. In comparison, Mark has only two instances of the heaven and earth pair and Luke five. Moreover, the language of "heaven and earth" as contrasting realities is found at the most important theological points throughout the Gospel such as in the Lord's Prayer (6:9-10), the ecclesiological passages (16:17-19; 18:18-19), and the Great Commission (28:18-20). Again, it is not difficult to see that Matthew is consciously developing a heaven and earth theme.

(3) *Father in Heaven*

Another common use of heaven language in Matthew is with reference to God as Father. The fatherhood of God is an important theme in Matthew, and he quite commonly modifies this by attaching heaven to it. Thirteen times we find the phrase ὁ πατήρ ὁ ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς ("Father in heaven"), and seven times the similar ὁ πατήρ ὁ οὐράνιος ("heavenly Father"). This language is very familiar to us because we as Christians often refer to God as our heavenly Father. But notably, in the Gospels "Father in heaven" occurs elsewhere *only* in Mark 11:25.7 This is apparently a particularly Matthean emphasis. All of this relates to the heaven and earth theme in two ways. First, when the noun "heaven" is connected with God as Father, Matthew always uses the uncommon plural form of οὐρανός. This is part of the singular versus plural pattern already mentioned. Second, references to God as Father very frequently occur in a way that presents a contrast between the Father in heaven and the things on earth (e.g., 23:9).

(4) *Kingdom of Heaven*

As we have already observed, the most common use of heaven in Matthew is in his unique and important phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven.” In each of these thirty-two occurrences the form is always plural (τῶν οὐρανῶν) and, like the references to “the Father in heaven,” is part of the singular versus plural pattern observed above. Additionally, closer examination reveals that many times Matthew uses “Kingdom of Heaven” as part of a contrast between the heavenly and earthly realms (e.g. 17:24-18:5; 4:1-11).

This last observation, combined with all that has been said so far, brings us to the main point. Analysis of this four-fold usage of heaven language in Matthew shows that there is a consistent and overarching theological point to all of it: Matthew is repeatedly setting up a *contrast* between two realms—the heavenly and the earthly—which stand for God on the one hand, and humanity on the other.

In other words, he is subtly but powerfully weaving into his Gospel narrative the theme of heaven and earth, particularly emphasizing the contrast between these two polar realms. Through this four-fold technique—singular versus plural forms of οὐρανός; heaven and earth pairs, usually in contrast; the Father in heaven; and the Kingdom of Heaven—Matthew is urging upon us the sense that there is a great disjunction between heaven and earth, between God’s way of doing things and ours. There is a standing tension between the realms of heaven and earth and this represents the tension between God and humanity. In this way Matthew is very typically apocalyptic.

THE MEANING OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

How does this relate to the meaning of “the Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew? Matthew’s choice to describe the kingdom as τῶν οὐρανῶν (“of heaven,” “from heaven,” or even “heavenly”)⁸ is not motivated by an avoidance of the divine name but is part of a thoughtful literary pattern with an important theological point. The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God that has come in the Lord Jesus is radically different from the way you and I naturally think and act and different from the way we structure human society. It is unexpected, shocking, and topsy-turvy to human sensibilities. The unexpected and radical nature of the kingdom is why Jesus spends so much time trying to explain what this kingdom

from heaven is like (and why people so seldom understand). The Beatitudes give us an image of the blessed ones that is just the opposite of what we would naturally value—they are the poor in spirit, the persecuted, the mourning, the meek. The parables of the kingdom paint for us pictures where debtors are freely forgiven, where the smallest seed produces the largest tree, and where the last-come workers receive the same reward. Jesus' model of life shows open-armed compassion for the downtrodden, the touching of the leper, the exalting of the lowly child, the welcoming of the Gentile, and the listening ear for blind outcast beggars. As King of the universe he enters Jerusalem not on a warhorse or golden chariot but riding humbly on the foal of a donkey. As king of all he willingly rides into the city where iron nails will soon be used to hang him naked on a cross in the scorching sun. As this king instructs us we learn that the one who wants to be first should not exercise an overbearing leadership style, but should be the slave of all. The one who is blessed by God with material wealth should set it aside to follow Christ. The one who desires to save his life must in fact die. Such is the radical nature of the vision of the kingdom that Jesus gives.

All of this is why it is so powerful and appropriate for Matthew to describe this as a kingdom τῶν οὐρανῶν; it is fundamentally different from the kingdoms of this world and all human expectations. God's Coming Kingdom—what Matthew likes to call the Kingdom of Heaven—is not built on human wisdom or human principles, but on God's character and nature! Matthew has intentionally taken the *cosmological* language of heaven and earth from the Old Testament and has used it to communicate the urgently *eschatological* message of Jesus. A new day has dawned with the coming of the Kingdom. All is overturned because of the epochal reality of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR THE CHURCH

As fascinating and interesting as this literary and theological theme is, we would be remiss if we did not ask further what the theological and practical ramifications are. This is certainly what Matthew would want for his readers. To truly understand the Word is to theologically integrate it and most importantly, to obey it.

What did Matthew intend for his hearers to take away from this emphasis on the contrast between the heavenly and earthly realms? One important

observation is how this contrast theme provides a strong critique of all worldly kingdoms. In Matthew's day this would have meant both a critique of the Roman Empire and the contemporary Jewish expectations for the Messiah's kingdom. Regarding the application to the Roman imperial context of first-century Judaism (and Christianity), it seems that Matthew is intentionally drawing on his many connections with the book of Daniel. In the same way that Daniel talks about the kingdom of the God of heaven over against the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, Matthew provides an implicit critique of the ruling power of his own day, the Romans. Matthew and his audience were facing a situation strikingly similar to the Jewish people of the Exilic and post-Exilic times. They were a defeated people under the power of the greatest earthly empire at the time. Daniel's language and stories about the God of heaven and this God's superiority over the greatest king of the earth at the time, Nebuchadnezzar, provide hope and solace and vision for the Jewish people. In the same way, Matthew's reference to the "Kingdom of Heaven" (as well as another significant Danielic phrase, the "Son of Man") evokes sentiments and encouragement regarding the ultimate superiority and eschatological hope of the God of Jesus. Thus, Matthew is beautifully and evocatively re-appropriating the vision and hope of Daniel for his own hearers' context, now understood in light of the Christ.

At the same time, Matthew critiques the common Jewish expectation for God's coming kingdom. It seems that many Jews of Jesus' day were expecting the Messiah to be a military leader who would drive out the heathen (Romans), deliver the Jews from bondage, and establish his Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem. Jesus' model and message about God's coming kingdom patently did not fulfill these expectations. Jesus not only repudiates the use of violence (e.g. 5:5, 9, 39; 26:52), but shockingly he heals and welcomes members of the Roman oppressors (e.g. 8:5-12). So, while the message about God's kingdom does provide solace for those suffering under oppression, its message is one of humility, meekness, cheek-turning, and waiting. This is not what most Jews expected or wanted.

Related, another clear function of Matthew's heaven and earth contrast theme is to provide a clear identity for the followers of Jesus. Matthew wants his hearers to understand that those who follow Christ are the true people of God and to encourage them with this reality. Jesus defines this new or true people not by ethnic pedigree, including having Abraham as one's father (3:9-10; 8:11-12; 23:9), nor by positions of honor (23:2-11), but as those who do the will of the Father who is in heaven (7:21; 12:50), as those whose lives bear the fruit of

following God's commands from the heart (3:7-10; 7:15-23; 12:33-38). This theme creates a heaven-oriented *identity* for the disciples in the midst of a hostile earthly world. The world is depicted as bipartite—heaven and earth—and Jesus' disciples are the true people of God aligned with heaven, as opposed to the rulers (Roman and Jewish) on earth. In this way, Matthew's heaven and earth theme is an important part of his ecclesiology (see esp. 16:17-19; 18:14-20).

A third theological function of the heaven and earth theme is to undergird the radical nature of the ethics and teachings of Jesus. Jesus' teachings and parables have a clear ring about them of challenge, urgency, and world-overturning realities. This is true nowhere more than in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. The followers of Jesus are called to live now with a God-hoping ethical standard that is counter-intuitive and counter-cultural. Mourners, the poor, the persecuted, and the meek are said to be blessed (5:3-5, 10-12). The standard of righteousness that Jesus requires must go beyond even the strictest interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20): it must cut to the level of the heart. Stated negatively, hating your brother is murder (5:21-26), and looking lustfully is adultery (5:27-30). Stated positively, instead of retaliation, the response should be gracious giving (5:38-42); instead of loving only one's neighbor, the disciples must love and pray for their enemies (5:43-47). The disciples' piety must be done from the heart and not from hypocrisy—as in the cases of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-21). In short, God's standard of righteousness as proclaimed by Jesus is perfection, for single-heartedness in the very same way that the Father himself is perfect (5:48). The radical nature of all such teachings is clearly seen and felt by any hearer. I suggest that the pervasive heaven and earth theme (which is itself concentrated in the Sermon) undergirds these radical teachings by positing the ways of God against the ways of humanity. That is, Jesus is presented as calling disciples to align themselves with the Kingdom of Heaven, as calling them to be sons of the Father *in heaven* (5:44-45; 7:21; 12:50), as calling them to lay up treasures *in heaven* and not *on earth* (6:19-21), as calling them to pray and hope for the Kingdom of Heaven to come *to earth* (6:9-10). This constant refrain of the tension or current disjuncture between the two realms of heaven and earth provides a tangible vision for the kind of hope that transforms daily living.⁹ To use Bauckham and Hart's language, it provides resources for the Christian imagination which give Godward hope.¹⁰ This heaven and earth disjunction is reminiscent of the same point in several of Paul's exhortations to godly living.¹¹ In Matthew, this way of speaking provides the framework of a symbolic universe that encourages the

disciples to align themselves within the world with a different vision and set of values. Only this can sustain such a radical ethical call as Matthew presents. At the core of this vision is the heaven and earth theme.

CONCLUSION

In sum, there is great literary, theological, and pastoral weight to Matthew's choice to depict the proclamation of Christ as about the "Kingdom of Heaven." With great skill and finesse Matthew has woven a comprehensive narrative account of Jesus' life and teachings. This account is full of memorable images and language, including the widespread theme of heaven and earth. Understanding this theme enables one to perceive the meaning and function of Matthew's unique phrase "Kingdom of Heaven." While this expression *denotes* the same thing as the "Kingdom of God," it *connotes* many other things. Particularly, we sense that God's (heavenly) ordering of life and society is radically different than the ways of sinful earth. Now that the new creation or new genesis (see Matt 19:28) has dawned through Christ, those who follow Jesus must align themselves with this coming radical heavenly kingdom. And as we do so, we stand to inherit the greatest reward, God's presence through Christ (cf. Matt 1:23; 28:20). In this time of waiting and hoping, the Christian's stance can be summed up in the great prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: "Let your name be sanctified, let your kingdom come, let your will be done *on earth even as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:9-10).

ENDNOTES

- 1 There are several valuable books that could be consulted on this matter. For many, a good place to start is Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002). Slightly longer and more comprehensive is Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen's *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). Closely related to this latter work is the excellent and paradigm-shifting book by Al Wolters, entitled, *Creation Regained* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).
- 2 Of course, there are many other ways in which the kingdom theme is communicated beyond simply the use of βασιλεία. These include references to Jesus as king (βασιλεὺς), actions that depict God's coming reign, and texts that allude to Old Testament images of God's kingship (e.g., Isa 40:1-12). Again, Matthew employs such language at least as frequently as the other Evangelists and often more.

- 3 The only other popular view was that of the classical Dispensationalists. They argued that there is a temporal difference in meaning between “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven.” This view proves quite untenable biblically and has since been abandoned by most modern (“progressive”) Dispensationalists.
- 4 Some manuscripts also have “Kingdom of God” at 6:33, but the original was almost certainly only “kingdom.” Inexplicably the ESV includes the whole phrase even though the critical editions of the Greek New Testament do not recommend it (nor does the RSV have it).
- 5 This is necessarily a very brief overview of the argument. A full exploration of the issue and documentation can be found in my *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 13-37. This whole article is a concise explanation of the main idea in this book, and I would refer the reader to that volume for more information on all the following arguments.
- 6 Οὐρανός occurs eighty-two times in Matthew (30 percent of all the New Testament occurrences) and οὐράνιος, seven times.
- 7 Mk 11:25 is parallel to one of Matthew’s occurrences of ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος (6:14). Who is dependent on whom is unclear. There is also the less exact parallel ὁ πατήρ [ὁ] ἐξ οὐρανοῦ in Luke 11:13, which in context is best understood as a reference to the Father giving the Holy Spirit *from* heaven.
- 8 These three translations are all potentially good glosses for the genitive phrase here. Indeed, we are not forced to choose only one and dismiss the others. As many scholars have observed, there is much ambiguity with regard to the Greek genitive and often more than one category is appropriate. Cf. Nigel Turner, *Syntax* (vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. James Hope Moulton; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 210; Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (trans. Joseph Smith; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), §25; Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. Gordon M. Messing; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), §1295.
- 9 This corresponds closely with the interpretation of heaven language in Matthew offered by Robert Foster. Foster states that the “heavenly language” of the Sermon “purposefully centres the lives of Matthew’s community on the reality that counts: heaven’s reality. Sociologically, the language of heaven encourages the disciples to continue in their counter-cultural lifestyle as they are assured that the FH [Father in heaven] cares about their earthly struggles and needs and will give them a heavenly reward. . . . Theologically, this language guides the community’s decisions as they look toward heaven for their standard of righteousness, their strength for holy living, and their reward for their labours.” Robert Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven?’: Matthew’s Terminology Revisited,” *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 487-99.
- 10 Bauckham and Hart give an excellent account of how a grand Christian vision (via imagination) re-sources the Christian life in Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). I suggest that Matthew’s vision of the world now and in the eschaton, described regularly with reference to heaven and earth, provides the kind of imaginative vision Bauckham and Hart are describing.
- 11 For example, Col 3:1-4 makes the basis for godliness the fact that the believer has been raised up with Christ, therefore his or her mind should be set on “things above, not on the things that are on the earth.” This is followed by the exhortation: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (3:5). Cf. Eph 1:19-20; 2:5-6.

LESSON 7: 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS

“What’s New About the New Covenant”

—John Piper

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. (*John 15:10*)

Jesus shatters any absolute dissociation of commandments and love.

He says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . . . Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father” (*John 14:15, 21*). “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” (*John 15:10*).

Thinking in terms of commandments and obedience did not stop Jesus from enjoying the love of his Father. And he expects that our thinking of him as one who commands will not jeopardize our love relationship with him either.

This is crucial to realize because the covenant relationship that we have with God through Jesus Christ is not a covenant without commandments. The basic difference between the old covenant offered by God through the Mosaic law and the new covenant offered by God through Christ is not that one had commandments and the other doesn’t.

The key differences are that (1) the Messiah, Jesus, has come and shed the blood of the new covenant (*Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 10:29*) so that henceforth he is the mediator of a new covenant, and all saving, covenantkeeping faith is conscious faith in him; (2) the old covenant has therefore become “obsolete” (*Hebrews 8:13*) and does not govern the newcovenant people of God (*2 Corinthians 3:7–18; Romans 7:4, 6; Galatians 3:19*); and (3) the promised new heart and the enabling power of Holy Spirit has been given through faith.

In the old covenant, the gracious enabling power to obey God was not poured out as fully as it is since Jesus. “To this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (*Deuteronomy 29:4*). What’s new about the new covenant is not that there are no commandments, but that God’s promise has come true! “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (*Jeremiah 31:33*). “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (*Ezekiel 36:27*).

From Future Grace, pages 155–156 (available for free download at desiringGod.org).

LESSON 10: HEBREWS AND JAMES

“Does James 2 Contradict Romans 4?”

—John MacArthur

The most serious problem these verses pose is the question of what James 2:24 means: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” Some imagine that this contradicts Paul in Romans 3:28: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” John Calvin explained this apparent difficulty:

It appears certain that [James] is speaking of the manifestation, not of the imputation of righteousness, as if he had said, Those who are justified by faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith. In one word, he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of all believers shall be operative. And as Paul contends that men are justified without the aid of works, so James will not allow any to be regarded as Justified who are destitute of good works ... Let them twist the words of James as they may, they will never extract out of them more than two propositions: That an empty phantom of faith does not justify, and that the believer, not contented with such an imagination, manifests his justification by good works. [Henry Beveridge, trans., John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 3:17:12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966 reprint), 2: 115.]

James is not at odds with Paul. “They are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords; they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the gospel.” [Alexander Ross, “The Epistle of James and John,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 53.] In 1:17-18, James affirmed that salvation is a gift bestowed according to the sovereign will of God. Now he is stressing the importance of faith’s fruit—the righteous behavior that genuine faith always produces. Paul, too, saw righteous works as the necessary proof of faith.

Those who imagine a discrepancy between James and Paul rarely observe that it was Paul who wrote, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!” (Rom. 6:15); and “Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (v. 18). Thus Paul condemns the same error James is exposing here. Paul never advocated any concept of dormant faith.

When Paul writes, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight,” (Rom. 3:20),

He is combatting a Jewish legalism which insisted upon the need for works to be justified; James insists upon the need for works in the lives of those who have been justified by faith. Paul insists that no man can ever win justification through his own efforts ... James demands that a man who already claims to stand in right relationship with God through faith must by a life of good works demonstrate that he has become a new creature in Christ. With this Paul thoroughly agreed. Paul was rooting out ‘works’ that excluded and destroyed saving faith; James was stimulating a sluggish faith that minimized the results of saving faith in daily life. [D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistle of James (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 175.]

James and Paul both echo Jesus’ preaching. Paul’s emphasis is an echo of Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” James’ teaching has the ring of Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” Paul represents the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount; James the end of it. Paul declares that we are saved by faith *without the deeds of the law*. James declares that we are saved by faith, *which shows itself in works*. Both James and Paul view good works as the proof of faith—not the path to salvation.

James could not be more explicit. He is confronting the concept of a passive, false “faith,” which is devoid of the fruits of salvation. He is not arguing for works in addition to or apart from faith. He is showing why and how, true, living faith always works. He is fighting against dead orthodoxy and its tendency to abuse grace.

The error James assails is faith without works; justification without sanctification; salvation without new life.

Again, James echoes the Master Himself, who insisted on a theology of lordship that involved obedience, not lipservice. Jesus chided the disobedient ones who had attached themselves to Him in name only: “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). Verbal allegiance, He said, will get no one to heaven: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

That is in perfect harmony with James: “Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (1:22); for “faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (2:17).

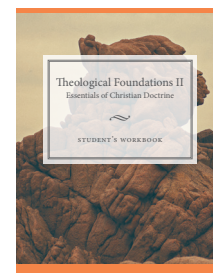
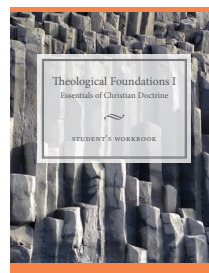
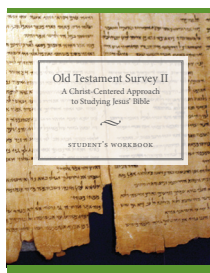
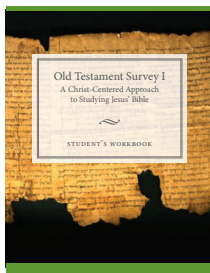
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