

2 | The Greek Scriptures

An introduction to the content of the New Testament

Enrichment Version

The Enrichment Version is designed for students who wish to explore biblical content of the New Testament without the intention of pursuing either a certificate or a degree. This syllabus is identical to the one used by credit and degree-track students, except it is void of Internet articles, videos, listings of secondary resources, exams, and writing assignments. There is nothing to submit for professorial review or grading. Yet, a person may glean substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of the New Testament through this guide.

The course includes the people, places, and events found in the New Testament, including a minimum of 75 personalities, major geographical sites, stories, and discourses. The course is organized in four modules: (1) The Gospels, (2) Acts of Apostles, (3) The Pauline Epistles, and (4) General Epistles and the Apocalypse.

Objectives

1. Relate people to geographical locations, events, and institutions found in the New Testament
2. Recognize the unique qualities and roles of Jesus Christ
3. Demonstrate a sense of continuity and integration in New Testament compositions

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the student will be able to

1. Identify and evaluate the significance of New Testament characters and sites.
2. Relate events surrounding New Testament characters and sites.
3. Read the New Testament with a sense of continuity and integration.

A Letter of Introduction

Presumably, you should have completed "A Search for Spirituality" and "The Hebrew Scriptures." If so, you are in an excellent position to begin a study of the "The Greek Scriptures." To speak of the Greek Scriptures is just another way to refer to the New Testament. These sacred writings follow the Hebrew Scriptures in time and in thought.

Here is the way the course works. The prepared syllabus guides you as you read and reflect upon the biblical text. The syllabus will introduce the people, places, and events recorded in the New Testament

and will help you gain a perspective to what you read. The names and places may be unfamiliar to you at first, but you should catch on quickly. It is important that you become familiar with the content of the New Testament before you begin to interpret individual verses. You should take notes and consider the Things to Know entries.

You are encouraged to do serious study and not pass over readings just because they may be familiar to you. The closer attention you pay to the text, the more insights will come your way. The course demands persistence. Make a schedule and stay with it. Pace yourself so you will learn the maximum.

Procedure

This course in the Greek Scriptures aims to help you learn the content of the New Testament. The plan assumes that the student can comprehend the biblical text if he/she will read with an open mind. The best predictor of success in the endeavor comes by laying aside biases, preconceptions, and historical interpretations. Forget all you were taught and read for your own understanding. You have nothing to fear and much to gain.

The commentary in this syllabus draws uses a summary technique to help you see how the story of these scriptures unfolds and are linked. Unnecessary details, lengthy discussions of background materials, and problematic passages are reserved for later courses. You will have opportunity in future courses to explore theological concepts and principles of interpretation.

This course argues neither for, nor against the authenticity of the New Testament. The text itself is assumed to be an accurate account of what it reports. The immediate task is to introduce you to what is recorded in the New Testament and help you come to terms with it.

This syllabus is not intended to replace the Bible but to prompt you in your study of the Bible itself. Each module will culminate with an examination. Assignments and exams are primarily over the content of the New Testament.

Now as to specifics procedures:

1. First, review the content of the entire course.
2. Read carefully the material in Module 1. A map of the ancient Mediterranean world is recommended for constant reference during your study.
3. After a first reading of the Gospels, you should read the biblical books again. This time make notes on the outstanding persons. Note their relation to one another and the story that surrounds them. Be aware of the geographical environment--important place names.
4. It will be helpful to read the four books through a third, fourth, and fifth time, stopping only when you need to make sure you have the people and events firmly in mind. Use the list of names, places, and events noted in the "Things to Know" section as a study guide. The guide may highlight personalities and places, but only a reading of the New Testament itself will give you the perspective and relationships you need.
5. Once you feel competent with the content of the Gospels, move on to the other modules.

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The Greek Scriptures

The Christian Bible consists of two parts: (1) writings composed primarily in the Hebrew language, with a few sections in the wider Aramaic tongue and (2) writings composed in Koiné Greek, the common language of the Hellenistic world. The Greek Scriptures (commonly known among Christians as the New Testament) comprise part of the canon of writings, which Christians generally hold to be sacred and “inspired” by God. All of the writings belong to the 1st century C.E. and were composed by apostles (*i.e.*, men who were specially appointed by Jesus), or by men closely associated with the apostles.

Christians consider the *Greek Scriptures* a “continuation” of the *Hebrew Scriptures*, but with an important difference—the particular covenant that the different sets of scripture represents. The Jews hold to the covenant Yahweh formed with their ancestors through Moses at Sinai. Christians live under a new covenant that God established in Jesus Christ. Since Jews do not recognize the “New” Testament as scripture, they generally refer to the “Old” Testament as the Tanakh (a word composed of the first two letters of the three divisions of the Jewish Bible—Torah, Prophets, and Writings), the Holy Scriptures, or the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Hebrew Scriptures (referred to by Christians as the “Old” Testament) designate writings that belong to a period prior to the birth of Jesus. With the exception of the book of Job, these writings correlate directly with the Sinai covenant. For subscribers to the Jewish faith, the Hebrew Scriptures are complete as “written” scripture. Jews may also recognize an authoritative “oral” tradition alongside the written scriptures, but they definitely do not recognize the Greek Scriptures as carrying any authority for their faith. For Christians, on the other hand, the story of the Bible as written scripture is incomplete without the New Testament.

If one wonders why we have chosen to name the course “The Greek Scriptures,” there are several reasons. One, we want to identify the collection in a manner that is both descriptive and reflective of the Christian tradition. Two, we wish to present the Old Testament in a positive light, so it is not relegated to the irrelevant past, but is positioned for proper Christian use. This includes demonstrating the essential link between the two testaments, showing how New Testament writers referenced the Old Testament, and making proper use of the Old Testament in the contemporary life of the Christian. The link is essential to the climax to which the New Testament leads. Events and identifications within the New Testament may draw heavily upon Old Testament. Perceiving how this is done, how prophecy is interpreted, and the full implication of an Old Testament citing create a foundation for interpretation.

Our path to biblical understanding travels through both sets of scripture. In the Greek Scriptures, we are reintroduced to names and events given in detail in the Hebrew Scriptures—and for good reason. In the Greek Scriptures we find God’s promises to Israel were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, one learns how God interceded into human history and provided a universal means of human redemption. The New Testament reveals the means to righteousness and a spiritual relationship with God, the application of divine love, and a realistic hope amid the struggles of this life.

In a fashion similar to the course on the Hebrew Scriptures, this course concentrates on people, places, and events of the New Testament. This may seem to be the lower level of modern learning categories, but it is essential. In later courses, we will ask deeper theological questions and we will provide

opportunity for personal in-depth study and analysis. But for now, it is essential that we concentrate on basic New Testament content. Without this phase, you will be hopelessly lost in your quest to know and make use of the Bible. So, we begin with Module 1 The Gospels, which will be followed by Module 2 Acts of Apostles, Module 3 The Pauline Epistles, and Module 4 General Epistles and the Apocalypse.

MODULE **1** The Gospels

Procedure

This online syllabus is not intended to replace the Bible but to guide you in your studies in the Bible itself. Each module will culminate with an examination. Assignments and exams are primarily over the content of the New Testament.

1. First, review the content of the entire course.
2. Read the Introductory section for a quick introduction to the Bible. Then, read carefully the material in Module 1. A map of the ancient Mediterranean world is recommended for constant reference during your study.
3. After a first reading of the Gospels, you should read the biblical books again. This time, make notes on the outstanding persons. Note their relation to one another and the story that surrounds them. Be aware of the geographical environment--important place names.
4. It will be helpful to read the four books through a third, fourth, and fifth time, stopping only when you need to make sure you have the people and events firmly in mind. Use the list of names, places, and events noted in the "Things to Know" section as a study guide. The guide may highlight personalities and places, but only a reading of the New Testament itself will give you the perspective and relationships you need.
5. Once you have completed Module 1, move on to Module 2.

Things to Know

1. You should know the identity of the following Old Testament personalities who are noted in the Gospels: Abraham, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jonah, and Moses. These are people who had a significant place in the story of the Gospels. You will find them referenced in the Gospel narratives.
2. Be acquainted with these personalities who appear in the story of the Gospels: Andrew, Anna and Simeon (associated with Jesus' birth), Annas, Barabbas, Bartholomew, Bartimaeus, Beelzebub, Caesar Augustus, Caiaphas, Elizabeth, Gabriel, the various kings named Herod, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Jesus, John the Baptist, Joseph the husband of Mary, Joseph of Arimathea, Judas Iscariot, Judas the son of James/Thaddaeus, James the son of Alphaeus, Jarius, Lazarus, the Magi, Mary of Magdala/Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary (the sisters of Lazarus), Mary the mother of Jesus, Matthew/Levi, Nathanael, Nicodemus, Philip, Pilate, Simon of Cyrene, Simon Peter, Simon the Zealot, Theophilus, Thomas, Zacchaeus, and Zechariah.
3. Know the identity of demons, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, as these play an important role in the Gospels.

4. You should be able to associate some event or person attached to these major geographical sites: Bethany, Bethlehem, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi, Cana, Capernaum, Decapolis, Egypt, the region of the Gadarenes, Galilee, Gethsemane, Jericho, Jerusalem, Jordan River, Judea, Magdala, Nain, Nazareth, Ramah, Samaria, Sea of Galilee, Sidon, Sodom, Tyre, and Zion.
5. You should have a general acquaintance with the events and content of the first four books of the New Testament. Especially noteworthy are the birth narratives, Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at age 12, John the Baptist's inquiry of Jesus from prison, the apostles' reaction to Jesus' predictions of his impending death, and reactions to various healings like the man born blind.
6. Know the events associated with the synagogues at Capernaum and Nazareth and the Sanhedrin and temple at Jerusalem.
7. Know the events surrounding the Passover and the Sabbath.
8. Have a general acquaintance with the parables of Jesus, as they provide insight into the nature of the kingdom of God.
9. Become acquainted with the miracles of Jesus.

Introduction

The Greek Scriptures are one and the same as the New Testament. The corpus is called the "Greek" Scriptures because the writings were composed in the Greek language. The idea of a "New" Testament distinguishes the collection from the "Old" Testament. With the Jews, Christians acknowledged the authenticity and authority of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). In addition to the Hebrew Scriptures, Christians recognized twenty-seven additional documents or "books" as being authentic revelation from God. These works received the title "New" Testament (Covenant), because they described the new covenant God was inaugurating as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses and the Prophets of Israel. Hence, the "New" Testament made the former one the "Old" Testament. This new covenant, intended for Gentiles as well as for Jews, centered on Jesus.

The central message of the New Testament and of apostolic proclamation is anchored in both the teaching and the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus announced the good news about the kingdom of God, which he himself was now bringing to men. But Jesus was more than a teacher and prophet. He was also the long-awaited Messiah promised to Israel. He was both the bearer of the message of salvation and its essential content. The Gospels focus on Jesus, who simultaneously revealed the mind of God and became the instrument of human redemption.

An immortal God, unbound by time and space, created the world. He made man in his own image, holy and righteous, and joined in a wholesome relationship with himself. Man, however, desiring to be more, sinned and ended the paradisiacal relationship. All was not lost to man, though. God, moved by mercy, love, and a desire for his own glory, set out to bring redemption to mankind. Through the ages, he revealed himself and created a covenant with descendants of Abraham. Through these people, God introduced his Son to the world.

The gospel is concerned with human redemption. It contains both ethical and factual teaching related to Jesus Christ. It is the good news about God's effectual grace to humanity. The gospel embraces the "mystery" of God. This mystery was purposed before the foundation of the world, promised through Abraham, foreshadowed by the Law of Moses, foretold by the prophets of Israel, prepared for by John the baptizer, fulfilled by Jesus the Christ, and revealed through the apostles.

Unit 1. Background

As you begin to read the four Gospels, you will be struck with their unique character. While they contain biographical details, they do not read like biographies. That is because they were not composed to entertain the reader or to answer reader curiosity. Matthew and Luke may include birth narratives of Jesus, but they say little else about Jesus prior to the last three years of his life. John even concentrates on a shorter period of Jesus' ministry.

You will also see quickly that the Gospels are not written as histories. They contain historical references to time, events, political positions, and religious notations, but these references are not employed for the purpose of preserving social or political history. By including historical events, the authors of the Gospels dispel the idea that their compositions were developed as fictions or myth. So, if the Gospels are not biographies or histories, or fiction, or myth, then what are they?

The Gospels manifest a unique literary form. Using common vocabulary and conventions of 1st century Greek writing, the uniqueness of the compositions pertains primarily to their purpose. The Gospels are unusual because of their subject and focus. If the writers of the Gospels had been content to relate some interesting stories about Jesus and merely introduce his life to their readers, they may be called biographies. Had they been intent on reviewing the events that led to some social or political upheaval, perhaps they could have been histories. If they had described the teaching of Jesus against that of the Pharisees, they may have been dubbed theologies. If they had made their primary interest the social agenda of the day, they would have been sociological treatises. And if they had discussed the implications of Jesus' teaching on political structures, they could have passed as political science. But their purpose was none of these.

Each Gospel writer set out to portray a person who has an uncommon relationship with God. In describing the events surrounding the advent of Jesus into the world, the authors give new meaning to events and sayings that involved Jesus, his teaching, and his behavior. Since he is a "unique one of God," their stories are special. It is the "good news" about what God has provided in Jesus that suggested the name "Gospels" to the four narratives. They should be read in this light. Since they exist in four distinct books, they ought to be read and studied separately.

a. The four Gospels. The Gospels constitute the first four books of the New Testament. The four are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They have been placed at the beginning of the New Testament because they introduce Jesus. Jesus, who appears in the Gospels as the "messenger" of God, becomes the "message" of the rest of the New Testament.

The Gospels have one purpose--to introduce Jesus as the Messiah (from the Hebrew word, meaning "the anointed one") or the Christ (from the Greek). In each of the four documents, Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of God's promise to provide man with an escape from sin. First stated in the call of Abraham, the promise was nurtured by the Hebrew prophets. God had chosen the descendants of Abraham to declare his glory and to be the people through whom he would bring the Messiah, his anointed, into the world.

Why are there four different Gospels? Since the writers of each of the compositions selects different points of emphasis, it is reasonable to conclude that they address four distinct audiences. The vocabulary of Matthew is more Jewish than the others. Mark emphasizes power and quickness of movement, as one might expect if the audience is more Roman in orientation. Luke is the first of two volumes (with Acts of Apostles) that sets forth a record of the story of Jesus in a more universal context. In Acts, Luke traces the progress of the gospel over the thirty years beyond Jesus' ascension. John is interested in detailing those events in the ministry of Jesus that culminated in the final weeks of his work. This Fourth Gospel is distinguished from the other three preceding "Synoptic" (seen together, parallel) Gospels, because it contains material not included in the others. Careful reading reveals that the material John chose and the method of presentation are designed to confirm faith in

Jesus. The "four" accounts of the gospel of Jesus Christ demonstrate that the Christ of the Gospels is for all mankind and the Good News has common application. God's revelation thus becomes personalized and universal. Having four ancient testimonies to Jesus strengthens the case.

Having four Gospels gives an indication as to how they should be interpreted and applied to a modern audience. Since the four are not identical, they reinforce the idea that biblical scripture is not primarily legal dictation of a heavenly figure. Rather, they are witnesses to a heavenly figure, Jesus, who declared the will of God and performed the will of God (John 6:35-40). The human authors arranged their selections of material to communicate the objectives of their individual compositions—compositions that have practical value because they witness to the truth about God and Christ.

b. Individual narratives. The compositions that comprise the Four Gospels may contain duplicated material, but they stand as individual literary works. They display unique organization and emphasis, as the divisions below illustrate. The divisions shown below are not intended to be definitive but illustrative only.

The Gospel of Matthew was composed around the following divisions:

1. Preparation for the ministry of Jesus, including the birth narrative, the preaching of John the Baptist, and the baptism and temptation of Jesus (1:1-4:11)
2. Jesus' ministry in Galilee (northern Palestine), which embraces his work in and around Capernaum and includes the Sermon on the Mount, miracles, parables, and the reaction of various elements of society (4:12-18:35)
3. Jesus' ministry in Judea and Jerusalem, focusing on the events that led to crucifixion and resurrection (19:1-28:15)
4. Jesus' commission to his apostles (28:16-20)

The Gospel of Mark may be analyzed as follows:

1. Preparation for the ministry of Jesus, with brief notice of the role of John the Baptist and of Jesus' baptism and temptation (1:1-13)
2. The preaching of Jesus relative to the kingdom of God and accompanying confrontations, primarily in Galilee (1:14-8:26)
3. The transfiguration and the announcement by Jesus of his impending death (8:27-10:52)
4. Events leading to the crucifixion (11:1-16:8)

The Gospel of Luke is laid out along these lines:

1. A prologue to introduce the work (1:1-4)
2. Narrative related to the birth of Jesus (1:5-2:52)
3. Preparation for the ministry of Jesus (3:1-4:13)
4. Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
5. Jesus' ministry in transit to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)
6. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, culminating in the crucifixion, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances (19:28-24:53)

The Gospel of John presents a paradox between belief and unbelief. With the object of affirming faith in Jesus as the Son of God who enables one to have life with God, the author shows how popular acceptance led ultimately to rejection by the Jewish authorities and the ultimate confirmation of the true identity of Jesus. Although there are several ways to divide the content of John's Gospel, it may be helpful to consider it along the following lines:

1. A prologue to introduce the theme (1:1-18)
2. A period where the populace was considering who Jesus was--the object of belief (1:19-4:54)
3. A period in which his actions and teaching brought controversy--the issues (5-6)

4. A period of conflict that developed between Jesus and the Jewish authorities (7:1-11:53)
5. A period of crisis (11:54-17:26)
6. A period of consummation (18-20)
7. An epilogue that shows the consequence of belief (21)

c. The setting. At the time of Jesus' entry into the world, the Jews were under Roman rule. Permanent independence from foreign domination had ended six centuries earlier because of a failure to be true to God. Only briefly during the Intertestamental period (167-63 B.C.E.) did they enjoy a reprieve from Gentile domination. As the Gospels open, the Jews are longing for a promised messiah, whom they believe will lead them to another age of glory.

The physical setting of the Gospels is 1st century Palestine. Events described in the narratives transpired in a narrow expanse of land stretching from Egypt to Caesarea Philippi. Most of the activity recorded occurred around the Sea of Galilee and near Jerusalem. Limited excursion of Jesus took him to the regions of Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast, to the Jordan River, the desert, and Jericho.

Palestine consists of plains on the West, hills, mountains, and valleys in the central region, and desert in the south. Elevation rises from the Mediterranean Sea on the West to 1,000 meters in the highest elevations before sinking to 400 meters below sea level at the Dead Sea. Very little rain falls in the lowest regions, creating desert or wilderness conditions.

The Romans allowed "home rule" with respect to Jewish customs and Jewish law. The Pharisees, a lay group of religious purists, dominated theological discussions. The priests who ministered at the temple belonged to the Sadducee party. Together, Pharisees and Sadducees constituted the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. The court dealt with matters pertaining to Jewish law.

Since the days of the exile, local assemblies of Jews took place in a synagogue. Synagogues existed throughout the land and provided a place for prayer and study. The Jews celebrated religious festivals in Jerusalem and the priests offered sacrifices at the temple. This temple was in process of renovation and expansion by King Herod during the days of Jesus. It was destroyed forty years after Jesus' crucifixion in 70 C.E., when the Romans put down a Jewish rebellion.

The material that follows provides a general outline of each of the four Gospels and gives a systematic treatment of the content of the Gospels. The purpose is to help you develop a sense of direction for your reading of various events, miracles, parables, and teachings. As you concentrate on content—people, places, and events—become aware of the interaction between the Romans and Jews, between Jews and Samaritans, between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, and between Jesus and his disciples.

Unit 2. Focus

The Gospels occupy a unique position in the biblical canon. Four separate accounts of the presence of Jesus among men offer the reader the opportunity to see him as a special revelation from God. Whereas God had spoken in the past through various men, he now speaks to the world in the Unique One, who is his "Son." The actual "word" of God is incarnated in Jesus himself, the Messiah, the anointed, entrusted with God's own word for mankind.

The Gospels describe a divine person who brings redemption to humanity. For the most part, they all concentrate on Jesus' short ministry of three or so years. In each of the accounts, the climax is found in Jesus' death and resurrection. These accounts unveil Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of God's plan and promises.

The essence of this revelation has been recorded for posterity by the disciples of Jesus and collected into a body of material known as the Gospels. The material itself makes no claim for having captured all the sayings and deeds of the Christ, who declared God to man. Quite the contrary, the writers of the Gospels make it clear that they have been selective in their efforts. But the selections are sufficient for their purpose.

The Gospels are literary pieces written by four authors. Each chose carefully what he wished to include and how he decided to organize the material. Although some readers wish to conflate the four into a single four-fold Gospel, this is not the way they were written or intended to be read. While it is sometimes enlightening to make comparisons, the point being made by each author may be missed by neglecting the context into which an author has placed his selected material. Some fear that authority attributed to "inspiration" will be denied if too much liberty is given to an author. Others look for discrepancies and contradictions without recognizing the mechanics of composition.

As you read the Gospels, you will become aware of the identity, mission, and nature of Jesus' ministry. You should read to learn the people, places, and events that tell the story, but you should also be looking to discover how all these came together to present a composite picture of Christ. Later courses offer a detailed analysis of the meaning of these events. Here, concentrate on learning the details that support the meaning. The unit is divided into three sections: (a) Content of the Gospels, (b) John, the forerunner, and (c) Jesus the Christ.

a. Content of the Gospels. The Gospels tell of a divine being, the Son of God, who was incarnated as Jesus for the purpose of renewing men in the image of God. Each narrative aims at establishing the authority of Jesus. Each Gospel moves toward the general conclusion that Jesus' divine mission was to enable men and women to experience eternal life. And each accomplishes its purpose in its own unique way of presenting the advent and work of Jesus.

The basic thrust of the Gospels is well-summarized by Luke. Designed as instruction to Theophilus and other Christians, Luke's Gospel was written to confirm earlier testimony. The goal of his work was to equip one for living under the reign of God and for an active share in the ministry of the Word of God. The Gospel of Luke leads the reader to one basic conclusion: the Hebrew Scriptures which foreshadowed the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus; therefore, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in his name to all nations. Or, as the apostle John said in his Gospel, the choice selections of material aimed at bringing his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, so they could experience eternal life. Indeed, the final commission of Jesus to his disciples expresses the meaning and implication of his life and work.

Having previously made himself known in the world through various revelations, God chose to reveal himself to mankind more fully in the person of Jesus. Jesus is God's "Son." Coming from the "Father," the "Son" declared the person and ways of God. Since the Son was pre-existent, his birth was unusual as he was born of a virgin through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospels reveal that God brought redemption to mankind through Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection. As God's initiative is coupled with human faith and discipleship, man is once again brought to the fullness of the image of God. A new relationship with God prompts the believer to adore the Father and respect his will.

The writers of the Gospels show that the mission and ministry of Jesus are supported by the witness of the Old Testament Law and Prophets, divine proclamation at his baptism and transfiguration, his miracles, and his teaching. They lay the foundation for the book of Acts and the remainder of the New Testament documents. These will show the intended extension of the Good News to all people.

b. John, the forerunner. The Old Testament prophets had long prophesied of a new era. Distinguishing marks of that new era included a new covenant written on the hearts of the people, a new kingdom of

God with a more expansive domain, and a messiah crowned by God himself. That era became imminent with the arrival of a lone preacher in the wilderness named John the Baptist (*i.e.*, the baptizer).

John himself became the forerunner of Jesus as he preached baptism of repentance unto remission of sins and the nearness of the kingdom that Jesus himself would inaugurate. The content of John's proclamation was an ethical demand, with his announcement of the one to come forming the basis for his ethical summons. He pronounced judgment to the attitude of self-righteousness. He denounced those who claimed to be favored by God merely because they were born Jews. His ethical teaching called for justice, proper marital relationships, providing clothing and food to the needy, the cessation of extortion, and contentment with wages. Throughout his short ministry, John bore testimony to the Christ, who would bring light and remission of sins to the world.

The role of John as a forerunner should be understood in two ways. First, the prophets had forecast that one would come to prepare the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1). That person appeared in the form of John. The question is not so much whether the people would accept John as whether they would accept the Messiah.

Second, preparing for the Messiah called for spiritual renewal. The Jewish leaders did not appreciate John's message, for it called them to reform as well. The Pharisees saw themselves as the reformers who called the general population to observe the law as they interpreted it. But through insistence on their interpretations, they had laid burdens on the people with their oral law prescriptions and had not, themselves, put into place the spirit of the law. They failed to realize that their sacrifices were insufficient, and that salvation rested with the person of Christ.

John understood his role, and he understood that a worthier one was in his midst. However, John did not grasp fully the mission of Jesus. After imprisonment for calling the ruler an adulterer, he sent a messenger to Jesus to ascertain if he really was the messiah. John paid the ultimate price for being faithful to his mission.

c. Jesus, the Christ. Jesus appears in the Gospels under a variety of figures: Messiah or Christ, Son of God, King of Israel, a teacher from God, a prophet, Son of Man, David's son and Lord, Holy One of God. He was God's anointed who had come to preach good tidings to the poor and release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to liberate the bruised. He came from heaven to save men by giving his life as a ransom. In contrast to man's spiritually destitute state, Jesus is the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the true vine. Matthew and John emphasized that no one can come to know God except through Jesus Christ.

The position and authority of Jesus are affirmed in several ways. He was the subject of prophecy. He was announced by an angel to Mary as one who would save from sin. He was introduced by John the Baptizer as his superior. At his baptism, Jesus was identified by a heavenly voice as God's son. His authority was most vividly portrayed in the transfiguration, where the heavenly voice demanded that Jesus be given respect above the revered lawgiver Moses and the prophet Elijah. His acts are affirmed by the miracles he performed. His teaching is affirmed by previous revelation. The events at his crucifixion testify to an extraordinary occasion. His resurrection, ascension, and the declaration through the Spirit that he had been seated at the right hand of God confirm all that is claimed for Jesus. In short, Jesus' words and deeds establish that he was carrying in his person a divine fullness of life.

With all judgment given to the Son, he is honored as is the Father. Yet, Jesus never claimed he could do anything of himself. He did only what he saw the Father doing. The Father loved the Son and showed him all things. The words and teachings of Jesus are, therefore, God's.

In revealing the Father, Jesus spoke of God's nature, God's purposes for mankind, God's grace, and God's expectations for mankind. He taught men the Father's will and demonstrated its meaning by showing compassion upon the hungry, the sick, the poor, and the bereaved. Hence, Jesus brought God's

word of truth. This true will bring life to the repentant believer. It will also be the standard by which every man is judged in the last day. To come to that truth is to come to Jesus. Those who believe in him have sonship and eternal life, but those who do not obey the Son can only expect to experience God's wrath at the resurrection.

Unit 3. Outcome

Briefly stated, the Gospels witness to a God-man who enabled spiritual reconnection with God. Their academic pronouncements are not limited to savory statements about the Christ and the reign of God. The reign of God is joined to an appropriate code of conduct, *i.e.*, personal response, engagement, and application wrapped in human emotion. However, the point cannot be over emphasized that the life-changing outcroppings can be neither understood nor appreciated without the theological ground that gives them birth.

The ethical teaching of Jesus rises out of the nature of God. Jesus is "God's Son" who came to redeem man. In that redemptive act, the nature of God is demonstrated in a manner never before witnessed. Divinity in the flesh came to teach and give himself through an atoning sacrifice. Thus, spiritual fellowship between man and God is reestablished through faith, not human performance. The call to holiness echoes the sentiment found in the Old Covenant—"You shall be holy, as I am holy." But man can be made holy only by God, who accomplishes his work through the atoning blood of Christ and his Holy Spirit.

Men write biographies to extol the virtues of a common man, but there is nothing redeeming in these works. If the Gospels had been mere biographies, they would offer no redemptive benefits either. But the Gospels were written to convict their readers and to confront them with the answer to their spiritual dilemma. The human spiritual condition could not be rehabilitated by laws, meditation, pilgrimages, or any other humanly motivated system. The message of the Gospels was then, and remains, the only solution to man's unholy condition. The authors aimed at provoking faith and a life that reflects the virtues of Jesus Christ.

The Gospels reveal Jesus to be a Prophet who not only shows the true way to God, but who makes demands through love and then offers his life in the interest of all men. Jesus' love is not limited to the obedient; he came to save sinners. He came not to renew a past legal code, which man could not keep. He came to free men from their efforts to win the compassion of God by law. He revealed a God whose compassion does not have to be earned. With this in view, the outcome of the Gospels is an expanding kingdom of God, whose citizens are identified by the manifestation of the spirit of Christ. As to be seen in Acts, those coming to faith in Christ form a community where Christ lives within them.

This unit comprises three sections: (a) The kingdom of God, (b) The ethical teaching of Jesus, and (c) Faith, prayer, and proclamation. These are themes found in the Gospels that relate to the appearance of Jesus.

a. The kingdom of God. Central pronouncements of Jesus included nearness of the kingdom of God (or heaven as it is alternatively called) and a general call to repentance. The kingdom's true nature is disclosed using illustrations drawn from daily life. Jesus revealed vividly how highly God values man and how he anxiously desires that all should submit voluntarily to his guidance. In parabolic language, he declared the kingdom would encompass the world. But even so, Jesus foresaw that because many would despise God's grace, good and evil would remain side by side until the judgment.

The kingdom of God has several inter-related aspects. One, the kingdom is a principle of righteousness that lives in human hearts. Or, it may encompass the church as people in whom God's holiness resides. Again, in some contexts, the kingdom pertains to the final consummation of all things. Unlike the kingdoms of men, outward and visible, the kingdom of God is established within the heart. The kingdom

advanced by Jesus is an association of people in whose hearts God's will is foremost, and where believers are bound together in common love. They give their allegiance to God, their only lord. But God not only rules over men; he loves them as friends.

The grace of God, which has been extended through Christ, draws men and women into this spiritual fellowship. Consciously willing subjects enter one at a time, being born anew with conscious commitment rather than by natural physical birth. Uniquely under the reign of God, those who comprise the kingdom of God also form the congregation of Christ, who atones for sins and reconciles former enemies in the flesh. As a reminder of this union through the Savior's death and resurrection, believers share regularly a memorial feast consisting of bread and wine that represent Christ's body and blood. Thus, an invisible kingdom where God reigns in human hearts becomes manifest through the worship and behavior of its citizens.

The kingdom of God stands in contrast to the kingdom of man. Citizens of the kingdom of God are righteous, because they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Citizens of the kingdom of man are unholy by divine standards. Being redeemed, citizens of the kingdom of God assume a nature that reflects the glory of God. Being unrepentant and unredeemed, citizens of the kingdom of man pursue their own desires and pleasures without regard for divine intention.

b. The ethical teaching of Jesus. The ethical teaching of Jesus assumes the reality of a spiritual world and that God, the Creator, has invited his human creatures to share in his righteousness. Jesus set forward a proper norm for human behavior and provided an example to be followed by translating his own teaching into life. Jesus' standard for ethical conduct is drawn from (1) his acts, (2) his teaching, and (3) the principles of his life.

The conditions on which Jesus offered life and salvation included faith, repentance, and endurance. The ethical summons of Jesus is summed up in repentance, which includes both penitence and good works. But the essential sanction for righteousness is the nature of God. To enter the kingdom, one must become humble and submissive to his will.

Jesus was not merely laying down general tests of character and discipleship. He was preparing each disciple for his own struggle. His ethical teaching is a description of how those who come under the rule of God should behave.

No new code of laws. Christ's imperatives are not to be taken as forming a new code of laws. He liberated man from "law," intending that the observance of ethical standards become the natural expression of life. He insisted upon a God-man relationship which requires faith and an inward condition on the part of man.

There is a distinction with Jesus between fundamental ethics and matters of ceremony, custom, and tradition. The hedges about the Law of Moses, created and supported by generations of Jews, had resulted in vain worship and suppressed honest devotion to God. The Pharisees honored God with lip-service, yet they neglected the weightier matters--justice, mercy, and faith. Through hypocrisy and iniquity, their worship was voided. But "righteousness" takes account of the spirit of ethical precepts, as well as the acts of righteousness. Jesus therefore advocated that the Law is fulfilled not only outwardly by deeds, but inwardly in the heart by perfect love to God and man.

Jesus pushed behind the evil action to the evil disposition, going beyond the form of Mosaic law to the principle of what the law was the expression. Setting himself in the place of the Law, he became the one through whom God revealed himself to man. He also became the one through whom man approaches God. Now, man has his relation to God through a relation to Jesus--to his word and to his person. The man who comes under the reign of God is expected to bear the fruit of a religious transformation.

Moral activity is an outward expression of an inward attitude. Because sin rises in the heart from self-love, a moral inner nature is necessary for salvation. When egoism is replaced by a voluntary acceptance of the rule of God, a new life appears. Conduct is then determined by the character of the new man.

The new nature. Real discipleship and right relationship with God are based on self-denial, self-discipline, taking one's own cross, and following Jesus. By keeping the commands of his Son Jesus, one demonstrates his love for God and thereby has assurance of the Father's love. When asked what was the great commandment in the Law, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Norms for moral conduct have their origin in God, but moral behavior must grow out of a proper association with him. Christian conduct is therefore based on divine love, where love toward God expresses itself in love toward others. One must be willing to put others before self, show mercy to the needy, seek reconciliation with a discontented brother, and extend forgiveness toward repeating offenders. The interpretation of to "love your neighbor" is in each concrete case left to the individual's enlightened moral sense. A supreme example of this kind of action is the parable of the good Samaritan.

Loving one's neighbor as oneself is much more than a form of worship. True brotherhood relationships in the kingdom of God extend beyond close family ties. Man's greatest love is expressed in one's willingness to lay down his life for his friend.

Attitudes and conduct should be established on divine attitudes. The general maxims which express Jesus' ethical teaching are, "Do not demand your rights," "Do more than is required," and "Perform your duties with a God-like spirit."

Virtues are to be spontaneous and lived in view of a reward of grace instead of merit. The cardinal virtues of Jesus' ethics are faith, love, wisdom, sincerity, justice, mercy, gentleness, peacefulness, courage, orderliness, purity, righteousness, humility, kindness, patience, gratitude, a forgiving spirit, service, and a desire for reconciliation and righteousness.

The ethical teaching of Jesus is positive. He taught that one is not merely to abstain from this and from that, but rather one should pursue actively the will of God. By such devotion, the Christian manifests the glory of him who calls men out of darkness. Nevertheless, there are activities which defile a man: evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness, false witnessing, and hypocrisy.

The ideal which Jesus advocated is service. Whatever serves the highest welfare of man is justified. That which impairs the highest welfare of others is condemned.

The "Sermon on the Mount." A synopsis of Jesus' message may be seen by examining Matthew's account of the "Sermon on the Mount." While the sermon is an incomplete statement of his ethic, it presents the essence of Jesus' moral teaching. With its central theme of righteousness, the sermon describes the character and conduct of the citizens of the kingdom of God. Principal features include personal character, influence in the world, and behavior.

The Sermon on the Mount depicts proper attributes of the disciples of Christ. Meekness, humility, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, righteousness, and endurance are extolled. On the other hand, a natural, self-righteous, self-vindicating spirit is condemned. Christ's disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They should be uniformly kind in the treatment of others, remain free from ill-will toward their fellows, and speak no contemptuous or idle words. When offended or injured, one must forgive and return good for evil, and even love his enemies. Exclusively outward obedience to a legal law gives way to a life motivated by a higher desire for devotion and service. Emphasis is upon a change of mind and heart, with the goal of becoming more spiritually-minded.

Complete commitment to the pursuit of righteousness must take precedence over a divided allegiance. Faith is to characterize a disciple's life as opposed to an undue regard for physical necessities. He should be ready to help anyone who is in distress without making a show of it. Charitable in judgment, one should not dwell upon the faults of others but be concerned to overcome his own. He should separate himself from that which hinders him, for the wise and foolish will stand or fall at the final judgment in keeping with their response to these teachings of Jesus.

Attitude toward the material world. The Father of this world is God. His gifts should be received with thanksgiving and used wisely. But God's special care for his spiritual children frees them from anxiety over physical goods.

Allegiance to God is evaluated by man's attitude toward possessions, power, and honor. Disciples cannot afford to set their minds on earthly matters. These can capture the heart for the mundane and limit one's reliance upon God. Wealth is not wrong, but because riches so easily become a snare, Jesus issued ample warning. Man is merely a steward of his possessions, whether he be rich or poor. Everyone who leaves associations and possessions behind to follow Jesus shall receive even more in this life and eternal life in the age to come.

Jesus did not advocate asceticism, for his gospel did not consist of such regulations. But he did teach temperance in all things--in food and drink, in thoughts, words, and deeds. Excesses and abuses are sinful. A disciple should be willing to deny himself the use and enjoyment of things if such would cause him to lose his highest goal--fellowship with God.

Submission to God is primary, but it does not excuse the disciple from performing normal responsibilities of worldly citizenship. Members of God's kingdom are obligated to obey civil authorities and pay assessed taxation.

Jesus urged men to be faithful in love and service in view of the unexpected hour of his return to judge the world. The judgment will be based on how well a man has responded to the needs of others, such as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, offering hospitality to the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned.

c. Faith, prayer, and proclamation. Jesus aimed to develop faith, encourage prayer, and compel proclamation. He himself was faithful to the Father who sent him. In turn, he called men and women to put their trust in him. He personally relied upon prayer and taught his disciples how to pray. As his teaching and behavior proclaimed the path to redemption, so his disciples spread the word of his advent.

Although hatred, despite, and persecution by the unrighteous are to be expected, believers live by their faith. Their faith sustains them, for they understand that they belong to God and are committed to honoring him regardless of the human cost. They are assured of final victory through the resurrection of Jesus.

With spiritual life contingent upon faith in Jesus, the follower of Christ is challenged to approach God in Jesus' name and in expectation that his requests will be heard. Jesus emphasized persistence in prayer and contended for the proper attitude to accompany it.

When Jesus began to gather disciples, he called them to leave their fishing nets to become "fishers of men." As his ministry ended, he expressed concern for the unity of these disciples, knowing they would meet opposition. Making disciples would require believers to persevere and demonstrate a oneness similar to what he and the Father shared.

Because of his obedience to the Father's will, Jesus was resurrected and given authority to commission his apostles. He asked them to preach the gospel of repentance and remission of sins in his name, make disciples of all men, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They were

expected to teach the new disciples to observe the commandments Jesus had given them, that his eternal presence with them may be assured.

Jesus promised to provide the twelve with a "counselor" who could guarantee continuance of his work after his ascension. The Holy Spirit, or Comforter as he was called, would (1) teach them needed matters, (2) bring to remembrance all Jesus had said in their presence, (3) bear witness to the Christ, (4) convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, (5) guide them in truth, (6) declare future events, and (7) glorify the Son of God. The Spirit's special work would begin shortly after Jesus' ascension. In Jerusalem, the disciples would be enabled as witnesses of what they had observed in Jesus.

In summary, the central figure in the Gospels is Jesus, the Messiah, who came to proclaim the kingdom of God. The concluding section of each of the Gospels indicates that Jesus' disciples were expected to bear witness to all the world concerning his person and mission. The book of Acts of Apostles reports the early efforts to that end.

MODULE **2** Acts of Apostles

Procedure

Step 1. Read the text of the syllabus--Module 2.

Step 2. Read the book of Acts of Apostles to become familiar with the material--people, places, events, and message.

Step 3. Read Acts again. This time, make notes of the major participants, place names, events, and teachings.

Step 4. Read Acts again and again, stopping only when you need to make sure you have the content firmly in mind.

Step 5. Continue to research the names, places, and events noted in this course until you feel you are ready to take the examination.

Step 6. Once the module is completed, move to Module 3.

Things to Know

1. You should know the identity of the following personalities: Ananias (of Damascus), Ananias and Sapphira, the apostles include Matthias, Aquila and Priscilla, Aristarchus, Artemis, Barnabas, Caesar, Candace, Cornelius, Demetrius, Dorcas/Tabitha, Felix, Festus, Gaius, John Mark, King Agrippa and Bernice, James the brother of Jesus, Lydia, Philip (the evangelist), Saul/Paul, Silas, Simon (the sorcerer), Stephen, Theophilus, and Timothy.

2. You should be able to associate some event or person attached to these major geographical sites: Antioch, Asia (Minor), Athens, Berea, Caesarea, Cilicia, Corinth, Crete, Cyprus, Damascus, Derbe, Ephesus, Gaza, Iconium, Jerusalem, Joppa, Judea, Lystra, Macedonia, Malta, Meletus, Philippi, Rome, Samaria, Syria, Tarsus, Thessalonica, and Troas.

Introduction

Acts of Apostles contains the witness of one of the gospel writers to how the final commission of Christ was executed by his disciples. Acts actually continues the story of the Gospels, being volume two of the writings of Luke to Theophilus. Very simply, the book gives an account of the fulfillment of Jesus' commission to his disciples to be his witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ultimately to the whole world.

Although the apostles did not comprehend the intention of divinity in regard to the kingdom, they were guided by the Holy Spirit in their mission. The apostles proclaimed faith in Christ first in Jerusalem. Then, they and other believers carried the message throughout Judea and into Samaria. Acts describes how the gospel was introduced to the Gentiles and how it penetrated the Roman Empire during its first three and one-half decades. As one proceeds through the book of Acts, one is made aware of the message which was destined for universal proclamation.

The book of Acts tells how the apostles and other believers were faithful to execute the commission of Jesus to go into all the world and declare his Sonship, repentance, the remission of sins in his name. Everywhere they went, they declared the good tidings concerning the kingdom of God. The witnesses declared that Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God by works, wonders, and signs. He was shown to be the Son of God by his resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand. They strove to establish that all this happened according to the Old Testament Law and Prophets. They taught with urgency and in every place--in the temple, synagogues, Sanhedrin, homes, market, on the river bank, and in jails. Signs and healing often accompanied their preaching. Guidance of the Holy Spirit and divine approval were shown openly.

Acts remains a definitive source for understanding the nature and intended consequence of gospel proclamation. The composition provides concrete situations which require the gospel message to be defined implicitly and explicitly. It also demonstrates how believing communities are formed and, to some extent, how they function. Through the Book of Acts, modern readers learn the major tenets of the Christian faith, the demands of the gospel, the terms of personal salvation, and the expectant behavior of local churches.

When Acts is used as a guide for gospel proclamation, the gospel message summons sinners to faith, repentance, and baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit. Its demands are singular, calling for exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. Those who respond to the gospel will form a local community or church and select mature men to shepherd the group. Each church functions independent of others, yet they are in contact with each other and come to the aid of those brethren who are in need. Disciples proclaim the message far and wide to all segments of society. When they meet opposition, they remain loyal to their Lord and Savior. Their lives reflect ethical standards defined by a relationship with a holy God rather than by an abstract code or superstitious ritual.

The task of this module is to analyze the book of Acts of Apostles chronologically, with special attention being given to the activity and message of the disciples of Jesus.

Unit 1. The Gospel Preached in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-8:1a)

The Old Testament writers had noted that Yahweh had chosen Jerusalem as the place for his name to "dwell" and his glory to be manifested. The temple represented the place where Israel came to worship. Zion (Jerusalem) was the natural place from which the word of God would go forth to the nations. It was the place to which the nations would also come for salvation.

Since God had chosen descendants of Abraham to be his witness among other people and had designated Jerusalem as a place for his name to dwell, it was quite natural that the Good News

concerning salvation in Christ be presented to the Jews first and be proclaimed initially in Jerusalem. Much is said in the Hebrew Scriptures about Jerusalem and its temple.

Acts opens with a statement that links the book with its companion volume—the Gospel of Luke. The closing events (Jesus’ commission to his apostles and his ascension) are repeated. The notation makes it clear that Jesus had prepared his followers for a mission beyond his bodily presence on earth. The twelve apostles, minus Judas who had betrayed Jesus and hanged himself, were instructed to return from the Mount of Olives (just outside the city walls of Jerusalem) to the city proper. There they were to wait for further divine guidance. In due time, these men who had accompany Jesus in his ministry proclaimed publicly the divine accomplishment in Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This is the “gospel” or Good News about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Proceeding through the book of Acts, one becomes aware that Jerusalem was only the initial preaching post. The message was destined to reach all corners of the world. Acts records the beginning of that process and extends it through much of the Roman Empire. Old Testament emphasis on Jerusalem, notwithstanding, a single physical location loses its significance in a global spiritual kingdom. Jesus had indicated this would happen (John 4:20-24).

Unit 1 is divided into three sections. First, the book is launched with a prologue. Then, there is the initial presentation of the gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-41). Finally, further developments are traced as more and more people came to faith in Christ in the city (Acts 2:42-8:1). The next two units will push beyond Jewish territory until describe how the gospel was preached among the Gentiles.

a. Prologue (Acts 1). Acts begins with a prologue that links the book with the Gospel of Luke. The author of both works was a physician and an occasional associate of the apostle Paul during his travels. He addresses the composition to Theophilus, who is otherwise unknown. The writing itself shows that the function of the work was to tell the recipient about the progress of “the kingdom of God.”

In Acts, Luke proceeds to tell how the apostles followed Jesus’ departing instructions to return to Jerusalem. As they waited in the city, Matthias was selected to replace Judas Iscariot. After betraying Jesus, Judas had hung himself (Acts 1). The setting is now complete for what is about to follow.

The prologue not only links the Gospel of Luke with Acts, it also lays the foundation for extending the story of the Gospel. The four Gospels present the Christ. But Acts details how Jesus’ intention for universal proclamation began and how the gospel spread to the Gentile world. We may surmise that a simple paragraph could state the intention of God. But Acts not only records the fact, it reveals the struggles involved in the process. Whatever enthusiasm the preaching of the Good News generated, the believers would eventually experience the same hostility Jesus faced during his ministry. The author shows the boldness of men of faith and how persecution led to the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem. Other events are brought into the story to demonstrate that the church was made up of various levels of commitment to the principles of Christ.

In the continuation of the story beyond Jerusalem, the author is careful to show that outcasts and Gentiles were admitted to the kingdom of God. The narrative touches on the believers’ struggles in the quest to understand the real nature of the gospel in relation to the Law of Moses.

Acts is more than a “history” of the 1st century church or a collection of biographies of select “heroes of the faith.” The composition is a purposed continuation of the Gospel of Luke and a guide book for future church life. It is not written as a church manual, a depository of creeds, or a new legal code. It is written as a “story” that carries meaning for all generations of Christians. Like other biblical books, Acts has a primary audience, but it was not intended to become a dead literary work. It may be dated in the 1st century, but it is relevant for people living in the 21st century and beyond. But herein lies a theoretical challenge. How does one make a 1st century document relative to modern people? First, no one “makes” the book relevant. It is relevant because of its content. The message proclaimed pertains to

human redemption, a redemption that targets all people in all time periods. Certainly, the principals, places, unique events, audiences, and modes of transportation mentioned in Acts belong to the past. But the unchanging message proclaimed by its principals has been passed to a new generation. Along with that message of a resurrected Savior and remission of sins come implications relative to morality, the needy, persecution, unity, evangelism, and assembly.

b. The initial presentation of the gospel (Acts 2:1-41). Acts 2 continues the storyline of chapter 1. The initial chapter establishes the setting with principals, location, and purpose. Without chapter 1, the reader would miss the intended connection with the Gospel of Luke and be perplexed over the divine orchestration of the Pentecost event described in this section of text. The Pentecost event followed Christ's ascension by ten days and was set into motion when the apostles acted in keeping with Jesus' instructions.

On Pentecost, a Jewish feast day that came fifty days after Jesus was crucified, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, accompanied by visible and audible signs. Peter declared the phenomena to be a specific fulfillment of a prophecy of Joel, which was to result in the availability of salvation to all peoples. He further declared to the large number of Jews gathered that God approved of Jesus of Nazareth by mighty works, wonders, and signs. The same one whom they crucified had been raised from the dead by God (in accordance with words of David) and is now exalted to the right hand of God as both Lord and Christ.

Being cut to heart, many in the audience cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter responded with the words, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to the Jews and to the Gentiles. The hearers were exhorted to save themselves from that crooked generation. Three thousand people were convicted by the apostles' message and were baptized.

The basic pattern of preaching was established with this sermon. However, some unusual events accompanied the first apostolic delivery. You will notice that the Holy Spirit was attended by visible signs that drew the attention of the crowd. The verification of apostolic authority was important at this beginning point. The only other record of a similar phenomenon is found in chapter 10, when Peter visits the first Gentile with the gospel.

As the gospel is preached to Jews, it draws from Old Testament references. Jesus is presented as the climax or fulfillment of ancient promises and prophecies. He is the legitimate successor to King David. He is the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek), *i.e.*, the anointed of God. He is Lord, who has ascended and sits at the right hand of God.

c. Further developments (Acts 2:42-8:1). As a consequence of apostolic preaching, the new disciples devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and formed a close fellowship. From all appearances, the ideals of Jesus were operative in the new community of believers. They shared their possessions with those in need, met together, offered praise to God, and enjoyed the favor of their neighbors. Their numbers grew daily as the Lord added those who were being "saved."

Those receiving the apostles' teaching were baptized and added "to the Lord." They continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and prayer. They also observed Jesus' command to love as they shared their material possessions with the needy. Unity prevailed as the disciples were welded together in heart and soul, sharing their goods, and bearing witness to the resurrection. It was considered an honor to receive dishonor for the name of Jesus.

On one occasion, Peter and John were going to the temple when they were confronted by a lame man who requested alms. Rather than give him money as he had requested, Peter healed the man. The commotion that followed gave opportunity for another sermon by Peter. The sermon was similar to his previous one in the proclamation of Jesus as one whom God anointed. Peter made it clear to the crowd that the healing was made possible by faith in Jesus' name. He declared the resurrection, again stating

that the disciples were witnesses. He asserted Jesus as having fulfilled the things foretold by God through the prophets, declared his audience guilty of the crucifixion, and commanded them to repent so their sins could be blotted out.

The preaching of Peter in the temple led to many more believers, but it also caused the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees to arrest Peter and John. In court, these unbelievers inquired by what power or in what name they had healed and spoken. Peter, filled with the Spirit, replied that they had acted in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and that in none other is there salvation. The two were commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, but they replied they could not refrain from speaking the things which they saw and heard.

With great power the apostles gave their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The multitude of believers were welded together in heart and soul. Those who had possessions sold them and made the proceeds available to the apostles for distribution to those in need. When a physical need developed, as in the case of neglect among certain widows at Jerusalem, qualified men were chosen to handle the matter.

However, the early church was not immune to impure motives. Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and contributed part of the proceeds for the benefit of the needy. But for personal aggrandizement, they gave with the impression of giving all the proceeds. Their death revealed divine displeasure with such behavior.

The apostles continued to perform signs and wonders, healing the sick, and casting out demons. The believers maintained oneness in mind and spirit. Multitudes of men and women continued to be "added" to the Lord.

Out of jealousy, the high priest and the Sadducees arrested the apostles a second time. But upon release from prison by an angel, they returned to the temple and continued to speak. Again, they were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council). The rulers testified that the apostles had filled Jerusalem with their teaching and had the intent of bringing Jesus' blood upon them. The apostles replied by restating their allegiance to God and their position as witnesses. Upon their departure from the Sanhedrin, the apostles rejoiced that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus. Daily, in the temple courts and from house to house, they taught and proclaimed the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

When a grievance arose over discrimination in the distribution of supplies to needy widows, the apostles instructed the disciples to appoint seven outstanding men to handle the matter. One of those selected was Stephen, who afterward performed wonders and signs. He spoke with wisdom as he answered the misrepresentation of his opposition. Stephen charged his opponents with being the real law-breakers and the murderers of the Righteous One that the prophets had forecast. As they stoned him to death, Stephen prayed a forgiving prayer.

A great persecution arose against the church and dispersed the disciples (except the apostles) throughout Judea and Samaria. Not to be discouraged, these disciples preached the message of Jesus everywhere they went.

Unit 2. The Gospel Reaches Samaria (Acts 8:1b-9:43)

The commission issued by Jesus outlined the direction the gospel was to travel. Before his ascension, Jesus told his eleven remaining apostles, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Accordingly, Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. The first seven chapters concentrate on Jerusalem. From this point forward, Luke describes how the message reached Samaria.

The gospel was carried to Samaria initially by Philip, one of the seven previously appointed in Jerusalem to care for the Grecian widows who had been discriminated against in food distribution. Philip was one of those forced to flee Jerusalem due to persecution. Rather than hide, he assumes a new role—that of evangelist in Samaria. The presence of Peter and John in Samaria came later.

The Samaritans represented a group of people of mixed blood. They were both Jewish and outcasts. Preaching the gospel to Samaritans clearly indicates that God's invitation to salvation extends to an audience wider than Jews of good standing. Samaritans recognized the Torah, but they disputed over the proper place of worship. Their worship centered in central Palestine, where they had built a temple. The conversation of Jesus with the woman at the well (John 4) brings the people into focus and opens the possibility of reception of a message that involved Jesus as their promised messiah.

The Pharisees held the Samaritans in contempt. They placed them in the same category as tax-collectors and sinners. They would have no social contact with them and avoided them as much as possible. In contrast, Jesus showed interest toward those who repented. He even conversed with a Samaritan woman about spiritual matters and declared the field ready for harvest (John 4:35). Even Jesus' disciples had reservation about the incident, but now in Acts it becomes clear that the Samaritans are invited into the kingdom of God. Implications for today should be evident.

The unit is divided into three sections. The first concentrates on two special-interest people: the Samaritans and a eunuch—both of whom were outcasts. The second moves to the conversion of Saul (known more commonly as Paul, his Greek name). Paul became the main character in the story of the second half of Acts. The third section observes the preaching of Peter and the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles.

a. Philip carries the gospel to Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch (8:1b-40). Philip (the evangelist), one of the seven appointed to care for the widows, went to a city of Samaria (an area that lies between Judea and Galilee in central Palestine) and proclaimed the "the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." He performed signs, cast out unclean spirits, and performed miracles of healing. Many believed and were baptized. When Simon, a sorcerer, heard Philip preach, he believed and was baptized. But after Peter and John arrived from Jerusalem to bestow special gifts of the Holy Spirit, Simon offered money that he might also have the advantage. Peter rebuked him and instructed him to repent and pray to God that the intent of his heart might be forgiven. The event illustrates that not all people who responded to the gospel did so out of pure motives.

Before their return to Jerusalem, Peter and John preached the gospel in Samaria and in many villages of the area. But Philip was found speaking to an Ethiopian nobleman who was returning home from Jewish worship in Jerusalem. Philip explained the suffering servant passage of Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus. Being persuaded that Jesus was the Christ, the Ethiopian was baptized.

The accounts regarding the baptism of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian are significant for at least two reasons. One, they introduce the gospel to those living beyond Jerusalem. Jesus had said the gospel should be preached first in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and throughout the world. The second stage is Samaria. The second item of note is that the gospel was intended for more than Jews who were in good standing. The mixed race of Samaritans traced their ancestry to the Hebrews, who lived in central Palestine and once constituted the northern kingdom of Israel. In the eyes of the purists, however, they were to be shunned. The Samaritans disliked the Jews as much as the Jews disliked them. In this story, one is informed that the gospel provided the avenue whereby Jews and Samaritans could be united spiritually in one body—the church, the body of Christ.

Nothing more is known about the Ethiopian other than his business and his physical condition. He was likely a Jew of the Diaspora, who came to Jerusalem to worship. But, he was a eunuch, which meant he was barred from the most intimate assembly at the temple. His conversion shows that the gospel did not discriminate against one's physical circumstance.

b. The conversion of Saul/Paul (9:1-31). The ninth chapter of Acts relates the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul the apostle. The Lord revealed himself to Saul who was on his way to Damascus to seek out and persecute believers. Saul proceeded to Damascus, fasted, and prayed for three days before being commanded by the preacher Ananias to be baptized to wash away his sins. Upon his obedience, he immediately began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Later he preached boldly at Jerusalem and disputed against the Grecian Jews, escaping with his life to Tarsus. The church had peace. The believers were edified, and they multiplied.

Paul's conversion is significant to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. It was also significant for convincing Jewish believers that God's righteousness was made known apart from observance of the Law of Moses. Maybe these are the reasons why Paul occupies the center of attention in the last half of Acts and the New Testament canon. Bear in mind, Paul did not alter the gospel of Christ; he did not reinterpret the message preached by the twelve apostles. He understood it clearly and was able to articulate it. That all began with his conversion.

Paul had been a member of the Pharisee party and had been trained thoroughly in the written and oral law of the Jews. He was such an ardent believer in God and supporter of the Pharisee position that he even engaged in persecuting those who believed Jesus to be the Messiah. It was precisely while he was on his way to ravage the believers in Damascus that he encountered the Lord. That encounter simply told him to find a certain believer who would inform him what to do.

Note that Saul/Paul was introduced in 8:1, only to have more time allotted to him beginning in chapter 9. At 9:32, the author, Luke, returns to the activity of Peter. He picks up with Paul at chapter 13 and follows him for the duration of the book. Clearly, a transition is taking place so far as the story of Acts is concerned. Surely, the activities of Peter and other apostles were important, but Luke becomes personally involved in the activity related to Paul's journeys. Paul's ministry provides insight into how the gospel was preached first to Jews and then to Gentiles across the Roman world.

c. Peter's preaching (9:32-43). As Luke often does in his writing, he completes a section of text with a summary. That occurs in 9:31. Following the summary, he returns to Peter. And he does so with purpose, for a big shift is about to take place in the narrative.

The passage begins, "As Peter traveled about the country." There is no full itinerary, as this was not essential to where the author is leading the reader. Luke is content to illustrate Peter's work with a few short stories as he will introduce the work of Paul to the larger Gentile world. To continue the story of Paul at this point would be premature. It is not that Peter's work is unimportant or that it ceased. To the contrary, Peter continued proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and teaching converts, as his two epistles confirm. Most important is his preaching to Cornelius and the significance of that event as indicated in chapters 10 and 11. The immediate stories prepare the reader for the embrace of Gentiles into the kingdom of God. The events related by Luke occur in two Mediterranean coastal cities: Lydda and Joppa in the northerly direction of Caesarea.

Wherever Peter went, he healed and preached. But to this point, Peter confined his work to the Jews. The miracles that accompanied his preaching reinforced his message and became the occasion of many believing in Christ. The miracles confirmed both Peter's authority and authenticity. Two such miracles are recorded: healing of a paralyzed man at Lydda and raising Dorcas from the dead, a female disciple at Joppa. Dorcas was known for her compassionate service, as she made coats and garments for widows.

Peter had been the featured character since the initial preaching at Jerusalem (Acts 2) and the events described through chapter 5. He appears again in connection with the Samaritan believers (8:14-25). He reappears in 9:32 and occupies the center of attention through 12:19. The passage at hand serves as a summation of Peter's work and prepares the reader for his presentation to Cornelius (Acts 10). The date of the section at about 40 C.E. That means that approximately a decade had transpired since the Pentecost of Acts 2.

Very little is known of the activities of other apostles. One can only surmise that they were active in preaching and healing. Since Peter is the focus of attention, perhaps his work represents that of the other apostles as well. Thus, Acts does not pretend to be a full compilation of the acts of all the apostles. It is enough for Luke to give some indication of early apostolic work. In a broader sense, he includes stories of personalities other than the apostles who were involved in gospel proclamation but concentrates on Peter and on Paul, who was specially called to become an apostle to the Gentiles.

Unit 3. The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles (Acts 10-28)

God's grace extends to all people. Once the gospel was preached to the Jews, it was then proclaimed to the Gentile world. It was only proper for the gospel to go to the Jews first, for they were the descendants of Abraham, to whom God gave a promise of future blessing. They had become God's covenant people for making him known to the world.

Apostles and evangelists were constantly on the move. On occasion, men like Paul would stay from one to two years in large centers such as Antioch, Corinth, or Ephesus. From these urban centers, the gospel radiated into surrounding areas. Men who knew only the baptism of John were taught the way of God more accurately. Christians were led to walk in the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

A controversy over legal requirements upon Gentile Christians was officially ended in a Jerusalem conference where only abstinence from idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood were bound upon the Gentile converts. The practice of circumcision was not a requirement. Paul showed how it was consistent for a Jew to keep portions of the Law, yet he explicitly taught it was wrong to bind the Law of Moses on a Gentile.

The message preached to the Gentiles who did not know the God of heaven included the following: (1) the true God--creator, Lord, source of life, one unrestricted to temples, not dependent upon men's hands, and impartial toward men; (2) his Son Jesus Christ--his good deeds, healing, crucifixion, resurrection, and manifestation, his approval of God, the witness of the prophets, and the kingdom of God; (3) good tidings of peace in Jesus Christ--that men should believe on him, repent, and be baptized (immersed) in water in his name, and pursue righteousness and self-control; and (4) judgment by Christ.

The message proclaimed was from a divine source and was intended for all humans. Tied to the promise God made to Israel, the message gave enlightenment to Gentiles that they may turn from the power of Satan to God and enjoy the benefits of salvation.

The material in Acts 10-28 is presented under three topics: (a) Initial phases of Gentile inclusion, (b) Paul's work in the spread of the gospel, and (c) Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and appeal to Caesar. This will bring you to the end of Acts.

a. Initial phases of Gentile inclusion. Admission of Gentiles into the believing community without requiring proselyte ritual became a difficult hurdle for Jewish believers. They would later learn that the the gospel of Jesus Christ was not based on legal requirements.

The conversion of Cornelius at Caesarea. Through chapter nine of the book of Acts, the gospel had evidently been restricted to Jews or proselytes to Judaism. But with chapter ten, Luke relates how the Gentiles were brought into covenant relationship with God and the fellowship of believers. Although Cornelius was a Roman centurion of the finest character and spiritual devotion, it took a vision, a divine injunction, and a demonstration of the Holy Spirit to convince Peter that the community of believers was open to Gentiles.

To the assembly at Cornelius' house, Peter declared the impartiality of God, the universal acceptance of men of every nation, and the good tidings of peace in Jesus Christ. Beginning with Jesus' ministry in

Galilee, he proclaimed his appointment by God with the Holy Spirit, his good deeds, his healing of those oppressed of the devil, his resurrection, his manifestation, and his role in the final judgment. Peter further declared the apostles to be witnesses of Jesus' activity and of his crucifixion. He further stated that the prophets had testified that everyone who believes in Jesus could receive forgiveness of sins. Luke records that the Spirit fell on the house of Cornelius as upon the apostles at Pentecost as a divine sign of God's acceptance of the Gentiles. Cornelius and his household were then baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Following the event, Peter had to defend his actions at Caesarea to fellow Jews in Jerusalem.

The gospel reaches Antioch of Syria. When the disciples in Jerusalem heard of the great number of believers at Antioch, they sent Barnabas to exhort them to remain faithful. Barnabas then went to Tarsus to bring Saul to Antioch. Here, they gathered with the church for a year and taught many. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians." When prophets came from Jerusalem and foretold a famine in Palestine, each disciple in Antioch determined to send relief to the brethren according to his ability. Meanwhile, Peter was imprisoned in Jerusalem. The church made earnest prayer, and many gathered at Mark's mother's house for this purpose.

In the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers, who led the Christians in worship and fasting. Upon direction of the Holy Spirit, they sent out Saul and Barnabas to preach the gospel, but only after they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them.

b. Paul's work in the spread of the gospel

Paul's first mission tour (Acts 13:1ff; late 40s C.E.). Wherever Paul and Barnabas traveled, they went first to the Jewish synagogues and then to the Gentiles. Paul preached Jesus, his death and resurrection, and the promise of the fathers. He declared remission of sins and freedom from sin, which the Law of Moses could not forgive. He warned against scoffers and turned to the Gentiles when the Jews became jealous.

At Iconium, Paul converted both Jews and Greeks and stayed there for a considerable time. Fleeing to Lystra and Derbe, Paul and his companions preached "the good news." Signs and miracles continued to be performed by them.

Paul responded to the men of Lystra who thought he and Barnabas were gods. He claimed nothing for the two except to be men, who were trying to get the people of Lystra to turn from worthless idols to the living Creator. Paul told them that in the past, God allowed the nations to go their own way. Nevertheless, he left his testimony by showing kindness in giving rain to grow their food.

After Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Derbe and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. In each place, they confirmed the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith. When they had appointed elders in every church, they prayed with fasting. Returning to Antioch, they gathered the church together and reported that God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. There they remained a long time.

Preaching to the Gentiles a plan for covenant relationship with God occasioned a major topic for discussion among the Jewish believers. Judaizing teachers from Judea contended that a Gentile could become a Christian only if he became a proselyte to Judaism first. They debated the question in Antioch, but the issue was brought to a head before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They agreed that the Gentiles who became Christians be given no greater burden than "to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." So the apostles and elders, with the whole church, chose men to bear a letter to the Gentile Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia to this effect.

When the messengers reached Antioch, they gathered the congregation together and read the letter. And two of the messengers, being also prophets (recognized authentic spokespersons), encouraged and strengthened the Christians.

Paul's second mission tour (Acts 15:36ff; about 50 C.E.). After a considerable stay in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decided to return to those cities where they had previously proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they were faring. Though they went separate ways due to a dispute over taking John Mark, the record says Paul chose Silas to go with him to strengthen the churches.

Timothy joined Paul's company along the way. They were conscientious to deliver to the churches the decree that had been ordained of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. The churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

Forbidden by the Spirit to speak the word in certain places, Paul's company moved toward Europe. Paul concluded from a vision that God had directed them to preach the gospel in Macedonia. Coming to Philippi, he taught and baptized Lydia's household. But when he and Silas cast out a spirit of divination from a maid, her master caused them to be put in prison. Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God when an earthquake freed them. Seizing an opportunity to teach the jailer, they proclaimed belief in the Lord Jesus a prerequisite for salvation. After speaking the word of the Lord to him and his household, the jailer and his family were baptized the same night. Before departing Philippi, Paul and his company met with their fellow Christians.

Coming to Thessalonica, Paul, according to his custom, entered the Jewish synagogue and showed from the Scriptures that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. He then identified Jesus as the Christ. Some Jews, many Greeks, and a number of influential women were persuaded. However, jealous, disbelieving Jews forced Paul and his company to move on to Berea. Here, they found Jews who readily received their message. They examined the Scriptures to see if the things being taught were true. Many Jews and Greeks at Berea believed.

Being driven from Berea by troublesome Jews who had come from Thessalonica, Paul traveled to Athens alone. In Athens, he was overwhelmed by a city full of idols. He reasoned in the synagogues with the Jews and in the market with Greeks. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers perceived him to set forth strange gods because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. When they pressed him, Paul declared God to be the true source of life. Their "unknown" God is neither restricted to temples nor dependent upon men. He announced that the times of ignorance are passed and that God now commands all men to repent. All must face a day when they will be judged by the resurrected Christ. His teaching on the resurrection caused some to mock, but others believed.

Moving on to Corinth, Paul worked as a tentmaker and reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath. He testified that Jesus was the Christ and persuaded Jews and Greeks. During his eighteen-month stay, unbelieving Jews tried to bring Paul to judgment in civil court. They claimed he was persuading men to worship God contrary to the Law of Moses. But the Roman proconsul refused to hear their case. From Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus and Caesarea on his return to Antioch.

Paul's third mission tour (Acts 18:23ff; about 52-55 C.E.). On departing from Antioch, Paul traveled from place to place throughout Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the disciples. At about the same time, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos entered Ephesus. Apollos taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, but knowing only the baptism of John. He spoke boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they explained the way of God more accurately. Apollos later went to Achaia and disputed with the unbelieving Jews by showing that Jesus was the Christ.

Meanwhile, Paul continued to establish the disciples in many places. Returning to Ephesus, he found about twelve disciples who had been baptized with the baptism of John and led them to be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When he had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit led them to speak with

tongues and prophesy. At Ephesus, Paul spoke in the synagogue for three months, reasoning concerning the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened, he separated the disciples and taught daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years. As a result, the gospel was heard throughout the province.

An episode in Ephesus that involved a number of Jewish exorcists resulted in the magnification of the name of Jesus. Fear fell upon both Jews and Greeks. Many who had practiced magical arts brought their books and burned them openly. The Christian community became such a strong influence in Ephesus that the shrine-builders' business suffered loss. The craftsmen, who made silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis, instigated a riot that forced Paul from the city. He exhorted the disciples, then traveled to Greece, exhorting others along the way.

Upon his return from Greece and Macedonia, Paul stopped at Troas where he remained seven days. On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered to eat the Lord's supper, Paul discoursed with them.

Coming to Miletus, Paul called to him the Ephesian elders. He reminded them of his ministry among them and how he had not shunned from declaring anything that was profitable. He had taught from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. Paul considered himself pure from the blood of all men, for he had not withheld from declaring "the whole counsel of God." The apostle warned the Ephesian elders to feed the church, which Jesus purchased with his own blood and over which the Holy Spirit had made them bishops. He warned them that false teachers would endeavor to lead the church astray. He challenged them to watch and recall his ceaseless admonition while with them. Paul also encouraged the elders to help the weak and discover the blessedness of giving.

c. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and appeal to Caesar. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem on his final visit, he reported to James and the elders the success of his ministry among the Gentiles. In an effort to set aside the charge that he had taught Jews scattered among the Gentiles to forsake Moses' Law and Jewish customs, the apostle purified himself and paid the fees of four men under a vow. But some Asian Jews, thinking Paul had taken a Greek into the temple, stirred up a riot.

Paul was "rescued" from the mob in Jerusalem by the Roman soldiers. He faced trial for the uproar, though no valid charge could be levied against him. Paul defended his life and conduct. He felt himself specially called of God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some of his opponents spoke of the Way as being a sect, but Paul emphasized that his beliefs were in accord with the Law and the Prophets. As touching the hope and resurrection of the dead, he was a Pharisee. He held the same hope as those ancients under the Law and advocated the resurrection for the just and unjust.

As Paul was being held for trial before Governor Felix, he had occasion to speak with him concerning the Way and faith in Christ Jesus. But as he reasoned of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified and sent Paul away. Later, standing before Governor Festus' judgment-seat, Paul declared that he had not sinned against the Law of the Jews, the temple, or Caesar.

Before King Agrippa, Paul considered that he stood trial for the hope of the promise God made to the Jewish forefathers. Though he first opposed the name of Jesus, the apostle was obedient to a divine appointment to be a minister and a witness to the Gentiles. He had been sent to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. He had preached remission of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ. To Jews and Gentiles, Paul proclaimed repentance and called men to do works worthy of repentance. He claimed to be testifying only what the prophets and Moses said should come: that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, and that light would be proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles.

At every turn, God showed his approval of the ministry of Paul. In a time of shipwreck on the voyage to Rome, Paul comforted the crew and was in turn comforted by an angel. The angel confirmed that Paul

would indeed stand trial before Caesar. On Malta, he shook off a poisonous snake without harm coming to him and continued to perform miracles of healing.

Three days after his arrival in Rome, Paul called together the chief of the Jews and declared his plight as a prisoner. He explained that he had done nothing against the people or the customs of their forefathers. Then he entreated them to hear his testimony, for he was bound because of the hope of Israel. On a specified day, Jews came in great numbers and Paul taught on the kingdom of God. He persuaded them concerning Jesus, both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some believed; others disbelieved. He interpreted Isaiah's word about hardness of heart to those who disbelieved and declared that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles.

The book of Acts ends with a statement describing how for two years Paul lived in his own rented house. Here he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

MODULE **3** The Pauline Epistles

Procedure

Step 1. Read the text of the syllabus for this module for an orientation to the Pauline Epistles. You will come back to this synopsis later, as you work through individual epistles.

Step 2. Read all the Epistles--Romans through Philemon. You may not understand all you read, but you will begin to get a feel for what is in the Epistles. You will begin to become familiar with the material--people, places, events, and message.

Step 3. After a first reading, read each of the Epistles multiple times before going on to the next. For example, read Romans several times, stopping to make notes of the major ideas. You should develop a familiarity with the material. As you move to succeeding epistles, visualize the different occasions that provoked the letters.

Step 4. Continue to read the Epistles, using the synopsis provided in this booklet as your guide.

Step 5. Once the module is completed, move to Module 4.

Things to Know

Modules 3 concentrate on the personalities and the distinguishing content of the Pauline Epistles.

1. Know the identity of the following personalities: Euodia and Syntyche, Onesimus, Philemon, Timothy, and Titus.
2. You should be able to associate these major geographical sites with appropriate epistles: Colosse, Corinth, Crete, Ephesus, Macedonia, Philippi, Rome, and Thessalonica.
3. Know also the persons or churches to which each epistle was addressed.
4. Be able to identify each epistle by major distinguishing features.

Introduction

To this point, we have become familiar with The Gospels and with Acts of Apostles. With this module, we entertain a new genre—letters or epistles. Whether ancient or modern, letters have a similar set of purposes, if not a rather common format.

We heartedly recognize the utility of letter writing. Letter writing lends itself to putting thoughts into permanent form. It also allows the author to express his thoughts concretely and precisely. When done in good literary form that follows accepted rules of syntax, the letter can be easily understood and have wide influence, as the New Testament epistles demonstrate.

For the sake of our study, we have broken the epistles into two modules. That is not because they represent two contrasting collections or categories. It is due to the fact that the letters outnumber the other types of works included in the New Testament.

The first set neatly fits into a category we will call the “Pauline Epistles.” These are letters originally addressed by the apostle Paul to both churches and individual Christians. Since Paul wrote prolifically, his epistles are easily collected into one bunch. Paul’s letters are placed ahead of other letters in the New Testament canon, probably because they are most numerous. There is no other significance to the arrangement.

Unit 1 provides a brief introduction to the Epistles. Unit 2 considers the Pauline letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and the Galatians. Unit 3 concentrates on Paul’s letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (commonly called the Prison Epistles), the Thessalonian correspondence, and his letters to Timothy and Titus (commonly referenced as the Pastorals).

Unit 1. Introduction to the Epistles

The Epistles comprise twenty-one letters written by an apostle or one closely associated with an apostle. Some letters are addressed to congregations of Christians in a 1st century location. A few are addressed to individuals. All are “occasional.” That is, they arose in response to some problem or need.

Most of the Epistles were written by Paul. These have been placed together, following Acts of Apostles. The Pauline letters include Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. There have been arranged roughly in the order of their size--longest first and shortest last.

Hebrews follows the Pauline epistles, having no author's name attached. Then follow a book by James, two by Peter (1 Peter and 2 Peter), three by John (1 John, 2 John, and 3 John), and one by Jude. The order has no significance for interpretation.

As religious literature, Christian scriptures are unique. The Gospels, for example, have no counterpart. Neither do the Epistles. The Epistles as documents may reflect common style and vocabulary with non-biblical writing, but they do not share in functionality. The key to appropriating the Epistles to current life is to grasp their original purpose. It would be a mistake to reformulate the various letters into a systematic handbook for Christian practice. Their function is to teach, clarify, encourage, warn, and offer correction to bad belief and behavior. By citing specific instances, the authors reveal how the teachings of Christ should be integrated into modern lives and religious practices.

Being Christian scripture places an added burden on believers—to show the truthfulness of scripture witness to God, Christ, and salvation. Without the claim of direct dictation from an angel to one man in isolation or the accumulation of human wisdom over centuries, the body of material revered by disciples

of Jesus is exceptional. They neither leave mankind to earn the respect of God by sheer obedience, nor do they require a cycle of reincarnations to attain to nothingness. They announce and celebrate the grace of a caring God whose love is unsurpassed in any religious system.

The task of this unit is to establish (a) the purpose of the Epistles, (b) date and place of composition, and (c) use of the Epistles. Since this is not a critical introduction to the New Testament, the goal in this course is to alert you to the necessary background requisite to reading for general comprehension.

a. Purpose. The Epistles reflect the inner life of 1st century Christian communities in their struggles to experience continuously the dynamic Christian message. The writers drew their message from the work of Jesus. Like Old Testament prophets who reached back to the Law of Moses for the substance of their messages, the authors of the Epistles relied on the revelation of Jesus Christ for core instruction.

Paul's epistles are similar in style and layout. However, some are more personal (1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) in address. What may be said of Paul's letters can also be said of John's. The first is general in nature, while the second and third are much more personal. Yet, all the letters have a personal touch. Even Romans, despite its formal arguments, is not without its personal sensitivities.

All the letters contain theological content, for their overriding purpose is to impart teaching and application related to the word of God. While employing a style of writing common in the ancient world, the authors thread their letters with language about God's act in Jesus Christ, prayer, ethical behavior, church life, false and healthful teaching, and the end times.

Each epistle is driven by a particular situation. For example, the Corinthians were seeking answers to disturbing issues. The Galatians and Thessalonians were deeply troubled. Some issues were theological in that they pertained to belief—belief in Jesus' divinity, resurrection of the dead, and salvation. Some issues were tied to morality—greed, sexual misconduct, and attitudes. Still others were concerned with practical matters—worship, caring for the poor, and relations with the political order.

The New Testament letters are not treatises written to answer some esoteric or irrelevant question. Their theology is fresh. Their audiences are real. The circumstances that evoked them point to critical faith issues. For example, while the Corinthians sought answers to a set of questions, their behavior contradicted their claims to spirituality. The Galatians were in danger of losing their faith altogether by seeking justification through performance. The church at Philippi faced threats from Judaizers.

The Pauline Epistles project themselves into the modern world in a dynamic manner. Neither theological components nor the demands for holiness have changed. But for a variety of reasons, Christians who find themselves in an increasingly hostile world, easily accept cultural norms. Since secular society lays no claim to morality (a religious ideal), the moral code of believers comes under assault. Christians claim a moral standard rooted in God's nature and found in divine revelation; unbelievers take comfort in what the secular legal code allows. The clash begs for serious consideration of the issues addressed in the Epistles. Paul is not to be dismissed as a mistaken out-of-date propagandist. If so, what can be believed as true?

b. Date and place of composition. The New Testament Epistles were composed between the late 40s to the mid-80s C.E. (1st century). The oldest extant copies date generally from the 4th and 5th centuries, but there is little question that they originated during the middle years of the 1st century.

Other letters were probably written by the biblical authors, which have now been lost. For example, Paul indicates he had written the Corinthians prior to the epistle commonly called First Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). He also mentions "the letter from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16), about which we know nothing. The letters that made their way into the canon of scripture were confined to apostles or their associates and are occasional in nature.

Paul's epistles are thought to be among the first written, beginning probably no earlier than 49 C.E. (Galatians) and ending no later than 67 C.E. (2 Timothy). They were all directed to individuals or churches located across the northern rim of the Mediterranean Sea. Hence, it is surmised that the first New Testament book was written about two decades after Pentecost.

The date of Hebrews is thought to be somewhere near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. That event—either in prospect or recently completed—may have suggested some of its content. Specifically, the emphasis on Jesus as high priest and the event of the new covenant play well against this background.

The non-Pauline writings are traditionally placed in the later part of the period. John is perhaps the last to pen the Gospel that bears his name, three epistles attributed by him, and Revelation. Peter ends his first epistle with the note, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you (*i.e.*, churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia) sends you her greetings” (1 Peter 1:1; 13), supposedly indicating that he is in Rome when he writes.

Some epistles bear the marks of having been composed while the author was in prison for preaching the gospel. Paul so remarks in the “Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). We may speculate that some were written from Rome; others were composed in Ephesus or some other city within the Roman Empire. Revelation was composed from the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean (Mediterranean) Sea. The date and place of writing are of interest to the reader, but they are not essential for getting the basic message of the books.

c. Use of the Epistles. Paul may have written his epistles to select 1st century addressees, but his words extend to a wider audience. He wrote under the claim of divine inspiration and set forth directions rooted in what scripture testifies to be eternal truth. What Paul wrote, therefore, did not have its origin with the human author. Neither were his words made sacred by the ones who first received it, by creeds, or by the historical church. Paul's epistles may be time-bound in the sense that he and his first readers lived in the 1st century. But the ideas they convey are not time-bound. They are timeless in dimension and universal in scope.

Who has the authority to say Paul was mistaken regarding the matters he addressed? Modern scholars find it tempting to dismiss him with respect to bodily resurrection of the dead, the role of women, and other statements with which they wish to disagree. Paul's epistles will remain useful to the extent one respects their integrity and to the extent one adopts their ideals.

If the gospel has universal appeal, it has modern application. Proper application begins with comprehending the content. Since the essence of the gospel does not change, the modern interpreter learns from these ancient documents the meaning of the gospel, then continues to make appropriate application in modern contexts.

In a later course, you will be exposed to those principles that determine good interpretation. Those principles deal with how one should understand compositions that employ different literary genre (Gospels, letters, apocalyptic, etc.). At that point, the issue of how one may make proper use of ancient writings in the present age will be explored in more detail, but that exercise lies beyond the scope of this course. However, you should be aware that what you are learning is not a matter of curiosity. You are not learning facts for feed-back purposes. You learn facts in view of application. The epistles take on importance for you as you consider what you learn may have relevance for your life.

The Epistles lead one to appreciate the redemption God provides in Christ. They also reveal the kind of life that the redeemed are called to live. The result is peace, joy, faith, hope, and love. The assurance offered by God's grace and the presence of his Spirit in the believer empowers one to face life's struggles boldly.

Unit 2. The Letters of Paul: Romans through Galatians

Paul's letters were written by a Jew born in Tarsus (located in south central Turkey). Because of the location of his birth, Paul was a Roman citizen. He was reared in an observant Jewish family. The student of the Bible meets him in Jerusalem, where as an unbeliever in Jesus' divinity and messiahship, he passionately pursues believers to put an end to their preaching. He was trained as a Pharisee and became devout in pharisaic beliefs. On one occasion, when he traveled to Damascus to search out Christians for arrest and persecution, he converted. Hence, Paul did not belong to the Twelve. He was divinely-commissioned to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews) of the Roman world. Perhaps for twenty years, he traveled the eastern and northern Mediterranean territory, preaching the gospel and receiving the same ill-treatment he had afflicted earlier on Christians. Paul naturally went to his Jewish brethren first, before turning to the Gentile population. His epistles reveal that the recipients of his letters were a mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians who resided in cities located in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome.

The letters of Paul vary in length, character, and purpose. This is true, even with the four letters considering in this unit. A theological treatise like Romans will certainly differ significantly from personal letters examined in Unit 3. As shall be seen, each letter is tailored to fit a set of peculiar situations. This makes the study intriguing for the glimpse afforded as to how the principles of the gospel apply in assorted circumstances.

Romans is addressed to Christians in Rome. The book is said to be the closest to a theological treatise one will find in the New Testament. Together with Galatians, it answers many questions as to how God's righteousness is imparted to man. The Corinthian correspondence was developed over a short space of time and addresses questions raised by the Corinthian Christians and other fundamental concerns that the church faced at that time.

A synopsis of the epistles under review is presented below. An italics section summarizes the major content of the epistle in the general order in which the author wrote it. This is followed with a summary outline of each letter. Remember, you are reading for comprehension of the books. At this stage, you are not attempting to construct a systematic theology.

a. Romans

Romans is a treatise on how a person attains righteousness. Gentiles consistently refused to acknowledge God, although he could be perceived through his creation. Jews, on the other hand, were given a law that revealed God, but they did not pursue it by faith. Consequently, all peoples have fallen short of the glory of God. In the face of mankind's lack of "righteousness," God sent his Son, Jesus, to become man's righteousness. The death of Jesus brought the atonement that the Law of Moses could not provide. Thus, God provided the basis for becoming righteous. What has always been impossible for mankind to achieve by personal endeavor (idolatry or law-keeping), is now available through faith.

Faith in God is acted upon in baptism, which is a burial into the death of Christ and a symbolic resurrection to a new life. Now, created anew, the Christian lives to the glory of God by adorning a new way of thinking and behaving. He dies to sin and becomes alive in Christ. A new attitude reigns in him. Now in Christ, he has no fear of the forces of evil. But the ramifications are clear: one submits to civil authorities, bears the infirmities of the weak, and behaves generally in a way that identifies one as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is laid out on the premise that the gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, whether he be Jew or Gentile (1:16-17). The author proceeds to demonstrate that the Gentile stands wanting before God because of long-term unrighteousness (1:18-31). The Jew, on the other hand, had the advantage of revelation from God, but he did not live by it (2:1-3:8). Consequently, all people come short of the glory of God (3:9-20, 23). However, the good news is that God has provided a means by which humankind can become righteous.

Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, who offered himself on the cross to atone for men's sins (3:21-31). The work of Jesus Christ is the culmination of the promise God made to Abraham (4). Justification means the believer dies to a commitment to sinful living and has been cleansed through the blood of Jesus, which he contacts in his immersion (baptism) into Jesus' death (5-6). Raised to a new kind of living, the Christian receives assurance of eternal life through the risen Lord (7-8).

With respect to physical Israel (the Jews), God's acts are always right. Israel's general unbelief did not hinder God from making redemption available to the Gentiles. Israel's hope rests in Jesus (9-11).

The implications of redemption extend to one's attitudes and actions. Now his whole body is a living sacrifice to God. He is expected to live an appropriate life in society and in brotherhood relations (12:1-15:13).

b. The Corinthian correspondence

1 Corinthians

First Corinthians was prompted by a series of questions raised by the church at Corinth. Before addressing specific questions, however, the apostle Paul spoke of his own concerns about the condition of the Christian community at Corinth. They had allowed dissension to develop over allegiances to different personalities. They permitted immorality to be practiced openly among them. Some were bringing lawsuits against others in the civil courts. Having addressed their detestable situation, Paul then proceeded to answer their questions about marriage and eating food offered in idol worship. As he wrote on propriety in worship, it became clear that the Corinthians were also needing instruction on how to approach the Lord's supper, prayer, the exercise of spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and financial giving.

Highlights of Paul's letter include those ideals that mark Christian maturity. These ideals include pursuing the wisdom of God, living above immorality, acting in the interest of others, exercising love, being orderly, and holding a correct understanding of the resurrection.

Following a salutation and thanksgiving (1:1-9), the apostle Paul appeals to the Corinthian saints not to divide over allegiances to men. They should recognize that the message of the cross makes foolish any claims to greatness in human attainment (1:10-31). Paul's own preaching among them was heavenly wisdom (2). The Corinthian Christians, on the other hand, acted in jealousy and quarreling. They had failed to understand that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit (3). Following a gentle warning about misbehavior (4), the apostle instructs the community of believers to expel one of their own who is living immorally (5). He condemns some for carrying personal disputes to the civil courts and for sexual immorality (6).

At chapter seven, Paul begins to address specific questions which the Corinthian Christians had raised in an earlier communication: marriage (7) and eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (8). Part of the rationale that underlies one's behavior before another brother is the nature of one's relationship to Christ. As a Christian, one may be free to do a lot of things, but he must act out of concern for his brother (9). Israel's history anticipated the spiritual life now in Christ, so the Christian ought to live in full appreciation of his spiritual status (10). Paul then addresses the question of public worship. He discusses the man-woman relationship (11:2-16), the Lord's supper (11:17-34), and spiritual gifts. The exercise of spiritual gifts is in the hands of the Christian. One should use spiritual gifts in keeping with the nature of the body of Christ (the church) and the purpose of the gifts themselves. Spiritual gifts would be temporary, while the dominant attitude on the part of the Christian should be love (12-14). As the author closes his letter, he addresses the question of the resurrection (15) and a financial collection planned for needy people in Jerusalem (16).

2 Corinthians

The second Corinthian letter is milder in tone than the first. Paul was more accommodating. He stressed

ministry and generous giving. However, he did feel the need to defend his own ministry and express his concerns for the Corinthian believers.

Paul, joined by Timothy in writing, greets the church in Corinth (1:1-2). He praises God for his comfort in times of difficulty. God's comfort has enabled him to work for the Corinthians' benefit (1:3-11). He describes his attitude and behavior toward the Corinthians and counsels them to receive back the reformed brother from whom they were instructed to withdraw earlier (1:12-2:11). He sets forth his philosophy of ministry as it relates to the new covenant. It is a ministry of reconciliation (2:12-6:13).

Paul encourages the Corinthians against being yoked with unbelievers in relationships that hinder their Christian devotion (6:14-7:1). Paul expresses his joy over how well the Corinthian believers had received him and his corrections (7:2-16). He encourages generous financial giving on behalf of others (8-9). Paul defends his ministry against those who preach a different gospel or do it with a different spirit (10-11). The apostle speaks of his difficulties but acknowledges their usefulness for keeping him on track (12:1-10). As he closes, he anticipates a visit to Corinth (12:11-13:14).

c. Galatians

Galatians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to believers living in the Roman province of Galatia (located today in central Turkey). The letter addresses doctrinal matters, followed by an appeal to the letter's recipients to return to belief and behavior that reflects the nature of the true gospel.

Some misinformed teachers had entered the area after Paul left and diverted the Galatian believers by leading them to return to a form of the Law of Moses that called for reliance upon a system of legal prescriptions. Paul approached the issue by contrasting the Way of Christ with the Law of Moses. Using allegory, he showed how the Law anticipated the coming of Jesus Christ and a new order. In Christ, God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled. Faith in Christ leads to life; reliance on law only brings death, because man cannot become righteous by keeping law. But in Christ, believers now stand free from the burden of sin.

Having established that faith in Christ led to reconciliation with God, the apostle showed the implications of that faith. The fruit of the Spirit of God working in the believer will lead to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The acts of the sinful nature are to be put aside.

A greeting by Paul quickly moves into a statement of alarm. The author is astonished that during his absence the Christians of Galatia have listened to others who have brought a perverted message (1:1-10). The gospel Paul initially preached was received by him through revelation from God and authenticated through his ministry. That gospel is one established through faith, not by works of the Law of Moses (1:11-2:21). The authentic gospel is the consequence of God's promise to Abraham and the desired conclusion to the Law of Moses. Spiritual sonship with God comes through faith in Christ. Immersion into Christ clothes one with Christ. In Christ, all stand equal before God (3). Paul elaborates upon the difference between what it means to be "in Christ" as opposed to being "under the Law." He employs the slave-free motif and offers an allegory based on Hagar (mother of Ishmael) and Sarah (mother of Isaac) (4).

Paul admonishes his readers to remain free in Christ by shedding those enslaving legal requirements. They should live by the Holy Spirit. This means putting aside acts of the earthly nature and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (5-6).

Unit 3. The Letters of Paul: Ephesians through Philemon

The letters written by the apostle Paul are known as the "Pauline Epistles." Of these, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon have been dubbed the "Prison Epistles," because Paul wrote them

while being held in prison for his preaching. The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are known as the "Pastoral Epistles" due to their nature and destination. All these classifications are artificial and affect interpretation or purpose only incidentally.

The Pauline Epistles may have some elements in common, but they have their differences. Of the four Prison Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians are the most alike. The distinctions lie more in emphasis than in content. Ephesians focuses on the church as *the body of Christ*. Colossians centers on the idea that the fullness of God *dwells in Christ*, who is the head of the church. Philippians is somewhat more personal but stresses the need for unity and the presence of joy that accrues from a spiritual relationship with God. Philemon stands alone in that it is directed to a slave holder, whose slave has run away and become a believer. The two letters to the church in Thessalonica were written to settle some anxieties about the return of Christ.

In your reading of the second set of Paul's epistles, you should learn more of the eternal purpose of God regarding human redemption. You should expect an emphasis on the ethical demands of the gospel. As you read, be aware that the epistles address specific situations and demonstrate how the gospel applied in each case.

A modern person should read the epistles against the background of an original audience, but with the understanding that they illustrate how the gospel is to be applied in modern times. Prior to application, define the theological ideology, faith concepts, and principles that lies behind the apostle's teaching and admonition. Determine how these elements function in the situations addressed by the apostle. Compare the circumstances described in the biblical text with present circumstances covered. Then, work out a legitimate application. Resist starting with present circumstances and forcing an application that the biblical text cannot support. Also, do not dismiss a direct application simply because you do not agree with the biblical text.

The unit is divided into three sections. The first is Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. The second is the Thessalonian correspondence. The third features 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

a. Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians

Ephesians

The theme of Ephesians is the church as the body of Christ. The church becomes the focus of God's activity in the world, because it is through its inception that powers above and men on earth come to know God's eternal purpose with regard to mankind. God brings Jews and Gentiles together in the church, which is presented as the body of Christ. Here they live under the authority of Jesus Christ and find their redemption through the cross experience. Now, as a new spiritual creation, Christians find that all human relationships are affected. The life of the redeemed is lived in view of the sacrifice Christ made for them.

This Pauline epistle begins with an introduction that summarizes God's scheme of redemption. Purposed before creation, God's plan for human redemption reached its climax in Jesus Christ, who became head of a body known as the church (1). Previous to God's act in Jesus Christ, men were spiritually dead because of their sins. Now they are alive with Christ. They are God's workmanship, reconstituted to do good. Gentiles and Jews are joined in a dwelling which God's Spirit occupies (2). The purpose of God has been concealed. But now, the "mystery" is revealed to all humanity. Through the creation of the church, God has revealed to all creation his intent. To God belongs all the glory in the church and in Christ (3).

Paul admonishes his readers to live a life worthy of their calling. They are to grow and to serve under their head, Jesus Christ (4:1-16). Spiritual behavior means a new life-style, one that is identified by a new attitude and behavior. Theirs is to be a life motivated by love and inspired by the Holy Spirit (4:17-5:21). All walls are broken down between Jews and Greeks. In Christ, all are made one, whether they

are bond or free, male or female.

The relationship between Christ and the church becomes a model for husbands and wives. Children obey their parents in the Lord. Even the slave-master relationship is made respectable. In summary, the Christian becomes aware that his wrestling is against spiritual powers (4:22-6:23).

Philippians

For the most part, Philippians is a letter of positive re-enforcement of the faith of the Philippian church. Paul sets the tone for their maturity by stressing the joy that should inhabit each Christian. He expresses concern, however, that falsely-motivated persons may lead them astray, and so he warns them of their danger. He is especially appreciative of the Philippians' concern for him.

Beginning with a prayer that expresses joy over his partnership with the Christians at Philippi, Paul calls upon his readers to rejoice in all they do. He is confident that God will complete his good work with the Philippians. He prays that their love may abound that they may bear the fruit of righteousness to the glory of God (1:1-11).

Paul rehearses his personal difficulties for the sake of Christ, but holds no regrets. He is committed to a life of faithful proclamation. He encourages his readers to be united with Christ, who unselfishly left heaven to become a servant of mankind. In view of their salvation, Christians are to live blamelessly and rejoice (1:12-2:18). Paul discloses his plan to send Timothy to get a first hand report on their spiritual well-being. He also intends to return Epaphroditus to them (2:19-30).

Since not everyone has pure motives, Paul issues warning against those who would subject believers to legalistic righteousness. The task is to press onward toward heaven. He also admonished two women at Philippi--Euodia and Syntyche--to set aside their differences. With final admonitions to appropriate behavior and greetings, the apostle closes the epistle (3-4).

Colossians

The theme of Colossians is the supremacy of Christ. While Ephesians emphasized the church as the body of Christ, Colossians stresses Christ as the one in whom the fullness of God dwells. All of God's plans for human redemption are realized in Christ. Human salvation involves victory over all those evil forces which can lay claim to men in death. That victory has been secured in Jesus Christ.

The faithful at Colosse are reminded of the position of Christ. They are warned against those who may seek to divert their attention to some human scheme rooted in human wisdom. They are encouraged to seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Following an introduction that acknowledges the widespread reputation of their faith and love, Paul encourages his readers to please God with their lives. He then sets forth the person of Jesus as the image of God and the head of creation. Once alienated from God, the Colossians are now reconciled through Christ (1:1-23).

Paul speaks of God's work in Jesus Christ as having been hidden previously. Now, however, his fullness dwells in Christ, who is head of every power and authority. In Christ, man is made alive, having been forgiven of his sins. Those who speak otherwise are disconnected from the head. The Christian's death to the principles of the world free him from regulations which are calculated to produce righteousness (1:24-2:23).

The Colossian Christians are admonished to set their affections on Christ and spiritual concerns. This means putting to death earthly desires and activities and clothing themselves with spiritual virtues. Human relations are thereby defined, as is prayer and watchfulness. Final personal notes close the letter (3-4).

b. The Thessalonian correspondence

1 Thessalonians

Written by the apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica, the letter encourages growth in the behavior that is pleasing to God. The letter followed Paul's hasty departure from the city due to persecution by unbelieving Jews (see Acts 17:1-9). While extolling them for the love they have shown to their brethren in Macedonia, he urges them to be holy.

One important matter drew Paul's attention. That related to the return of Jesus. He wrote that by living righteously, the saints do not fear the coming of Jesus.

The first epistle to the Thessalonians begins with a routine greeting, followed by thanksgiving for the faith of the believers in Thessalonica. The Christians here had become a good model for all believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia (1). Paul's own ministry in Thessalonica had been motivated by the love of a father for his children. His continuing concern for these people made him long to see them (2).

Unable to return to Thessalonica, Paul dispatched Timothy to see how they were faring. Timothy's report was encouraging. However, Paul did detect a need to speak about avoiding immorality and about the second coming of Jesus. With a few personal remarks, Paul closes the letter (3-5).

2 Thessalonians

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was occasioned by idleness caused by a misunderstanding of the return of Jesus. First, he spoke of the appearance of a "lawless" one who must precede the second coming of Jesus. This man of lawlessness would oppose God, exalt himself, and attempt to deceive. There is uncertainty as to the identity of the lawless one, or if the reference is to a particular person. But his presence could be devastating to faith. The Thessalonians were encouraged to stand firm in faith in Christ, be alert, and remain diligent.

Paul is joined by Silas and Timothy in addressing his second letter to the Thessalonian church. He expresses thanksgiving for their faith. He affirms that God's justice will prevail against any who resist those who advocate righteousness. The ultimate judgment of God will accompany the return of Jesus (1).

The return of Jesus would await the manifestation of intense evil, represented by the appearance of "the man of lawlessness." Even though Paul had talked to them about persons who would resist righteousness, his readers needed to be reminded to stand firm (2). Paul closes with admonitions to pray and be industrious (3).

c. Timothy, Titus, and Philemon

1 Timothy

Timothy was a young man who became a Christian under the teaching of Paul in Lystra. Thereafter, he became a traveling companion of Paul (see Acts 16:1-5). Paul occasionally dispatched him to some church that needed attention. In writing his first letter to Timothy, Paul sensed Timothy needed encouragement and specific instruction for his ministerial tasks. He was now on a mission and faced numerous obstacles.

Paul's first letter to Timothy recalls his assignment to remain in Ephesus to correct false teaching and contribute to the maturation of the church there (1). Paul lays out instructions regarding worship and the qualities needed in elders and deacons (2-3). Additional instruction is given regarding correct teaching, relationships, spiritual behavior, and attitudes toward money (4:1-6:10). The apostle closes with an admonition to Timothy (6:11-21).

2 Timothy

The second letter Paul wrote to Timothy encouraged the young evangelist to remain faithful and to preach with boldness. Paul's model of ministry is his own work.

Paul expresses to Timothy his profound appreciation for his faithfulness. The personal affection the apostle had for Timothy is coupled with encouragement to proclaim the gospel boldly. While Phygelus and Hermogenes had given up on their faith, Onesiphorus had remained loyal. Timothy is admonished to remain strong in the grace of Jesus Christ and serve him as a good soldier. Remember the risen Christ. Warn against religious bickering. Flee evil desires (1-2).

The second half of the letter is given to bolstering Timothy by reminding him of evil times which lie ahead. Those whose minds are evil will persist. Paul's defense is his manner of life (3). In view of approaching judgment, Paul instructs Timothy to preach truth, even when men do not want to hear it. In his closing personal remarks, the apostle wants Timothy to come to him quickly, as Demas has forsaken him for worldly pleasures. Alexander did him great harm. Only the Lord stood by him when he was opposed (4).

Titus

Like Timothy, Titus was a faithful spiritual son of the apostle Paul. Paul had dispatched Titus to Crete to strengthen the Christians scattered across the island. His task was challenging, given the reputation of the Cretan people. The key to spiritual maturity would be the placement of spiritual leaders in the churches and spiritual teaching.

The apostle Paul addressed this brief letter to Titus, whom he calls his son in the faith. Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete to bring discipline to the Christians there and to set up elders in every town. He describes the qualities which must be found in these spiritual overseers and acknowledges that Cretans have a reputation of being liars, brutes, and lazy gluttons (1).

The task for Titus is to bring healthy teaching to the churches. This will include teaching older men, older women, young men, and slaves (2). He is to remind his hearers to be subject to civil authorities and live peaceably with others in a spirit of humility. Controversies are to be avoided (3).

Philemon

Joined by Timothy in writing, the aged Paul addressed the brief letter of Philemon to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Colosse. The target of the letter, however, is Philemon. Paul appealed to this slave owner to receive his runaway slave, Onesimus. Onesimus had become a Christian. The right thing for him to do was to return. But Philemon was also a Christian. Paul appealed to Philemon to respond to Onesimus' return as one who had come to know the forgiveness of God through the teaching of Paul.

Following the initial greeting, Paul addresses Philemon, a man known for his faith and love. These qualities in Philemon's character have been encouraging to Paul (1-7). Paul makes a request of Philemon and appeals to his love, to his commitment to Christ, and to his debt to Paul's ministry. Philemon is asked to receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus. Onesimus, now a Christian, becomes useful to Philemon as a brother. Paul even offers to repay any debt Onesimus may owe Philemon (8-21). The brief letter closes with a note of Paul's intention to visit and with greetings (22-25).

MODULE **4** General Epistles and the Apocalypse

Procedure

Module 4 exam consists of multiple choice problems relating to Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The exam includes sections devoted to (1) identifying an epistle by a description of its contents, (2) identifying personalities, (3) measuring your acquaintance with teachings and significant ideas, and (4) identifying places. The following steps are suggested for preparing for the exam.

Step 1. Read carefully the General Epistles and the written synopsis included in this module. Concentrate on each epistle until you know its basic message. You will need to know each epistle well enough to be able to distinguish one from the other by a description of contents.

Read with the aim of getting a general orientation to the literature. Concentrate on the flow of each author's thoughts. Jot down leading ideas. Make your own outline of the book. The outline does not have to be detailed, but it should include the author's major points.

Step 2. Read and re-read the Apocalypse, using the synopsis provided in this syllabus. You may be puzzled at what you read. As you get a feel for apocalyptic writing, the text will begin to make more sense. In the end, you may still have more questions than answers. Do not be anxious about not understanding. This course aims at comprehending basic content. You will not be examined over the book's details or specific interpretation.

When examining the Apocalypse, it is hoped you will come to an appreciation of the nature of apocalyptic. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that the Apocalypse is a promise of victory from God, provided the saints remain loyal to his Son and to his cause.

Things to Know

1. Know the identity of the following personalities: Antipas, Diotrephes, Gaius, the apostle of love, and Old Testament characters referenced in the texts.
2. Be able to identify these major geographical sites: Patmos and the seven churches of Asia--Ephesus, Laodicea, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna, and Thyatira.
3. Know the authors of each New Testament book where an author is associated with the text. Know to whom each epistle was addressed.
4. Be able to identify each epistle by major distinguishing features and content.

Introduction

Module 4 is concerned with the General Epistles and the Apocalypse. The General Epistles include Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. The Apocalypse is sometimes called the Book of Revelation.

What the General Epistles have in common is that they were composed by someone other than the apostle Paul. No one knows for sure who wrote Hebrews. James and Jude, physical brothers of Jesus, are thought to be the authors of the books bearing their names. The apostle Peter wrote the books

bearing his name. The apostle John was the instrument for the three epistles of John and The Apocalypse, in addition to the Fourth Gospel.

As you read the material assigned to this module, keep in mind what it means to have a variety of authors. These authors had their own style. They directed their letters to people in different locations and circumstances with a unique purpose. Their messages are in concert.

The content of the books under review confirms that the works were “inspired,” not dictated. Inspiration indicates divine guidance; dictation affirms that every word was from the lips of God himself. Just as there were four separate Gospels, written by four different men who selected the material and arranged it to fit their goals, there are many epistles that address unique circumstances in a manner chosen by the author. That is the nature of the New Testament. These writings do not have to be dictated to be authoritative or to be an authentic witness to Jesus Christ.

Unit 1. Individual Epistles

The General Epistles address an assortment of situations. Hebrews is perhaps the most apologetic of the lot, exalting the position of Christ. James and 1 Peter deal more with the affairs of everyday life. 2 Peter, Jude, and the letters of John are preoccupied with confronting the forces at work to destroy faith. The variety attests to both the practical and exclusive aspects of the Christian gospel.

The authorship, date of composition, and destination of Hebrews are unknown. One can ascertain the reason for writing and have no difficulty understanding its content. The uniqueness of Hebrews lies in the presentation of Jesus as high priest and author of the new covenant.

The Epistle of James is particularly interested in motivating Christians to demonstrate their faith through appropriate actions. Christianity is not simply a matter of meditation and good will; it requires doing something about the needs found among fellow-believers. Peter’s epistles contain much helpful material relative to suffering, relationships, principles of the faith, and warning against false teachers.

John’s writings are recognizable by their style and content. Beginning in a manner similar to the Fourth Gospel, the first epistle displays the mood of an apostle who has mellowed over the years and who has indeed become the apostle of love. His second and third epistles are brief. They not only fortified Christians whose faith was threatened, they demonstrate the nature of New Testament writing—personal, occasional, and spiritual. Jude attacks false teachers in a manner that shows the threats made against the early church.

Together, these eight letters complement those of Paul. They speak of similar themes, each within a unique context. They emphasize truth in doctrine, practical spiritual living, and warn against compromising faith.

The three divisions in this unit are merely for the sake of management. These are (a) Hebrew and James, (b) The epistles of Peter, and (c) The epistles of John and Jude. The ordering of the epistles in the New Testament canon has been determined by size, author, and date of composition. Like the Pauline Epistles, arrangement of the “General” (*i.e.*, non-Pauline) epistles tends to be ordered by the same criteria. Hebrews is placed at the end of the Pauline Epistles (the longest group of epistles by one author), being long but questionable as to whether it belongs to the Pauline corpus. The remainder are grouped by author. Additionally, the non-Pauline letters are normally dated later than the Pauline letters. This makes for a convenient way to study them. One should expect to find agreement among all the books of the New Testament, regardless of the date of composition, which seems to fall in the 50 to 90 C.E. range. It is hardly questioned that Paul was deceased by the middle 60s and John lived into the 90s.

a. Hebrews and James

Hebrews

The unknown author of the book of Hebrews addressed Jewish Christians for the purpose of bolstering their faith in Jesus Christ against a tendency to slip back into Judaism. Jesus is presented as the Son, who is superior to the angels by virtue of his place in creation and position. As Son, Jesus is superior to Moses as the builder of a house is over a servant within a house. As a high priest, Jesus is superior to the high priest who served under the Law of Moses. Jesus is the initiator of a new covenant, which offers forgiveness of sins. Consequently, those who have been tempted to rely upon the inferior Law of Moses for redemption or succumb to persecution, were encouraged to look at the cloud of witnesses that surrounded them. They were told to persevere, keep loving each other, and uphold their leaders.

The author introduces his treatise by asserting that God, who spoke in various ways in the past, has spoken finally in his Son, Jesus. Jesus is closely associated with God as heir, instrumentality of creation, the radiance of God's glory, the representation of God's being, sustainer of creation, purifier of man, and as one who has been exalted to God's right hand. God never so spoke through angels, who are but servants, as he has through the Son. The message of salvation brought by Jesus demands serious attention, for its neglect will bring certain judgment (1:1-2:4).

Jesus became lower than the angels when he entered the world but has now been crowned with glory and honor because he died in the interest of man's redemption. The author of salvation came to man as a "brother." He shared humanity but destroyed the power of the devil. He became a high priest to make atonement for sins. Because he suffered, he is able to minister to all who are tempted (2:5-18).

As apostle (one sent from God) and high priest (one who makes atonement for sin), Jesus is superior to Moses. He holds forth the promise of a permanent resting place for God's people, if believers will maintain their faith (3:1-4:13).

Jesus is a better high priest than that set forth in the Law of Moses. He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (4:14-5:10). Therefore, the author warns about the precarious condition of those who would return to the Law of Moses as a spiritual path. The assurance of God's promise of life through Jesus Christ is established by his oath (5:11-6:20).

The order of Jesus' priesthood--that of Melchizedek--establishes Jesus' superiority to Aaron. Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, the great grandfather of Levi and the ancestor of Aaron. Consequently, the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the order of Aaron because it was first in time, was combined with kingship, and acknowledged no successive line of priests (7).

Since Jesus would not function as a priest under the Law of Moses, then a new covenant was required. In fact, the Hebrew Scriptures attested to the coming of a new covenant which would offer remission of sins (8). The covenant regulated by the Law of Moses centered on a physical place and embraced a system of animal sacrifice. The blood of Christ renders the old system inadequate and opens the possibility of an eternal inheritance (9).

The sacrifice of Christ is final. It provides forgiveness of sins. Consequently, believers in Christ are encouraged to persevere and draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (10). As a matter of fact, the cast of faithful persons noted in the Old Testament provides a model of faith for the Christian (11). The cloud of witnesses that surrounds them encourages endurance. Those who refuse to take advantage of the offer of salvation in Christ are warned of the judgment to come (12).

From the final chapter, it is clear that the call of the gospel is more than academic belief. Based on conviction of God's work in Jesus Christ, believers should keep on loving each other, entertain strangers, remember the imprisoned, respect marriage, resist the love of money, honor their leaders, and beware of strange teachings (13).

The book of Hebrews draws upon many Old Testament concepts and personalities in its presentation of Jesus. He is the one in whom God has completed his long-awaited promises. The composition makes an unmistakable statement about Jesus: he is of God and he has made salvation possible. Faith in Jesus is expressed through Christ-like behavior and perseverance.

James

Written by James, the brother of Jesus, this epistle draws heavily upon an Old Testament background. Perhaps this indicates that James is writing to a Jewish Christian audience. Beyond that, it indicates how closely related the gospel is to the law (see especially Jas. 1:26-27). The epistle encourages its readers to avoid favoritism, combine works with their faith, subdue their tongues, submit to God, be patient in suffering, and exercise diligence in prayer. James stresses the practical application of Christian principles.

James addresses Jewish Christians who are spread across the Roman Empire. They are admonished to face trials joyfully, because trials test one's faith and develop perseverance. Perseverance is a sign of maturity, for the wisdom that comes from God demands faith. While temptation appeals to fleshly desires, God's concern for man provides all that is good. God has provided new life that people may produce the fruit of righteousness. His people will be slow to become angry, care for the orphans and widows, and keep themselves pure (1).

The fruit of faith is shown through a person's love for others. This means acting the same toward rich and poor. Favoring the rich is both sinful and futile. The claim to faith is empty, unless it is expressed in concrete action (2). James warns his readers of the seriousness of assuming the role of a teacher. A teacher is capable of uttering both good and bad messages, so one should both speak wisely and demonstrate his faith in humility. One should get rid of envy, selfish ambition, and boasting. Divine wisdom is pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, and sincere (3).

Since fighting is unspiritual, God's people are to submit to God, resist the devil, put aside personal judgments, and live one day at a time (4). Inasmuch as the rich often gain their wealth by abusing others, disciples of Jesus are urged to be patient in suffering, content, pray fervently, and reclaim sinners from the error of their way (5).

b. The epistles of Peter

1 Peter

The first letter of Peter was addressed to believers who lived in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The author developed three lines of thought. One dealt with the principle of suffering, a second with various relationships, and a third with ethical precepts.

Peter contended that testing of one's faith actually proves it to be genuine. He encouraged holiness and the removal of evil thoughts and deceitfulness. Christians should live in view of their creation as living stones in the edifice of God. Disciples should submit to those who rule in the civil arena and submit to one another. In various relationships--slaves and masters, younger and older--they ought to behave in a Christ-like spirit.

The apostle Peter addresses Christians scattered through Asia Minor. He offers praise to God who, through Jesus Christ, has given a hope of heaven. As their faith is proven genuine, the faithful are guarded by God's power. The salvation which they enjoy was foretold by the Old Testament prophets and revealed in the gospel. Consequently, believers are to live in holiness and reverence (1).

As holy people, Christians are to dispense with malice, deceit, envy, and slander. They should crave spiritual food and live as chosen people. This affects their relationships with civil authorities and the social order. A whole new attitude is called for in keeping with the Spirit of Jesus Christ (2). Wives should be submissive to their husbands and husbands are to be considerate of their wives. Harmonious

living, love, compassion, and humility are to rule. Even if one suffers wrongfully, one should take it patiently (3-4).

At the close, Peter encourages elders within the churches to recognize that they serve under a shepherd, Christ. They are to care for God's sheep as servants, not as lords. Young men are counseled to be submissive to older men. All are called upon to be humble, self-controlled, and alert to Satan's advances (5).

2 Peter

Peter's second letter is strikingly different from his first. He admonished his readers to give diligence to making their calling and election sure. This called for affirming the authority of revealed scripture and being aware of false teachers. The need to pay attention to revealed truth is that false teachers were active. Nevertheless, false teachers will be judged at a time set by God.

Peter affirms that God's power has provided what is needed for life and godliness. God's promises provide assurance of participation in the divine nature. Therefore, Christians are admonished to add spiritual virtues to their faith--goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love. These qualities will keep one productive and lead to eternal life. The message preached by Peter came from an eyewitness experience of the transfiguration and conformed to divinely revealed scriptures (1).

False prophets and teachers are a constant threat. They are bold and arrogant blasphemers, whose motivation is greed. But their terrible end is as certain as was that of misbehaving angels. Believers must remember their God knows how to rescue them from their trials. False teachers are empty, so they should be recognized for the evil men they are (2).

Peter ends his work with a description of the "day of the Lord," a day when the world ends and righteous judgment will be dispensed. That day will come when men least expect it. In view of that event, believers are admonished to live holy and godly lives (3).

c. The epistles of John and Jude

1 John

The first epistle of John is by the same author as the Gospel of John--the man affectionately known as the apostle of love. The similarity is seen in his reference to Jesus as the Word and his theme of love. Spiritual life comes through Jesus. The believer is to live in a close relationship with God and his son, Jesus. They are to pursue the command to love God by keeping his commandments. There is warning against loving the world and following "antichrists." His readers were told to test the spirits and remain faithful.

John begins his epistle by affirming that Jesus is the Word of God. The message declared from the beginning has been that God is light and that those who have fellowship with him must walk in light. The blood of Jesus provides the forgiveness of sins (1).

John encourages his readers to put aside sinful habits. God's love is made complete when one obeys him by walking as Jesus walked. This implies loving one another and turning from the love of fleshly desires. As those who oppose Christ seek to lead believers astray, believers are admonished to continue in Christ (2).

The Father's love is extolled. Those who live in him must live appropriately and exercise the kind of love expressed by Christ when he laid down his life (3). Alternative teaching should be examined. The true teaching is that we love because this is the true nature of God (4). Only the one who believes in Jesus as the Son of God has the hope of overcoming the world and honoring God (5).

The epistle appears to address a situation in which the audience was being distracted from their walk with God. Even if they did not misunderstand the nature of their new life in Christ, some were attempting to undermine their faith through enticements of worldly lusts. The recipients of the letter were urged to turn aside from those who denied Christ, love one another, and live a life of righteousness.

2 John

The author of 2 John was the apostle John, known simply as "the elder." This short letter was addressed to "the chosen lady and her children." Whether this is an euphemism for a specific church or is an unnamed individual and her "children" makes no difference in the message. It is personal and to the point: "Love one another!" To divert from the teaching of Christ, i.e., not to love one another, is to be without God.

The author is pleased to know that some are walking in the truth. To walk in the truth is to love one another. Deceivers (antichrists) who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ should be shunned. Living in the truth is essential because that truth resides in Jesus, who is the anointed of God.

3 John

The final letter by John was addressed to Gaius, a dear friend. John expressed joy that Gaius was living in the truth of the gospel. But he was concerned about Diotrephes, who loves to be first and so denied the essence of the gospel. To bolster himself, Diotrephes had been gossiping maliciously and turning true believers away from the church.

The elder wishes Gaius good health, but he is more enthusiastic about the report that Gaius has been faithful to the truth. Gaius has shown his love through his hospitality. Diotrephes, on the other hand, has pursued the opposite path by tearing down others. His presence in the church cannot be tolerated. Demetrius, another faithful servant, is commended.

Jude

The author of Jude is thought by many to have been a fleshly brother of Jesus. He addressed a brief, terse letter to Christians who were in danger of losing their faith to teachers who advocated a license for immorality. His appeal to the authentic gospel was an effort to encourage perseverance.

Jude addresses "those who have been called." Intending to write concerning the salvation they shared, he was compelled to urge his readers to contend for the system of faith which they had received. The need for this admonition was in view of many godless teachers who promote freedom to sin. In reality, the teachers were denying Jesus, the sovereign Lord. Jude compared the godless teachers with several Old Testament characters. Their end would be destruction. Jude admonishes perseverance and mercy.

Unit 2. Apocalyptic Literature

The literary form of the Book of Revelation is "apocalyptic." Apocalyptic is a fairly modern term used in biblical studies to identify a literary genre that contains visions interpreted for the seer by a heavenly messenger. The genre is the extension (or replacement) of prophecy by a supra-historical presentation starting from contemporary events. In common secular contexts, the term assumes its own definition and does not convey the same idea.

Apocalyptic writing appears in the Hebrew Scriptures in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. Throughout the period between the two testaments, the genre proved useful in projecting a divine message through symbolic language. In the New Testament, this kind of speech is found in Jesus' words to his disciples about the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In this setting, apocalyptic may be said to be prophetic or prophesy. Yet, to limit its purpose to telling the future under some mysterious form limits its

function. For example, visions of the glory of God are cast in “apocalyptic” language, because this is a way to disclose to the human mind something that is otherwise indescribable. Some future event may come from the vision, but the language itself is, at the time, a present reality albeit in vision form. The last book of the Bible uses this type of writing to portray the future struggle of the church. Employment of apocalyptic becomes stronger than mere narrative, as it captures the concept that God, Christ, and the Spirit are behind the actions. The battle portrayed involves higher powers and victory over Satan. Apocalyptic in biblical terms makes no sense without belief in other worldly entities, including the existence of God.

Interpretation of apocalyptic is governed by its literary context. That context is often prefaced by suggesting to the reader what lies ahead. Accompanying the apocalyptic segment, one will often find an explanation given. In Revelation, for example, it is stated that what is revealed “must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1). This would suggest that the content relates to the near future. The wording may not intend to convey the thought that *everything* in the book has an immediate fulfillment in the way humans calculate time, for apocalyptic tends to be ageless. But the starting point is with 1st century believers who were facing persecution for their faith and with God who directs the future according to his own purposes. Some identifications are clear. For example, in describing the throne in heaven, God is mentioned as its occupant (Revelation 4). Other identifications are suggestive but can be surmised. Hence, one starts with what is revealed and identified and moves cautiously in interpreting what is less clear to the modern person.

Since apocalyptic is a legitimate genre of writing, one should not be afraid to read it. One must resist the temptation to set it aside quickly because of lack of experience with it. There is a message within the text that is useful for every reader, if he/she will avoid speculation and not be overwhelmed with the terminology. Your immediate task is to become familiar with the writing and begin to build confidence that you can capture its overall intent.

Before beginning reading and analysis of Revelation, a few more observations regarding apocalyptic literature are in order. First, consider the intent of this particular apocalypse. Become aware that apostolic vision often concerns the succession of historical epochs. Finally, note that apocalyptic addresses those whose social and political structures are about to collapse.

a. The intent of apocalypse is divine revelation. Apocalyptic writing is simply a means for presenting an idea. Ideas can be conveyed in narrative, poetry, or apocalyptic (as well as other forms). If narrative is selected, one expects a straightforward literal statement. Measures are exact. Vocabulary is precise. The intent of the author is often stated forthrightly.

If one selects the medium of poetry to present an idea, one understands language can be flowery, the material can be restated in separate lines, and the words are picturesque. The language is vivid and vibrant. The vocabulary is well-selected, but the reader recognizes that the author is expressing an idea that is borne with words filled with imaginative thoughts.

Apocalyptic also has special characteristics. The words often carry symbolic meaning. Events are described in exaggerated speech. For example, instead of describing an animal as “a large brown bear, weighing several hundred pounds” (as in narrative) or “as a ferocious bear, my enemy mounted an attack” (as in poetry), one may say, “and with one swoop of a tail that reached to the stars, the bear wiped out a third of the camp” (as in apocalyptic). In each case, a large bear is the subject. In the first instance, the bear is real. In the second instance, the bear stands for one’s enemy. In the third instance, one does not know what the bear represents, for as yet the explanation is lacking. In apocalyptic, the author will inform the reader of the subject and this guides interpretation of graphic imagery used to portray a dramatic outcome.

In the case at hand, the Book of Revelation, God is saying something to humans through apocalyptic language. Much of what he speaks relates to the future. However, the divine communication is not merely

to foretell the future. It is the guarantee that God controls the future. Destiny is held in God's hands, not Satan's. Actually, the apocalypse is not radical in content. It tends to repeat and underscore in a dramatic way what should be common to the faith of God's saints. It is the unique matrix for conveying divine revelation that makes it significant. Consequently, one should not become caught up in the details. Much like a parable, the details are necessary to tell the story but are not the story in and of themselves. Or, the details may operate like pieces of a puzzle. One piece does not make the puzzle, but it is needed to complete the picture.

b. The apocalyptic vision. Apocalyptic presents a view of a prototypical heavenly order in which the author depicts how earthly realities are about to succumb to God's sovereign rule. Regardless of their perceived strength, humans will be unable to challenge the divine successfully, for in God's order of things, evil cannot prevail. A primary tenet is that God will act in keeping with his purposes to disenfranchise the forces of evil in the interest of his own person. Apocalyptic structure thus includes (1) a revelation by God, (2) given through a mediator (3) to a seer (4) regarding future events.

The uniqueness of apocalyptic is that it can widen the vision to include more than the physical universe. In apocalyptic, temporal, historical, earth-world events are mixed with the world of the supernatural. Consequently, it can collapse time and time-bound events into a systematic whole. The interpreter must bear in mind that while time sequences may become part of the apocalyptic vision, it is not obliged to a linear story. In fact, apocalyptic is often repetitive, giving repeated views of the same idea in differing graphic portrayals.

Biblical apocalyptic weaves together catastrophic events with beast-like creatures, familiar objects, and super-human forces to produce a story line. The scene may include a messiah, cosmic conflict, resurrection, judgment, and the consummation of the world order. Reducing these elements to some peculiar historical circumstance is risky. The genre is concerned more with principles than with purely historical events. Yet, apocalyptic is not unaware of history. Its characters arise from the common world, having given reason for the presentation.

When interpreting apocalyptic, look to the text itself for critical keys. The interpreter is cautioned against extending meaning beyond what the text supports. Human curiosity tends to ask for more than the text itself is willing to give. Gaining the intended message should be sufficient. If God had intended to reveal more, he is perfectly able to do so. But the nature of biblical scripture is not to answer all human questions. Scripture teaches man to trust God to do the right thing, even when man cannot understand God's actions. Casting the material in the form of a vision alerts the reader to the idea that the descriptions are not literal. To interpret them as literal, whether they be beasts of numbers, is usually a mistake. Actions are symbolized; so are figures. Seven and ten point to an idealized state or perfect situation; six suggests something that is imperfect; 1,000 signifies a long, undefined time.

c. Audience. Apocalyptic addresses social, political, and spiritual structures that are about to collapse. Consequently, the audience for biblical apocalyptic embraces all people. In one instance, it aims at faithful believers. In another instance, it aims at wicked unbelievers. The righteous may suffer, but their hope will eventually become reality. The unrighteous may enjoy the fruits of their evil for the moment, but they are destined to judgment, as is Satan, the instigator of evil.

In view of circumstances, apocalyptic usually points to a crisis with the intention of offering comfort, hope, consolation, and exhortation to God's faithful. It also presents the threat of judgment to those who oppose God's sovereign reign. Structurally, the text may disclose a pattern of crisis, judgment, and salvation. In the Book of Revelation, there is a cosmic scope which transcends history and points to judgment and resurrection. It does so without strict regard for human time as the entire sweep of history is swallowed up in a cosmic conclusion.

Revelation is a prophetic text in that it shows that history has meaning. But the work goes beyond common prophecy by raising questions pertaining to God's involvement in future historical events, the role of forces of evil, and the way God will culminate the human sphere. Perhaps more significant for

understanding Revelation is the book's affinity to Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. Many similarities are found that a good grasp of those works becomes requisite to proper interpretation of The Apocalypse.

Through the use of apocalyptic, Revelation helped prepare God's faithful of the past for suffering that lay in their future. They would struggle, but they would prevail. For the church of today, the book provides a basis for hope and encouragement to those whose faith is tested. Persecution is ongoing, for evil cannot tolerate the Good News that resides in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even though you will find reading Revelation a challenge, it can nurture faith in God and the triumphant Christ. It can console the believer who is suffering under evil, dictatorial rulers. These are but a passing in the night. Their kingdoms shall not last, for they cannot prevail against Jesus Christ.

Modern Christians face a tremendous challenge from secularism. Secularism is the product of the Age of Reason and humanitarian interests. It underlies democratic processes that assume human thinking is the court of final appeal. Apocalyptic is the very opposite of this type of rationale. It assumes God is in control and that as sovereign, he will direct all matters to their proper end in a time he determines.

Unit 3. The Apocalypse (Book of Revelation)

The Apocalypse is the final book of the New Testament in both placement and date of composition. Taking its name from the opening word in the Greek text (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokálypsis*), the term is understood in English as "an uncovering." Hence, in translation, the term carries over into English as "Revelation."

The name of the book has lent itself to a range of associations. Besides the more recent interest in weird futurist phenomena, apocalyptic has been used to describe the literary genre that is prominent throughout. Similar writing is found in The Prophets (especially Ezekiel and Zechariah), sections of the Synoptics that Jesus used to describe the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and extra-biblical literature. In this instance, apocalyptic is a manufactured (or, at least, adapted) word to describe a type of literature that meets given criteria.

Christians generally take two positions regarding the book. Either they are fascinated to the extent of creating elaborate schemes of interpretation, or they refuse to engage it altogether. For example, the first group may read of the "mark of the beast" and proceed to identify it with a host of historical characters. They then build a scheme of interpretation, which they believe fits their identification. Since over time, all the human identifications have had to be revised, this should be sufficient to declare the weakness of this approach. Others in this category may see the coming of a one-thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth as the major focus of the composition. The fallacies of this position are six-fold. One, the whole system fails to consider the nature of God's work in Christ. It assumes God did not follow through with Christ's teachings relative to the imminent kingdom that John the baptizer and Jesus proclaimed. Two, the theory requires the distortion of many Old Testament texts. Three, it attempts to read the signs of the times and figure out the time of the end, which Jesus said only the Father knew. Four, it calls for the reestablishment of institutions that became obsolete with Christ's death. Five, it attempts to turn figurative language into literal applications, something that runs afoul of the nature of apocalyptic. Six, it ignores basic rules of interpretation by failing to pick up on identifications made within the text itself.

The second group—those who neglect the book because they feel it is often misunderstood—miss a great message of encouragement. If they are familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus' address at the temple, they should be able to comprehend the dramatic presentation. In some ways, the book elaborates on ideas found in the Epistles regarding spiritual warfare.

The purpose at hand is not to pursue any one theory, but to offer a basic orientation to The Apocalypse. Please read as though you were a Christian living toward the end of the 1st century. These Christians

were facing difficult times. Whether there was doubt or not as to the final outcome, what you need to keep in mind is that the book demonstrates in symbolic language the victory of Christ and his church against Satan's efforts to destroy it. You will no doubt notice many images in the book that have been pulled from the Old Testament.

The outline that follows in the sections below may prove helpful as you read Revelation. Hence, the discussion is divided accordingly: (a) Introductory (chaps. 1-3), (b) The spiritual battle (chaps. 4-16), and (c) Ultimate victory (chaps. 17-22).

a. Introductory (chaps. 1-3). The Book of Revelation is the "unveiling" of Jesus Christ and directed to late 1st century Christians regarding matters which "must soon take place." It is clearly stated that the focus of the book is the immediate future of the original audience. The message is delivered to the apostle John, who is exiled on the island of Patmos, which lies off the southwest coast of present-day Turkey. The primary audience was constituted by the Christians who resided in seven Asian cities.

Preliminary to receiving the individual letters, a theophany appears to John. This phenomenon is similar to that which came to Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) and establishes the authority of the one who speaks to him. Elements found in the theophany are tied to the letters in a manner that creates a symphonic connection between Christ and the seven churches.

The seven letters take their form from the picture of the heavenly scene described in chapter 1. Ordered in a common fashion, each letter is personalized to fit the specific situation of each church. In most instances, the believers have demonstrated fidelity, but they need to make amends and reaffirm their single-minded commitment to Jesus and God.

The Lord commended the church at Ephesus for resisting evil men and false apostles, for their patience, and for hating the works of the Nicolaitans. However, loss of their first love put them in jeopardy of losing God's recognition. The Smyrnians were appreciated for their faith and encouraged in the face of other tribulation. Christ recognized the church in Pergamum for holding fast his name in the face of martyrdom, but he was displeased with those who held the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. He knew of the works, love, faith, ministry, and patience of the church of Thyatira. Their last works exceeded their first, but he rebuked them for suffering the continuance of "Jezebel," a false prophetess who was seducing saints to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols. Sardis, which had a name for living while dead, was encouraged to be watchful and to establish the things that remained. None of her works were found perfected before God. Jesus commended the saints at Philadelphia who, with little power, had kept his word and had not denied his name. To Laodicea he sent warning because they claimed to be rich and in need of nothing. Instead, they were spiritually destitute.

b. The spiritual battle (chaps. 4-16). Apocalyptic is ideal for describing the ethereal realm. It presumes a realm so different from the physical realm that it takes special language to portray it. However, the secularist who limits knowledge to the human mind refuses to entertain it. And the scientific method has no capacity for dealing with it. Consequently, if the ethereal is beyond human ability to comprehend, why would it not be left to one who is familiar with it (God) to present it and do so in a fashion that communicates the essence of that realm—especially if it has something to do with ultimate reality? That realm may lie beyond what the five senses can interpret, but the human mind can grasp its magnitude through apocalyptic.

The scene around the throne in heaven (4-5). For the unveiling of God's future to take place, someone must be able to open a sealed scroll held in his hand. A dramatic scene depicts God on his throne and Jesus (simultaneously portrayed as a lamb and a lion) standing nearby. While no one in heaven or on earth is worthy to take the scroll and unseal it, Jesus comes forward as the only one who is worthy to do so. The same kind of praise offered to God is offered to the Lamb of God.

Opening the book with seven seals (6:1-8:1). As the Lamb opens the seals of the scroll, the apocalyptic vision reveals that the earth is filled with conflict and troubled times. There were even some

who had died for testifying that Jesus is the Christ. Although these were secure "under the altar," they waited for God to avenge the blood of the saints.

Seven trumpets of judgment (8:2-11:19). Trumpets of warning are sounded and more trouble comes upon mankind. But there is no question that God is in control and is planning appropriate action upon evil doers. Those who commit evil are given ample warning in keeping with the nature of God.

Powers of Evil (12:1-14:20). With graphic depiction, a struggle between the universal church and the opposing evil forces within the Roman Empire is set forth. Saints are told to endure. In a matter of time the heavenly host will crush the evil powers. Christians who remain faithful receive assurance of salvation.

Seven bowls of wrath (15-16). Bowls of wrath are poured out upon the Empire and its supporters. The significance of the action lies in the presentation of God as judge of world kingdoms and of his eternal judgment upon evil. The language is symbolic and resistant to strict historical identifications.

c. Ultimate victory (chaps. 17-22). If the book of Revelation had left in doubt the outcome of the contention between good and evil, the book would have no utility. If Christ had not secured the ultimate victory, there would have still been doubt. The genius of The Apocalypse is that it demonstrates in no uncertain manner that the victory is already secured, and that Christians only must remain faithful to realize it. If the declaration that begins the book, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants *what must soon take place*" (1:1) be taken at face value, then one is obliged to read it in view of what it meant to the early Christians.

The triumph of Christ (17:1-20:15). The same Christ who brought redemption to the church now brings victory over the powers of Satan. Ultimately, Satan himself is doomed. The prayer of the martyrs under the altar is answered.

If Rome is identified as the great prostitute symbolized as "Babylon," it is easy to see what this would have meant to the believers who were facing persecution. There are several points of identification with Rome: her conduct, her rule, the seven hills, the great city, commerce, relation to other kings. But she is also connected with evil that calls for divine judgment. Behind this evil is Satan himself, who will be judged. Hence, the portrayal is not just another doomed city, but of the power behind the wickedness that rivals the kingdom of God. The discussion about Satan's binding is not so much about a future reign of Christ on earth as it is about judging the power behind the death of the martyrs (chap. 6). The book is reminiscent of Habakkuk, the Old Testament prophet who could not understand God's intentions toward Israel and ancient Babylon.

The New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5). The prize for faith and endurance is presented as a glorious bride made ready for the bridegroom. Relief and blessedness attend the faithful with the judgment upon Rome and Satan. The apocalyptic language points to the idealized rest anticipated by the faithful, much in line with the apocalyptic language in Ezekiel that describes the return of Jews after the Babylonian exile.

Epilogue: Christ challenging (22:6-21). The epilogue offers a final word to the churches of Asia and warns against tampering with the message of the revelation. The book that addressed impending judgment also holds a message for modern people. It declares a sovereign God who will not be deposed by evil forces, deterred by unrighteous rulers, or dissuaded by unbelievers. Furthermore, he is mindful of faithful believers and promises them victor. This is a final piece of evidence that apocalyptic reinforces the concept of God's rule over all of his creation.

Conclusion

The gospel bears witness to Jesus, the unique one of God, who revealed God more fully than he had ever been revealed. The gospel identifies the character of the new man in Christ. It describes the life of

those who are remade in a likeness to God. The principles it sets forth are of divine origin and intended for man's good.

The goal of the gospel is a redeemed person who will dedicate his/her energies to the service of others. That service or ministry may be any type of service performed in the name of Christ by a Christian. This service to other humans is conjoined with service to God and must be congruent with the nature of the gospel. One who serves or ministers may be an agent of God for effecting change in the life of human beings through the message of proclamation. Or one may be a servant for the alleviation of physical, mental, or spiritual want. In either case, one is acting under the authority of Christ. It is the New Testament which defines the nature and task of Christian ministry.

The Epistles bring to the believer an understanding of the life one is expected to live under Christ. They show the application of those principles taught by Jesus and unfold more fully the mystery of redemption. The redemption offered by God presupposes definite concepts of truth, a truth rooted in theological ideas. For those who accept it, there are expectations in ethical and social behavior and in attitudes toward God.

Redemption is a dramatic process which had a historical point of beginning and develops toward maturity throughout the believer's earthly existence. By the grace of God who sent his Son to die for him, man becomes united with Christ in the likeness of his resurrection. He simultaneously escapes from the threat of God's wrath by being loosed from the throes of unrighteousness and enjoys the peace and well-being that comes from a close fellowship with the Sovereign of the universe.

There is a sense in which the Epistles may be conceived as offering a "pattern" for life, but one should be careful not to reduce the gospel to forms and ceremonies. The best safeguard against an abuse of the gospel is a dedication to objective pursuit of God's will. Such study will lay bare God's instructions for mankind and enable one to seek out the proper application of the Scriptures to modern living.

This exploration of the New Testament has aimed at determining the general content of the Greek Scriptures. It is hoped that the student may judge it objectively and make a proper response to it.

After completing the exam, you will be expected to complete the Course Evaluation. The link to the Course Evaluation will be found in the right column of the Course Menu, below the Course Summary block.

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