

WEEKS 40-52

Days 274-365

Series 2

Volume 4

Reflections



Reading
through
the Bible
in a year

Malachi	I Timothy
Mark	II Timothy
Luke	Titus
John	Philemon
Acts	Hebrews
Romans	James
I Corinthians	I Peter
II Corinthians	II Peter
Galatians	I John
Ephesians	II John
Phillippians	III John
Colossians	Jude
I Thessalonians	Revelation
II Thessalonians	

Michael Perry
Reflections



This effort is dedicated to my wife Denise, the love of my life, who has been my constant morning companion in reading God's Word for 27 years.

To my assistant, Katie Witbeck, for transforming 365 blog entries into workable documents.

To Lynn Bringold, SpringHill Development Coordinator, along with my wife Denise, for their diligent and effective editing of 365 days of journal entries—thank you.

Special thanks to Mike Smith and his team at Designvox for their creative giftedness, encouragement and willingness to take on this project. Their work made the publication of these journal entries a reality and the life transformation of many more people possible.

Dear Friend,

The first time I saw the Rocky Mountains was on a morning in Colorado Springs. I had traveled in a van full of friends from the Midwest, but by the time we approached the mountains it was night. Even though I desperately wanted to see the mountains, there was nothing for me to see without the light of the sun. So, I went to bed disappointed because I still hadn't seen the mountains.

Then in the morning, with the dawn appearing in the Eastern sky, I stepped outside and saw for the first time the Rocky Mountains. In particular, I saw what seemed to me the highest mountain in the world, Pike's Peak. The sun lit up Pike's Peak in a way that made it glow in bright pinks, oranges, and browns. It was truly majestic; more beautiful than any photo I had ever seen, and certainly more stunning than anything I could ever imagine.

You see, Pike's Peak had always been there for me to see; I just needed the light of day to make it visible.

The Bible is like the sun on that morning in Colorado Springs. Through its light (Psalm 119:105) we can see new things in the world; and see the world in a new way. Both the light and Scripture, will transform us and the world in which we live. So, just as the dawn appears every morning, let me encourage you to make the light of the Scriptures a daily part of your life.



Michael Perry, President
SpringHill Camps

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Zechariah 11-14

Zechariah's stream of teaching moves towards a historical climax addressing the important topic of Israel's leadership and, in particular, the coming of the Messiah. This is important because the climax of history is centered on the coming Messiah. In these last chapters we'll see a number of important prophecies and allusions to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As you read these verses, remember that we have the benefit of reading them after the coming of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament. Imagine, as you read, how Zechariah's readers and listeners would have understood these words and what excitement, fear, and anticipation they would bring.

In particular, notice the allusions to the price paid by Judas for betraying Jesus (11:12-13), the crucifixion (12:10-13:1), and the resulting impact of Jesus' death on His disciples (13:7). But Zechariah's teachings do not end here; he concludes them with the hope of the coming King who will rule over all the earth (14:9). Then all people and nations will acknowledge Jesus as King and as Lord God over all (14:9). It will be a day when living waters will flow from Jerusalem, providing life to the entire earth. It's a glorious end and one we should pray for and anticipate with joy.

□ Notes



Malachi 1-4

The writing of the last book of the Old Testament appeared a short time after Zechariah and Haggai. The brief revival that occurred under Zechariah and Haggai's teaching had begun to fade out and some of Israel's old habits were showing themselves again. For example, the priests fell back into the habit of not offering the best animals for sacrifices, instead keeping these for themselves and offering the animals with blemishes (1:14). In addition, divorce had become widespread during Malachi's day. From God's perspective this growing "divorce rate" (2:14-15) reflected not only the faithlessness in marriages but also in the people's relationship to God.

With both of these issues Malachi calls the people to repent and turn away from this ungodly behavior, to once again be faithful to God by being faithful in religious worship and in their relationships with each other. As an added incentive, Malachi reminds them that the "Day of the Lord" was coming, beginning with the return of Elijah (we now know as John the Baptist) to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ) thus, they needed to be ready.

□ Notes

Matthew 1-4

The first book of the New Testament, Matthew, begins with Jesus' birth, baptism, and early ministry. These first chapters are full of Old Testament Scriptures fulfilled by Jesus demonstrating the reality that one of the purposes of the Old Testament is to point us to Jesus Christ and to His Gospel.

We also see God's hand directing the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Each of these stories are part of the Christmas narrative we're so familiar with. Yet, as we examine these verses a bit closer and away from the sentimental celebration of Christmas, we learn of the humble and fragile beginnings of Jesus' life. We also see His early ministry being carried out, as was John's, in the remote areas of Israel. Jesus didn't explode onto the world's scene in a big city but in the rural, backwaters of Israel. From these places He ministered, selected His small group of disciples, and ultimately announced the coming of the Kingdom of God.

□ Notes



Matthew 5-6

The book of Matthew alternates between Jesus' actions and His teachings. Today we begin reading one of the longer and more well-known stretches, the "Sermon on the Mount". It fills three entire chapters with lessons taught by Jesus on top of a mountain (thus the title "Sermon on the Mount"). It is full of perspective-altering, life-transforming, and world-changing ideas. Jesus literally re-interrupts much of the Old Testament Law. But as you read Jesus' perspective of the Law keep in mind this important thing: Jesus didn't destroy the Law but came to fulfill every last word of it (5:17). However, He did rescue it from the misuse and abuse of it by the religious leaders of His day. This is why He re-interpreted it. Jesus didn't bring a new interpretation of the Law; He returned it to its rightful and intended meaning. Jesus showed His disciples, and now us, how we're to understand the Law and thus live according to it. In this way, Jesus doesn't abolish the Law but becomes a living example for us of how we can truly fulfill its intentions not just its letters.

□ Notes

Matthew 7-9

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount finishes with His parable about the foundation options for building a house. It's the perfect way to conclude one of the most influential parts of the entire Bible. Jesus provides His listeners with two options – hearing and obeying His words, which is like building a house on a rock or hearing His words and not obeying them, which is like building a house on sand. In essence Jesus is asking His listeners and us, will we obey what we've now heard? But His challenge isn't just about the Sermon on the Mount, but about the entire Bible, because it too is God's Word. Will we hear it and obey?

What does it take to obey God's Word, to accept it, believe it, and live by it? It requires faith – the same faith that the centurion showed, the same faith the woman who bled for 12 years demonstrated, and the same faith the two blind men who approached Jesus to be healed had. Faith is a gift from God; granted to us when we ask Him for it in humility.

□ Notes

Matthew 10-12

Jesus calls His 12 apostles to Him and begins their preparation of leading His Church after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Part of His preparation is teaching and part of it is hands-on experience. With the hands-on experience, Jesus sends them out two-by-two to share the Good News in the cities and villages of Israel. But before sending them out He instructs them on how to handle the different reactions they would likely experience. His teaching is instructive for us as well, as we live and share the Good News with the people God will put into our lives.

One of the situations Jesus warns His apostles about and continues to reinforce in His teachings is the fact that they'll be persecuted for their allegiance to Him. Jesus wants His apostles, and us, to know that a life committed to following Him will not be easy, as a matter of fact, it will be difficult. Yet, Jesus also tells us that if we turn to Him, He will give us rest – true rest that only He can give amid the pressures of this life.

Notes

Matthew 13-14

“The kingdom of heaven is like...” begins a number of Jesus’ parables describing the Kingdom to the people. Each parable provides insight into the Kingdom, its character, its place in the world today, its future state, and the people who’ll be a part of it. For it was Jesus’ purpose for coming into the world to preach the Good News and usher in the Kingdom. Yet, He chooses to announce the Kingdom in parables – which are short illustrations and stories requiring discernment to grasp and understand. When challenged about His use of parables, Jesus explains that He did so fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about His teachings. It appears Jesus’ teachings were for those who had the spiritual “ears to hear and eyes to see” (13:16). In other words, Jesus’ teachings were for those given the gift of faith, who were a part of the secret of the Kingdom or called to be a part of it. To understand and see the Kingdom is a gift (13:11). It’s a secret not given to everyone, so it’s not a matter of intelligence, but a matter of faith and the Spirit that gives the understanding.

□ Notes

Matthew 15-17

After much teaching about the Kingdom of heaven and the growing opposition to Jesus and His ministry, He is able to give three disciples a real life glimpse into what the Kingdom will look like. In the last verse of chapter 16 Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.” Then, six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the side of a mountain where these three men saw Jesus transfigured into all His glory and talking to Moses – who represents the Law, and Elijah – who represents the Old Testament prophets. This meeting was a glimpse into Jesus “coming into His Kingdom.” This event affirmed Jesus’ claims of being the Messiah; but not just the Messiah, but the Son of God as well. It’s within this context that these apostles will live and interpret the coming events in Christ’s life – His arrest, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

□ Notes

Matthew 18-20

Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of heaven move from descriptions of its character to teachings about how people are to act and relate to one another in the Kingdom. In many cases Jesus' teachings about relationships were earth-shattering concepts compared to the norms of His day (and may I say our day as well?). For example, Jesus teaches about the way leaders are to treat those they have authority over. They are to treat others like a servant not a slave driver. He also teaches about how men are to view marriage and their commitments to their wives. Men are to see their marriage vows as forever and not as dispensable commitments to be tossed out when no longer wanted. Finally, there are Jesus' teachings on children. In His day, children were treated as non-people – more like possessions than people. But Jesus taught that children were important in God's eyes, particularly because of their faith.

All these relationships – leaders to servants, husbands to wives, and children to adults, were redefined by Jesus and given new meaning in light of the Kingdom.

□ Notes

Matthew 21-22

As we begin chapter 21 we begin reading about the last week of Jesus' life on earth. It's the climax of His ministry, filled with challenging pronouncements and serious conflicts with the religious leaders of His day. It is apparent that Jesus knew it was His final week because of the direct messages He spoke and the actions He took. For example, Jesus enters the Temple and throws out all of the moneychangers, treating the Temple as if it was His (which of course it was). This action challenged the religious leaders on many levels – it challenged their political power, their religious authority, and of course their pocketbooks. Jesus followed this action up with two scathing parables (the parable of the tenants and the parable of the wedding feast in chapter 21), both of which accuse the religious leaders of neglecting and abusing their responsibilities and ultimately losing their place in God's Kingdom. These direct messages would lead to Jesus' arrest. And, as we know, it was through His arrest and execution that His parables become reality and more importantly, fulfill His purpose for coming to earth.

□ Notes

Matthew 23-24

In these final days of Jesus' earthly life He spends his time teaching both the crowds and His disciples. His instruction becomes more like the Old Testament prophets in its tone and message. After publicly condemning the religious leaders of the day, Jesus speaks about Jerusalem and the temple. His message is both gloomy and cloudy. It's gloomy because He foretells the coming destruction of the Temple and the city, as well as its impact on the people.

His message is also cloudy – it's not always as clear as we'd like it to be in terms of what events Jesus is talking about in what verses – especially in His teaching recorded in chapter 24. As with the Old Testament prophets, Jesus intertwines His message about near events – the Temple and Jerusalem's destruction – with His message concerning distant events – His second coming. Our work is to discern which of His events He's speaking about when, and then be humble enough to admit that we don't see things clearly and need to take Jesus' words in faith.

□ Notes

Matthew 25-26

After finishing His teachings about the Kingdom and challenging His disciples to be ready for its arrival, Jesus institutes communion as a sacrament at the “last supper”. Once dinner is completed He takes His disciples out to a garden to pray (by this time it would have been evening). It was here in the garden – Jesus’ temporary sanctuary – that His betrayal takes place. Judas, who for 30 silver coins, brings the religious leaders’ thugs to Jesus to arrest Him. The signal identifying Jesus was simply a kiss. Ironically, a kiss of a friend and companion was the start of the betrayal and, as Jesus said, the fulfillment of the Scriptures. From this point forward the events of Jesus’ life move quickly – with all the disciples scattering at Jesus’ arrest while He’s brought before the high priest and the council meeting secretly at night. All the while, Peter stayed close to Jesus. He followed the crowd to the place of Jesus’ “trial”. As Jesus foretold, Peter even though he committed to stick with Jesus to death, denies he knows Jesus three times during the night. All of these events were in contrast to a few days earlier when Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of “Hosanna to the Son of David” (21:9).

□ Notes

Matthew 27-28

Jesus' earthly life comes to a temporary end at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities. It all went down just as Jesus and the Old Testament prophets foretold it would. Even in its final details, Matthew makes sure we see that Christ's humiliation and ultimate death on the cross did not come as a surprise to God, but instead, as a part of His grand plan. Take note of such details and allusions to both Jesus' own words and the words of the Old Testament prophets as you read – they provide comfort and assurance of God's ultimate plan.

But God's plan didn't stop with Jesus' crucifixion, it continued in the defeat of death by Jesus through His resurrection from the dead. Once again, Matthew provides us details that could only be associated with an actual event, giving us assurance of its truth and affirmation of Christ's death as effective for paying the price for our sins. Finally, Jesus speaks words so often overlooked, "all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me" (28:18). Jesus now rules and for that reason we can be comforted.

□ Notes



Mark 1-3

We begin the book of Mark – often called the “action” Gospel. It’s called the action Gospel because of the quick speed in which Mark moves from scene to scene in Jesus’ life – often providing fewer details than the other Gospels. It’s also called the action Gospel because of the emphasis on what Jesus Christ did in His ministry compared to what He said and taught. For example, five times in the first chapter Mark writes “immediately” when telling us what Jesus did next. This would give us a sense of action, of speed, and of moving forward. As we continue to read Mark we’ll see these characteristics in his writing and in his focus on the actions of Jesus.

Yet, Mark has another notable focus in his book. It’s how Jesus also “withdrew” and went to “lonely places” to pray – just the opposite of taking action. Jesus’ action-filled life was also filled with time alone with God. Mark wants us to see the connection between these two parts of Jesus’ life. Not surprising, Mark also records Jesus’ position on the Sabbath in the first few chapters – highlighting the sacred connection between work and rest.

□ Notes

Mark 4-5

As we reviewed yesterday, Mark is called the “action” Gospel because so much of it records the actions of Jesus. Yet, like the other Gospels, Mark also records some of Jesus’ teachings as we read today in chapter 4. As you read these brief parables you’ll recognize some of them from our reading of Matthew. But, unlike some of the longer sections of teaching in Matthew (the Sermon on the Mount for example), this record of Jesus’ teaching is short. As a matter of fact, at the end of it Mark states “with many such parables He spoke the word to them” (4:33) – indicating that Jesus said significantly more than Mark recorded.

Then Mark once again moves to recording the actions of Jesus – calming a storm, casting out demons, healing a woman with a chronic illness, and raising a young girl from the dead. Mark makes these stories such a focus because they say as much about Jesus and the Kingdom of God as do Jesus’ own words – reminding us that the Kingdom, for us, is about both words and deeds.

□ Notes

Mark 6-7

Faith is another theme of Mark's Gospel – particularly, faith in Jesus. We see in chapter 6 that Jesus is rejected by the people of His hometown of Nazareth and that Jesus “marveled because of their unbelief” (6:6). What was the result of this lack of faith? Jesus couldn't do any “mighty work there...” (6:5). Faith is the door by which Christ's miracle enters into a person's life. Without faith there is no door to walk through.

We also see a lack of faith by the disciples when Jesus feeds the 5,000 people and then walks on the water out to their boat. The disciples' lack of faith is the result of their lack of understanding (6:52). So an understanding of God, His will, and purpose is what creates the door in a person's life for which Jesus can walk through.

Finally, we see faith come from a surprising place, from a Syrophenician woman who believed Jesus could heal her daughter. In boldness, she approached Jesus and He walked through that open door of faith and healed the woman's daughter.

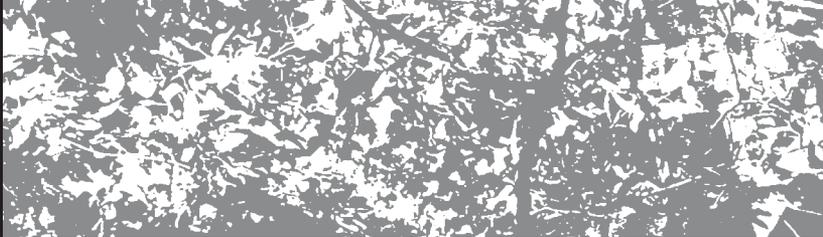
□ Notes

Mark 8-9

Faith continues to be a central theme in these two chapters of Mark, including the lack of faith, the asking for faith, and having faith. First, we see Jesus once again feeding a large crowd of people with just a bit of bread and fish. When Jesus asks His disciples to feed the crowd their response was, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” – even though they had witnessed Jesus already doing it one other time (8:4). Their response shows the disciples’ lack of faith.

Then there was the deaf and mute boy whom the disciples could not heal. When Jesus discovers this situation He exclaims “O faithless generation” (9:19). The boy’s father says to Jesus, “If you can...” (9:22). To this lack of faith Jesus says, “All things are possible for one who believes” (9:23). Then, in what may be one of the best lines in all of the Scriptures, the father cries out to Jesus “I believe; help my unbelief” (9:24). This acknowledgement of our unbelief and asking for more faith is the kind of faith that Jesus desires.

□ Notes



Mark 10-11

Mark gives us a brief break in the action by sharing some more of Jesus' teachings in chapter 10. The topics include marriage and divorce, our proper relationship to possessions, His upcoming death, and the nature of leadership in the Kingdom of God. Almost all these teachings begin with a question posed to Jesus. Both the questions and Jesus' answers provide us with a glimpse into the times in which Jesus lived.

After this teaching break, Mark moves us right back into the action and the final week of Jesus' life on earth. It's here that we begin to see the building tension between Jesus and the religious leaders. The tension is first created by Jesus' forthright teaching about God's Kingdom and confrontation of those people and situations which are contrary to the values of the Kingdom. Secondly, the religious leaders are not only hearing Jesus' forthright words – many directed at them – but also Jesus' popularity. We'll see this tension grow over the next chapters (and the last week of Jesus' life) leading to the final climax of the greatest story in the history of world.

□ Notes

Mark 12-13

As the tension builds, the religious leaders bring a more frontal attack on Jesus. They wanted to discredit Him in front of the crowds of people. The different groups of religious leaders take their cracks at Jesus by asking Him loaded questions, trying to trap Him in His answers. For example, they question Jesus about paying taxes to the pagan Roman government, marriage, the resurrection, and finally about the greatest command of the Law. In every case Jesus answered in a surprising and powerful way. He avoided their traps and, at the same time, become elevated in the eyes of the people.

These question and answer sessions lead to Jesus' teachings about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and His ultimate return to earth. These teachings provide challenging interpretation issues which have led to our own contemporary controversies about the nature of Christ's return. But the key message for us about Jesus and His return is found in 13:35, "Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come."

□ Notes



Mark 14-16

Mark's version of the story of Jesus comes to its conclusion. One of Jesus' closest friends betrays Him, He's arrested, put through a rigged trial, mocked, abused, crucified, killed, and then buried. All of this happened to Jesus because He spoke and lived the truth. Jesus did nothing to deserve this. He did not deserve any of it because He was completely innocent of all sin. Yet, the sin of people in a fallen world led to the greatest injustice – treating Jesus like a common criminal.

But as we know, this is not the end of the story. The rest of the New Testament doesn't focus on a martyr. The Church hasn't worshipped and been persecuted for worshipping a good and moral man who was unjustly executed. No, His death, though it paid the full price for the sins of His people, was not the pivotal point of the story; it was Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Because of Jesus' innocence, death could not hold Him down. He rose from the dead, affirming the effectiveness of His death. It's in the resurrection we find our hope. It's in His resurrection that we put our faith for our eternal destiny.

□ Notes

Luke 1

Part 1 of the story of Jesus and the early Church is found in Luke and part 2 is found in the book of Acts – both books were written by Luke. Luke was a physician and a companion of the Apostle Paul. As we read both Luke and Acts we'll see the attention to detail in the story consistent with a physician's work. His percision in story telling begins with the birth and early life of Jesus. In no other Gospel are we given as much information about Jesus' early life as we find in chapters 1 and 2.

What was the reason for Luke's thoughtful and detailed story? Luke tells us right at the beginning of chapter 1, "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you..." (v. 3). Luke wrote this account of Jesus' life for a friend; to help his friend with his faith and trust in the story of Jesus. This same purpose carries over to our own reading of Luke and it should help our understanding and trust in who Jesus was and who He is today as our risen Lord.

□ Notes

Luke 2-3

Chapter 2 tells us of the birth of Jesus and some of the accompanying circumstances surrounding it. Many of these stories are familiar to us because they're retold every year during the Christmas season. But, it's Luke's telling of Jesus' early childhood that provides us with a unique glimpse of Jesus and His family. We learn that from very early on Jesus' desire is for His Father's presence in the temple. We also see that even early in His life Jesus had wisdom and knowledge beyond His age. We see this wisdom continue to grow as He becomes an adult.

Finally, after being introduced to the birth of John the Baptist in chapter 1, Luke gives us a glimpse into his ministry after he becomes an adult. John came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (1:17), he came to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. He did this by preaching the "good news" (3:18) to all the people and pointing the people to the coming of the Messiah (3:16-17).

□ Notes

Luke 4-5

The tension we saw building between Jesus and the religious leaders, in the book of Mark, begins earlier in Luke's account. Right from the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus begins to challenge the teachings and actions of the religious leaders. But this tension is magnified by the growing popularity of Jesus. People began to flock around Him – even following Him into desolate places (4:42).

What makes Jesus so popular and at the same time so threatening? First, Jesus healed the sick. Luke is filled with stories of Jesus meeting the needs of the “poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed” (4:18). But it was also Jesus' teachings – the people were “astonished at His teaching” (4:36). Both Jesus' words and His actions came with authority, as one who is the “Son of God – the Holy One of God,” bringing hope to many and threatening destruction to others.

□ Notes

Luke 6-7

In these two chapters we're given Luke's version of the "Sermon on the Mount" that we read in Matthew. Though Luke's version is shorter, it provides us with some additional teachings of Jesus not recorded in Matthew. These teachings and the accompanying healings Luke records sets us up for a dialogue between Jesus and two of John's disciples. John sends his disciples to Jesus to verify if Jesus is really the one Israel has been waiting for – the Messiah. Jesus' answer is important because it not only affirms His work and that He's the Messiah, but it outlines the nature of His ministry and His Kingdom. Jesus answers by saying, "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (7:22). These were the actions that the Old Testament prophets said would accompany the Messiah. These were the affirmations John the Baptist was looking for to confirm that he completed his work of preparing the way for the Messiah.

□ Notes

Luke 8

Jesus' ministry continues to remind us of His concern for the marginalized people in the world of His day. In particular, we see His care and focus on women. Women, as in much of the world today, were clearly second-class citizens in Jesus' day. This focus on women begins at the end of chapter 7 when Jesus defends a "sinful" woman who washes His feet with her tears as He sat at dinner with some religious leaders. This powerful story introduces a number of other stories of Jesus ministering to women.

In chapter 8, Luke tells us about the growing number of women who joined the 12 disciples that followed Jesus as He ministered to the large crowds. Next, we see Jesus questioned about His mother and the way He redefines who His family truly is. This is followed by two dramatic healings of women. First, is the healing of a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years – making her "unclean" in the eyes of the religious leaders. This healing is followed by an even more dramatic event – the resurrection of a young girl from the dead. In all of these cases Jesus' love and concern for women, and all marginalized people of the world, is clearly demonstrated.

□ Notes

Luke 9

Luke records some significant events in chapter 9. Each event clarifies and affirms Jesus as the Messiah. First, Luke compares two different people and their responses to Jesus. The first is Herod who's confused by Jesus. The second is Peter who comes to an understanding of who Jesus is by proclaiming Him as the Christ. From this point forward Jesus begins to make it clear that He is the Messiah and that He came to die for the sins of the people and then to rise from the dead. We see this affirmed in the meeting of a transfigured Jesus, Moses, and Elijah up on a mountaintop. Then Jesus as "the Christ" – which is another title for Messiah – is also affirmed by healings and the feeding of the 5,000 people. All of these events align with what the prophets of the Old Testament said about the Messiah and what He would do. As a result of all these acts of Jesus and His powerful teachings, people were quick to follow Him without understanding the cost of giving their life to Him. It's a cost we too need to seriously consider.

□ Notes

Luke 10-11

At the end of chapter 9 (9:51) Luke tells us that the end of Jesus' earthly life is drawing near. This means the remaining 15 chapters of Luke cover the last weeks of His life. It's within this context that we read of the words and actions of Jesus – both of which now have a sense of urgency and determination to them. Jesus also begins to prepare His disciples for the day He'll leave them by sending out 72 of them in pairs to preach the Good News to all of the villages on their way to Jerusalem. After they return from their missions, Luke records a number of Jesus' teachings and dialogues. One of them begins with a question intended to trip Jesus up – a religious leader asked Jesus, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:25) followed by the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (10:29) Jesus answers the man by telling him the parable of the Good Samaritan – one of the well-known and loved parables found in the Bible.

□ Notes

Luke 12-13

In the urgency of Jesus' last days He spends time teaching His disciples (and all those who were listening to Him) about the proper relationship we're to have with possessions, popularity, acceptance, wealth, and even with our lives. In each case, Jesus teaches that we should see all that we have as a gift from God and thus be grateful and thankful for them. Yet, we're also to see them as secondary to the more important things in the Kingdom of God and make God's Kingdom our highest priority. Jesus tells us in 12:31 to "seek His Kingdom, and these things will be added to you".

We're to seek God's Kingdom first, which means we're to advance its mission and live out its values in all that we do. We are to do this and trust God for all of the other things we need in our lives for "your Father knows that you need them" (12:30). By doing this we'll be entering into God's Kingdom through the narrow door (13:24) – when we enter narrow doors there's not room to carry a lot of extras, usually just room for ourselves.

□ Notes

Luke 14-16

One of the biggest areas of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders concerned the Sabbath Day. The religious leaders created elaborate laws and regulations governing what could be done and what couldn't be done on the Sabbath. Jesus challenged these rules and regulations, and thus challenged the leaders who created them. It was one of these conflicts – when Jesus healed a man with a crippling disease on a Sabbath – that we read about today. This conflict led to Jesus' numerous teachings about the Kingdom of God. They're powerful stories, each providing a different perspective about the Kingdom.

These parables end with one that describes heaven and hell and who ends up in each place. It's a detailed story that addresses many of the questions people have about eternal life. It ends with a man living in hell asking Father Abraham to send poor Lazarus, now in heaven, to warn his living relatives of their coming fate. Abraham answers that if people don't believe the law and the prophets, they won't believe if someone rises from the dead – the same reality we'll see after Jesus' own resurrection.

□ Notes



Luke 17-18

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, word about Him spreads among the neighboring towns and people. Twice in our reading people with physical ailments stand near the road Jesus is walking on and call out to Him for healing.

First, as Jesus walks into a village, 10 lepers meet Him. Because of their illness they must stand far away from all the other people, but when they see Jesus approaching they loudly call out to Him. They ask Jesus to have mercy on them and, of course, Jesus does. He instructs them to present themselves to the priest as affirmation of their healing (Jesus healed them on their way to the priests). What is surprising is that only one of the 10 returns to Jesus to thank Him for His healing and this person happened to be a Samaritan, not a Jew.

As Jesus approached Jericho, a town near Jerusalem, a blind beggar also calls out to Jesus to have mercy on him. Though the crowd tells the blind man to be quiet he calls out all the more, and all the louder. Jesus heals him as well and the man responds in the same way as the Samaritan leper, he glorifies God and begins to follow Jesus.

□ Notes

Luke 19-20

As Jesus nears Jerusalem He encounters a tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jesus invites Himself to Zacchaeus' house for dinner. This creates yet another stir among the religious leaders. The question asked by the religious leaders is, "How can Jesus associate with sinners?" To which Jesus answers, as He always does throughout His ministry, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (19:10). But it was this event that led to Jesus sharing a parable directed at these religious leaders and their rejection of the Kingdom of God. This parable, along with Jesus' parade-like entry into Jerusalem, created even more tension. When Jesus clears the Temple of the moneychangers, the religious leaders begin a concerted effort to discredit Jesus. They send people into the crowd to ask Jesus questions that might trip Him up and make Him look bad in front of all the people. But, as we read, every time they challenge Jesus with a different question His answer only affirms more publicly His claim as Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

□ Notes

Luke 21-22

From this point forward, at least until chapter 24, Jesus' words and what happens to Him becomes more negative and violent. First, Jesus becomes very frank with the religious leaders about the future destruction of both the Temple and Jerusalem. He also foretells of coming wars and persecution that will follow His resurrection. He shares these prophecies as a warning to those listening so that they may align their lives with God and His Kingdom. It was this message about the Jews' beloved Temple and Jerusalem, as well as His convicting words about the fate of those who live like the religious leaders, that finally pushes these leaders over the edge. They move quickly from trying to discredit Jesus to plotting how to kill Him. They hire Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, to help set up the arrest. During these last hours of Jesus' life, He warns His disciples of His coming death and the immediate reaction His disciples will have. Just as Jesus said, when they arrest Him, all of the disciples scatter, except for Peter, who follows Jesus at a distance – only to deny Him three times.

□ Notes

Luke 23-24

The soldier guarding Jesus and the two other men crucified that day, watched Jesus' last breath. And after Jesus died, this Roman soldier spoke out by saying, "Certainly this man was innocent" (23:47). No truer words have ever been spoken in the history of the world. Jesus, a man innocent of all charges, a man even innocent before God, the only person to ever live and know no sin, was given a state's sentence – capital punishment, alongside two criminals. The religious leaders finally got what they wanted – a discredited and final removal of Jesus – or so they thought.

After His resurrection, Jesus tells the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus that His death was not the end of the story. As a matter of fact, Jesus explains that His death was all part of the plan and "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem" (24:47). Jesus' death was not the end of the story but a new beginning – especially a new beginning for all who put their faith in Jesus.

□ Notes



John 1-3

We begin the final of the four Gospels, the book of John. As we read it we'll quickly see that John brings an entirely different perspective to the life of Jesus compared to the other three Gospels. John's goal is to help people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, so it's written with this in mind.

The first three chapters contain some of the most memorable verses found in the entire Bible. From the opening verses, which define who Jesus was and is, to the verses found in the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisee, Nicodemus, in chapter 3 – which we see on cards held up at sporting events – to the words of John the Baptist that all Christians should repeat and take to heart “He must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30).

The experience we have in reading the first three chapters we'll also find in the rest of John. Someone once said, this was an experience like wading in a cool lake on a hot day or like falling in over their head in that same lake. Reading John can be either or both of these experiences all in one reading.

□ Notes

John 4-5

As I mentioned in yesterday's reading, John can make us feel as though we've gotten in over our heads theologically – which is certainly the case in today's texts. John's focus is on Jesus as God's Son and Jesus as God. In a number of ways, John presents this case to us. First, he begins with an interaction Jesus has with a Samaritan woman and then all of the people of her village. Both the woman and the people of the village exclaim, "we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (4:42). This interaction is followed by the debate Jesus has with the religious leaders about healing on the Sabbath. In the debate Jesus calls God His Father, leading to the religious leaders accusing Jesus of saying, "He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal to God" (5:18). Then Jesus directly affirms His deity by using the principle of the Law that requires two witnesses to prove a case in court. Jesus provides His two witnesses who confirm that He is exactly who He says He is – the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord God Himself in human form. It's a powerful line of thinking that John makes to prove his case that Jesus "was God" (John 1:1).

□ Notes

John 6-7

As Jesus' ministry continues, He continues to challenge and stretch the Jew's ideas about who the Messiah should be. In many cases, Jesus' mind-stretching ideas are offensive to the Jews because of their biases. For example, Jesus uses His feeding of the 5,000 as an object lesson about true spiritual food and where it comes from. Jesus tells the people who continue to seek and follow Him – He is the "bread of life" and that "whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (6:35). But Jesus clarifies His statement by stating that, "I have come down from heaven" (6:38) creating a further stir among the people because this claim pointed to Jesus being God – a very difficult idea for the Jews to grasp. Then Jesus makes another difficult statement, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (6:54). Nothing could be more contrary to Jewish sensibilities than drinking blood or eating the flesh of another human. Because of this the disciples said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (6:60).

□ Notes

John 8-9

Jesus continues to challenge the people, and in particular, the religious leaders of His day about their understanding of who He was. In chapter 8 this takes the form of a long dialogue, but in chapter 9 it centers on a miracle Jesus performs on the Sabbath in which He gives sight to a man born blind.

Jesus put mud into the blind man's eyes – an act considered work-prohibited on the Sabbath – and told the man to go to a pool and wash his eyes. When the man did, he received his sight. He then went to look for Jesus but couldn't find Him. Instead he ends up being questioned by the Pharisees about who healed him. The discussion between the man and the Pharisees is fascinating. It shows two different responses to Jesus. The response of the Pharisees is one of stubbornness and unwillingness to accept anyone who didn't fit into their box of what the Messiah should be. The response of the blind man demonstrates a simple faith by telling the Pharisees, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (9:25) and to Jesus "'Lord I believe' and he worshipped Him" (9:38).

□ Notes

John 10-11

As Jesus approaches His final days on earth He tells His disciples who He is through a number of “I” statements. Jesus tells His disciples “I am the door” (10:9), “the Good Shepherd” (10:11), and “the resurrection and the life” (11:25). But one “I” statement pushes the religious leaders over-the-edge and sets off a series of events leading to Jesus’ arrest and ultimate crucifixion. The statement simply is “I and the Father are One” (10:30). Of all the things Jesus says about Himself, this statement created the greatest affront to the Jewish leaders because in it Jesus claims to be God. This statement, along with Jesus’ intentional actions leading to Him raising His friend, Lazarus, from the dead pushed the religious leaders to take drastic action and begin the planning of Jesus’ demise. Ironically, these religious leaders couldn’t see that raising Lazarus from the dead affirmed all of the things Jesus said about Himself. He is the Christ, the Son of God, God coming in the flesh to save sinners and restore all things to their rightful place and condition.

□ Notes

John 12-13

Beginning in chapter 12 and through the rest of the book of John, we'll be reading about the last 6 days of Jesus' life. Much of what we'll read in these last chapters will cover Jesus' private time with His disciples as He prepares them for both His death and for their life after His resurrection and ascension.

Part of this preparation included Jesus' friend, Mary, anointing Jesus with expensive perfume – an act that represented a preparation for a burial. Then Jesus turns that act around and later washes His disciples' feet. This act not only turned the idea of spiritual leadership on its head, it communicated a strong spiritual truth – if one wants to have eternal life they're to be washed clean of sin by Jesus' blood as represented by baptism. This act reinforced Jesus' "new commandment", "love one another, just as I loved you" (13:34).

□ Notes

John 14-16

Jesus finishes His instructions to the disciples by introducing them to the Holy Spirit. Jesus describes the purpose and character of the Holy Spirit is to prepare them for His coming. Jesus explains that when the Holy Spirit comes He “will be in you” (14:17), “He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26), “He will convict the world of sin” (16:8), “He will guide you into all the truth”, and “He will declare to you the things that are to come” (16:13). Finally, the Holy Spirit “will glorify me [Jesus], for He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:14). For all of these reasons, Jesus told His disciples “I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you” (16:7). This promise is not just for the disciples of Jesus’ day but for all disciples that followed throughout history, including us.

□ Notes

John 17-18

The final word and act of Jesus before His arrest recorded by John is a powerful prayer He makes to His Father in heaven. What looks like one prayer in chapter 17 is really three prayers. The first prayer (17:1-8) is a prayer for Himself. It reaffirms His purpose for coming to earth and His relationship to the Father. From this prayer Jesus moves to praying for His disciples (17:9-19) – those people close to Him at that time. Jesus prays – knowing what the rest of their lives hold for them – not that they'd escape the hardship and persecution ahead, but that they'd be faithful, be given the words they need through the Holy Spirit, and that the Father would protect them from the evil one.

The final prayer (17:20-26) Jesus makes is for all the future disciples – those people who will come to faith in Jesus as the result of the ministry of His disciples. It is truly a prayer for every disciple since the time of Jesus, including us today. The theme of this prayer is love, “that the love with which you (the Father) have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (17:26).

□ Notes

John 19-21

As we read chapter 19 it appears that the religious leaders won, they got what they wanted – Jesus’ death. It really couldn’t have gone any better for them. Jesus wasn’t only discredited, but was permanently out of the picture, even if it came as a result of injustice. Even Pilate sensed that a grave injustice had occurred.

And, of course, it was the greatest injustice in the history of the world. The one person who never did anything wrong in His entire life, who always thought of others first, a person who never sinned before God or man, was convicted and crucified for living and telling the truth. But, as in the case of God’s dealing with people and the world, we know it’s these types of situations that He turns to His advantage and fulfills His purposes. In this case, it’s the greatest purpose in history. God uses Jesus’ death, affirmed through His resurrection, to redeem and save His people for Himself. Through this historic injustice, God brings His people into His Kingdom for eternity.

□ Notes

Acts 1-3

Having completed the four Gospels – books written about the life of Christ – we now read one last historical book before entering into the rest of the New Testament. The book of Acts is often described as a bridge between the Gospels, which focuses on the life of Christ, and the rest of the New Testament, which focuses on the growing Church of Christ.

The book is officially titled in many Bibles, “The Acts of the Apostles” but could as easily be called, “The Acts of the Church” or maybe even more accurately, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” because both the emerging Church and the Holy Spirit play central roles in the book of Acts. We see this in our reading today where the Church begins to form through the working of the Holy Spirit in the apostles. This demonstration of power through the Holy Spirit in word and deed ignites the spread of the Gospel throughout Jerusalem and, as we’ll soon read, spreading throughout “Judea, Samaria, and into the end of the earth” (1:8).

□ Notes

Acts 4-6

As the Church begins to grab hold in Jerusalem, because of the working of the Holy Spirit through the preaching and works of the apostles and the witness of the community being formed, persecution breaks out and trouble starts to rear its ugly head. It's clear, from Luke's perspective, this movement of the Holy Spirit is paralleled by a separate movement by Satan. This movement by the enemy takes two different forms. First, we see the Church, and in particular the apostles, begin to be persecuted by the religious leaders. What keeps this persecution from getting out of hand is the incredibly positive response to the Gospel and the Church by the people of Jerusalem. Second, we see Satan working within the Church to create division and to undermine the integrity and witness of the Church to the world. We see this most clearly in Ananias and Sapphira's attempt to deceive the apostles and the entire Church. God quickly responds to both attacks by Satan through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

□ Notes

Acts 7-8

The persecution heats up as the apostles begin to share the teaching, serving and leading of the people with other qualified disciples. Some of the Jewish leaders arrest one of the newly appointed leaders, Stephen, and bring him before the religious leaders on false charges. Stephen defends himself with one of the most beautiful speeches found in the entire Bible. It centers directly on the false charges brought against him. He does this by comparing the Jewish ancestors' continual rejection and rebellion of Moses to their contemporary rejection of Jesus and His message. Stephen, in essence, claims that the current generation is no different from the generation Moses led out of Egypt. God gave both generations the opportunity to escape from slavery, the slavery of Egypt and the slavery of sin, and both generations rejected this opportunity by rejecting those who brought the freedom to them. The speech leads to Stephen's stoning, and his death leads to a further breakout, further persecution of the Church, and dispersal of the disciples outside of Jerusalem. This dispersion, as we'll read, leads to the Gospel being preached in Judea and Samaria, just as Jesus commanded the apostles to do.

□ Notes

Acts 9-10

After being briefly introduced to the character named Paul in chapters 7 and 8, Luke brings Paul, or should I say, God brings Paul fully into the story of the Church. In chapter 9 we read the powerful story of Paul's conversion and the immediate impact he has on the Gospel. As we will learn, and will soon read about, because of Paul's unique background, experience, and gifts, God chose him to be His ambassador and to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people).

Then, just to affirm Paul's and the Church's future ministry, both Peter and a Gentile named Cornelius have separate visions which lead Peter to enter Cornelius' house and share the Gospel with Cornelius' entire household. After hearing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit descends on the entire household, just as it did with those first Jewish believers, and Peter and his companions baptize them all. This affirmed to Peter and the leaders of the Church that God's plan, as stated by Jesus before His ascension, was that the Gospel was to go out to all people, people beyond Israel, affirming and laying the groundwork for Paul's future ministry.

□ Notes

Acts 11-13

There are a number of key turning points in the story of the early Church that we read about today. First, is the Church's affirmation of the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit just like the Jews. This affirmation broadens the Church's mission by including Gentiles, not as an afterthought, but as a focus of its ministry. This turning point is followed by another – the arrest of Peter and, what appeared to be, his coming death. Though Peter is miraculously rescued, he begins to fall into the background of the Acts story and Paul moves to the front of it. The last turning point is Paul's ascension in the Church and the spread of the Gospel, and the Church, to the "ends of the earth". This "turn" in the story begins with Barnabas bringing Paul to Antioch to serve as a teacher and preacher in the church, his first official assignment within the Church. Then God calls Paul and Barnabas to go on their first missionary journey into the wider Roman Empire. The Church was going global and Paul was its global leader.

□ Notes

Acts 14-16

As we finish reading about Paul's first missionary journey out into the Roman Empire, a dispute breaks out among those in the Church. Disciples from Jerusalem who were previously Pharisees begin to teach that to be saved and be a member of the Church required a man to be circumcised. This "requirement" is directed right at the new Gentile believers since the Jewish believers had already been circumcised as children. As we read, it created quite a stir in the Gentile Church. This created both practical and theological issues for the Gentiles and the Church that centered on the question – what does it mean to be a Christian? Does it mean one must become a circumcised Jew as a sign of their conversion? As a response, in the first known theological/doctrinal statement published by the Church, the apostles and elders were clear when they wrote, "we believe that we were saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they (the Gentiles) will" (15:11). In other words, salvation comes through faith, in Christ by grace alone, and through no other act or person. The other guidelines outlined in the document were not conditions of salvation but given to help the Gentiles live peacefully with their Jewish brothers and sisters.

□ Notes

Acts 17-18

While on his second missionary journey, Paul traveled all the way around the Aegean Sea to Corinth. He visited and preached in all of the major cities along the coastline of, what is today, Greece and Turkey. In each city, Paul went first to the Jewish synagogue, “as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (17:2). Paul did this because he understood that the Gospel came, as a gift from God, to the world through the Jewish people. Paul also knew that devout Jews around the world were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, so he felt obligated to let them know that indeed the Messiah had come. But, we read today that some of the Jews believe in Christ and some do not. Those who didn’t often became violent in their opposition to Paul and the Gospel. This was especially true when Paul left the synagogue and brought the Good News to the Gentiles of the city where he was visiting. Even the Gentiles who did not accept the Gospel became violent. It seems that no one was neutral about the Gospel.

□ Notes

Acts 19-20

As we read about Paul's third missionary journey, we see that he visits the cities where there are churches he helped to plant. His goal was to strengthen these churches and, in particular, the leaders of these churches. As we reviewed in an earlier reading, the persecution and violence against Paul and the Church moves from being inflicted on the Jews, to the Gentiles – as the Church gains more Gentile followers. Notice the reaction of the silver smiths in Ephesus upon Paul's return (19:21). Because of the large number of Ephesians who become followers of Christ, the silversmiths take a huge hit to their idol selling businesses. These craftsmen literally create a riot in the city, forcing Paul and his companions to leave. When Paul visits Ephesus for the third time, he stays away from the city, due to time constraints and to avoid the potential danger. In this final visit to the church at Ephesus, Paul meets with the elders (20:18-35) and delivers a message that's full of powerful and insightful words about Paul's ministry. By reading these words we gain insight into the thoughts and motives of this remarkable man who did so much for the Church of Jesus Christ.

□ Notes

Acts 21-22

Paul continues his trip back to Jerusalem. Along the way he makes brief stops to meet with the disciples at the different cities where churches existed. Paul encouraged the disciples while he was with them but, at the same time, Paul received prophecies from some of the disciples about what awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul knew that possible arrest and even death might confront him in Jerusalem. He understood that the growth of the Church, not just in Jerusalem, but also throughout the Roman Empire, was causing a stir. Paul anticipated that word would get back to Jerusalem and the religious leaders there. It's clear that this chaos, created by the growth of the Church, was attributable to Paul – the one-time persecutor of the Church and rising star of the Jewish faith. Yet, Paul felt called to come to Jerusalem and tell the disciples, "For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13). Finally, the disciples reply to Paul "Let the will of the Lord be done" (21:14).

□ Notes



Acts 23-25

After Paul's arrest, he's brought before the Jewish religious council to be tried for unknown charges. Yet, because Paul continues to be a practicing Jew, with faith in the Law of Moses, the council finds no grounds to accuse him. They believe that Paul was the cause of riots around the Roman Empire and they committed themselves to eliminating Paul because he threatened their religious power and authority. The Roman authorities learned of this plot to kill Paul and transferred him to Caesarea, the region's Roman capital. It was here that Paul began a multiple year confinement where he presented the Gospel to "the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (9:15) just as Jesus told him he would when He initially confronted him on the road to Damascus.

Even in this difficult situation we see God at work, not only in Paul's life, but in the Church and throughout the world. God protects Paul and uses this difficult situation to advance the Church and the cause of the Gospel.

□ Notes

Acts 26-28

At the end of the book of Acts the focus is on Paul. As Jesus promised, Paul spoke before kings and rulers. Paul also desired to bring the Gospel to Rome, the capital of the empire, and sees his desire become reality. However, his visit to Rome didn't happen as Paul may have planned, but instead came as a result of his appeal to Caesar after being arrested on false charges. Though the officials declared Paul innocent, because of the continued accusations of the Jews and the threat to his life, Paul felt compelled to present his case to Caesar.

In this brief chapter in Paul's story we see his ability to defend the Gospel before a wide range of people, from kings to sailors and soldiers. We see his great faith in God even when things appear out of control. We also see God continuing His work through Paul by performing miracles. Finally, we see Paul's faithfulness to his calling regardless of his situation. All of this background on Paul sets the stage for much of the rest of the New Testament.

□ Notes



Romans 1-3

The Apostle Paul, whose life and ministry we read about at the end of the book of Acts, wrote the next 13 books of the Bible. Paul wrote this first book, Romans, before he had ever visited Rome. In it, he lays out his understanding of the human condition, of Christ's work to mend this condition, and he addresses the complex issue of Israel's place in God's future plans. Paul ends his letter with some practical teachings about how we are to live in light of the incredible reality of Christ.

In the first three chapters, Paul begins laying his case that all people have sinned before God. This is true regardless of their knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of God's Law. All people stand condemned because of their rebellion and no one has an excuse for their rebellion. This bad news is the first part of understanding the Good News that Paul so clearly describes to the believers of Rome.

□ Notes



Romans 4-7

Paul continues his breathtaking explanation of the Gospel by reviewing significant parts of redemptive history as revealed in the Old Testament. Beginning with Abraham, Paul demonstrates the need for faith in one's salvation. Paul shows that Abraham didn't find justification before God through his good works but by believing in God and His promises. God's promises to Abraham began with the assurance that Abraham would have many descendants, and through these descendants God would bless all people and nations. We now know that this blessing has come through Jesus Christ.

Paul walks us through the struggle and reality of sin in our lives. Paul says we are enslaved by sin and our sinful nature. Yet, he explains that we can become free from sin and become slaves to righteousness instead through faith in Jesus Christ. But, as we'll see in our next readings, there's more to just believing in Christ, because it's the power of the Holy Spirit that allows us to begin to live as free people.

□ Notes

Romans 8-10

After Paul challenges us to be free from sin and captive to righteousness, he instructs us on how to make this a reality in our lives. Paul explains that in Christ we receive the Holy Spirit who helps us in all of our weaknesses, and prays for us when we don't know what and how to pray (8:16-17). It's this reality that the Old Testament prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah, taught so clearly – the Law of God would one day be written not on stone but on the hearts of people.

What is the outcome of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? We become the adopted children of God, heirs of God, and members of His Kingdom (8:16-17). So, what should our response be to this incredible truth? We need to respond in thanksgiving and gratitude because Paul makes it clear that it's God's sovereign choice who shall become children of God. We can't earn this nor can we work for it, we become God's children through God's decision. For God "foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified" those whom He loves (8:29-30).

□ Notes

Romans 11-14

In chapter 11, Paul finishes his discourse about salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles. On one level, it's a very simple discussion, God only saves those who believe through faith in Christ whether Jew or Gentile. Yet, at the same time, because of the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament, there is some sense that the Jews will have a special place in God's plan of salvation. In the end, Paul calls it a mystery (11:25) but reassures his readers of God's faithfulness to the promises He made to His people.

For the rest of this letter, Paul moves onto more practical topics, as he often does in his letters. Paul challenges the Christians of Rome to live in the light and worship God. He outlines the kind of life we're to live first, in our relationship to Christ (12:9-21), then in our relationship to civil authorities (13:1-7), then with others (13:8-14), and finally, with other believers (chapter 14).

□ Notes

Romans 15-16

Paul finishes his section on practical Christian living by calling believers to look to Christ and His example for inspiration as to how to live. Then Paul addresses some housekeeping issues and other personal messages to Christians he knew at the church in Rome. As we read these last chapters we can see that Paul planned to visit Rome after making a visit to Jerusalem, to deliver gifts to the poor that came from some of the Greek churches Paul planted. We know that Paul did get to Rome, but not as part of a trip to Spain as he hoped. Instead, Paul arrived as a Roman prisoner making an appeal to Caesar.

Paul's goal for his ministry was to take the Gospel to places and people that had not previously heard it (15:20). He saw this clearly as part of Christ's call on his life. As we continue through the New Testament we'll see him fulfill his calling as he plants churches and ministers to cities all around the Roman Empire.

□ Notes

I Corinthians 1-4

We begin the first of two letters Paul writes to the church in Corinth – a city in present day Greece. In Paul’s day, Corinth was known as a cosmopolitan city, full of diversity, pagan worship, and sexual immorality. These issues influenced the church there motivating Paul to write about them in his two letters. As we read these two letters it’s easy to think, “how terrible these Christians must have been” but if we take a closer look we’ll see that ancient Corinth, and the church located there, look a lot like our country and the church of today. That is why it’s so important that we note Paul’s response and the directions he gives to the church and ask ourselves how this applies to us today.

The first issue Paul addresses is the division within the church. It seems there were numerous factions based on the teachings of Paul, Apollo, and Peter. Paul quickly clears up their misperceptions about who actually causes people to grow spiritually – it’s not people but God through the Holy Spirit. This is a great reminder not to put too much focus on human teachers but instead focus on Jesus Christ.

□ Notes

I Corinthians 5-8

Paul now moves directly into addressing the many issues and controversies facing the church in Corinth. Many scholars believe that Paul is actually answering questions presented to him in a letter from the church. It appears to be a laundry list of issues that have arisen within the church, issues including sexual immorality, marriage, and eating meat sacrificed to idols.

One theme seems to connect many issues that Paul covers. It relates to sexual relationships of many kinds, both within and outside the context of marriage. Paul addresses very specific issues that have surfaced such as a man who has sexual relations with his father's wife (though it appears the woman was not his mother). Paul is very straightforward about the destructiveness of sexual relations outside the context of marriage, including the harm it does to the people participating as well as to the name of Christ. Paul shows no middle ground on these issues but instead calls the Corinthian church to deal strongly with people who call themselves Christians but are practicing some type of sexual immorality. A clear lesson needed in our churches today.

□ Notes

I Corinthians 9-11

If there's any doubt or question about Paul's motives for his work, we're given a clear picture of what they are in these chapters. First, Paul addresses the issue of compensation for the work he does among the churches. Though Paul feels he has a right to be paid, as the other apostles are, he has not collected any money up to this point. This discussion makes it clear that Paul doesn't do his work for the money. If not for money, what is it that drives Paul? We find the words here in these chapters, repeated three times but said in three different ways. Paul says he does what he does so that, "I might save some" (9:19, 22, 10:33). Paul's reason for ministry is that people would come to know Christ and be saved. Yet, as we read, we see there's an even deeper reason for why Paul does what he does and it's found in 9:16 when he says, "For I preach the Gospel, that gives me no grounds for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel." Ultimately, Paul understands that God called him to this work, and that the work itself is his reason to serve.

□ Notes



I Corinthians 12-14

Yesterday's reading focused on how Paul was compelled by God to see that some people would be saved. Today's reading focuses on people after they're saved. And in particular helping the church in Corinth to do the things that build up believers and avoid doing the things that could tear them down. The foundation of these wide-ranging discussions in our reading today, Paul says, is love. He describes love in chapter 13, one of the most well-known chapters in the Bible. It is love that ultimately seeks to build up others and not puff-up oneself. As a matter of fact, Paul makes it clear that you can have great faith, perform miracles, and do tremendous work for God, but if you don't do them in love they mean nothing. This love should impact and motivate everything we do, from how we relate to those inside the church and those outside of it, how we use our gifts and abilities, to even how we worship together. It's clear that if love was center stage in the church at Corinth, Paul's letter would have a significantly different tone.

□ Notes

I Corinthians 15-16

The final issue Paul addresses in this letter to the church in Corinth is a question about the resurrection. Paul begins by looking at the Gospel, the Good News, and the absolute necessity of Christ's physical and bodily resurrection. Once Paul establishes Christ's resurrection as fact, he connects it to our own future resurrection. For, just as we all experience death because death came into the world through one man, Adam, we can rise from death into eternal life, through the resurrection of one man, Jesus Christ. After he establishes the resurrection for us, Paul addresses the nature of the resurrection. Paul makes it clear it isn't just a resurrection of our spirits, but like Christ's own resurrection, it will be a resurrection of our bodies, in which ours are transformed into new, everlasting bodies. Then Paul closes the discussion by acknowledging that this is all a great mystery, but it's a great mystery that is also a great victory. It's a victory over sin and its major consequence – death. For this reason, we're to believe, embrace, hope, and pray that one day we'll experience the resurrection into eternal life.

□ Notes

II Corinthians 1-4

We begin Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. The scholars believe the letter's writing to be about a year after the first letter. Though the tone is a little different, there are some familiar themes found in the first one. One of the major themes in this letter centers on Paul's ministry. It seems the divisions in the church at Corinth, Paul addressed in his first letter, have led to a group of people discrediting Paul and his ministry. Yet, as Paul states clearly, discrediting him actually discredits them because he planted their church and led many of the Corinthians to Christ. Those discrediting Paul point to his suffering as proof that he isn't a real apostle. But Paul turns his suffering and persecution around and demonstrates how they actually show the close association Paul has with Christ, since Christ too suffered. This encourages any of us who experience suffering. Paul reminds us that, as people who identify closely with Christ, we should expect difficulties and persecution but rewards in the eternal life to come.

□ Notes

II Corinthians 5-8

Paul reminds the believers at Corinth that they are God's Temple, the place God now dwells on earth. When Jesus inaugurated the Church at Pentecost, God moved His presence from the physical Temple in Jerusalem to His Church, the body of believers. This powerful change in the understanding of God and His relationship to the Church impacts everything in life. As Paul addresses in this and other letters, it means that it's important how we relate together, how we treat our bodies, what behaviors we engage in, and how we relate to the culture and society in general. We are to be righteous and holy because we're the place the Living God now dwells. And this extends to how we use money. Paul begins, in this reading, the longest discussion about giving found in the New Testament. It provides us with a theology of giving as well as practical examples and instructions on how individuals and local churches should give. Giving, then, should reflect that the Living God dwells in us.

□ Notes

II Corinthians 9-13

Paul continues his teaching on generosity and moves to a more personal matter – a defense of himself and his ministry. This defense is delivered humbly, with humor, and love for Christ and the churches. This defense provides one of the best biographical sketches of Paul’s life outside the book of Acts. But, as we read this defense, we see quickly that Paul’s not truly concerned about his own defense or reputation, but instead, he’s most concerned about Christ’s. Notice what Paul says in verses 11:4-5, while defending himself, Paul is truly defending Christ; “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaim, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles.” To question Paul’s message and ministry is to question the One who called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

□ Notes

Galatians 1-6

The book of Galatians was written to a group of churches in a region in what is now Turkey. These churches existed because of Paul's ministry. As a result, as we read through this book, we'll see strong emotions expressed by Paul about the Galatians' acceptance of a "different" gospel. We see the Galatians begin to accept the teaching of some Jewish Christians who claimed that, to be saved, one must become Jewish – meaning adhering to the Law and, in particular, becoming circumcised. From Paul's perspective, this added requirement nullified the true Gospel and threatened their lives in Christ. Notice how Paul uses strong language to help these churches see their error and to come back to the true Gospel. Words such as "bewitched" (3:1), "slavery" (4:24), "promise" (4:28), and "freedom" (5:1) are used by Paul to move these believers back to the rich fruit of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit (6:22).

□ Notes

Ephesians 1-3

Paul writes another letter, this time to the church in Ephesus, a city found on the coast of modern-day Turkey. The first half of the book, the section we read today, focuses on what we as Christians should know and believe about God and His plan for saving His people. The second half, which we'll read tomorrow, focuses on how we're to live in light of this truth.

What is it that Paul expects us to know and to believe? It's simply this, the mystery that God had hidden for ages is now revealed to the apostles and the prophets – the Gentiles can be saved, along with God's people the Jews, through faith in Jesus Christ. This is possible because, though we're all dead in our sins, we're made alive in Christ through faith, and one day we will reign with Christ in the heavenly places (2:4-6). Just like physically dead people cannot raise themselves from the dead, spiritually dead people can't raise themselves up spiritually (not through works), but it comes through faith in Christ who raises us up. It is by faith we're saved.

□ Notes

Ephesians 4-6

After laying the Gospel's foundation in the first three chapters of Ephesians, the truths we're to know and trust, Paul moves to more practical instructions. These instructions all center on our relationships with each other, with ourselves, and with God. Paul begins chapter 4 by challenging us to have unity in Christ, calling us to "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:2-3). Then Paul addresses the universal behaviors and attitudes we're to have, "walking in love, as Christ loved us" (5:2) and the ones we're to avoid, "sexual immorality, covetous, filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking" (5:3-4), if we're to have the right kind of relationships with God and others. Paul gives instructions on specific types of relationships such as husbands and wives, and parents and children. This very practical teaching ends with an inspirational call for all believers to put on the "full armor of God" so we're prepared to fight the spiritual battles we find ourselves in.

□ Notes

Philippians 1-4

In one of the most upbeat and positive letters written by Paul in the New Testament, the book of Philippians is full of helpful instructions as well as insightful autobiographical information. As a result, it's also one of the most quoted and memorized books of the Bible. The letter is so positive because of the character of the church in Philippi. This character is first reflected in the sacrificial gift they gave Paul while he was in prison in Rome. It appears some Christians and churches had abandoned Paul when he was imprisoned but the Philippians continued to show their love for Paul through their care for him.

Paul encourages the Philippians to continue in this same kind of love, and attitude seen in Christ Jesus – a love and attitude that does “nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility counts others more significant than yourself” (2:3). Paul calls the Philippians, and us, to look to Christ for an example of how we're to think and live. Paul also calls the Philippians, and us, to learn from his example as he followed Christ, and in doing so, along with Paul, we may “gain Christ” (3:8).

□ Notes

Colossians 1-4

Paul writes to the church in Colossae – a city inland from Ephesus in what is modern-day Turkey. We see some of the same messages and themes found in Paul’s other letters. In particular, it appears that Paul is concerned that the Colossians might be influenced by the Jewish Christians who were promoting the idea that to be saved one must follow the entire Old Testament Law, in essence, become Jewish. As we know from Paul’s previous letters, he stood firmly opposed to this theology. To build his case for the Colossians, Paul teaches the pre-eminence of Christ in the eternal order of things. From Paul’s perspective, to add anything to Christ and His work is to diminish both, something we should never allow. Yet, Paul also reminds the Colossians that freedom from the Law doesn’t mean license to live and act in any fashion they wish. They’re no longer to live by the spirit of the world but instead, to live by the Spirit of God who leads us into all righteousness.

□ Notes

I Thessalonians 1-5

We have two letters from Paul to the church in Thessalonica – now present-day Thessaloniki, Greece. During Roman times, it was the capital of Macedonia and located along key trade routes, making it an important city. As you might remember, Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). It was during this visit that Paul established the church there but eventually chased out-of-town by jealous Jews who lived there. This letter is a note of encouragement to this church, as well as an answer to questions that arose during Paul's absence.

In particular, for some reason, the church had become concerned about the salvation of those who had died. But Paul reminds them, as he reminds us, that all who die in Christ will rise again when He returns. Paul leads us to believe that those who died will be the first, followed by those who are still alive, to be with Christ when He returns. For this reason we're to be always ready for His assured, glorious return.

□ Notes

II Thessalonians 1-3

Apparently questions and concerns about Christ's return continued at the church in Thessalonica because Paul needed to write a follow-up letter to the church. In particular, it seems the Thessalonians believed that Christ had already returned and somehow they had missed it. But Paul reassured them that it hadn't happened yet. Then Paul goes on to give them the conditions that must exist in the world before Christ's return. Paul warns of the increasing evil and lawlessness that will appear on earth, all driven by Satan and his followers. Not only that, but it appears that God will allow this evil to deceive those who don't know Christ, so that they will follow the "lawless one" in his evil, and carry out the lawless one's work here on earth. It will be as if Satan and his followers are waging one final battle in a last-ditch effort to destroy the Church, including those who follow Christ. But Paul reassured the Thessalonians, and his words reassure us well, that Christ will return and He will save those who have committed their allegiance to Him.

□ Notes

I Timothy 1-4

The next three books of the New Testament are called the “pastoral epistles” because they’re addressed to two pastors, Timothy and Titus. Paul mentored both of these men and, in particular, Paul considered Timothy his spiritual son. As we read today all of these letters provide helpful instructions for church leadership in general. In today’s chapters we read about the qualifications a person needs to be an elder and deacon in a local church. In addition, Paul helps Timothy understand his specific role as the pastor of this local church – the church in Ephesus. Notice some of the key instructions given to Timothy; “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness,” (4:7), “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (4:13), and finally “Set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12). All these are great and applicable instructions for any believer, including us.

□ Notes

I Timothy 5-6

In this last section of Paul's letter to Timothy he provides practical instructions for living. These instructions are primarily for the pastor directly and the congregation indirectly. The teaching includes instructions on the attitude and the relationships Timothy should have with others, including older men and women, and younger women and widows. In each case, Paul helps Timothy to see how to have such relationships without compromising his work as a pastor. The key to each relationship is purity (5:2).

Paul also reminds Timothy of a challenge he and the church will face concerning false teachers and teachings. One of his main responsibilities was to protect the church from these false teachers and their teachings. Paul also warns Timothy about the temptation to become discontent with his salary and lifestyle but instead to be content with what he has because, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (6:10) – a warning that applies not just to pastors, but also to all of God's people.

□ Notes



II Timothy 1-4

This may be the last letter written by Paul included in the Bible. Scholars believe, not long before Paul arrived in Rome, he wrote this letter. We sense this from Paul's own words in the letter, "the time for my departure has come" (4:6) and "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:7). His impending departure may explain the deep love, affection, frankness, and urgency of his words to Timothy.

In particular, Paul challenges Timothy to be faithful to Christ through faithfulness to the Scriptures, which "make you wise for salvation" (3:15). This faithfulness to the Scriptures takes two forms according to Paul. The first is simply to believe and trust the Scriptures as God's inspired Word, "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (3:16). But secondly, Timothy had to do more than believe the Scriptures – he was to preach them to his congregation. Paul tells Timothy, "preach the word" (4:2) and "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (4:2) because "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching" (4:3).

□ Notes

Titus and Philemon

Titus is the final of Paul's "pastoral letters" written to another of Paul's "children of faith". The letter, though shorter than the two pastoral letters to Timothy, covers much of the same ground. First, Paul outlines the qualifications for leaders in the local church. You'll notice these qualifications overlap with the lists found in Paul's other letters. Second, Paul challenges Titus, as he did Timothy, to hold onto sound doctrine and to teach this same sound doctrine to his churches. These two functions, selecting leaders and teaching sound doctrine, seem to be the cornerstone responsibilities of every pastor.

Paul's second letter is written to a dear friend of his, a man named Philemon. The letter is the most personal of all of Paul's letters, dealing with a mutual relationship between these two friends. Yet, there is a clear principle about the proper relationship between workers and bosses, especially in light of the Lord. Our relationships should always be lived out first within the context of our place before Christ, only then followed by the context of our worldly place and positions.

□ Notes



Hebrews 1-5

The book of Hebrews is a beautiful case for the supremacy of Christ in God's plan for salvation. The unknown author makes his case as to why Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, and even to the high priests and the sacrifices they made in the temple, for satisfying God's need for justice in dealing with sin. This clarity of Christ's role, and work on behalf of God, helped the young and persecuted church find strength to continue in its obedience to the Gospel.

The writer says that if God's people continue faithfully in following Christ, if they continue in obedience, God will provide us a true Sabbath rest. This rest represents the rest we're to find on the seventh day of each week, but the true Sabbath rest the author speaks of is an eternal rest. The author writes, "Let us strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (4:11).

□ Notes

Hebrews 6-9

The Hebrew's author now addresses a question that's been debated for centuries and has divided churches and launched denominations. The question is, once a person's saved are they saved forever or can they lose their salvation? To truly answer this question we need to look at the other Scriptures that address this topic and not limit ourselves to just this passage. But, what this text does do for us is help us see what our lives should look like if we follow Christ, which in the end, is the most important question for us to answer.

Then, the author makes his case for why Jesus' priesthood is superior to that of the old covenant, followed by his case for why this new covenant is superior to the old one and ultimately, why Christ's one and final sacrifice is superior to the old covenant's repetitive sacrifices. In each case, the foundation for the author's arguments based on this idea that all that's a part of the old covenant is "a copy and shadow of heavenly things" (8:5). The old paves the way for the new by pointing us to Jesus Christ.

□ Notes

Hebrews 10-11

As the author indicated in the previous chapters, the Old Testament Law foreshadows better things to come and points us to its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. Next, he moves to the climax of his theological case for the supremacy of Christ. Jesus Christ, the one who is superior to the angels and Moses – the old covenant’s high priest – provides the sacrifice that once and for all pays for our sins and whose blood once and for all makes us perfect before God, “for by a single offering He has perfected for all times those who are being sanctified” (10:14).

So, what should our response be in light of His perfect sacrifice? We’re to respond in faith, faith being, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of the things not seen” (11:1). To encourage us in our faith, the author runs through a list of faithful people from the Old Testament, people looking forward to God’s promises in Christ. This great “roll call of faith” should inspire us to endure the sufferings of this present and temporary world because we know that we’ll be restored, along with these great saints, in the life to come.

□ Notes



Hebrews 12-13

Following this inspiring call to faith in Christ and His final sacrifice for our sins, the author describes what this faith looks like in our lives. He begins by challenging us to not “grow weary or fainthearted” (12:3) and then assures us of the eternal nature of the heavenly city compared to the temporary nature of our worldly cities. We don’t need to grow fainthearted because we believe God’s promise – there is a coming eternal city, where we will dwell forever in victory over sin and its consequences.

Finally, the author outlines our actions and behaviors at a practical level. They should be a practiced reality in our lives in light of this great gift (Christ’s death) and this great promise (life in this eternal city). The instructions include such challenges as being hospitable when the opportunity arises, to more grand challenges such as maintaining marriage’s sanctity. Our faith, like the faith of the ancients – those great witnesses now cheering us on – should direct every part and every moment of our lives.

□ Notes

James 1-5

The book of James was most likely written by the brother of Jesus to Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire (James 1:1). As a result, the letter has a very first century Jewish tone to it. In contrast, Paul's letters were written primarily to a Gentile audience. In particular, James addresses the tension found between faith and works – a tension that Jewish believers lived with at that time (and many Christians still live with today). Though it's been claimed that James had a significantly different opinion about faith and works than Paul did, if we read this letter closely, we'll see that James' and Paul's perspectives on this topic were not different at all, but instead, much the same. It was the language that they used that was different. This makes sense, considering the fact that they were both writing to two different audiences. But maybe the most relevant part of this letter, for us today, is the clear description James gives of what a life of faith looks like. For this reason alone, we should pay close attention to James and his letter.

□ Notes

I Peter 1-5

Today, we read the first of two letters found in the New Testament written by the Apostle Peter. As you may recall, Jesus appointed Peter as the first leader of the new Church (Matthew 16:18). In this letter, Peter writes to encourage believers facing suffering and persecution. First he encourages their faith by providing a great vision for who Christ is and who we're called to be in Christ. He describes Christ as the Living Stone, and through faith we also become "living stones being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus" (2:5). This faith in the Living Stone means we're to "honor everyone" (2:17) even in the midst of suffering. Finally, Peter reminds his readers that we shouldn't be surprised when suffering comes our way. Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trail when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you" (4:12). Because, we believe that God will ultimately bless us for our suffering (4:14).

□ Notes



II Peter 1-3

If you're ever tempted to complain about the Church's diligent watch over doctrine and theology, that somehow "this stuff isn't as important as just loving Jesus and loving others," remember what you read today in Peter's second letter. One of Peter's major concerns – maybe his greatest concern, at least expressed in this letter – is for the Church to protect itself from false teachers and their false teachings. Peter was also concerned, on the flip side of this issue, that the Church would begin to weaken its commitment to the sacredness of the Scriptures. Peter saw these two issues as directly linked to each other. If belief in and faithfulness to God's Word is compromised, then the Church opens itself up to the influence of false teachers by allowing their teachings to cast doubt on the Scripture's reliability and its acceptable interpretation. So, what is Peter's message to us? Read, know, and believe all of the Scriptures, and by doing so, we will protect ourselves from false teachers and their bent teachings.

□ Notes

I John 1-5

Besides Paul, the Apostle John was the most prolific writer of the New Testament books. He wrote one of the four Gospels, three letters, and the book of Revelation. John clearly has a style of writing which is poetic in nature, contrasted to Paul's direct style of communicating. As we read the next three letters and approach the book of Revelation it's helpful to identify the larger themes that John is addressing. By doing so, it helps to make sense of the individual sentences and phrases in his writings.

In this first letter the major theme is love – love for God and love for others. John then goes on to describe what the love of each looks like. For example, the love for God is expressed in obeying His commandments, which include believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and loving others. How are we to love others? In the same way God expressed His love for us. This entire letter beautifully expresses these themes in ways that are both memorable and convicting.

□ Notes

II and III John, Jude

John continues in his next two letters on the theme of love – love for God expressed in obedience to His commandments and love for others. John wrote these letters to two different people and each letter expresses a different application of love. John's second letter also warns against false teachers. This makes sense because it's easy, in our attempt to love others, to overlook the false teaching of others in an effort to embrace them. John challenges us to love, but to also be wary of false teachings. In John's third letter, he calls us to welcome and to honor those strangers in our midst who follow Christ. We're to support and encourage these people when they visit even if we don't know them personally.

Finally, Jude, who was James' brother and the author of this book, focuses on the familiar topic of false teachers. God is concerned about proper doctrine and theology and, through Jude, challenges us to watch out for those who deceive believers with their teachings. Jude then ends with one of the most beautiful songs found in all of Scripture, bringing a fitting end to his letter.

□ Notes

Revelation 1-3

We begin Revelation, the final book of the Bible written by the Apostle John while he was in exile on the Greek island of Patmos. It's a fitting book to conclude the Bible with because nearly 85% of its verses are either direct quotes or paraphrases of other verses found throughout the entire Bible. In other words, Revelation provides a great summary of the entire Bible. As a matter of fact, it's truly impossible to understand the book of Revelation without knowing or understanding the rest of the Bible. It's a great reminder of why it's important to read the entire Bible, not just sections of it.

The first three chapters contain letters written to seven churches found in what today is modern Turkey. These letters stand as an introduction to this powerful and challenging book. As we read each letter, we should be measuring ourselves against the Lord's expectation for these churches and asking ourselves, "Could any of these letters be written to me?" And if then asking ourselves, with the Spirit's aid, "What should I do if I find myself in one or more of these letters?"

□ Notes

Revelation 4-8

We quickly see that numbers are a very important part of the book of Revelation. In particular, the number seven is used a lot by John. He chooses the number seven because, in ancient Hebrew thinking, seven represented completeness and wholeness – often called the perfect number. Whenever we see the number seven, or sets of seven, we need to understand that John is trying to communicate completeness in reality or symbolism. For example, John writes to seven actual churches, but because he choose to write to just seven, we can understand that the letters are to the entire church – the complete church, not just those seven specific churches.

After these letters to the churches we have a prelude to another set of seven. This introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God – slain for the sins of the world, now sitting on His throne in heaven, worthy of our worship. Jesus then opens a scroll with seven seals (completely sealed) that only He is worthy of opening. After each seal is opened, a glimpse into the fallen world we currently live in is revealed. The sixth seal though, when opened, reveals the hope of those who remain faithful to the slain Lamb, now enthroned in heaven.

□ Notes

Revelation 9-12

As we continue in John's second set of sevens – trumpets – we should notice the growing intensity of activity against all the earth and its people. In particular, notice the detail before and after the seventh trumpet is sounded. This pattern of increasing intensity and detail provides more insight into the events that are currently happening in our world, and events that will still come, described at the climax of the book – the coming of Jesus and the new heaven and earth.

One of the things that will grow in intensity is the persecution of God's people. Notice in chapter 12 where the dragon (symbolizing Satan) attacks the woman (representing the Church) and her offspring (representing God's people). The dragon's pursuit is persistent. He's looking to destroy the woman and her children. But in the end, God protects the woman by assuring her escape from the dragon's deadly pursuit. This scene should give us hope, no matter our suffering, of God's ultimate protection of His Church and of His people.

□ Notes

Revelation 13-16

The confrontation between God and the evil forces of the world builds to its final and decisive end. There are three messages John intends for us to see and believe about the coming of our Lord Jesus, and with Him the new heaven and earth.

First, God wants all people to repent and acknowledge God as Lord and Savior. As the angel said in announcing to the whole world in 14:1, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of waters.”

Secondly, God will judge and punish those who refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord – refusing to bow to Him in worship. “So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores come upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image” (16:2).

Finally, God will save those who follow Him and trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. John represents these people with the 144,000 people found in verses 14:1-5.

□ Notes

Revelation 17-19

John's writing becomes more graphic and "other worldly" as he brings us closer to the end of his book and to this age of the world. We read of the downfall of the great prostitute and the beast followed by the downfall of Babylon. Each of these images represent our fallen world including the fallen culture (prostitute), fallen religion (the beast), and fallen government (Babylon), each facing God's judgment in God's time. John's intent was to give his readers hope that the evil we see so rampant in so much of the world will come to an end. God will prevail and evil will not. For God will carry forth His judgment and bring justice for the evil wrought.

When completed there will be a celebration in heaven and eventually on earth. The celebration reflects God's word fulfilled and the renewal and restoration of all things. Some of the chorus' found in chapter 19 are the most beautiful verses in all of the Scriptures. As you read them, take a moment and say them as prayers to a victorious God who assures that His plans are completed.

□ Notes

Revelation 20-22

We come to the end of the Bible, having read through it from the beginning we find it ends as it began – with a garden and some fruit bearing trees. From the moment in the beginning of the Bible when Adam and Eve fell from God’s grace, the entire story we just read is a story of redemption. God laying the groundwork to redeem His people and to redeem the world in which He created. The story ends with this complete redemption and restoration just as He had planned. And this is the hope we’re given in Revelation that Christ will return, He will bring justice to the world, He will restore the earth and redeem His people, and He will dwell among us, for God will now be with us as He was with Adam and Eve in the garden.

For this reason we join the “The Spirit and the Bride and say ‘come’. And let the ones who hear say ‘Come’. Come Lord Jesus, Come!”

□ Notes



□ Notes





About SpringHill Camps

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About Michael Perry

I'm married to Denise and we have four children, M.D., Christina, Mitch and Jonathan. I've worked for SpringHill Camps since 1998 and have been its President and CEO since 2001.

I graduated from Central Michigan University with a degree in Business Administration in 1984. I obtained my MA in Ministry Leadership at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary through Cornerstone University in May 2012.

Since my days at Central Michigan, I have made reading the Bible in its entirety a major commitment. This practice has made a significant personal difference in my life and I'm excited to help others live out this similar commitment.

Though I am not a Bible scholar or theologian, I have a deep love of the Scriptures and have taught it for over 15 years through adult Sunday school classes and retreat seminars. My goal is to inspire others to spend time in all of the Scriptures on a daily basis allowing the Scriptures to transform their lives and the world in which they live.

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