

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

Four men were charged with recording the events and teaching associated with the life of the Messiah, Christ Jesus of Nazareth. Each comes from a different background and communicates the gospel message from a unique perspective. The three gospels other than John are considered synoptic because the latter contains 92 percent information that is unique to John.

Matthew, or Levi (Mark 2:14), was an apostle, but had served as a Jewish tax collector for the hated Roman empire prior to his call. Matthew and his fellow publicans were generally despised by the Jewish populace for their perceived disloyalty, greed and collaboration with an infidel occupational force.

That is what makes the call of Matthew so provocative. Jesus early hints at the fact that he cares not for national pride or military resistance by choosing the best man for the office regardless of his political leanings. Interestingly, another of the apostles, Simon the Zealot, was a member of a party that sought to expel the Gentiles from Judah altogether.

Matthew does not identify himself in the book but early tradition connects him to it nonetheless. His name means “gift of God.”

Matthew might have written his account from Syrian Antioch between A.D. 58 and 68. His Hebrew background lends itself well to the deeply religious tone of his account. He emphasizes the fulfillment of prophecy in a series of messianic discourses. About 42 percent of his narrative is unique. Matthew is writing to Jewish readers who may still be curious about this alleged Messiah and to others who might be confused about the promise of the kingdom which appeared to many to be snuffed out at the cross.

THEMES

Matthew provides a very orderly gospel account, placing sections of his teaching neatly in between narratives about his activities. He quotes frequently from the Old Testament, making some 65 references to the Law and the Prophets.

His message focuses on the fact that Jesus was more than an “alleged” messiah or pretender to David’s throne. By weaving a thread through the life of Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew makes his case for the validity of that claim, giving his ethereal teaching, supernatural power and atoning death as evidence. Jesus is portrayed as a man unafraid to confront the corrupt religious establishment and prod the softer hearts toward restoration.

Matthew hangs upon the words of Jesus relating to the kingdom. The Jews were not only looking for a king, but for a restoration of the kingdom, which they supposed would occur when a second David or Gideon or Moses burst on the scene, mustered his forces and repelled the Gentiles. The prophetic plan for the kingdom, however, involved spiritual redemption and a kingdom unlike the ones of this world. Jesus was that king and the church he died to establish with his blood formed the population of that kingdom.

Even more unexpectedly, Jesus fulfills the Law of Moses and takes it out of the way at his cross, opening a path for these Gentile neighbors to join the Jewish readers in the kingdom of God. The sermon on the Mount occupies three chapters of this book, following a series of philosophical beatitudes with clear interpretations and extrapolations of the law. So many were stopping short of true compliance, either because they were poorly taught or just too casual about obedience.

Matthew traces the earthly life of Jesus from the dawn of creation to beyond the cross, where he prepares the apostles for the real revolution after his ascension. They would be commissioned to take the good news of redemption into all the world, changing the course of history.

The gospel according to Matthew provides the Christian with ready reminders of the source of his faith and teaching about the example and doctrine of his savior.

It invites the reader to brush up on the Old Testament, so that he can understand more fully the connection of Jesus to the messianic prophecies that preceded him.

Matthew directs the disciple of Christ to let the gospel message sink deeper into his heart, that his faith be not hypocritical or self-serving or short-lived, but far-reaching and effective.

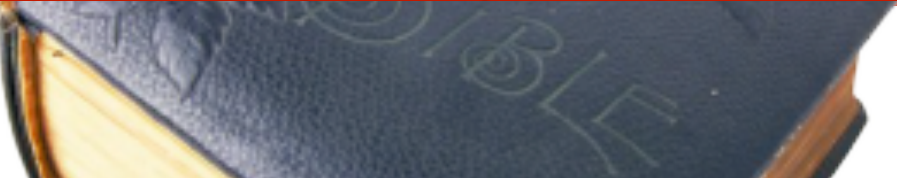
Its conclusion inspires the reader to get involved in the apostles’ commission to take the gospel into every community.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The Birth of Jesus Christ.....	1:1-25
2. Adoration and Advancement.....	2:1-23
3. His Baptism.....	3:1-17
4. Temptation and Inauguration.....	4:1-25
5. Sermon on the Mount: Beatitudes.....	5:1-16
6. Sermon on the Mount: You Have Heard.....	5:17-32
7. Sermon on the Mount: I Say To You.....	5:33-48
8. Sermon on the Mount: True Piety.....	6:1-18
9. Sermon on the Mount: Treasure in Heaven.....	6:19-34
10. Sermon on the Mount: Judge Not.....	7:1-12
11. Sermon on the Mount: The Narrow Gate.....	7:13-29
12. Power.....	8:1-34
13. Pardon.....	9:1-38
14. Preaching.....	10:1-42
15. Come To Me.....	11:1-30
16. Sabbath Controversy.....	12:1-37
17. See A Sign.....	12:38-50
18. Parable of the Sower.....	13:1-23
19. Parables of Great Price.....	13:24-52
20. Walk on Water.....	14:1-36
21. Scribes and Pharisees.....	15:1-39
22. Sadducees.....	16:1-28
23. Transfigured.....	17:1-27
24. Little Children.....	18:1-35
25. Life.....	19:1-30
26. In The Kingdom.....	20:1-34
27. The King.....	21:1-27
28. Rebellion.....	21:28-46
29. Rejection.....	22:1-46
30. The Pharisees.....	23:1-39
31. Coming of the Kingdom.....	24:1-35
32. End of the Age.....	24:36-51
33. Preparation.....	25:1-46
34. Passover.....	26:1-30
35. Betrayal.....	26:31-56
36. Hearings.....	26:57-75
37. Trials.....	27:1-26
38. Crucifixion.....	27:27-44
39. Death.....	27:45-66
40. Resurrection.....	28:1-20

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-25How was it righteous for Joseph to put Mary away secretly?
2. 2:1-23Were the magi justified in deceiving Herod?
3. 3:1-17Why is it necessary to bear worthy fruits to repentance?
4. 4:1-25Explain how Jesus resisted each temptation.
5. 5:1-16Summarize the beatitudes in a few, concise words.
6. 5:17-32Explain the distinction between abolition and fulfillment.
7. 5:33-48At what point, can one stop turning cheeks?
8. 6:1-18Summarize the teaching on alms, prayers and fasts.
9. 6:19-34What is the real problem with a Christian worrying?
10. 7:1-12Harmonize Matthew 7:15 with John 7:24.
11. 7:13-29Apply this passage to the doctrine of salvation by faith only.
12. 8:1-34What does authority have to do with the centurion's faith?
13. 9:1-38Which is easier—to forgive sins or heal lameness?
14. 10:1-42Explain being shrewd as serpents, but harmless as doves.
15. 11:1-30How does Jesus give rest to the weary and heavy-laden?
16. 12:1-37How is eating grain heads different from situation ethics?
17. 12:38-50Explain the sign of Jonah.
18. 13:1-23Discuss the four kinds of soils/hearts.
19. 13:24-52In summary, what is Jesus telling us about the kingdom?
20. 14:1-36Explain why John the immerser died.
21. 15:1-39What are some precepts of men that pass for doctrines?
22. 16:1-28Why is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees dangerous?
23. 17:1-27What was the point of Christ's transfiguration?
24. 18:1-35Who is greatest in the kingdom?
25. 19:1-30Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any cause?
26. 20:1-34Why does ambition always seem to engender strife?
27. 21:1-27Reconcile meekness with this temple cleansing.
28. 21:28-46What is the point of these parables?
29. 22:1-46What things belong to Caesar?
30. 23:1-39How would you characterize the scribes and Pharisees?
31. 24:1-35What event is Jesus foretelling in this section?
32. 24:36-51What event is Jesus foretelling in this section?
33. 25:1-46Which lasts longer—Heaven or Hell?
34. 26:1-30Why did this event prompt Iscariot to betray Jesus at last?
35. 26:31-56When is the spirit willing, but the flesh weak?
36. 26:57-75What might motivate someone today to deny Jesus?
37. 27:1-26Was Judas Iscariot's suicide evidence of repentance?
38. 27:27-44Why did Jesus not prove his deity and strike his accusers?
39. 27:45-66What is the benefit of securing the tomb?
40. 28:1-20What is your role in the Great Commission?



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John Mark was the son of a woman named Mary, apparently a woman of some means in Jerusalem, for the disciples met behind her gate to pray when Peter was about to be executed (Acts 12:12). History has closely linked the apostle Peter with both Mark and this gospel account and a notation at the end of the apostle's first epistle seems to support that (5:13).

John Mark also had the opportunity to travel with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25), but in his life's most noteworthy failure, he abandoned the mission in the middle in order to return home (Acts 13:13). This led to a rift between Paul and Barnabas and resulted in their separation as Mark then accompanied Barnabas on a preaching journey (Acts 15:36-41).

Mark seems to write for Gentile readers, especially among the Romans. He passes over the genealogy of the Lord, which would have had little impact upon those not schooled in the Old Testament, and leaves the condemnations of the Jewish sects to Matthew.

Mark might have written from Rome between A.D. 55 and 65. He writes like a journalist with very concise and pointed records of Christ's life. Mark emphasizes the redemptive work of Christ and the importance of serving God. The Roman pragmatist would have been likely to heed Mark's tone.

THEMES

Mark, the disciple who was probably influenced by an association with Peter, appears to have written the earliest account, followed by Matthew, the publican cum apostle. Matthew addresses a Jewish audience, but also pays some attention to Gentile readers, while emphasizing the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life of his subject.

Mark reveals the humanity of Christ, the son of God. He becomes a savior who is grieved, compassionate, troubled and optimistic, in spite of the resistance he discovers among his countrymen. His preferred title for the Lord is “son of Man.”

If the Petrine influence is true, John Mark records for us the apostle’s inspired memory of the actual Aramaic words spoken by Jesus Christ, including the memorable, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (15:34).

Interestingly, the passage that most promotes Peter’s strength and leadership is missing from this account. Matthew records the discussion of Peter’s good confession and the Lord’s promise to construct his church upon it, but John Mark does not.

Mark shows us that true doctrine is from God and that it does not always match what passes for common sense or human wisdom. The miracles done by Christ reveal and confirm his deity, even though he is somewhat uneasy with them being promoted to a populace that was not yet ready to consider him as such.

Sadly, Mark goes a long way to show that the stiffest resistance to reformation, restoration and true religion will often come from very religious people whose faith has been infected with tradition and pride. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and chief priests are all portrayed as terribly misguided in their persecution of the band and its leader.

Mark includes an insightful perspective on what is called the “Great Commission,” making the importance of both belief and baptism even more clear and connected (16:15-16). He concludes with a brief announcement of the ascension and the apostles’ obedience to their marching orders.

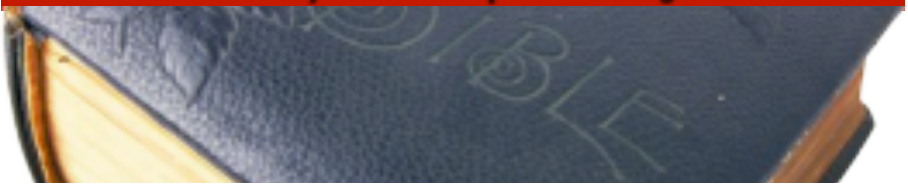
Mark’s account is the shortest and only seven percent of what he wrote is unique to his record. Mark, who may have written from Rome, seems to address a pragmatic Roman audience, and thus stresses the importance of service, not to the state, but to God himself. It is Mark who notes how Jesus was somewhat secretive about his identity and ministry because of the messianic misunderstandings so prevalent among his audience.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The Beginning of the Gospel	1:1-45
2. The Great Physician	2:1-28
3. A House Divided Cannot Stand.....	3:1-35
4. Parable of the Sower	4:1-20
5. Who Then Is This?	4:21-41
6. Power Over Demons	5:1-43
7. Rejections	6:1-29
8. Feeding Five Thousand	6:30-56
9. Tradition	7:1-37
10. Feeding Four Thousand.....	8:1-9:1
11. Transfiguration	9:2-29
12. Salt is Good	9:30-50
13. Preaching in Perea	10:1-52
14. Approaching Jerusalem	11:1-33
15. Greatest Commandment.....	12:1-44
16. No Stone Left Upon Another	13:1-37
17. Anointing.....	14:1-42
18. Betrayal	14:43-72
19. Crucifixion	15:1-47
20. Resurrection	16:1-20

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-45What was involved in becoming fishers of men?
2. 2:1-28.....Why didn't the Lord's disciples fast?
3. 3:1-35Who is the Lord's brother and sister and mother?
4. 4:1-20.....Why did Jesus teach in parables?
5. 4:21-41How is the kingdom like a mustard seed?
6. 5:1-43Why did the Gerasene people implore Jesus to leave them?
7. 6:1-29What led to the death of John the immerser?
8. 6:30-56Why were they so astonished when Jesus walked on water?
9. 7:1-37.....Why was Jesus reluctant to throw bread to the dogs?
10. 8:1-9:1.....What must be true if Mark 9:1 has failed?
11. 9:2-29Explain how all things are possible to him who believes.
12. 9:30-50How does Jesus describe Hell?
13. 10:1-52What disappointed the rich young ruler?
14. 11:1-33.....What kind of faith moves mountains?
15. 12:1-44.....What do we learn about the resurrection?
16. 13:1-37Why was Jesus so unimpressed with the temple's beauty?
17. 14:1-42.....Discuss the meaning of the Lord's Supper.
18. 14:43-72.....Why was Jesus not arrested in public?
19. 15:1-47What was signified when the temple veil tore?
20. 16:1-20What role do belief and baptism play in salvation?



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Luke is the accepted author of the gospel that has come to bear his name. Its introduction and the initial words in the Acts of the Apostles certainly connect the two works, and the eyewitness account in the latter is tied to the doctor who accompanied Paul on some of his preaching tours.

Luke was the beloved physician who became a disciple of Christ. He works more scientifically, giving a chronological outline of the Lord's life. Luke writes for the Greek idealist, stressing the perfection of the sacrifice and God's love for all. He probably wrote his gospel between A.D. 60 and 68. Tradition is that he was a Gentile who remained unmarried throughout life, dying at age 84. Although not a witness of the life of Christ, his inspiration, character and courage made him an indispensable historian nonetheless.

In the prologue, Luke states that he had investigated carefully the accounts of the life of Christ and had since decided to write out an orderly narrative of the things he had discovered. He addresses someone called Theophilus ("loved of God"), as he does in Acts as well (1:1-4).

Luke demonstrates that Jesus is the savior for all kinds of people, not just religious Jews, but their sinners and even those from other nations. Secondly, he shows that Christianity is not a threat to the empire, but perhaps its last, best hope. He records more about the Lord's childhood than any other writer and emphasizes individuals as well.

THEMES

If not for Matthew, Luke the physician would have the fullest account of all, but surely Luke can be credited for having a greatly chronological effort. Luke appears to address a Greek audience and stresses the idealism of the Christian system and the love of all men. When placed alongside his Acts of the Apostles, one has a history of the faith from the birth of the forerunner up to just before the demise of Jerusalem.

Luke is an excellent storyteller, in part due to his own ability, but also dependent upon divine inspiration of his account. He combines those elements with the information gleaned from his research and interviews to compile a very orderly and chronological record of the most important person ever to live.

Luke writes more of the parables, the individuals and the resurrection than any other writer. Although a physician, he is not afraid to soil his hands or his narrative with tales of very common people—those considered unworthy dogs and sinners by the Jewish religious establishment. He invites the forgotten, downtrodden and the pagan to consider Christ by concentrating upon children, women and social outcasts, especially as their lives intersected the Lord's.

Luke's gospel is a headline about the good news of salvation from sin and its wages. The miraculous birth of Christ is laid out in full terms and the availability of grace is advertised as available.

Luke sketches out the Lord's description of the kingdom, its imminent establishment, character and destiny. Careful readers can see the correlation between this gospel kingdom and the church that Christ died to found and purchased with his own blood.

Luke was a scientist and like most scientists up to the twentieth century, he was a believer in God, as well as in Christ his son. The good news of redemption was no fairy tale. The virgin birth, miracles, messages and resurrection were proof and evidence to this doctor that Jesus was real and worth believing in.

Luke writes often of the place of prayer in the life of Christ, including parables on the subject.

He emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ's ministry.

Luke attaches the natural joy at the birth of Christ to his biography, making room for inspired records of song and celebration.

Forgiveness is an important theme because it was a revolutionary and rather unexpected development as Gentiles expected nothing and Jews set their sights lower on military and political redemption.

Luke's gospel emphasizes equal opportunity for women and children, who had few legal rights in that age, but were on par with every man in the mind of Christ. Even social outcasts—sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors—are described as being invited to sit down with salvation.

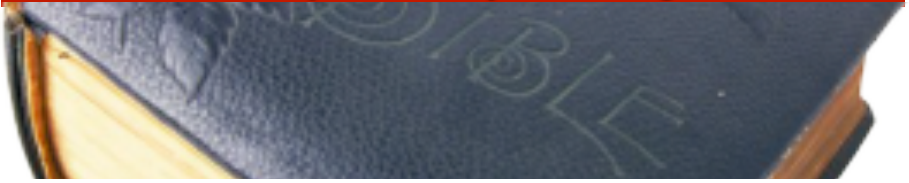
OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Birth Announcements	1:1-80
2. Childhood of Jesus	2:1-52
3. John's Ministry	3:1-38
4. Temptation of Jesus	4:1-13
5. Ministry Launched	4:14-44
6. Jesus Works Miracles	5:1-26
7. Calling of Levi	5:27-39
8. Sabbath	6:1-16
9. Preaching to the Crowd	6:17-49
10. Healing, Resurrection and Identity	7:1-35
11. The Sinful Woman in Simon's House	7:36-50
12. The Word of God	8:1-21
13. Three More Miracles	8:22-56
14. Missions	9:1-27
15. Transfiguration	9:28-50
16. The Cost	9:51-62
17. The Seventy	10:1-25
18. The Good Samaritan	10:25-42
19. Prayer, Spirits and Signs	11:1-36
20. Pharisees and Lawyers	11:37-54
21. Teaching a Great Crowd	12:1-59
22. Unless You Repent	13:1-35
23. Dinner with a Pharisee	14:1-24
24. Counting The Cost	14:25-35
25. The Lost	15:1-32
26. Money	16:1-31
27. Service	17:1-19
28. Coming of the Kingdom	17:20-37
29. Justice and Humility	18:1-17
30. The Rich Young Ruler	18:18-43
31. Zacchaeus	19:1-10
32. Parable of the Pounds	19:11-27
33. Entry Into Jerusalem	19:28-48
34. Teaching in the Temple	20:1-21:4
35. Jesus Tells The Future	21:5-38
36. The Last Supper	22:1-38
37. Betrayals	22:39-62
38. Trials	22:63-23:25
39. Crucifixion and Burial	23:26-56
40. Resurrection and Ascension	24:1-53

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-80.....What claims does the writer make about his account?
2. 2:1-52How do you reconcile Luke 2:14 with Matthew 10:34?
3. 3:1-38How did John apply the principle of repentance?
4. 4:1-13Why doesn't the devil ever give up?
5. 4:14-44Explain Isaiah's prophecy as it relates to Christ's ministry.
6. 5:1-26.....Why did Peter react so strongly to the miracle?
7. 5:27-39What did Jesus teach at Levi's house?
8. 6:1-16Can the Lord of the Sabbath break the Sabbath?
9. 6:17-49What distinguishes the wise house-builder from the fool?
10. 7:1-35How is wisdom vindicated by all her children?
11. 7:36-50.....What could the sinful woman have taught Simon?
12. 8:1-21.....What is the example set by Joanna, Susanna, et al.?
13. 8:22-56.....What is the power in the hem of his garment?
14. 9:1-27What is involved in taking up one's cross daily?
15. 9:28-50Why didn't the apostles understand the Lord's fate?
16. 9:51-62Why was Jesus not asking too much of these followers?
17. 10:1-25How did Satan fall like lightning from heaven?
18. 10:25-42What is the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan?
19. 11:1-36Explain the sign of Jonah.
20. 11:37-54Why was Jesus justified in insulting the lawyers?
21. 12:1-59Explain the parable of building bigger barns.
22. 13:1-35What is the kingdom of heaven like?
23. 14:1-24Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? Explain.
24. 14:25-35Explain why disciples should "hate" their parents, etc.
25. 15:1-32Explain the point of the three "lost" parables.
26. 16:1-31How does one make friends with unrighteous mammon?
27. 17:1-19What is the effect of considering oneself an unworthy slave?
28. 17:20-37Why must one remember Lot's wife?
29. 18:1-17Contrast the prayers of the Pharisee and publican.
30. 18:18-43Why is it hard for rich man to enter the kingdom?
31. 19:1-10.....Was Zacchaeus bragging or repenting?
32. 19:11-27What was the point of the parable of the pounds (minas)?
33. 19:28-48.....Do you think the disciples stole the colt?
34. 20:1-21:4.....Why would no one tell the origin of John's baptism?
35. 21:5-38What do all of these signs portend?
36. 22:1-38.....Which of the apostles was the greatest?
37. 22:39-62Did Jesus desire to escape the cross?
38. 22:63-23:25.....How much is Pilate to blame for the death of Jesus?
39. 23:26-56Was the thief saved by faith alone?
40. 24:1-53Did the Jews' rejection of Jesus come as a surprise to God?

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The author of the fourth gospel account is identified within the book only as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:20, 24). Because James had been killed before this book was apparently written, and Peter is associated with this particular disciple, the leading candidate is the apostle John, one of the sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). John is also credited with writing three Biblical letters and recording the Revelation of Jesus Christ at the latter end of his life, while on the island of Patmos.

John’s account is considered the most theological and personal of the four gospels. He clearly presents Jesus as divine and much more than mere man. He explains his purpose by way of conclusion in the twentieth chapter.

John possibly wrote from Ephesus between A.D. 80 and 90. His work is also quite structured, but contains much material that the others do not. He stresses the deity of Christ and His propitiatory offering. John seems to be the disciple whom Jesus especially loved and for that reason, perhaps, John’s gospel account is less public and more private and personal in tone. It eschews a recounting of Christ’s parables, favoring metaphors instead.

THEMES

While these three gospels are called synoptic for their similar approaches in summarizing the life of Christ, the gospel according to the apostle John is much more personal and private in its revelations. John, who is also the writer of three New Testament letters and the Revelation, speaks as a theologian and addresses a universal audience of thoughtful and compassionate listeners. He stresses the sacrifice of Christ on such a human level that it is impossible to miss the blood, sweat and tears of the cross. John does not record the parables of Christ so prevalent in the synoptic accounts and probably wrote the latest account of his friend's life.

Most memorable is the visit by night of Nicodemus to Jesus in which the Lord describes a new birth and informs us all that God so loved the world that Jesus was sent so men might believe and be saved rather than dying in their sins.

The relationship of Christ and Jehovah is important to John, who pictures them as Father and Son, often to the consternation of their enemies among the Jews who considered such words to be boastful blasphemy. Christ is more than a prophet, but is in fact, the Creator and intimately attached to God from eternity.

The death of Jesus is predicted in a way that makes clear it was no accident or coincidence, but was part of a plan to redeem men with a perfect sacrifice and to establish a new kind of kingdom.

John spends several chapters recording the last audience the Lord had with the apostles, in which he encouraged them to be faithful and loyal and promised them a Helper would appear after his departure. That Helper, the Holy Spirit, occupies much of this section and paves the way for the events of Pentecost.

John's gospel is sometimes called The Book of the Seven Signs because the writer chose to include seven signs to paint a portrait of the Messiah. He turns water into wine (2:1-11), cures a nobleman's son (4:46-54) and a paralytic (5:1-18), feeds a multitude (6:6-13), walks on water (6:16-21), restores sight to the blind (9:1-7) and raises Lazarus (11:1-45).

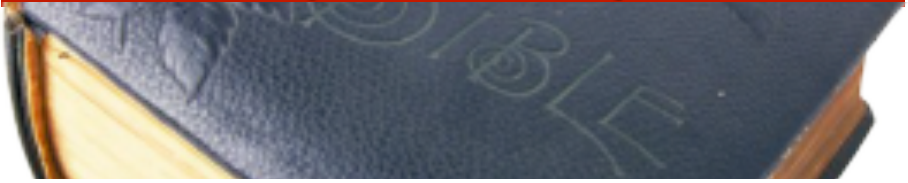
OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Incarnation	1:1-18
2. Anything Good	1:19-51
3. Wedding in Cana of Galilee	2:1-11
4. Temple in Jerusalem	2:12-25
5. Nicodemus	3:1-21
6. John the Baptizer	3:22-36
7. Samaritan Woman at the Well	4:1-54
8. Pool of Bethesda	5:1-18
9. Testimony	5:19-47
10. Passover in Galilee	6:1-21
11. Discourse on the Miracle	6:22-52
12. Flesh and Blood	6:53-71
13. Feast of Tabernacles	7:1-52
14. Light of the World	7:53-8:30
15. Freedom	8:31-59
16. Man Born Blind	9:1-41
17. Good Shepherd	10:1-18
18. Feast of Dedication	10:19-42
19. Anointing by Mary	11:55-12:19
20. Lifted Up	12:20-50
21. Lord and Servant	13:1-38
22. Jesus and the Father	14:1-31
23. The Vine	15:1-27
24. The Comforter	16:1-33
25. The Prayer of Jesus	17:1-26
26. Betrayal	18:1-27
27. Pilate	18:28-19:16
28. Crucify	19:17-42
29. Resurrection	20:1-31
30. Ascension	21:1-25

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-18..In the beginning of creation, who was Jesus and where was he?
2. 1:19-51Why did John baptize, considering that he was not Christ?
3. 2:1-11Discuss whether Jesus helped to intoxicate these people.
4. 2:12-25How do you reconcile Christ's behavior with meekness?
5. 3:1-21...Explain what it means to be born again of water and the Spirit.
6. 3:22-36Explain John's bridegroom illustration.
7. 4:1-54What is living water and how do we obtain it?
8. 5:1-18.....Discuss whether or not Jesus broke the Sabbath.
9. 5:19-47.....How does Jesus foresee Judgment Day?
10. 6:1-21.....Why were the diners intent on forcing Jesus to the throne?
11. 6:22-52What fault did Jesus expose in their faith?
12. 6:53-71What is it that drove away so many?
13. 7:1-52Discuss the arrogance of the Pharisees.
14. 7:53-8:30How did Jesus avoid condoning sin without condemning?
15. 8:31-59When is truth liberating?
16. 9:1-41Is the man correct when he says God does not hear sinners?
17. 10:1-18.....What is abundant life?
18. 10:19-42Who were the gods that Jesus mentioned (Psalm 82:6)?
19. 11:55-12:19.....Why did Jesus refuse to rebuke the crowd of disciples?
20. 12:20-50What will judge a man in the last day?
21. 13:1-38Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet?
22. 14:1-31What is the relationship between love and obedience?
23. 15:1-27Who are the vine, branches, vinedresser and fruit?
24. 16:1-33What was to be the work of the Comforter?
25. 17:1-26How is unity obtained?
26. 18:1-27Why was it expedient for one man to die for the nation?
27. 18:28-19:16.....What did Pilate mean by asking about truth?
28. 19:17-42What is a secret disciple?
29. 20:1-31Describe Thomas's epiphany.
30. 21:1-25What was Jesus trying to communicate to Peter?

New Testament Study Guide: Acts of the Apostles



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The book is addressed to Theophilus, as Luke had also addressed his gospel account. Theophilus means “lover of God” in Greek and may, therefore, refer to an anonymous individual or someone who actually bore that good name. Effectively, the book is addressed to all of every age who love Jehovah and seek to understand the scheme of redemption and the pattern for the New Testament church.

The author is determined to be the beloved physician, Luke, one of Paul’s traveling companions (Acts 16:10, Second Timothy 4:11). Luke’s scientific and analytical nature and education bring to bear a detailed study of every aspect of this history.

The purpose of this epistle is to complete a two volume historical set on the life of Christ and the church he built. Luke’s gospel closes with an emphasis on Christ’s ascension; Acts opens with an account of this event and its effect on the apostles.

At a loss as to what they should do now, two heavenly men and the Holy Spirit map out their first steps. The apostles replenish their number and then begin taking the urgent gospel message to a dying world, beginning on Pentecost in Jerusalem.

This book is actually some of the acts of some of the apostles. The greater number of them was not with Luke and so their work is more obscure to us. Peter is the main character in the first twelve chapters, but the remarkable conversion of former persecutor Saul of Tarsus makes him the leading man thereafter.

Acts shows us the scheme of redemption at work as the preached gospel converts men to Jesus. Numerous conversion accounts are recorded, creating a pattern for preaching and obedience that has lasted ever since.

The book is also valuable in that explains the nature, organization, work and worship of the church to which we claim to be a part.

THEMES

The Acts of the Apostles appears to be a sequel to Luke's gospel account and picks up at the point of Christ's ascension back into heaven as the apostles and disciples wait for guidance concerning what to do next.

As promised, the Holy Spirit arrives to remind them of Christ's doctrine and to lead them into further truth. Immediately, redemption through the blood of the savior becomes the overriding theme of the book and the church's mission. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, audiences as small as one and as large as many thousands are instructed to believe the truth about Jesus, turn from their sins, confess their faith publicly and courageously, and then be baptized for the remission of sins. The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs just twice, once upon Jews (the apostles in Acts 2) and then upon Gentiles (Cornelius's household in Acts 10), fulfilling Joel's prophecy and making the gift of the Holy Spirit (his presence and grace) possible for all of mankind.

The word "witness" is used at least 30 times in the book, showing that the early church used the eyewitness testimony of the apostles and others to assert that this same Jesus was resurrected from the dead and is the savior of the world. Eschewing a social or recreational gospel, the various congregations appointed their own overseers and attended to a spiritual mission centered around the forgiveness of sins.

Our English word "martyr" comes from the same root as witness and the Acts shows how often professing Christ could bring about persecution and even martyrdom. Yet this willingness to die for one's beliefs is surely also good reason for heathen and Jewish audiences to consider the faith more seriously—if some are willing to give their lives for it, there must be something to it. If we are failing to take risks for our faith, we should not be surprised if the lost understand that our beliefs really don't mean that much to us.

The governing and practice of the early church becomes an obvious pattern. Outside of Jerusalem where the apostles were, local congregations appointed overseers (known variously as elders, pastors, bishops and presbyters) and deacons (or servants) and labored with evangelists and other teachers. Worship consisted of prayers, singing, the Lord's Supper and a monetary contribution for needy saints. No pope was selected and no denomination was established; they were simply churches of Christ.

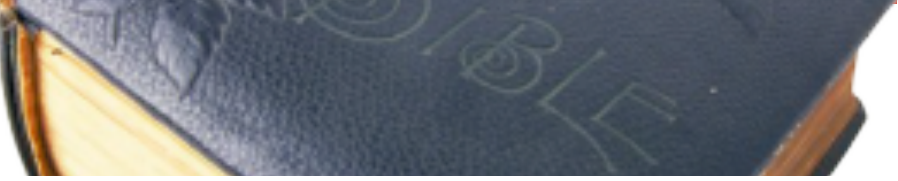
Out of this book springs forth a seminal character in church history. Paul emerges from among the fiercest persecutors of the church to become its most tireless proponent, abandoning his influence and prosperity within Judaism to embrace Christ and risk his life preaching him. His efforts take him around the known world and put him in extremely dangerous predicaments, but as the book concludes he is still going strong. His dedication is an example for all those who wear the same blessed name of Christ.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Ascension	1:1-26
2. Spirit Comes	2:1-21
3. Church Established	2:22-47
4. Apostles' Witness	3:1-26
5. Peter and John Imprisoned	4:1-31
6. Generosity	4:32-5:11
7. Imprisoned Again	5:12-42
8. Hebrews and Hellenists	6:1-7
9. Stephen Martyred	6:8-8:3
10. Philip in Samaria	8:4-25
11. The Ethiopian Eunuch	8:26-40
12. Saul is Converted	9:1-30
13. Aeneas and Dorcas	9:31-43
14. Cornelius is Converted	10:1-48
15. Peter's Defense	11:1-18
16. Antioch	11:19-30
17. James and Peter	12:1-25
18. First Missionary Journey	13:1-14:28
19. Meeting in Jerusalem	15:1-40
20. Second Missionary Journey	16:1-17:14
21. Paul in Athens	17:15-34
22. Paul in Corinth	18:1-28
23. Paul in Ephesus	19:1-41
24. Journey to Jerusalem	20:1-21:16
25. Paul on Trial	21:17-23:32
26. Defense Before Felix	23:33-24:27
27. Defense Before Festus	25:1-21
28. Defense Before Agrippa	25:22-26:32
29. Voyage to Rome	27:1-28:16
30. Paul in Rome	28:17-31

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-26What is the scriptural authority for apostolic succession?
2. 2:1-21What is described by the phrase “last days”?
3. 2:22-47Is it possible to be saved outside of the church?
4. 3:1-26Does it make any difference if someone sins ignorantly?
5. 4:1-31What does it take to speak the word of God with boldness?
6. 4:32-5:11What is the difference between Barnabas and the couple?
7. 5:12-42How do we apply the example of obeying God before men?
8. 6:1-7How can we aspire to have necessary qualities of these men?
9. 6:8-8:3How did Stephen arouse the hatred of the Freedmen?
10. 8:4-25Why didn't Philip just give them the Holy Spirit?
11. 8:26-40Why didn't Philip just sprinkle a little water on his head?
12. 9:1-30At what point is Paul evidently saved from his sins?
13. 9:31-43Why did Peter raise Dorcas from the dead?
14. 10:1-48How many babies were baptized in Cornelius's household?
15. 11:1-18...What convinced Peter's accusers he had done the right thing?
16. 11:19-30For whom was this collection to be raised?
17. 12:1-25Why is flattering such a bittersweet experience?
18. 13:1-14:28Why did Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles?
19. 15:1-40Why is this not the first worldwide denominational conference?
20. 16:1-17:14Why did Timothy circumcise Timothy, but not Titus?
21. 17:15-34In what ways did people respond to the resurrection?
22. 18:1-28What difference did Apollos' sincerity make?
23. 19:1-41What caused the great commotion about the Way?
24. 20:1-21:16What made Paul feel innocent of the blood of all men?
25. 21:17-23:32Why did Paul's attempt to placate the Jews backfire?
26. 23:33-24:27What made Felix afraid?
27. 25:1-21Why did Paul appeal to Caesar?
28. 25:22-26:32Why wasn't Agrippa's belief enough to save him?
29. 27:1-28:16How did Luke feel when the sun and stars were lost?
30. 28:17-31How did Paul spend his next two years in prison?



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the books of Galatians and Hebrews, the letter to the Romans forms a three-part effort at dispelling the controversy and misunderstanding simmering over the old and new covenants. Hebrews goes to great lengths in asserting that Jewish converts to Christ should remain faithful because the new covenant is better and is the substance of God’s plan, whereas the old was simply its shadow. Galatians assaults the Judaizing teacher with clear evidence that one need not keep the law of Moses to be a Christian. Romans completes that model as it teaches that no one can be saved by doing works of the old law; rather one is saved when he lives by faith in the Savior.

It may be that the Roman church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost, for there were citizens of that city present when Peter preached his first lesson (Acts 2:10). As Paul writes, he had not yet visited the city himself, though he was acquainted with many of the saints that lived there.

It seems clear that this epistle was penned from Corinth as the apostle was engaged in collecting benevolence funds for the needy brethren in Jerusalem (15:25-26, 16:23). This would date the epistle about the year A.D. 57 in origin at the end of his third missionary journey (15:25, Acts 20:2-3).

Throughout the first century church, the Judaizing element was very strong and dangerous. They demanded that male Gentile converts to Christianity undergo circumcision and keep other tenets of the old law to be considered faithful.

The letter is composed with two major sections, that are first theological (1:18-11:36), and practical (12:1-15:13). The introduction and conclusion fill out the remaining verses in the book. Where James stresses that one cannot be saved by faith alone, Paul emphasizes that one cannot be saved by a meritorious observance of the law of Moses either. For both writers, salvation is by grace through obedient faith.

THEMES

Unlike James's audience, Paul's is more apt to be tempted by the idea of self-attained righteousness through excellent, if imperfect keeping of the Law of Moses. Paul is determined to show them all sin and fall short, so that the wages of sin, which is death, is unavoidable, even if for the excellent keeper of the Law, as Paul was himself. The answer, then, is Christ Jesus, whose death and resurrection provide for the free gift of eternal life.

Some take this message to such an extreme that they place all responsibility for salvation on God and take none for themselves. James speaks to that audience whose faith is not only weak, but dead through inactivity, yet Paul is not responsible for the misunderstanding. He stresses the function of water baptism in chapter six, arguing that the faith is something for man to obey as well (1:5, 16:26).

Paul distinguishes between the law of works and the law of faith, or the Spirit (3:27, 8:2). Both are laws, yet the first exposes man's need for grace while the second supplies that grace. Paul acknowledges that God is no respecter of persons by identifying Gentile idolatry and Jewish hypocrisy as equal problems. Like James, he uses Abraham as an illustration, but here to show that man cannot effect his own salvation through perfect law-keeping.

Justification by faith is a major theme throughout the letter and unless harmonized with James's assertion that justification is not effected by faith only, a clear conflict would exist and the inspiration of the Scriptures would become dubious. Truly, there is harmony, for Paul is arguing against justification by Mosaic perfectionism, not obedience to faith and that form of doctrine by which men are delivered from doom.

Because the doctrine of Christ led some to believe that he was disdaining Moses and Hebrew history, Paul the Jew goes to great lengths to reach out to his countrymen and invite them to see that Jesus is the logical messianic progression toward redemption.

The final few chapters are much more practical in nature as they call upon believers to present themselves as living sacrifices each day before God. Relationships with other saints, the government and unbelievers are described in ways that reflect the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The fourteenth chapter instructs the racially-divided Roman congregation to find peace in Christ without bickering over cultural matters about which God was generally indifferent. The fulfillment and removal of the Law of Moses becomes even more obvious as circumcision, holy days and the eating of meat cease to be questions of fellowship.

Even Paul's conclusion is of great interest. He elevates women in the sight of God to a very useful place, even commending Phoebe as a great servant of the congregation in Cenchræa. Lastly, he warns against those who would divide the church with false doctrine because of their greed.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Introduction	1:1-17
2. Gentile Iniquity	1:18-32
3. Jewish Iniquity	2:1-16
4. God's Judgment	2:17-29
5. All Sin	3:1-18
6. God's Way	3:19-31
7. Abraham's Illustration	4:1-12
8. God's Promise	4:13-25
9. Salvation's Blessings	5:1-21
10. Dead to Sin	6:1-14
11. Slaves.....	6:15-23
12. Life in the Flesh	7:1-25
13. Life in the Spirit	8:1-17
14. Future Blessings	8:18-30
15. God Is For Us	8:31-39
16. The Promise.....	9:1-13
17. God's Mercy	9:14-33
18. Self-Righteousness	10:1-13
19. Israel Rejected Jesus.....	10:14-21
20. Mercy Toward Israel.....	11:1-10
21. Israel's Salvation	11:11-36
22. Living Sacrifices.....	12:1-13
23. Life Among Unbelievers	12:14-21
24. Government.....	13:1-7
25. Love Fulfills the Law	13:8-14
26. Unity and Liberty	14:1-13
27. Do Not Be a Stumbling Block.....	14:14-23
28. Consideration of Others.....	15:1-13
29. Plans	15:14-33
30. Conclusion	16:1-27

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-17What does it mean to “live by faith”?
2. 1:18-32Why are unbelievers “without excuse”?
3. 2:1-16How do Gentiles “by nature” do the things of the Law?
4. 2:17-29How are we susceptible to the same brand of hypocrisy?
5. 3:1-18What advantage then has the Jew?
6. 3:19-31Does justification by faith forbid conditional salvation?
7. 4:1-12.....How do you reconcile what Paul says with James 2:14-26?
8. 4:13-25What is imputation?
9. 5:1-21How did sin spread to all men?
10. 6:1-14Describe how baptism imitates and initiates into his death.
11. 6:15-23Explain what is meant by “not under law, but grace”.
12. 7:1-25Summarize the struggle that Paul is describing.
13. 8:1-17What does it take to be spiritually minded?
14. 8:18-30How does the Spirit help in our weaknesses?
15. 8:31-39What can separate us from the love of God?
16. 9:1-13What is meant: “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated”?
17. 9:14-33Since this is true, how does God have the right to judge us?
18. 10:1-13Why is ignorant zeal so dangerous?
19. 10:14-21Discuss the value of a preacher.
20. 11:1-10Why and how did God blind the non-elect?
21. 11:11-36.....How does Paul warn Gentiles that apostasy is a threat?
22. 12:1-13What is involved in the “renewing of your mind”?
23. 12:14-21Is it easier to weep or rejoice with those who do?
24. 13:1-7.....Why must we be subject to governing authorities?
25. 13:8-14.....How is love the fulfillment of the law?
26. 14:1-13What are the limitations of this tolerance?
27. 14:14-23.....How far should I go to avoid causing a brother to stumble?
28. 15:1-13Discuss Paul’s prayer in verse 13.
29. 15:14-33Why had Paul not yet visited Rome?
30. 16:1-27 ..How do we remain simple concerning evil, but wise in good?

New Testament Study Guide: First Corinthians

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The book of First Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul (1:1, 16:21) and addressed to the church in Corinth. It was likely written around the year A.D. 55, during Paul's third missionary journey. Since he was planning his departure according to chapter 16, it was probably during the last of his three years in Ephesus that he wrote this impressive letter. Tertius was his amanuensis, or secretary (16:22).

Because of Venus's supposed presence, the city was given to sexual immorality and her temple boasted a hundred priestesses dedicated to harlotry. Even the most immoral cities and people of the world looked down on Corinth for her vice. Corinth had been founded as a Roman colony during the years before Christ's birth, being strategically located between the Aegean and Adriatic seas, making it an ideal hub for the trade routes between east and west. This resulting prosperity, however, led to excessive lifestyles of luxury and immoral experimentation. "To live like a Corinthian" became an axiom for the immoral lifestyle.

The establishment of a church in this most inhospitable moral climate is described by the historian Luke in Acts chapter 18. Paul arrived there from Athens and found Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and he began persuading both Jews and Greeks to accept Christ, initially by preaching in the synagogues where Jews assembled on the Sabbath for worship. Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia and notable converts included Justus who lived next to the synagogue and Crispus who ruled it. Paul remained there for 18 months in spite of terrific opposition from the local Jews.

First Corinthians is apparently a response by Paul to some written questions that had been forwarded to him, as well as some information he had received from other sources concerning the church's difficulties. Serious doctrinal, moral and ethical problems had arisen, causing the infant congregation to splinter.

THEMES

First Corinthians has perhaps more distinct themes than any letter in the New Testament. It is Paul's observations and responses to the numerous troubles the church there was experiencing.

Beginning with the disturbing practice of idolizing their preachers, Paul attempts to remind the saints that they are to seek unity of doctrine and brotherhood. When he thanks God that he did not personally baptize more of them, it is not within some context diminishing the importance of immersion, but rather that they could not use that to perpetuate their idolization of him, Apollos, Peter and perhaps others. Their sectarian efforts hint at what Protestantism has eventually done to the body of Christ.

The contrast between wisdom and folly abounds early in the book as Paul describes the power that comes through God and his word and the ways in which men attempt to follow their own version of wisdom, which is utterly weak by comparison.

Seven questions that begin, "Do you not know?" pepper chapters five and six. These form seven evident principles that believers forget to their own destruction because they should be fairly obvious.

Persecution of the early church created what Paul called a "present distress" and led him, along with other reasons, to caution against the challenges of marriage. Divorce was already a booming business and Paul issues a series of commandments that the modern world often finds difficult to uphold. Marriage is still one man for woman for life, and only adultery is an exception to that.

As in Rome, the interaction of formerly pagan Gentile Christians and their Hebrew brethren also provides impetus for disorder. Paul's instructions mirror those in Romans—the strong and weak should respect one another because the kingdom is not about eating and drinking and idols are nothing.

The matter of spiritual gifts and worship within the church was designed to foster unity, but without love as a motivation, even such blessings can be warped into curses. Women are especially singled out for their proper behavior in worship assemblies. Supernatural gifts took many forms, but without love, they were not being used to God's ultimate glory.

The importance of the resurrection to our faith is underscored as the book concludes. Although moderns may have difficulty accepting such a miracle, without it, all hope is lost. Paul describes the resurrection of Christ and uses it to foretell the resurrection of all believers when he returns, a subject that is treated in even more detail in First Thessalonians and Second Peter.

Paul's final chapter introduces a theme common to Second Corinthians—the matter of Christian giving into a collection made by the church, at first for benevolent needs but also applicable to the costs associated with assembling, evangelism and edification.

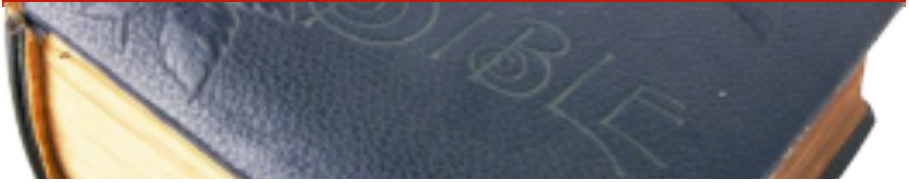
OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Introduction	1:1-9
2. Divisive Parties	1:10-17
3. Gospel Power	1:18-2:5
4. Divine Revelation	2:6-16
5. Carnal Christians	3:1-23
6. Faithful Preacher	4:1-21
7. Church Discipline.....	5:1-13
8. Lawsuits.....	6:1-11
9. Misuse of the Body	6:12-20
10. Marriage and Sexuality	7:1-9
11. Marriage and Divorce.....	7:10-16
12. Spiritual Contentment	7:17-24
13. Marriage During That Present Distress	7:25-40
14. Principles of Spiritual Liberty	8:1-13
15. Paul's Example.....	9:1-27
16. Pilgrims' Example	10:1-13
17. Christian and Idol Feasts	10:14-22
18. Applying Christian Liberty	10:23-11:1
19. Women In Worship	11:2-16
20. The Lord's Supper	11:17-34
21. Spiritual Gifts That Differ	12:1-11
22. Spiritual Gifts and Unity	12:12-31
23. Love is Better	13:1-13
24. Prophecy and Tongues.....	14:1-19
25. Regulating Gifts	14:20-40
26. Christ's Resurrection and Ours.....	15:1-11
27. Resurrection of Believers	15:12-34
28. Resurrection Body	15:35-58
29. Giving.....	16:1-4
30. Conclusion	16:5-24

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-9What is involved in “eagerly waiting” for the return of Christ?
2. 1:10-17Why do Paul’s arguments support the necessity of baptism?
3. 1:18-2:5How do Christians, Jews and Greeks see the cross?
4. 2:6-16What is said about the inevitability of the crucifixion?
5. 3:1-23What is our role and God’s role in converting souls?
6. 4:1-21What is the significance of calling a minister a steward?
7. 5:1-13What part of withdrawal should have great impact?
8. 6:1-11What should litigious brethren do?
9. 6:12-20What happens to the body of a Christian who fornicates?
10. 7:1-9Under what circumstances may one suspend conjugal duties?
11. 7:10-16 ...If such a couple separates, what is to be the conduct of each?
12. 7:17-24What is the theme of this passage?
13. 7:25-40What was the “present distress” Paul wrote about?
14. 8:1-13Why does knowledge puff up and love edify?
15. 9:1-27Did Paul think it possible he could forfeit his own salvation?
16. 10:1-13What is the danger in thinking you stand?
17. 10:14-22 ...What is the modern application of drinking these two cups?
18. 10:23-11:1How does this passage compare to Romans 14?
19. 11:2-16What was the purpose of the veil?
20. 11:17-34Do the bread and wine literally become flesh and blood?
21. 12:1-11What kinds of natural abilities do we possess today?
22. 12:12-31What is the point of this illustration?
23. 13:1-13When were supernatural gifts due to expire?
24. 14:1-19Why did Paul consider prophecy to be superior to tongues?
25. 14:20-40What is meant by women keeping silent in church?
26. 15:1-11How does Paul help his effort to establish his apostleship?
27. 15:12-34What is true if Christ was not resurrected?
28. 15:35-58How does Paul describe the resurrection body?
29. 16:1-4Why is this example binding and authoritative?
30. 16:5-24How does love perfect our efforts to watch and stand fast?

New Testament Study Guide: Second Corinthians



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Second Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul (1:1, 16:21) and addressed to the church in Corinth. It was likely written around the year A.D. 55, about six months to a year after he sent the first letter.

Because of Venus's supposed presence, the city was given to sexual immorality and her temple boasted a hundred priestesses dedicated to harlotry. Even the most immoral cities and people of the world looked down on Corinth for her vice. Corinth had been founded as a Roman colony during the years before Christ's birth, being strategically located between the Aegean and Adriatic seas, making it an ideal hub for the trade routes between east and west. This resulting prosperity, however, led to excessive lifestyles of luxury and immoral experimentation. "To live like a Corinthian" became an axiom for the immoral lifestyle.

The establishment of a church in this most inhospitable moral climate is described by the historian Luke in Acts chapter 18. Paul arrived there from Athens and found Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and he began persuading both Jews and Greeks to accept Christ, initially by preaching in the synagogues where Jews assembled on the Sabbath for worship. Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia and notable converts included Justus who lived next to the synagogue and Crispus who ruled it. Paul remained there for 18 months in spite of terrific opposition from the local Jews.

Second Corinthians is a more positive letter than its predecessor because the church had responded with contrition and action. Paul is happily able to write and commend the church for doing the right things, but he also renews his warnings about false apostles who were threatening the congregation. He continues to urge them to complete their offering for the needy saints in Judea as well.

THEMES

Second Corinthians is an intensely personal letter as it describes the improvement in Paul's relationship with the deeply troubled congregation.

One of the chief issues in First Corinthians was the church's tolerance of a member who had married his stepmother. Not only were they reluctant to do anything about his behavior, they actually seemed proud of how tolerant they were being. After Paul's commands, however, they withdrew themselves from him and it becomes apparent that he had repented. Now Paul has to tell them to renew their fellowship with him.

Throughout the letter, Paul is compelled to prove his apostleship to the church that was being invaded by false apostles who denied Paul's authority and exerted their own insidious influence. These false ministers taught a false gospel and Paul contrasts its fleshly message with the spiritual gospel that he had taught them in person and in letter. Paul confesses to being jealous over the church's affection because they were being wooed away by those who taught error.

The discouragement and disappointment that Paul felt regarding the troubled church prevails throughout Second Corinthians. Along with the persecution he suffered, the fact that these beloved brethren had come to doubt and even rebuff him was a source of great emotional pain. Still, in sizing up his sacrifices and hardships, he was thankful to serve Christ and to be able to look forward to eternity in Heaven.

As in Romans and Galatians, if not also in Hebrews where his authorship is questionable, Paul uses Second Corinthians to contrast the old and new covenants, arguing for the superiority of the latter. The glory that faded away in Moses's era was intended to be permanent and deeper through Christ. In spite of the hardships in this tent—this life—the hope of heaven should renew the spirit day by day.

The collection to aid the needy saints in Judea is brought up again and Paul's words help to form the pattern by which Christians give to the work of the local church even today. The first letter specified that a collection should be made each Sunday, but this letter gets more to the attitude that must be behind such sacrifice.

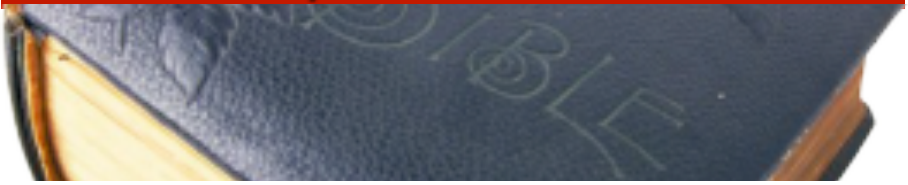
A compelling part of the letter takes up much of chapter twelve where the apostle humbly broaches the subject of a spiritual journey into the third heaven, or the abode of God. He acknowledges the temptation to take pride in such insight, but states that a certain thorn in his flesh was provided to keep him humble—a messenger of Satan which God refused to remove in spite of Paul's pleas. The thorn seems to represent something other than the literal, but its exact identity is unknown, although there is some evidence that Paul did have a physical malady—possibly regarding his eyesight (Galatians 4:13-14).

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Salutation	1:1-11
2. Canceled Visit	1:12-24
3. Forgiveness.....	2:1-17
4. Ministry of the Spirit	3:1-11
5. Where the Spirit of the Lord Is.....	3:12-18
6. We Do Not Lose Heart	4:1-6
7. Strength in Suffering	4:7-15
8. Future Glory	4:16-5:10
9. Ministry of Reconciliation	5:11-6:13
10. Unequally Yoked	6:14-7:1
11. Joy Over Reconciliation	7:2-16
12. Benevolence	8:1-15
13. Giving.....	8:16-24
14. Ministry to the Saints	9:1-15
15. Paul Defends His Apostleship	10:1-18
16. Marks of Apostleship.....	11:1-15
17. Christ in Paul	11:16-33
18. Thorn in the Flesh	12:1-10
19. Unselfishness.....	12:11-21
20. Preparation for Paul's Visit	13:1-14

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-11Explain the connection between suffering and consolation.
2. 1:12-24How was the Spirit given to them an earnest of salvation?
3. 2:1-17Who is probably the one they were to renew their love for?
4. 3:1-11How does the letter kill, but the Spirit give life?
5. 3:12-18Why did Moses veil his face?
6. 4:1-6How is the gospel veiled to those who are perishing?
7. 4:7-15How do we manifest Christ in our bodies today?
8. 4:16-5:10Explain how we walk by faith and not by sight.
9. 5:11-6:13What must become of the old man and his deeds?
10. 6:14-7:1What does this passage have to do with marriage?
11. 7:2-16Contrast godly sorrow with worldly sorrow.
12. 8:1-15Summarize how should our giving be characterized.
13. 8:16-24How might we imitate this example today?
14. 9:1-15Explain the law of sowing and reaping.
15. 10:1-18What are the weapons of our warfare?
16. 11:1-15What is the danger in judging things by appearances?
17. 11:16-33How is Paul being facetious in this passage?
18. 12:1-10Explain how strength is perfected in weakness.
19. 12:11-21Why did Paul wrong them by not burdening them?
20. 13:1-14How is it possible to become disqualified from the faith?



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The book is addressed to the Galatians, residents of the Roman province that included the cities of Antioch, Lystra, Derbe and Iconium, which Paul visited on each of his first two missionary journeys (Acts 13-14, 16). Galatia was dominated by the Gauls at one time and it is from these ancient Frenchmen that the region draws its name. Like so many others, however, Galatia eventually was taken by Rome. Julius Caesar described the Galatians as a people who are “fickle in their resolves and fond of change ... not to be trusted.”

If Caesar’s criticism was on the mark, it could be that the basic nature of the region’s impulsiveness and vanity also invaded the churches. Paul, however, was impressed with the manner in which they received him, even in his physical shortcoming (4:14-16). Still, the church faced doctrinal confusion when Judaizing teachers challenged their reliance on the Lord instead of the Old Law.

The purpose of this epistle is to continue the apostolic fight against the influence of the Judaizing teachers who troubled the early church. They were finding some success in persuading the Galatian Christians that becoming a Jewish proselyte was a prerequisite for becoming a Christian and that they could not be saved without being circumcised. Paul spares no harsh word in criticizing these teachers and even the saints who had fallen under their sway as well. His solution is to emphasize that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through the futile pursuit of perfect adherence to all the tenets of the Law of Moses. Contrary to the opinions of most commentators, Paul nowhere extols the idea of salvation by faith alone, but merely contrasts salvation by faith with the Law of Moses.

Once again, his apostolic authority is questioned—some supposing him to be an unfaithful messenger of the true 12. The letter seems to have been written in 57 A.D. from either Macedonia or Corinth in the same period as Romans and Second Corinthians.

THEMES

Paul dives into his major theme almost immediately. Only a few words of greeting precede his assessment of the false Judaizing teachers who were imposing a counterfeit perversion of the true gospel upon the saints in Galatia. It seems that many teachers accepted Christ as the savior, but were intent upon perpetuating the customs and restrictions of the Law of Moses, even if it meant circumcising adult men.

Such teachers and this issue had been dealt with decisively already, but the doctrine did not die out so easily. That many of the Judaizing teachers were members of the sect of Pharisees is logical (Acts 15:1-5) and in spite of their membership in Christ's church now, the apostles found them to be as formidable in their opinions as Jesus himself did. Other parts of the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath, holy days and dietary restrictions were also made tests of fellowship by these teachers so that Paul and the other apostles were compelled to dispute with them in person and print repeatedly.

Paul spends some time defending his authority as an apostle, reminding the readers that his doctrine was inspired of God and if it conflicted with the Judaizers, they should be rejected. His association with Peter comes into play, especially as an illustration of the hypocrisy and falseness of the Judaizing doctrine. Paul recalled having to rebuke Peter for refusing to dine with Gentile Christians. Peter was apparently afraid of what the Judaizers might think of him and so he indirectly strengthened the false position by paying it heed. The words of his reproof to Peter spoke volumes as well to the Galatians who were troubled with the same questions and pressures.

Often missed in the context is the clear fact that Paul begins to contrast the law of faith in Christ with the defunct law of works through Moses. His purpose is to relegate the law of Moses to fulfillment and abolition, so that only the law of faith in Christ should remain active for Christians, whether they were Jewish or Gentile in background. In the midst of all this, Paul advances the importance of baptism in bringing one into Christ, thus nullifying the arguments of Protestants that salvation is by faith only and that man has no responsibility in his own redemption. Calvinism is just an extreme reaction to the Judaizers' reliance upon self-righteousness and a defunct law; it passes over the truth and swings violently to the opposite extreme and creates yet another evil. The contrast in Galatians is between the law of faith and the law of Moses; salvation is not obtained or maintained by personal merit, but is the gift of God by grace. God, however, makes room in that equation for conditions, including obedient faith.

As in Romans, Hebrews and James, Abraham is called as evidence of salvation by an obedient, although imperfect, faith. Again, the contrast is between the law of Moses and the law of faith. Paul warned that seeking to be justified by the law of Moses would cause one to fall from grace.

Paul goes to great lengths also to contrast how one walks by faith with how one walks according to the flesh.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Another Gospel1:1-10

2. Paul's Authority1:11-24

3. The Other Apostles and Paul2:1-21

4. Abraham and Justification3:1-14

5. The Law of Moses as Tutor3:15-29

6. Justified by Faith4:1-20

7. Hagar and Sarah4:21-31

8. Liberty and Love5:1-15

9. Led by The Spirit5:16-26

10. Boasting in the Cross.....6:1-18

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-10How can one tell that he is hearing a perverted gospel?
2. 1:11-24.....How long had God been preparing to call Paul to minister?
3. 2:1-21Upon what does the right hand of fellowship depend?
4. 3:1-14Why cannot anyone be justified by the Law of Moses?
5. 3:15-29What is the purpose of the Law of Moses? Of baptism?
6. 4:1-20What doubts did Paul have about the Galatians?
7. 4:21-31Explain the contrast between Hagar and Sarah.
8. 5:1-15.....What does it mean to fall from grace and how is it achieved?
9. 5:16-26Explain the conflict between flesh and spirit.
10. 6:1-18 ...Explain the sowing and reaping illustration as it affects works.

New Testament Study Guide: Paul's Prison Epistles

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

These four New Testament books comprise the group known commonly as the prison epistles, because they were likely written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome in the early sixties of the first century.

The book of Ephesians is addressed to the Christians in the capital of the Asian province. She was surrounded by mountains and the sea and intimate with Greek trade, art and science. Ephesus was the famed home of the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world, and its evangelization plays a pivotal role in the history of Acts 18-19. The purpose of this epistle does not seem to be occasioned by any special circumstances or outstanding event. Rather, it seems to be a convenient opportunity for Paul to correspond with his beloved brethren at Ephesus. A large part of this missive is about unity. Paul did not want to see or engender a split among Jewish churches and Gentile churches. There was but one church.

The book of Philippians is considered to be an overwhelmingly complimentary letter, but it also addresses the problems of false teaching and congregational disunity. According to Acts 16, Paul labored in Philippi, where he met Lydia and exorcised a demon from a damsel, which led him to the opportunity to convert his jailer. Paul wrote to inform the Philippian brethren of his welfare and apparently finds little reason for reproof as they were holding to the truth and had even helped to fund his ministry.

The book of Colossians was sent to an important geographical and cultural meeting place between east and west. Colossae boasted a mixture of Greeks and Jews and a constant stream of international visitors with new ideas. Paul writes to confront some resulting false teaching, done by Judaizers and philosophers

The little book of Philemon is a personal missive from Paul to the owner of a runaway slave named Onesimus whom the apostle had converted. Although Paul returned him, he was hoping that Philemon would send him back to minister to Paul.

THEMES

During his first imprisonment in a Roman cell in the early 60s, Paul enjoyed tremendous liberty and was able to write at least these four letters to beloved brethren throughout the world. Even with the tremendously personal nature of the letter to Philemon, these works help to form the basis of New Testament life.

Ephesians and Colossians are very similar books, although the former is considerably longer—half of the verses in Ephesians contain phraseology associated also with Colossians.

The primary theme of Ephesians and Colossians is salvation by God's grace through human faith in Jesus Christ. Not only was the Judaizing element a threat to this truth, but also the infiltration of asceticism and secular philosophy are identified. Even Philippians contains some very negative warnings for the Judaizers, however.

Congregational unity is stressed among Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters and even two women who are personally named. A platform for unity is constructed around the singularity of our faith and its tenets.

Individual spirituality is also stressed as a result of putting Christ on in faithful baptism and walking according to the new man of such conviction. Paul makes lists of righteous deeds and contrasts them with the works of the flesh, adding hope to the equation with his description of the whole armor of God. Within this theme, the Christian's relationships are delineated—family, work, and so on. Perseverance rounds out the picture as Paul discusses his own efforts to remain faithful and keep walking toward Heaven.

The book of Philippians is a refreshing reminder that churches can really get it mostly right. Paul writes in gratitude and hopefulness for the prospects of a church that was standing fast and helping out. Unity through selflessness helps to form the pattern of living after the example of Christ and shining as a light in the world.

Modern, stressed out readers, may take solace and instruction in Paul's discussion of prayer and contentment in Philippians 4. He gives a list of the kinds of things that make for a fit mind and advises that prayer should be marked by thankfulness as much as petition.

Philemon was a resident of Colossae and one indebted to Paul. Now that Paul has converted Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus, the apostle feels duty-bound to return him, but is hopeful that Philemon will release him to come back and help Paul.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. One in Christ Ephesians 1:1-14
2. Spiritual Insight Ephesians 1:15-23
3. Saved by Grace Through Faith Ephesians 2:1-10
4. A New Temple Ephesians 2:11-22
5. Mission to the Gentiles Ephesians 3:1-13
6. Prayer for the Church Ephesians 3:14-21
7. Live as One Ephesians 4:1-16
8. New Life Ephesians 4:17-32
9. In the Light Ephesians 5:1-21
10. Husbands and Wives Ephesians 5:22-33
11. Relationships Ephesians 6:1-9
12. Whole Armor Ephesians 6:10-24
13. Prayer for Philippians Philippians 1:1-11
14. Joy in Proclaiming Christ Philippians 1:12-26
15. Living Worthy Philippians 1:27-2:18
16. Timothy and Epaphroditus Philippians 2:19-30
17. Paul's Commitment Philippians 3:1-11
18. Press On Philippians 3:12-21
19. Exhortations Philippians 4:1-9
20. Gratitude Philippians 4:10-23
21. Prayer for Colossians Colossians 1:1-12
22. Preeminence of Christ Colossians 1:13-23
23. We Proclaim Him Colossians 1:24-29
24. False Teaching Denounced Colossians 2:1-15
25. Self-Imposed Religion Colossians 2:16-3:4
26. New Life Colossians 3:5-17
27. New Relationships Colossians 3:18-4:1
28. New Living Colossians 4:2-18
29. Letter to Philemon Philemon 1-11
30. Sending Onesimus Back Philemon 1:12-25

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Eph. 1:1-14.....Contrast biblical foreordination with Calvin’s version.
2. Eph. 1:15-23If Christ is the head of the church, what is the Pope?
3. Eph. 2:1-10How are works and obedience necessary to salvation?
4. Eph. 2:11-22What part of the old law was abolished and when?
5. Eph. 3:1-13What is the “mystery of Christ”?
6. Eph. 3:14-21How do Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell in us?
7. Eph. 4:1-16What is the platform of Christian unity?
8. Eph. 4:17-32How do we sometimes grieve the Holy Spirit?
9. Eph. 5:1-21What is necessary to walking circumspectly?
10. Eph. 5:22-33Explain how a husband should love his wife.
11. Eph. 6:1-9How might fathers provoke their children to wrath?
12. Eph. 6:10-24Explain each part of the whole armor of God.
13. Phil. 1:1-11What are the fruits of righteousness?
14. Phil. 1:12-26Who are guilty of preaching Christ due to selfishness?
15. Phil. 1:27-2:18Describe what it means to have “the mind of Christ.”
16. Phil. 2:19-30What kinds of men today are due esteem?
17. Phil. 3:1-11What does it take to “know Christ”?
18. Phil. 3:12-21 ..Contrast Paul’s teaching with once saved, always saved.
19. Phil. 4:1-9What might interfere with thinking on these things?
20. Phil. 4:10-23How did the Philippians gain fruit in their account?
21. Col. 1:1-12Contrast knowledge, wisdom and understanding.
22. Col. 1:13-23Is Jesus creator or creature or both?
23. Col. 1:24-29How was Paul preaching Christ
24. Col. 2:1-15What is the circumcision made without hands?
25. Col. 2:16-3:4Discuss a modern example of self-imposed religion.
26. Col. 3:5-17What are the purposes of singing hymns?
27. Col. 3:18-4:1How should wives submit to their husbands?
28. Col. 4:2-18What is vigilant prayer?
29. Philemon 1-11What is the Bible position regarding slavery?
30. Philemon 12-25Why didn’t Paul just keep Onesimus?

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The two letters are addressed to the saints in Thessalonica, the seaport capital of Macedonia and center of commerce, wealth and education. When Paul entered the city in A.D. 51, he found a large Greek element along with a slightly smaller population of Roman colonists. The Jews also inhabited the city and had at least one synagogue. Thessalonica had a wondrous amphitheater where gladiator contests were held, but the town's general morals have been held in doubt for most of its history.

According to Acts 17:1-10, the writer, the apostle Paul, helped to establish the congregation along with Titus in about A.D. 51. His tack was to remind them of the prophecies and show that Jesus fulfilled them. A few of the Jews were convinced and joined a larger number of devout Greeks and women. They were there for less than a month before a mob ran them out of town at the behest of the anti-Christian Jews.

Both of these letters were likely written not long after Paul was expelled from Thessalonica, probably months apart in A.D. 51.

Because the majority of the church had been converted out of paganism and lives of gross immorality, Paul felt it necessary to ground them further in the lessons of the cross. While applauding their steadfastness in the face of persecution, he encourages them to grow in holiness.

The first letter remarks on a report Paul had received concerning the church in Thessalonica (3:6) and goes to great lengths to correct the deep misconceptions many apparently had about the return of Christ. It seems that some saints were so convinced that Jesus would return imminently that they had quit working and were dependent upon others to care for them.

The second letter continues this theme and further encourages the Christians to endure their suffering while laboring to support themselves in an honorable fashion. The writer goes so far as to describe events which must occur before Jesus can return, including prophecy about an apostasy.

THEMES

Persecution is on the apostle's mind as he writes these letters to the young church in Thessalonica.

He applauds them for standing fast in their faith despite the fact they he had to leave so suddenly and his opponents remained behind in the city to trouble the saints from a base in the synagogue. He uses his own integrity and perseverance in the midst of ongoing persecution as an example they can follow. Throughout the epistles, Paul takes a fatherly tone in consoling God's children and encouraging them to grow spiritually.

Because of the gross immorality throughout the Greek and Roman worlds, Paul finds it necessary to discuss with them the matter of personal holiness, especially as it touched on sexual morality. Every age of men has been charged with sexual perversion and although it seems the twenty-first century is the nadir of human behavior, thus it has always been. And so the fact that sexual purity is a vital sign of sanctification must never be overlooked or diminished.

Beyond sexual morality, Paul adds the virtue of minding one's own business and avoiding the sin of gossip. Because some of the Christians had taken to idly awaiting Jesus, they had plenty of time for being busybodies and few things are as destructive to communities. The fifth chapter of the first letter contains a series of rapid fire exhortations about other matters of personal behavior.

The doctrinal source of their discomfort was the return of Christ. Perhaps they had been so excited about the coming glory that they assumed it was imminent, but obviously it was not, because we are also waiting nearly 2000 years later. Paul reasons that a great, widespread apostasy must first occur, accompanying some son of perdition who would oppose God and elevate himself to a position of worship.

The second coming, though, was to be a comfort since both the living and the dead would be reunited with Christ for eternity. A stark picture of the sad realities of Judgment Day for the wicked is found in the first chapter of the second letter, making it awfully hard to remain complacent or ignorant of God's will.

Paul also touches on the seriousness of becoming idle and falling into gossip because one is doing nothing but waiting on the Lord to return. The apostle urges the church to warn such brethren, stop supporting them, and even withdraw from them if they refused to repent. For a group so apparently bent on having fellowship with Christ, such action would surely get their attention. One wonders how much better each nation today would be if it were true that the able-bodied would either work or not eat. Churches must continue also to be careful not to support sinful habits by treating addicts and lazy people like victims and objects of ongoing charity.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Salutation.....First Thessalonians 1:1-10
2. Paul’s IntegrityFirst Thessalonians 2:1-20
3. Good News From ThessalonicaFirst Thessalonians 3:1-13
4. A Pleasing LifeFirst Thessalonians 4:1-12
5. The Coming of the LordFirst Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
6. Daily Christian Living.....First Thessalonians 5:12-28
7. Christ’s ComingSecond Thessalonians 1:1-12
8. Rebellion FirstSecond Thessalonians 2:1-12
9. The PresentSecond Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
10. Living ResponsiblySecond Thessalonians 3:6-18

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. First Thessalonians 1:1-10How does God elect people to salvation?
2. First Thessalonians 2:1-20How might persecution be a blessing?
3. First Thessalonians 3:1-13 ...What should we tell seekers about persecution?
4. First Thessalonians 4:1-12What does “sexual immorality” include?
5. First Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 ...What is comforting about this passage?
6. First Thessalonians 5:12-28How do we treat people differently?
7. Second Thessalonians 1:1-12 ..What role do patience and faith play in perseverance?
8. Second Thessalonians 2:1-12 .What evidence exists that a falling away is past?
9. Second Thessalonians 2:13-3:5What traditions must be held fast?
10. Second Thessalonians 3:6-18 ...What sins are worthy of this discipline?

New Testament Study Guide: Letters to Timothy and Titus



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The three letters collectively to Timothy and Titus are often styled as the apostle Paul's "pastoral epistles," because the writer is considered to be acting as a "senior pastor" in addressing the younger preachers in the work they should do. It is assumed that Timothy and Titus were the pastors of churches where they were, but this exposes the common misunderstanding of the term. In reality, because Paul was unmarried, he himself did not even meet the necessary qualities for serving as a pastor that are given in two of these letters. Pastor is used interchangeably in the New Testament with its synonyms—bishop, elder, overseer and presbyter.

These letters address young preachers who were working with infant congregations to get them fully established in what would become the pattern for churches of Christ everywhere. The appointment of elders and deacons in every congregation was of immediate importance.

Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment around the end of A.D. 62 or early 63. These letters probably began to be sent in 65 and were concluded with Paul's valedictory, 2 Timothy, a couple of years later, after Paul's rearrest and while his execution seemed to be impending (Second Timothy 4:6).

Timothy had been carefully instructed in the scriptures by his mother and grandmother when he a child. His mother was Jewish but his father was Greek (Acts 16:1-3), but he became a companion of Paul in his travels and preaching, as well as an occasional emissary, and now the preacher in Ephesus (First Timothy 1:3). Their association is a picture of the ideal older and younger preacher relationship.

Titus was a Christian born of Gentile parents (Galatians 2:3) and a frequent companion of Paul (Titus 1:4). The apostle's refusal to circumcise Titus made a monumental statement that Gentiles were accepted into the church of Christ without first being Mosaic proselytes.

THEMES

The three major themes in these three books are the organization of the local church, the minister's personal morality and dealing with false teachers within the church.

Besides the many personal notes from Paul to these young friends, Paul gives them the authority to preach the gospel and to encourage the organization of the local congregation with elders and deacons. Both men are instructed in the qualities necessary to both offices, along with the qualities that the wives of such men must possess. The two lists (First Timothy 3: 1-13, Titus 1:5-9) can be harmonized although they are not identical. Elders, along with the preachers, were specially charged to respond to the teaching of error, and that response was to be very forceful.

Paul spends a great deal of useful time in instructing the young men on how to relate to various members of the church, charging them to maintain their purity especially with the young sisters. Paul reminds them that their behavior will have great influence and effect on the church as a whole, including its image in the community.

The letters also contain an element of prophecy, in predicting that many will fall away from the true faith while maintaining some social connection to it. Timothy and Titus are exhorted to study the Scriptures and persist in preaching the word in season and out. The gospel era, or "last days," would be marred by love of self, money and other modern idols that would provoke false doctrines and corrupted churches.

Specific errors are mentioned and the proponents are even named. One involves the notion that the resurrection had already passed. False teaching is compared to a cancer that must be confronted and not tolerated.

Paul prepares Timothy and Titus for persecution that will always follow when one is living godly in Christ Jesus. Timothy especially seems to have suffered from some stomach ailment and this might have been exacerbated by the stresses of his work. Paul seems concerned that his youth will cause him to be too timid in dealing with error.

The various roles of men and women are touched upon in the first letter to Timothy, leading to doctrines regarding male public prayer leadership and modesty of female attire. Care for widows is considered and the rich are reminded to be generous in sharing with all in need. Later, in writing to Titus, Paul takes the time to delineate the behavior that is respectable for members of different groups—older men, younger men, older women, younger women and bondservants.

Paul's last written words are included in the end of Second Timothy, as he was waiting to be executed by the Roman government (1:8, 16-17). Luke, the writer of Paul's biography in the book of Acts, was with him (4:11), and Paul anticipated his death as a bittersweet transition to eternity. His confident words have formed the hopeful thoughts of millions of souls who have lived since.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Sound Doctrine and False.....First Timothy 1:1-11
2. Charge to TimothyFirst Timothy 1:12-20
3. Prayer.....First Timothy 2:1-7
4. Women in the Church.....First Timothy 2:8-15
5. In the Church.....First Timothy 3:1-16
6. False Teaching in the Last Days.....First Timothy 4:1-5:2
7. Widows.....First Timothy 5:3-16
8. Nurturing Leaders.....First Timothy 5:17-25
9. Spiritual Riches.....First Timothy 6:1-20
10. Reflections on MinistrySecond Timothy 1:1-12
11. EnduranceSecond Timothy 1:13-2:13
12. Dealing With False Teachers.....Second Timothy 2:14-26
13. Degeneration.....Second Timothy 3:1-9
14. Steadfastness.....Second Timothy 3:10-17
15. Charge to TimothySecond Timothy 4:1-22
16. Elders.....Titus 1:1-9
17. Dealing With False Teachers.....Titus 1:10-16
18. Instructing BelieversTitus 2:1-10
19. Graceful LivingTitus 2:11-3:8
20. Personal Messages.....Titus 3:9-15

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. First Timothy 1:1-11 ..How is the law not made for a righteous person?
2. First Timothy 1:12-20Why did Paul obtain mercy from God?
3. First Timothy 2:1-7What do we pray to receive from governments?
4. First Timothy 2:8-15How is a woman saved in childbearing?
5. First Timothy 3:1-16Explain how the church is the pillar of truth.
6. First Timothy 4:1-5:2Identify a modern example of this warning.
7. First Timothy 5:3-16 ...Explain why the church can't support everyone.
8. First Timothy 5:17-25When may elders be paid for their work?
9. First Timothy 6:1-20What is included in fighting the good fight?
10. Second Timothy 1:1-12What spirit does God intend us to have?
11. Second Timothy 1:13-2:13 ...How is a disciple like a soldier, athlete, farmer?
12. Second Timothy 2:14-26Is it proper to call false teachers by name?
13. Second Timothy 3:1-9When are the "last days"?
14. Second Timothy 3:10-17.....Why should no persecution be a concern?
15. Second Timothy 4:1-22What is the "work of an evangelist"?
16. Titus 1:1-9How does one harmonize this list with First Timothy 3?
17. Titus 1:10-16Is gluttony sinful?
18. Titus 2:1-10Discuss how you fulfill the command to your group.
19. Titus 2:11-3:8What is the washing of regeneration?
20. Titus 3:9-15How is a divisive person handled?

New Testament Study Guide: Letter to the Hebrews

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is clearly a letter, but it lacks both the sender's and addressee's names. It is not a circular letter like the General Epistles and reads more like a series of sermons on the superiority of Christ than anything else.

Even those in early church history were uncertain about the author of Hebrews, but the mention of Timothy's name (13:23) gives credence to the conclusion that the apostle Paul is the writer. Too, the writing style is Pauline at times, but a hint of Greek background has led some to favor Apollos as the author. Barnabas, Luke, Silas, Aquila or Priscilla have all been suggested as possible writers as well. This, however, must remain a secret thing that belongs to God and in the end, the book is consistent with the rest of the New Testament and its place in the canon is unquestionable.

Jewish Christians are addressed in the book—those who had come to Christ from a Hebrew background and were now faced with persecution and pressure to renounce Jesus and return to Mosaic worship. The letter employs very dramatic language to persuade these saints that Christ and his new testament are so far superior to Moses that they should consider it an honor to endure persecution and remain faithful. The alternative would bring acceptance by Jewish kin but rejection by God and a sentence of hell.

Deep doctrinal discourses are often interrupted by very practical commandments regarding various aspects of the Christian's life, including sexual morality, prayer and contentment. The writer scolds his audience for their dullness of hearing and encourages them to grow in their knowledge.

The message throughout the letter, however, is one of comparison between old and new. The new covenant of Jesus Christ is better than the old covenant of Moses; the letter is in some ways a counterpart to the letter to the Romans. The key word to understanding Hebrews is "better." The Hebrew Christians were in danger of reverting to the law of Moses, giving up their faith, and falling away.

THEMES

The sole major theme in Hebrews, around which all the other themes revolve, is the superiority of Jesus Christ to the Old Law system the readers had considered returning to.

Christ is portrayed as superior to angels and especially to Moses and the imperfect law that he inaugurated, but only as a temporary measure until the messiah should come. So great was the need for grace that the law of Moses only emphasized that fact through its animal sacrifices and remembrance of sins. The law of Christ was designed to remit sins—take them away completely. Hebrew Christians who thought about succumbing to pressure and reverting to classic Judaism would be forfeiting their salvation and placing their souls back into sin and under condemnation. In effect, they would also be putting Christ back on his cross, and if they truly believed in him, that would be a heartbreaking mistake.

The readers' affinity for the temple, worship and priest system are addressed, and again, the superiority of Christ in each of these realms is emphasized. Christ is our high priest according to the pre-Levitical order of Melchizedek and is superior to any Levite because he has no sins of his own to make offering for.

The writer subtly compares their current plight with the downfall of the Exodus pilgrims who fell in the wilderness, far short of the Promised Land. Should the current crop submit to persecution and renounce Christ, or simply stop assembling with the saints for worship, they would likewise miss out on God's greater Sabbath rest—heaven.

The writer contrasts some fundamental doctrines with deeper matters like the priesthood of Melchizedek, accusing his readers of neglecting the progress of their salvation and becoming dull of hearing. The responsibility of every Christian to grow so that he can teach others is clarified.

The superiority of Christ's covenant comes into play as it is described as a law written on the hearts of believers, rather than one engraved on stone and imposed upon people who just happen to be born into the Hebrew religion. This makes faith a choice and obedience a lifestyle.

If any were casting doubt upon a crucified man as the savior, the writer explains that his perfect sacrifice was necessary to remit sins. The blood of bulls and goats was insufficient as a propitiatory offering and so the son's eternal spirit was brought to earth in a human body and led to the cross as a perfect offering.

The eleventh chapter is well-known for its practical definition of faith, enumerating the heroes of Hebrew history that acted by faith and accomplished great things. The writer calls them "a great cloud of witnesses" and casts them as spectators watching this audience struggle with persecution and fear to serve the savior. The writer portrays persecution as part of God's chastening.

The letter ends with a series of admonitions on holy living.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Christ's Superiority	1:1-14
2. Obedience	2:1-18
3. Superior to Moses.....	3:1-6
4. Be Faithful.....	3:7-19
5. Enter God's Rest	4:1-13
6. A Great High Priest	4:14-5:11
7. Spiritual Maturity	5:12-6:8
8. Hope	6:9-20
9. Melchizedek	7:1-25
10. The New Priest	7:26-8:13
11. Sacrifices	9:1-28
12. Christ's Obedience	10:1-18
13. Draw Near	10:19-39
14. Hall of Faith	11:1-16
15. Patriarchs' Faith.....	11:17-31
16. They Overcame	11:32-40
17. Jesus Endured	12:1-11
18. Pursue Holiness	12:12-29
19. Living Well.....	13:1-17
20. Farewell	13:18-25

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-14How do angels minister to the saved?
2. 2:1-18How do we avoid neglecting our salvation?
3. 3:1-6How can Jesus possibly be an apostle?
4. 3:7-19.....Explain the possibility of apostasy as illustrated here.
5. 4:1-13Why does the gospel not benefit all who hear it?
6. 4:14-5:11How do Christians become “dull of hearing”?
7. 5:12-6:8Is it possible to restore one who has fallen away?
8. 6:9-20.....Into what is Jesus our forerunner?
9. 7:1-25.....Explain the connection between Jesus and Melchizedek.
10. 7:26-8:13.....What became of the 10 commandments?
11. 9:1-28Why don't we all eagerly anticipate Christ's return?
12. 10:1-18Why was animal sacrifice insufficient?
13. 10:19-39What is the effect of willful sin left uncorrected?
14. 11:1-16.....What might be involved in a diligent search for God?
15. 11:17-31How could Moses have experienced Christ's reproach?
16. 11:32-40What was the purpose of this chapter?
17. 12:1-11In what ways does God chasten us?
18. 12:12-29Explain what Esau's experience illustrates.
19. 13:1-17.....Who are they who rule over us?
20. 13:18-25Why are they urged to bear with this letter?

New Testament Study Guide: Letter of James

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The book is addressed to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” in 1:1. Most certainly, that makes them Jewish converts to Christianity. Judging by the overall tone of the book regarding materialism, most of his first readers were probably quite poor. The author’s frequent mention of geographical and meteorological conditions points to the strong possibility that he wrote from Palestine, from whence the pilgrims were dispersed.

The author is named James, a servant of God. The New Testament makes three men named James prominent — John’s brother, the apostle (Matthew 4:21), the other apostle named James, called the Less (Matthew 10:3) and the Lord’s brother in the flesh (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3).

The first James was martyred by Herod long before this book was written (Acts 12:1-2). The second is also unlikely, for he was an apostle and our author does not so identify himself.

The most likely candidate is the Lord’s brother in the flesh, who did not believe in his brother until after the resurrection (John 7:5, Acts 1:14). (Another brother of them both is credited with writing the book of Jude.) In spite of his initial disbelief, James is now pleased to call himself “the bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

The purpose of this epistle is to instruct and encourage a group of downtrodden disciples. The teacher exhorts them to endure the trials brought by the rich and to overcome sinful urges by employing a few basic principles. The book is sometimes called the gospel of common sense because of its practicality.

James attacks the always thorny issue of faith and works from the opposite side of Paul in Romans and Galatians, but the three books are each necessary to come to a harmonious and thorough understanding of God’s will. Where Paul emphasizes faith, because his audience tended toward self-justification by works of the Law of Moses, James emphasizes the works of faithful obedience to Christ.

THEMES

The Christians who first read this wonderful little letter were a downtrodden bunch. Verse one makes it appear that they were already scattered from Jerusalem by persecutors and now they are falling prey to the wealthy as well. Nevertheless, the letter addresses both the rich and poor among the flock of God.

The lowly brother is encouraged to glory in his exaltation, while the wealthy brother is reminded to participate in the humbling of discipleship. The objective is for brethren at both ends of the economic spectrum to find a place to meet in the middle with Christ. The church is warned against showing partiality to the wealthy, because God accepts the poor, the rich often persecute Christians, partiality violates Christ's law and God will judge those who are thus guilty.

The fifth chapter lays the subject bare, exposing the oppression wrought by the rich of that long ago age. James counsels patience but acknowledges the egregiousness of the crimes committed against the poor.

Several quote-worthy verses pepper the book of James, beginning in verse 2 where the writer encourages his readers to find joy even in various trials because such testing of one's faith produces perseverance. Toward the end of the book, James illustrates his point with the case of Job, emphasizing God's desire to be merciful and compassionate in such circumstances.

James is intent on teaching that faith without works—faith only—is dead. He uses the same illustration employed by Paul, who taught that justification is not according to perfect keeping of the Law of Moses (Romans 4, Galatians 3-4), and there is no disharmony between the two inspired writers. Salvation is by God's grace through man's faith, which is not simply mental assent, but is obedient, trusting and penitent. Therefore, men must be doers of the word who exhibit their faith in their works, as did Rahab also.

Paul and James simply examine faith and works from different perspectives and for different audiences. More than any other, James destroys the Calvinistic concept of salvation or justification by faith alone.

James is also concerned about the everyday temptations of life, for which he does not fault God who does not tempt men. He reveals the doctrine of Christ regarding anger, the tongue, selfishness and covetousness by distinguishing between heavenly wisdom and earthly opinion.

The writer is not shy about rebuking his readers, no matter what millennium they happen to call home. He warns them about becoming teachers without the proper attitude and diligence, and invites spiritual adulterers to put off the world and approach God for mercy and cleansing. James also introduces the idea of confessing sins one to another, not in the auricular confessional of the Roman tradition, but on a personal level among brethren in need.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Various Trials.....1:1-11

2. Temptation.....1:12-18

3. Doers of the Word1:19-27

4. Rich and Poor2:1-13

5. Not By Faith Only2:14-26

6. The Tongue.....3:1-12

7. Wisdom3:13-18

8. Life is a Vapor4:1-17

9. Patience5:1-12

10. Prayer and Confession.....5:13-20

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-11Explain how trials contain potential for joy.
2. 1:12-18.....Summarize the process of temptation and sin.
3. 1:19-27How does one truly show himself to be “religious”?
4. 2:1-13Besides wealth, why else might one show partiality?
5. 2:14-26How do you harmonize this passage with Romans 4:1-8?
6. 3:1-12Why is James discouraging teachers?
7. 3:13-18Contrast the wisdoms from above and below.
8. 4:1-17.....What is involved in drawing nearer to God?
9. 5:1-12Why does it seem so hard for the rich to be righteous?
10. 5:13-20.....When should we bother confessing sins to one another?

New Testament Study Guide: Letters of Peter and Jude

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

Simon Peter identifies himself as the author of the two letters that have come to bear his name. In addition, the tiny book of Jude bears an uncanny, but logical resemblance to the flow of Second Peter, but was evidently written by one of the Lord's fleshly brothers, Judas, or Jude.

Peter's letters were likely written around A.D. 64 from the city of Rome, called Babylon in the epistle probably to disguise the source (5:13). Emperor Nero was just then commencing his persecution of the church and uninspired historians contend that Peter would lose his life as a result. Silvanus and Mark were with Peter, and the latter association may have had something to do with the second canonical gospel account.

The purpose of First Peter is to communicate the commands of God to his servants. Peter vividly recalls Jesus's death and teaches about leadership and perseverance. The apostle wrote to settle them in the midst of bewildering persecution. His guidance is practical and temperate. Peter urges them to stand firm in their faith based on the knowledge of salvation and the example set by Jesus.

The purpose of Second Peter is to deal with some problems, including false teaching and a faltering trust that Jesus was coming back because nearly 35 years had already passed. It is little wonder that the world has grown so lax now that nearly 2000 years have come and gone.

Second Peter 2:1-3:4 appears to quote almost word for word from Jude 4-19, so that both books show common inspiration and purpose. Jude describes the character of the wicked instructors in trying to train his brethren to recognize them. He tells his readers how to deal with error and how to protect their own from its destructive course.

Jude was written during the last half of the first century when itinerant false prophets were troubling the churches with their errors. Jude exposes their greed, pride and selfishness in an attempt separate the true saints from their influence.

THEMES

The Christians who received Peter's first letter are described as pilgrims of the Dispersion in regions that today are identified with Turkey or Asia Minor. There are certainly indications that at least a significant portion of them were Gentiles (1:18, 2:10, 4:1-4). No matter—this first Petrine letter is a reminder that all Christians are pilgrims upon the Earth, whose ultimate home is with God in heaven.

Persecution is a major theme of First Peter and is envisioned as a refining fire that helps to prove and improve the faith of every saint. Christians should be prepared to suffer for their convictions.

Holiness in lifestyle is another major theme. Peter urges his readers to drink the pure milk of the word and to grow to a point that they can truly imitate the holiness of their savior and share his message with seekers and scoffers alike. Peter pictures fleshly lusts as warring against the souls of men. A number of virtues are outlined in the first chapter of the second letter, which prove necessary to ensuring one's election to salvation.

The pattern of Christ is that of a suffering servant, so that even those who find themselves in less than ideal circumstances should honor their rulers and masters—even those who hardly seem to deserve it. Likewise, believing women are taught how to endure unbelieving husbands with the hope of winning them to Christ as well. The will of the Gentiles is the antithesis of a holy lifestyle, including the use of alcohol in different amounts, wild parties and sexual immorality.

The heavenly citizenship of these Christians is stressed and the church becomes their mutual county. Some of the final nails in the coffin of the Law of Moses are hammered when Peter refers to all believers as priests, rather than perpetuating the Mosaic custom or creating a new clergy system such as the one adopted in the Roman church through disregard of this letter.

Peter, although never given the title "Pope" did serve as an elder in a local congregation, and so he addresses others of that rank in their duties. In the same context, he urges the young and all to be sober and watchful because of the power of temptation in the world. His apostleship is evident in the second letter in which he indicates his life is growing short and he sees a need to preserve his insight for future generations (1:120-15).

If First Peter seems to indicate the return of Christ was imminent, (4:7) Second Peter explains why it had not yet come (3:1-9). The delayed return of Jesus would occasion much scoffing among the weak and skeptical, but would also give more time for repentance to the soft of heart.

Almost all of Jude's message finds its way into Peter's second letter, in which both men deal with the problem of false teaching. The motives and methods of such men are exposed and deemed worthy of rejection.

Peter adds a word about the writings of Paul as he closes his second letter, calling Paul's writings "Scripture" but indicating that some of them are hard to understand.

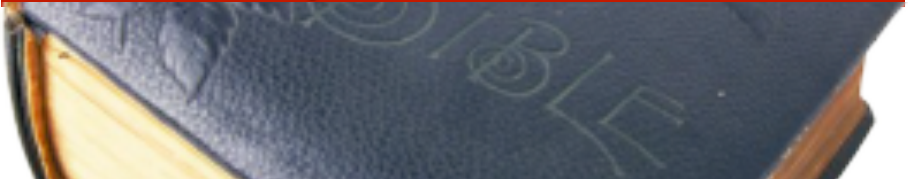
OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The Christian's HopeFirst Peter 1:1-9
2. Holiness.....First Peter 1:10-21
3. The Pure Milk of the WordFirst Peter 1:22-2:3
4. Christ's TempleFirst Peter 2:4-10
5. Pilgrims and SojournersFirst Peter 2:11-17
6. Christ's Example.....First Peter 2:18-25
7. Husbands and WivesFirst Peter 3:1-7
8. One MindFirst Peter 3:8-17
9. The Days of NoahFirst Peter 3:18-22
10. The Same Mind.....First Peter 4:1-11
11. PersecutionFirst Peter 4:12-19
12. Graceful ServiceFirst Peter 5:1-14
13. Spiritual GrowthSecond Peter 1:1-11
14. RememberSecond Peter 1:12-21
15. False Teachers.....Second Peter 2:1-11
16. Corrupt Conduct of False TeachersSecond Peter 2:12-22
17. Judgment is CertainSecond Peter 3:1-9
18. Preparation for JudgmentSecond Peter 3:10-18
19. Jude's Appeal.....Jude 1-16
20. ExhortationJude 17-25

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. First Peter 1:1-9 ..What effect do trials have on the faith of a Christian?
2. First Peter 1:10-21What is holiness and how is it humanly possible?
3. First Peter 1:22-2:3How is God’s word like pure milk?
4. First Peter 2:4-10In what ways are Christians “priests”?
5. First Peter 2:11-17What is the brotherhood?
6. First Peter 2:18-25How should we respond when ridiculed?
7. First Peter 3:1-7Explain dwelling with wives with understanding.
8. First Peter 3:8-17Does God listen to the prayers of the unrighteous?
9. First Peter 3:18-22What role has baptism in faith and salvation?
10. First Peter 4:1-11Define the six sins in verse 3.
11. First Peter 4:12-19What will be the end of those who do not obey?
12. First Peter 5:1-14.....How does the devil work today?
13. Second Peter 1:1-11How does one partake of the divine nature?
14. Second Peter 1:12-21 ..Describe the prophet’s test (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)?
15. Second Peter 2:1-11What makes one a false teacher?
16. Second Peter 2:12-22.....What is the way of Balaam?
17. Second Peter 3:1-9Why do the scoffers scoff?
18. Second Peter 3:10-18.....What will be the fate of the Earth?
19. Jude 1-4.....Why did Jude write what he wrote?
20. Jude 17-25How do we treat different people differently?

New Testament Study Guide: Letters of John



NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

The apostle John is credited with writing these three epistles, along with a gospel account and the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Johannine authorship has been settled among men since at least the second century even though the writer does not overtly identify himself. John, “the elder” in these letters, appears to be the last surviving apostle and these letters were likely written after the church had come to maturity—probably between A.D. 85 and 95. All three letters share a similar style with each other and with the gospel clearly attributed to John. Also, apostolic authority is in clear evidence.

The first letter, the longest, is not addressed to anyone in particular, but the other two, while much shorter are respectively addressed to “the elect lady” and the beloved Gaius. The latter two are obviously of a much more personal nature than First John, but all three letters are valuable in regulating individual and church action.

First John appears to be a doctrinal treatise sent to a group of Christians like those in Revelation, troubled both by incessant persecution and insidious false doctrine. While false teachers are the focus of First and Second John, a false brother is at the heart of the third letter.

Without naming them, the Gnostics seem to be the target of John’s ire in the first letter. They were guilty of teaching the early church that Christ could not have come in in sinful flesh and that any iniquity committed in the body would have no effect on the spirit. The result of was skepticism about the cross and tolerance of wicked behavior.

The more personal letters—Second and Third John—are words of encouragement to brethren beloved of John. The apostle is concerned with the children of the elect lady—possibly a euphemism for a local church and its members. Third John addresses division in the church where Gaius worshiped.

THEMES

Each of these three letters have unique themes, although the brevity of the last two makes them fairly simple in thematic elements.

First John reads something like a sermon rather than a letter or a reply. John's purpose is stated in the fifth chapter: "That you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the son of God" (13). Gnosticism was based on the flimsy idea that this group of thinkers had such excellent knowledge of Christ that they could see beyond the Incarnation doctrine and comprehend the division of body and soul. Their influence led Christians to reject the virgin birth and humanity of Christ, and to tolerate iniquity because they assumed the works of the flesh had no impact upon the eternal spirit.

John goes to great lengths to explain the reality of sin and that it could not be accepted as inevitable without forfeiting the commitment to righteousness necessary to maintaining salvation. The Gnostic lifestyle vainly tried to combine a spiritual temperament with sinful indulgence; John argued that Christians must cleanse their minds and hands at the same time. He categorizes the way of this world as an appeal to the lust of the eyes and flesh and the pride of life and counsels his readers to rise above them.

John distinguishes between committing a sin and walking or living in sin. All sin and even Christians are far from immune to temptation, but none should ever be content to remain in sin, impenitent and risking apostasy. God gives him time to repent, but if he refuses to show contrition, he forfeits his fellowship with God and the church.

John echoes many of Christ's commandments to the apostles before his crucifixion in urging disciples to be obedient to the will of God, disposed to laying down their lives for others and holy in demeanor. Obedience is coupled with love, so that complying with the commandments of God is not some heartless ritual or futile stab at earning divine favor, but is instead the natural reaction to the offer of grace. Reverence, or godly fear, is valued, so that one need not be terrified of God and unable to approach his throne.

Besides general obedience, John uses Jesus as an example of one willing to lay down his life for his brethren. He argues that apathy toward a brother is tantamount to hatred and that such a one would be lost.

More than any other writer, John tries to expose the antichrist element working among the churches. Far from being some distant individual, John identified the false doctrines of his own day as against Jesus, or "antichrist." The Judaizers, Gnostics and idolaters were all antichrist in their own way, and today their number and kind have only proliferated. The writer instructs his readers to test their teachers' doctrines to make certain they are of the truth and to refuse fellowship to all who are not.

John also must touch on division in the local church as a man named Diotrephes tried to rule one congregation as a malevolent dictator. Many are the churches divided even today by those who would rule on their own.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. God Is LightFirst John 1:1-10

2. Our Advocate.....First John 2:1-17

3. AntichristFirst John 2:18-29

4. Children of God.....First John 3:1-12

5. Blessed AssuranceFirst John 3:13-24

6. Test the SpiritsFirst John 4:1-10

7. Perfect LoveFirst John 4:11-21

8. He Who Has The Son.....First John 5:1-21

9. Joy of Christian Love.....Second John 1-13

10. Walking in TruthThird John 1-13

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. First John 1:1-10Distinguish between sinning and “walking in sin.”
2. First John 2:1-17How does Jesus behave as our Advocate?
3. First John 2:18-29What is Antichrist?
4. First John 3:1-12...What is taught concerning Christians’ ability to sin?
5. First John 3:13-24.....Will God answer our every prayer affirmatively?
6. First John 4:1-10How does one go about testing spirits or teachers?
7. First John 4:11-21What fear of God is good and what kind is not?
8. First John 5:1-21Why do some commandments seem burdensome?
9. Second John 1-13.....Discuss what it means to walk in the truth.
10. Third John 1-13How can we be fellow workers for the truth today?

New Testament Study Guide: Revelation of Jesus Christ

NEW TESTAMENT STUDY GUIDES

Rather than studying the New Testament verse-by-verse or in an overview, this series seeks to look at the letter according to its contexts—passage-by-passage, that is, by analyzing each of its paragraphs. Responses to the questions should be done on a separate sheet of paper and in short-answer or essay format.

INTRODUCTION

Revelation is the unfolding of God's will in prophecy. Revelation 1:3 urges its readers to hear and keep it, and so it was mainly for the immediate use of the Christians who were reading it and being comforted by it in the first century.

Revelation is apocalyptic, rich with symbolism and figures. In fact, it was written in a code revealed in the Old Testament language. Revelation was written as it is so that the persecutors of the era could not understand it while the suffering people of God could.

The theme of the book is stated in 17:14: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords and king of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." This statement and this book are intended as a consolation to the suffering Christian in the late first century. Jesus is portrayed throughout the book as the Victor and Conqueror. He overcomes hades, death, the beasts, the dragon and those who worship the beast. Although victory seems uncertain and conditions seem gloomy, the saints will overcome.

Revelation was likely written by John when Domitian ruled Rome between A.D. 81-96, specifically around 95. Persecution was widespread in this era and included Caesar worship. Domitian was a wicked, cold-blooded persecutor who demanded to be addressed as "Lord God." Those who refused to bow to him were persecuted or killed. The Christian had to choose Caesar or Jesus. Revelation sought to show why the choice should be Jesus. There is much evidence from man's history, especially from Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, that leads to this late date. Some argue it was written during Nero's reign and predicts the fall of Jerusalem.

Although there are some practical points in Revelation, especially in chapter 2-3, its value to modern readers is mainly in the encouragement that comes from seeing God gain victory over the Roman persecution of the early church.

THEMES

The book of Revelation proves to be mysterious and often confusing, even unapproachable to the average Christian. For this reason, it has been exploited by the devil through human speculators to the disillusionment of millions.

Sadly, every generation since the resurrection of Christ has believed it was surely the last. Because evil men tend to wax worse and worse, it always seems to the current generation of saints as if God must be about to act (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). Christians of the first and second centuries, however, were persecuted first by the Jews and then by the Romans, who held the power of law over the world and could execute anyone who refused to worship Caesar. The saints may very well have expected the gospel age was expiring, but in fact, the faith would rise even higher in a few generations and so God's patience would bear fruit. The apostles had forewarned every convert of this threat (Second Timothy 3:10-13).

Domitian is a horrible, blasphemous ruler who goes so far as to demand that his royal subjects address him as Lord, God Caesar. Most of his subjects go along with this demand because to refuse may very well mean execution, but this demand is far too much for you and your brethren in Christ. To call one on earth God is to deny Christ and seal your eternal condemnation where Nero and Domitian will suffer by your side in hellfire.

What will become of the church of Christ, the very cause of Christ, if God does not act? When will we ever find consolation and overcome? Or will we at all?

John has received a revelation from God that will bring comfort and courage to every suffering saint. It is a message that has been encrypted in a code of numerical and scriptural symbolism. The numbers will denote very general characteristics while the scriptures will describe specific kinds of events. Infidels like the emperor may understand the numbers if they intercept the message but they will never see into the scriptures for they are naturally untrained.

God has seen that this message will only encourage His people and not tip off Domitian's servants to the way in which the Lord will cease the persecution, punish the guilty and set the church back to its mission. Perhaps most encouraging is God's timetable. The opening of the message says that these things will come to pass shortly (Revelation 1:1-3). If the message had told of events 2000 years from now, it would have only discouraged them more, but the turn of events is promised to begin shortly and so it is a consolation instead. Such language is not new to scripture and God had never failed to make words mean things (Gen. 41:25-32). He had even told the Roman brethren that he would bruise Satan's power shortly in using false doctrine if they would adhere to the truth: Romans 16:17-20.

OUTLINE OF PASSAGES FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Introduction	1:1-8
2. Triumphant Christ	1:9-20
3. Ephesus.....	2:1-7
4. Smyrna.....	2:8-11
5. Pergamos	2:12-17
6. Thyatira	2:18-29
7. Sardis.....	3:1-6
8. Philadelphia.....	3:7-13
9. Laodicea	3:14-22
10. Ministering Servants.....	4:1-11
11. The Scroll	5:1-14
12. Seven Seals.....	6:1-17
13. 144,000.....	7:1-17
14. Four Trumpets	8:1-13
15. Two More Trumpets	9:1-21
16. Little Scroll.....	10:1-11
17. Two Witnesses.....	11:1-19
18. The Struggle	12:1-17
19. 666.....	13:1-18
20. Babylon is Fallen.....	14:1-20
21. Prelude to Seven Bowls.....	15:1-8
22. Seven Bowls.....	16:1-21
23. Mother of Harlots	17:1-18
24. Judgment on Babylon.....	18:1-24
25. King of Kings and Lord of Lords.....	19:1-21
26. Thousand Years	20:1-15
27. New Heaven and Earth	21:1-8
28. The Lamb's Wife	21:9-27
29. Tree of Life.....	22:1-5
30. Come, Lord Jesus!.....	22:6-21

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 1:1-8What is the importance of the time-hints here?
2. 1:9-20How is Jesus described?
3. 2:1-7Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
4. 2:8-11Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
5. 2:12-17Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
6. 2:18-29Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
7. 3:1-6Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
8. 3:7-13Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
9. 3:14-22Describe the church as Jesus saw it.
10. 4:1-11Describe what each of the four creatures is like.
11. 5:1-14How is Jesus like a lamb?
12. 6:1-17How much longer must they await justice?
13. 7:1-17What was the number sealed? Who are they?
14. 8:1-13What immediately follows opening the seventh seal?
15. 9:1-21Why didn't the plagues produce widespread repentance?
16. 10:1-11Explain what John did with the book (Ezekiel 2:8-3:14)?
17. 11:1-19What is the response to the seventh trumpet?
18. 12:1-17What three terms are used in verse 9 to refer to the dragon?
19. 13:1-18Who alone refuse to worship the sea beast?
20. 14:1-20What does it mean to die in the Lord?
21. 15:1-8Describe the song of Moses and the Lamb.
22. 16:1-21What do the seven bowls contain?
23. 17:1-18What had intoxicated the harlot?
24. 18:1-24What did the second voice from heaven implore?
25. 19:1-21Who is the Lamb's bride? In what is she attired?
26. 20:1-15According to what were all men judged?
27. 21:1-8What is necessary to drink of the water of life?
28. 21:9-27Why did the new city have no temple or shining stars?
29. 22:1-5What grows along the river? When had access to it been lost?
30. 22:6-21Who may claim a right to enter the city?