

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY COMMENTARY

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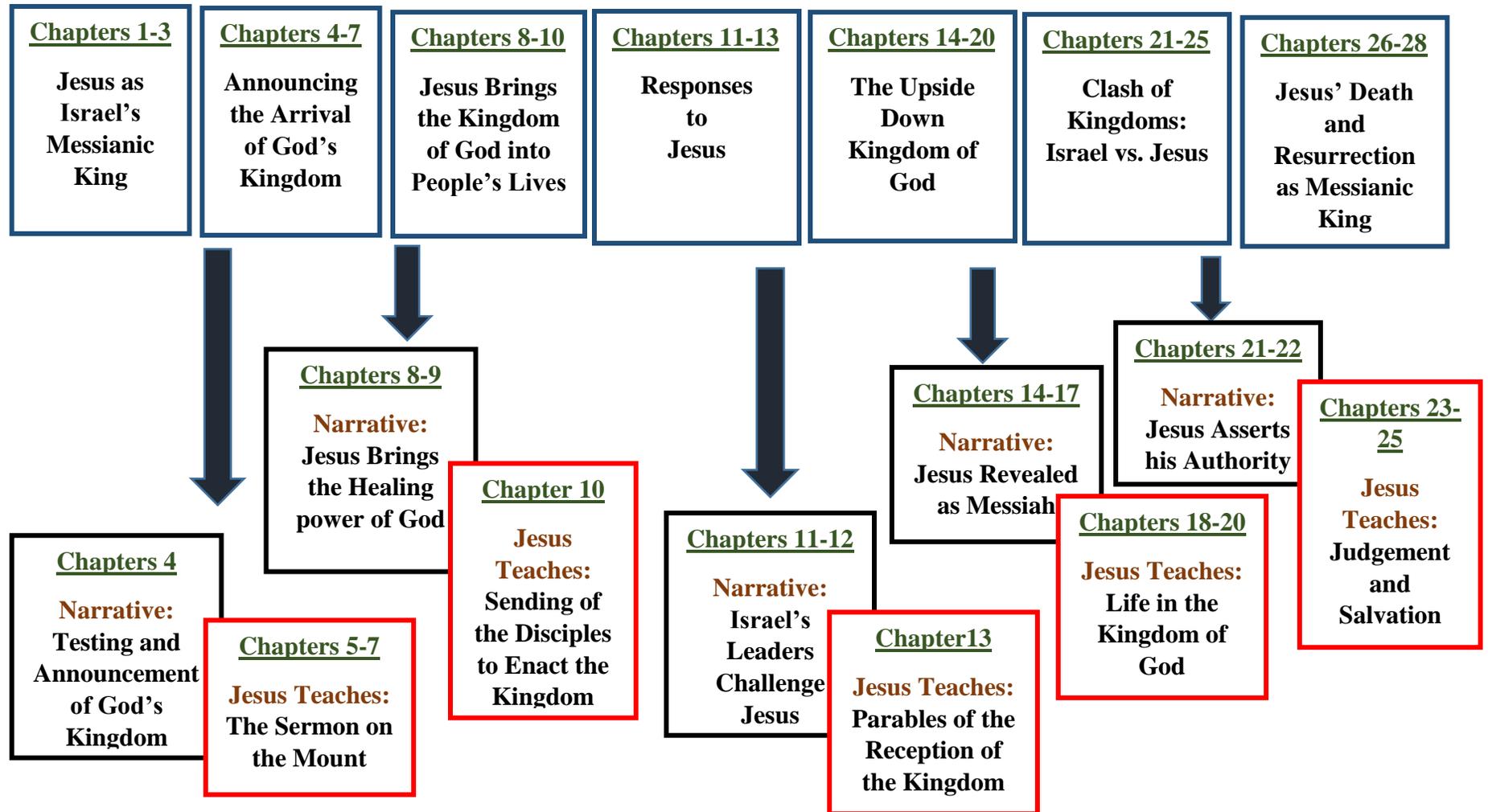
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The Book of Matthew

Structure



Main Idea: The Gospel of Matthew tells the story of the person Jesus Christ, the son of God, and how through his life, death, and resurrection he fulfilled the promises and prophecies God made to his people in the Old Testament, as the divine, messianic, shepherd king who would one day bring salvation and rule the world.

Chapters 1-3: Jesus as Israel's Messianic King

This opening section of Matthew is all about showing us how Jesus is connected to the Old Testament. We mustn't skip over this genealogy, as if it is irrelevant to the story, what it says is profound and of great importance. Matthew opens his gospel, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). This short sentence is packed with information. "Son of David" should make us think back to the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 (as well as "David" as a title for the Messiah in the Prophets {Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3 Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 23:5, 30:9; Ezek. 34:23, ch.37}). Matthew is claiming that here in front of our eyes is the messianic seed for Israel. "Son of Abraham" should make us think back to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17). Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham that will bring blessing to all of the nations, gentiles included (the "seed" "first promised in Gen. 3:15; see also Gal. 3:6-29). Matthew is telling his readers that this is going to be a continuation of the story about the seed of Abraham and the Davidic kingdom.

Matthew lists 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile, and 14 from the exile to Jesus (1:1-17). This is interesting, because if one were to read the book of Chronicles they would find that there are more generations than this, so either Matthew can't count, or he is creating a highly intelligent literary piece of art, and trying to tell his readers about something that happened in a creative way. I take it to be the latter, and that genealogies can be theological as well as ancestral. Matthew is playing with numbers, adapting details to make theological points, that is, "the 3 x 14 shape of the genealogy is a numerical wordplay (called "gematria") on the name "David" in Hebrew: דוד = 14. It's certain that Matthew shaped the genealogy to fit the number 14" (Mackie, 1).

It is also of interest that there are four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy. They are righteous, gentile, Canaanite women that set bold precedents in their time: Tamar (Gen. 38), Rahab (Josh. 2, 6), Ruth (Ruth 1-4), Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11, 12; 1 Kings 1 and 2). Their stories in Scripture, though surrounded by particular circumstances and situations, share much in common and are in many regards parallels to each other. The most important themes emerging from their stories is their claims/connections to the line of David, and gentile inclusion in the Kingdom of God. We see this developed further when a fifth Canaanite woman is added in to the mix later in chapter 15:28, which serves as a sort of hinge point in which we see Jesus' ministry opening up to the gentiles only a few verses later (the feeding of the 4,000). Richard Bauckham comments, "Jesus' identification in Matthew 1 as the 'Son of David,' is capable of many meanings, but the presence of these gentile women highlights the inclusiveness of the Messiah's role, to be a blessing to the nations as well as to save his own people from their sins" (44).

Chapters 1:18-2:23 give us the narrative of Jesus' birth. Chapter 1:18-25 give us the account of Jesus' miraculous, virgin (Isa. 7), Holy Spirit-conceived birth. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him to name the child, "Jesus" (Ἰησοῦς/ ישוע) meaning "Yahweh saves" for, "...he will save his people from their sins" (v.21, Mic. 7:18-20; Psa.130:8). We are told that this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah about the "Immanuel Child" (Isa. 7:13-15,8:8-10, 11:1-16). Jesus is "God with us." Immanuel, in Isaiah, is connected to the suffering servant (Isa. 42,

49, 50, 52-53). Here, Matthew is pointing the reader to the idea and climax of the story: redemption through death. He doesn't say how Jesus will do this yet, just that he will. It is the teaser trailer.

Chapter two is an incredible and crazy story involving more about Jesus' birth, Herod's jealousy leading to mass murder, the flight of Jesus and his family to Egypt, and the return from Egypt. The wise men (literally sorcerers and magicians) come seeking the one born "king of the Jews" (v.2). He, along with everyone else in town it seems, was troubled by this, so they sought to find out where the messiah was to be born. Verse six quotes and blends Micah 5:2 and Ezekiel 34:23 together showing that the messianic shepherd king from the line of David was to be born in Bethlehem. As the story progresses we learn that this is indeed the birth place of Jesus.

In verse thirteen Joseph is visited again by an angel in a dream and told to flee for Egypt and stay there until Herod (who is shown here to be a total maniac) is dead, because his newborn son is in danger. Jesus has a price on his head, as Herod ordered the killing of all male children two years and under in the entire region (v. 16-18). The flight of Jesus to Egypt is said to fulfill the prophesy spoken in Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (v.15). Matthew is showing his reader that Jesus is reliving Israel's story (and looks a lot like both Israel and Moses). This is language from the Exodus account. God calls Israel his son in Exodus 4:22. Herod is the new Pharaoh (Exod. 1:15-16; Matt. 2:16-18), and in an interesting turn of events, Egypt and Israel as symbols, change meaning. Jesus flees from Israel to take refuge in Egypt. As the narrative and imagery paint it, Israel has become Egypt. Verse 18 further demonstrates this in quoting Jeremiah 31:15. Matthew shows us here that Jesus is reenacting the Exodus story.

Chapter three is primarily about two things: showing John the Baptist as the forerunner to the messiah, and the baptism of Jesus. John goes out into the wilderness as a sign-act (Ezek. 3-5; Jer. 13). He was the Elijah who was to come (Mal. 4:5, flip just a few pages back in your Bible), he even dressed like him! (v.4; 2 Kings 1:8). He was trying to restart the story of Israel by calling people to confess their sin, repent, and be baptized as a symbol of their commitment (Deut. 30; Dan. 9; Micah 7:18-20). So when the author quotes Isaiah 40:3, he is saying this is the guy who is paving the way for the messiah.

Verses 13-17 give us the account of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. There are many Old Testament allusions taking place here that link Jesus with Israel's story: the anointing of David (1 Sam. 16:1-13 {spirit of God came upon him}), crossing the Jordan River (Josh. 2-4), the hovering of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2 {at creation}) (Mackie, 3). So we have a new Joshua, who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, to carry out the beginnings of a new creation. So deeply profound is the divine speech in verse 17, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." This is combination of three Old Testament quotes (Psa. 2:6-7; Gen. 22:2; and Isa. 42:1) (Mackie, 4). They actually go in order as it reads in Greek, "Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου (This is my son { see Psa. 2:6-7}) ὁ ἀγαπητός (the beloved {see Gen.22:2}), ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα (in whom I am pleased {see Isa. 42:1). Psalm two describes the messianic warrior king, Genesis 22 is the only other occurrence in the Bible of another "beloved son", and tells the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his only son Isaac (until God intervenes), and Isaiah 42 speaks of the servant of Yahweh empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring justice to the nations (Mackie, 4). It's an incredibly rich verse that says so much about Jesus, his mission, and empowerment to carry out that mission.

Chapters 4-7: Announcing the Arrival of God's Kingdom

Jesus' testing in the wilderness in chapter four proves him to be the true Israel, and the suffering messiah. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness to be tested by Satan, and after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he was put to the test (4:3-11). The number "40" is significant. It ties Jesus once again to Moses (Deut. 9:9) and Israel (wilderness wandering book of Numbers 40 years). Satan attacks Jesus' identity, "If you are the son of God..." (v. 3 and 5). The reader was just told in chapter three that Jesus is the son of God. Further he says things like, "make some food out these rocks, show how powerful you are, and worship me I'll give you everything", using scripture to provoke Jesus (Psa.91). Jesus tells Satan to get behind him (v. 10, only other usage is in Matt. 16 when Jesus says this to Peter). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16 (also echoes of 1 Sam. 7:3; and Isa. 7:12). In doing so he is refusing to come to power and rule the world the way Israel's kings had in the past, giving into satanic temptation to grab power through selfishness, manipulation, cruelty, wickedness, etc. Jesus knew his Bible. He knew from the book of Daniel, that when humans forget they are under God's authority and on his mission, they don't rule beasts, they become them. When humans want to become powerful apart from God, in reality they become beasts. Jesus doesn't give in, and he overcomes the temptations of Satan. He prevails where Israel had failed. In his temptation, he showed that he would not take the easy road out, but trod down the treacherous trail set before him (Isa. 42).

After emerging from his testing, in chapter 4:12-25 Jesus begins his ministry which is to announce and inaugurate the kingdom of God. Verse 17 tells us the central message of his preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (For Old Testament background see Exod. 15, 2 Sam. 7, Psalms 2, 72, 93-100, Isa. 1-2, 9, 11, 52, 65-66, and Daniel . 2 and 7) (Mackie, 4). The Kingdom of God/heaven refers to the same thing (see Dan. 4:26). The kingdom of God put simply is God's people under his rule (Psa.145:9-13). The kingdom is not just a gift we get some day; it is both present and future, "already-not-yet". That is why Jesus is spoken of as inaugurating, because full consummation will not take place until the Second Advent. However, the kingdom of God has drawn near in the person of Jesus Christ. In verse 18-22 Jesus begins to form a new Israel (he begins calling the 12 disciples). In verses 23-25 we are told that Jesus begins preaching the good news of the gospel in Galilee, and healing the spiritually and physically sick of their ailments. Jesus confronts sin and evil head on, ruling over it, and drawing quite the crowd.

Chapters five through seven record what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus teaches us how to live as new covenant believers under his rule and authority. Once again Jesus looks like Moses as he goes up to a mountain to teach about the Torah (Exod. 18-34). This signifies Jesus bringing the Torah to fulfillment and giving a "New Torah" for the inaugurated kingdom of God. The structure of the Book of Matthew (see graphic above) has a repeated pattern from chapter four onward. There will be a narrative section, followed by a big block of Jesus' teachings. This is pattern occurs five times, the same number as the five books of Moses (Mackie, 1). In chapter four we received a narrative about Jesus announcing the kingdom, preaching and healing. Now in this section we get to see what he was teaching.

Jesus teaches us how we (and he) relate to the Torah as new covenant, kingdom of God believers. This entire section details the ethics of the kingdom and shows how Jesus' teaching is, "now the standard of divine justice by which God's people are called to account" (Mackie, 6). The Beatitudes (5:1-12) speak of the kind of people to whom the kingdom comes (think of the first people

Jesus came to in chapter 4). The Beatitudes are not a formula for gaining favor with God. Jesus is actually taking the “blessed life” or the “good life” from Psalms and Proverbs, and flipping it on its head for effect, showing us that the kingdom comes in a surprising way, to the destitute and the unfortunate as well. In verses 13-16 Jesus talks about salt and light, describing what his disciples are to be like as the new kingdom of priests (Isa. 2:1-5; 60-62). In verse 17-20 Jesus shows that he is not anti or pro Torah, but fulfillment of Torah. To follow Jesus and his teachings is the very essence of what it means to obey the Torah as a new covenant believer. As we shall see later, His death and resurrection brought the New Covenant blessings, the promised Holy Spirit, and a Torah-inscribed heart with the power to do what Jesus is demanding, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). Dr. Mackie comments, “. . . ‘Greater righteousness’ points to Jesus’ diagnosis of Israel/humanity’s condition: the twisted, selfish nature of the human heart which needs to undergo transformation (see also 15:15-20 and 22:34-40)” (6).

Chapter 5:21-48 contains the six “antitheses” illustrating the “greater righteousness” to which the Law and Prophets already pointed, and that Jesus is now bringing into reality (Mackie, 6). In this section of chapter five, Jesus is deepening the law. The specific laws contained in the Torah are not always God’s true and ultimate will (Matt. 19), because humanity is fallen and sinful. Jesus wants more than literal surface observance of specific laws. To not sleep with your neighbor’s wife, isn’t good enough to fulfill loving God and loving neighbor. Don’t even lust, Jesus says, then you will be doing justice and righteousness. It’s not enough that you don’t murder someone in your anger. Jesus doesn’t want us to hate. He cares about our motivations for doing things. New Covenant people of God internalize the Torah so that it becomes a very part of being, so that inwardly they don’t sin, and outwardly they do justice and righteousness in all of their relationships (Deuteronomy 30, Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-28). We have greater power to keep and live out the law, because of Jesus.

Chapters six and seven speak of this “greater righteousness” in terms of how it should transform what we call today “spiritual disciplines”, like giving and managing our resources (6:1-4, 19-34) prayer (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18). Additionally, Jesus speaks to how following his kingdom ethics should transform our relationships with each other (7:1-20). In summary, the entire narrative in both cases of Exodus and Matthew so far proceed the same: childhood, Exodus through the Red Sea/ baptism in the Jordan, wilderness testing, mountain, law, etc. The extensive use of the Moses/Sinai/Exodus motif reflects Matthew’s burden to present Jesus as the new and greater Moses and true Israel (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-3; Matt. 4, 17).

Chapters 8-10: Jesus Brings the Kingdom of God into People’s Lives

Chapters eight and nine pick up the narrative again, after Jesus’ first large block of teaching (chs. 5-7). This section demonstrates what the Kingdom looks like when it invades the lives of the broken. There are 10 outcasts of society who receive healing and/or salvation from Jesus in nine stories, paired in groups of three. In-between triads are Jesus’ two calls to follow him, radical calls to discipleship (Mackie, 7). They are depicted as sheep without a shepherd. The “shepherd-less sheep” motif is prominent throughout Scripture (1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2; Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34)

The first three healings include Jesus healing a leper (8:1-4), the Roman centurion’s son (8:5-13), and Peter’s sick mother-in-law (8:14-17). Verses 19-22 describe Jesus’ first call to follow him,

preceded by three more displays of power and healings. Jesus saves the disciples from the storm (8:23-27), heals the demon possessed men (8:28-34), brings healing and salvation to the paralytic man (9:1-8), and then gives his second call to follow him (9:9-17). The first call is one to the righteous or pious, and this call to the sinners, showing the expansiveness and inclusion of all people groups in Jesus' call. Jesus final three healings are the resurrection of a dead girl (9:18-26), healing a sick woman (9:18-26), a blind man (9:27-31), and finally a mute man (9:32-34).

These healings are saying something about Jesus as the temple (Matt. 12; 26; Jn.2; Acts 6:14). The source of divine holiness is walking around (Jesus) not contracting the disease, or destroying people, but cleansing, healing, and restoring, and doing so outside the "establishment", because he is the "greater than" temple (Matt. 12).

Chapter ten is the second block of Jesus' teachings in which he sends out his twelve (he is the new Israel, so this makes sense {12 tribes}) disciples to do the same things he is doing, "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction" (v.1). They are now to act on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, to be "salt" and "light", priests to the nations (5:13-16; Isa. 2:1-5; 60-62). Verses 5-42 record Jesus' detailed instructions to the disciples from what they should bring on the journey, to whom they are being sent (lost children of Israel), to encouraging them to persevere, because the road is going to be rocky. They will be accepted by some and rejected by others, but rewards await kingdom builders.

Chapters 11-13: Responses to Jesus

In these chapters Matthew records for us the various responses to Jesus' words and deeds thus far. It is a mixed bag of positive, negative, and neutral responses. There is a person attached to the kingdom, how do you respond to him?

Chapter 11:2-19 tells the story of John the Baptist's response to Jesus' ministry so far. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, as he sits in prison, is questioning if Jesus is the messiah. His is a neutral response. Notice that Jesus doesn't rebuke John. John knows what is supposed to happen when the messiah comes, and Jesus isn't quite fitting his idea of what the messiah is supposed to look like. He and even preached that he was coming (3:12). Jesus quotes Isaiah in his message to John (Isa. 35:5-6 and 61), which John would have known. He also would have known that they spoke of judgement, not just healing and restoration, but Jesus doesn't quote that part to John; he leaves it out. First fruits of messianic age are here, but the judgements are not yet. Jesus' miracles were not "cool parlor tricks", he was doing stuff in character with messianic kingdom, that people would know that he had authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6). Jesus tells John that he is the messiah, but that his expectations are skewed. Previously it was John who bore testimony about Jesus, now Jesus bears testimony about John, beginning in verse seven. Jesus says that he was the one who was to prepare the way for the messiah, quoting Malachi 3:1 (v.10), no one born greater than John (v.11), the Elijah that was to come (v.14; Mal. 4:5), the final prophet (v.13 signifies the end of the classic prophetic office!). Jesus thinks very highly of John who at the moment is having some doubts.

In Jesus' address to the crowds about John the Baptist, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (v. 11). What does Jesus mean? What is he saying about the kingdom? First, John was the greatest, because he is the one who introduced Jesus. Everything he ever said about Jesus was true. There was one man on the entire stage of human history who said, "Here he

is; he is the one!” That’s what makes him the greatest. However, the least in the kingdom are greater than he (v.11). This is true, because now that messiah has come, and kingdom of God people can point out Jesus more clearly than John ever could have because of their place in salvation history, they can point to Jesus like those before never could (this becomes especially true after Jesus death, resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit).

In chapter 11:20-24 Jesus rebukes the towns in which he performed most of his miracles, because they did not repent. Verses 25-30 record Jesus’ call to come to him, that he may grant rest, for there is no other way to the Father, but through him. People don’t have a problem with the kingdom of God, they like the signs and wonders. They have a problem with the king of that kingdom, but Jesus teaches that you can’t have one without the other.

Chapter 12 gives account to Jesus’ authority being challenged by Israel’s leaders, who accuse him of violating the covenant and tapping into demonic power to perform exorcisms. In chapter 12:1-8 Jesus proclaims that he is greater than the temple, Lord of the Sabbath, and again identifies himself as Daniel’s “Son of Man” (Dan. 7). Matthew shows the boldness and gentleness of Jesus in the next few verses. Jesus proves these claims (v.1-8) by healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (v.9-16). Verses 15-21 prepare the reader for Jesus’ confrontational encounter with the Pharisees and the crowd’s response to Jesus that runs to the end of the chapter. Verses 18-21 are a blend of quotes from Isaiah (11:10; 42:1-3;61:1) stating that Jesus is the beloved of God, filled with the Spirit, and sent to bring justice and hope, even to the Gentiles.

Jesus heals a demon-possessed man in verse twenty-two which elicits two responses. The crowds say, “Can this be the son of David” (v.23) and the Pharisees respond that it is by the power of evil, something demonic/satanic that he heals (v.24). The people respond correctly, that’s exactly what they should have been thinking. Interestingly the religious elite, the ones who should have recognized this first, don’t see it the same way. Jesus tells them they don’t make sense, why would Satan drive out Satan, but if it is by God that Jesus is able to do what he does, then the kingdom of God has indeed come. Jesus then talks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The primary messianic credential is the Spirit of God. Jesus does the miracles by the power of the spirit, he is the king right in front of them, and they attribute it to Satan. If one take the voice of the Spirit who is convicting of sin and pointing to Jesus and that person says “No! That’s Satan”, what a hardening of heart is taking place. It is calling evil good and good evil (v.33-37; Isa. 5:20). To reject the messiah, Jesus, is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

In verses 38-42 Jesus speaks about the sign of Jonah, and relates the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish, to his own death and resurrection that will soon take place. Jesus is portrayed as a greater than Jonah and Solomon here (just like Jesus prior claims of being greater than the temple v.6).

Chapter thirteen contains the third block of Jesus’ teachings. They are the kingdom parables, that are a commentary on what the reader has just read in chapters eleven and twelve regarding responses to the kingdom. Dr. Mackie comments, “The kingdom parables show how Israel’s rejection of their king is paradoxically the very means by which God’s kingdom is coming into reality through Jesus” (7).

The parable of the Four Soils in verses one through nine demonstrates how the kingdom is accepted by some and rejected by others. Notice how the first three soils are useless (Jesus explains the parable in v.18-23). Chapter 13:24-30 is the parable of the Weeds. It explains how good and evil grow

together in the world, and this won't change until the end. True sons and fake sons will not be separated until final judgement. Verses 31-32 tell of how the kingdom is like a mustard seed, it has a small beginning and a big end. Verse 33-43 recount the Leaven parable. It's an image about how the kingdom of God grows, and its exhaustiveness. The parable of the Treasure and the Pearl in verses 44-46 speak to how the kingdom is of estimable value, to be sought more than anything. It comes in the unexpected and the prudent find it. Verses 47-50, the parable of the Net speaks of eschatological judgment, and how the kingdom has come without effecting this judgment yet. Jesus spoke in parables as fulfillment of prophesy (v. 34-35), they serve a two-fold purpose: a blessing and a curse. They are given so that some can understand and for others, so that they don't (v.10-17; Isa. 6:9-10).

To close out the chapter Matthew tells of how those in Jesus' hometown, those who should have known him best, are offended by him and are full of unbelief, to the point Jesus couldn't minister there (v. 53-58). Jesus says, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household" (v. 57; Jer. 11:21). Matthew shows us again how those who should know and understand Jesus, are actually not the ones who do, especially in the beginning.

Chapters 14-20: The Upside Down Kingdom of God

In this section Jesus shatters the expectations of what others thought the messiah would be and do. He redefines what it means to be messiah, and reshapes how people are to think about what it means to be part of the New Covenant people.

Chapter 14:1-12 tells the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist. Jesus hears of this, and tries to go away and be alone hopping on a boat, but is followed by a large crowd. He had compassion on them and healed the sick among them. This leads into the feeding of the 5000 story (v. 13-21), which plays on the shepherd imagery (feeding the sheep of Israel) and the figure of Moses and the Manna from heaven (Exod. 16). There are echoes of creation here too it seems, as bread doesn't just multiple itself, more bread and fish was miraculously created. In verses 22-33 Jesus walks on water displaying his power, offering the disciples yet another reason to believe and have faith in him. In verse 34-36 Jesus does some more healing and people are made well simply by touching his clothes.

In chapter 15:1-10 Israel's religious leaders question Jesus about his disciple's behavior. Jesus lashes back at them that they care more about their man-made traditions than the laws of God (v.8-9), and quotes Isaiah 29:13 and Ezekiel 33:31, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." In verse 10-20 Jesus teaches that the fundamental problem of humanity is a wicked heart, for, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (v.19). Jesus' verdict of the human heart is the same as that of Moses and the prophets (Deut. 30:1-6; Jer. 17:9), only the renewal of the covenant can bring hope (Mackie, 7).

The healing of the Canaanite woman in chapter 15:21-28 and feeding the 4,000 gentiles in chapter 15:32-38 show the widening of Jesus' shepherding mission and activities to all peoples, Jew and non-Jew alike. The Canaanite woman carries on the tradition and adds to the portrait of the women in Matthew genealogy from chapter one. Her faith, and recognition of Jesus as the son of David, kicks off Jesus' openness to the gentiles throughout the rest of the book (the feeding of the 4,000 takes place in gentile land right after Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite Woman. The kingdom is first offered only to Israel (10:5), but non-Jews keep coming to Jesus to be healed (8:5-13; 15:21-28) (Mackie, 7). This plays into Matthew's portrayal of the closest people to Jesus not understanding him, and gentile

inclusion in the kingdom of God. The ones who should understand him, don't. That is what Matthew is demonstrating in these side-by-side stories of the religious leaders and the Canaanite woman.

In chapter 16 Jesus teaches how, contrary to what many thought, the messiah will be victorious through suffering and the giving of his own life in self-sacrificial love. This is exemplified most prominently in the story of Jesus and Peter (16:13-20). Peter knows Jesus is the Messiah, but he still doesn't get how the kingdom of God is coming into existence. Peter, along with many others was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah's death and resurrection which Jesus foretells three different times in this section of Matthew (16:21-27; 17:12; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

The last verse of chapter 16 reads, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (v.28). Immediately after Jesus says this, Matthew gives us the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (17:1-13). Those Jesus is talking about in verse 28 we learn are Peter, James, and John. Jesus is transfigured before them, and is described as looking like the "ancient of days" from Daniel (7:9, describing God), and standing with him are Elijah and Moses (the law and the prophets). A voice from heaven repeats what he spoke in chapter 3:17 at Jesus baptism, but the phrase, "listen to him" is added (v. 5). At this the men fall on their faces, Jesus tells them to get up, but when they open their eyes only Jesus is standing there. Jesus has been portrayed as "like" or even "greater than" various Old Testament characters, but here now Matthew is saying even more. Jesus eclipses them, he completely transcends them.

The remaining verses consist of Jesus healing a demon possessed boy (v.14-20), foretelling his death again (v. 22-23), and this funny and bizarre story about where Jesus pays taxes with a coin Peter gets from a fish's mouth (v. 24-27).

Chapter 18-20 are Jesus' fourth block of teaching and is about how to live life in the kingdom of God. Jesus' example of humility, self-sacrificing love, and service is to be reflected by everyone in everyday life. It is a call to radical obedience to God and concern for neighbors. Jesus speaks to the issues of care for children and humility (18:1-5), temptations to sin (18:6-9), concern for the wayward (18:10-14), how to handle being sinned against/church discipline (18:15-20), and then he explains forgiveness and the character of God in a powerful parable (18:21-35).

Chapter 19:1-12 is Jesus' teaching on divorce, in which he takes us back to a Genesis one, creation understanding of marriage. Jesus shows care for children again (v.13-14) showing that all are important in the kingdom, and it is actually those who adopt the fearless abandon, trust, faith, and love of a child that inherit the kingdom. Verses 16-30 tell the encounter of Jesus and the rich young ruler, in which at its core shows that salvation is impossible apart from God, it cannot be earned. The journey of being a disciple is costly, but will be rewarded (v.28-30 also see v.21). Verse 28 speaks of the disciples being given authority when Jesus fulfills Daniel seven both now (v.28) and in the future (v.29). It seems Matthew is tying this in with the church (16:8) as functioning how Israel was supposed to, but failed, now in the messianic age.

Chapter twenty opens up with the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (v.1-16). This parable is framed by two claims that the last will be first and the first last (19:30, 20:16), and come directly after Jesus' teaching on rewards. It expands on the paradoxical nature and values of the kingdom God. It highlights God's radical generosity, and challenges our assumptions of what is fair and how we compare ourselves to others. It reveals our hardheartedness in struggling to celebrate the undeserved

generosity of God upon others, perhaps even those we judge as undeserving. In verse 17-19 Jesus predicts his death a third time. In verses 20-28 Jesus explains once again the upside down kingdom values that greatness comes through serving. Jesus points out that his role as messiah is one of service, and suffering (v. 28 Isa. 53:10-12; 51:17; Ezek. 23:31). In verses 29-34 Jesus heals two blind men, directly after he tells the disciples he came to serve. Jesus takes the opportunity to put his money where his mouth is.

Chapters 21-25: Clash of Kingdoms: Israel vs. Jesus

In this section Jesus asserts his authority and faces the religious leaders of Jerusalem head on. In chapter 21:1-11 Matthew describes Jesus' style of entry into the city as fulfillment of prophesy (Zech. 9:9; Isa. 62:11). This is the first mention of Jesus riding any kind of animal, it was for a purpose, and Matthew shares that with the reader. It appears the crowd understood what was happening in this "sign-act" of Jesus because they begin praising the messiah. If the ruckus Jesus was causing in the streets wasn't getting enough attention, his temple stunt definitely did (v. 12-17).

Jesus is enraged at what the temple has become, so he "purifies" it, because it wasn't fulfilling its purpose, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers'" (v. 13, quoting Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11). After he turns over tables, pushes people out, and begins to heal others, the religious leaders are furious for two reasons: because of what Jesus is doing and what people are saying about him, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Jesus doesn't offer an apology and perhaps made matters worse by affirming the people's praise by quoting Psalm 8:2, which is about the praise of Yahweh.

In verses 18- 22 we receive the bizarre story of Jesus cursing the fig tree. This story taken on its own doesn't seem to make much sense, it seems random. However, when taken in context (Jesus cleansing the temple) it begins to make more sense. The fig tree is a symbol of the temple, a healthy-looking tree full of leaves, but lacking fruit (just like the temple, see Mic. 7:1; Jer. 8:13). The temple looked pretty, but Jesus saw through the veneer and used the fig tree as an object lesson for the disciples, showing that the temple is about to become withered like the fig tree. He also uses it to teach them that there is power in faith.

In verses 23-27 Jesus' authority is questioned, which leads into three parables which all share one core theme. That theme being, "who are the true people of God?" The Parable of the Two Sons (v. 28-32) is about how actions speak louder than words. God cares more about what we do than what we say we're going to do. Our true intentions and heart are revealed in our actions. The Tenants of the Vineyard pulls heavily on the understanding of the imagery in Isaiah 5:1-7. It is about Israel and its leaders' failure to live up to God's expectations. More specifically the focus is on Israel's leaders, who like the death of the landowner's son in the parable, were about to kill God's son showing that they had rejected the prophets and God himself like their ancestors before them. The true people of God are revealed here to be those "producing fruit" (v.43, Isa. 5:4, 7). The Parable of the Wedding Feast (22:1-14) is another example of the first being last and the last being first. The kingdom of God is open to anyone, however Israel's leaders had rejected salvation and Jesus to their own demise.

The next three confrontations Jesus has with the religious leaders were initiated by his opponents all to try and trap him so they could have some sort of legal or legitimate claims over him to put an end to him. The first encounter was taxes (22:15-22), the second resurrection (22:23-33), and the third the greatest commandment (22:34-40). In verses 41-45 Jesus is the approacher this time and

asks the religious leaders a theology question about the “Son of David”, which no one can answer, and therefore no one dared to ask him any more questions (v.46).

Chapters 23-25 are Jesus’ last big block of teaching. Chapter 23 is Jesus reproving the religious leaders for distorting what it means to be the people of God. They live lives of total hypocrisy, and Jesus’ tone is harsh. The chapter reads much like the judgement passages of the prophets. The chapter ends with Jesus lamenting,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Jesus alludes to a plethora of Old Testament passages (Deut. 32:11-12; Psalms 118:26; 147:2; Proverbs 1:24; Ruth 2:12; Isaiah 64:11; Jeremiah 12:7; 22:5). He is angry and devastated. This chapter showcases a passionate Jesus.

Chapters 24-25 are Jesus’ judgement speech. Jesus foretells, in chapter 24, the destruction of the temple (v.1-2), signs of the end of the age (v. 3-13), the abomination that makes desolate (v. 14-28), the unexpected coming of the son of man (v. 29-35), and the temporal unknowability of “*The end*” (v. 36-51). A lot of imagery is drawn from Isaiah 13 and Daniel 7. Verses 3-35 speak about events taking place during the generation after Jesus’ death and verses 36-51 speak of final judgement, the “last” generation. Knowing these things Jesus has revealed he doesn’t want people to depend on the temple or its religious leaders, or be panicked by political upheaval, natural disasters, the destruction of the temple, or false prophets, but to depend on him eagerly and expectantly await his coming again, and proclaim his story in word and deed until he returns. Keep doing kingdom stuff.

Chapter 25 has three main sections, two parables and a description of final judgement. The parable of the Ten Virgins (v.1-13) is about readiness (recall 24:42), and compares and contrasts between the ready and the unready in regard to the second coming. The reality of ultimate exclusion from the kingdom of heaven for some in verse twelve is reminiscent of chapter 7:13. The parable of the Talents (v. 14-30) is similar to the parable of the Two Servants from the previous chapter (24:45-51). In both, the master leaves and gives his workers responsibilities that they are to fulfill in his absence. Like the previous parable the question is, “Who will be ready when the master/bridegroom returns?” Unlike the parable of the Ten Virgins, we are more explicitly shown what it looks like to be “ready”. Being ready is not a passive activity, it looks like carrying out the responsibilities given to us with the utmost effort and care. The three servants are given different amounts of money based on their abilities, and are expected to bring in a return in line with their abilities (God is a just and fair God). The first two servants receive the same accolades from the master (v. 21, 23) because of their faithful service to him. The third servant however, shows himself to not understand the nature and character of the master, and opted to play it safe rather than get in the game. The “ready” use their gifts responsibly, adventurously, skillfully, and to glorify the master until he comes. Verses 31-46 close of Jesus’ final block of teaching and speak of final judgment using language from Daniel 7 and Joel 3. The Old Jerusalem has to be destroyed so that a New Jerusalem can happen. It’s just like in the prophets. This section powerfully shows how the authority, rule, and reign attributed to God in the Old Testament is now being attributed to Jesus as well. Jesus teaches here that people are judged in the end based on their response to the kingdom of God/heaven come in the person of Jesus the messiah.

Chapters 26-28: Jesus' Death and Resurrection as Messianic King

Chapters 26-28 record the death and resurrection of Jesus, and show him to be Israel's true messiah and king of the world. It has five major movements, or landmarks: the Passover, the garden, Jesus' trial, his execution, and his resurrection.

Chapter 26:1-5 Jesus tells his exactly what is going to happen to him in just a couple of days, during Passover. He will be handed over to be crucified (v.1-2). The following verse (v.3-5) tells of the plotting of the high priest and elders to arrest and kill Jesus. In verse six through thirteen Jesus is anointed with oil by a woman, and as Jesus interprets, it is to prepare him for his burial (v.12). Jesus honors the woman, and corrects his disciples, for judging her, for she is actually the one who gets it right (the reoccurring theme of who actually recognizes Jesus). In verses 14-16 Judas goes to the high priest, asks what he will receive if he betrays Jesus, and they pay him 30 pieces of silver (see Exod. 21:32 and especially Zech. 11:12, the rejected shepherd).

Chapter 26:17-30 records the Passover meal, and Last Supper event. Jesus' death is the Passover offering that creates ushers in the New Covenant of God's kingdom (Mackie, 8). The Passover retells the story, every year, of rescue from slavery, and its most powerful image is of the lamb (Exod. 12). That imagery is huge here. Jesus rescues from the slavery of sin, and he is himself the Passover lamb. Jesus uses bread and wine as profound symbols of his death that is soon to take place. The "bread" being broken was an image of his body. He had been providing the bread in the wilderness (14:13-21; 15:32-38), a means of life, now he is providing bread in a new way. He is the bread that will bring life through suffering and physical death. Matthew highlights how Jesus' death, his "...blood... poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (v.28). This is smothered with Old Testament imagery: Exodus 24:7-8 (blood of the covenant), Isaiah 53:10-12 (a death that brings forgiveness) and Jeremiah 31:31-34 (New Covenant, forgiveness of sins) (Mackie, Lecture). By consuming the elements, the disciples partake in his death and experience the forgiveness that it brings. Verse twenty-nine looks forward to the great wedding banquet in the future (Isa. 2:6-8; Matt. 21:33-46; 25:1-13; Rev. 19).

Verses 31-35 foretell of the scattering of the disciples as fulfillment of prophesy (Zech. 13:7) carrying on the theme of a rejected and suffering messiah (quotes from Zechariah 9,11, and 12 appear in Matt. 21,24, and 27 driving this theme home). Peter is particularly highlighted here, perhaps to highlight that the leader and one who seemed to understand Jesus the most out of the disciples, he too will fall away.

Verses 36-46 bring us to the second movement, to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is tested once again (ch.4), this time not in the wilderness (Moses, Israel in the Book of Numbers), but in a garden (Adam and Eve Gen. 3). In Genesis three there are humans tested in a garden, but they fail. Matthew shows that where Adam and Eve failed in the garden, Jesus persevered in his. When Jesus says, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39) it seems to me that he is talking about the same cup he mentioned to the disciples earlier in Matthew 20:22 when he said, "are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (In context, who will sit next to him in his kingdom). What is the cup he is referring to? Remember the cup from chapter 25 of Jeremiah? The cup is the image representing God's wrath against Israel and the nations. It is full of wine, and Jeremiah is told to take it to Israel and all of the nations the Lord tells him to, and make them drink, and get drunk on it. Jeremiah is to Jerusalem what Jesus is to Jerusalem, except that Jesus won't hand the cup to the nations like

Jeremiah, rather Jesus takes the cup and drinks it himself, and it kills him (Mackie, Lecture). The level of loyalty and trust between the father and the son is beyond words, it's amazing. The Father and the son's wills fuse together, like they always have, in this ultimate test.

Chapter 26:47-27:26 give the account of Jesus' arrest and trial. In chapter 26:47-56 Jesus is arrested as a "messianic revolutionary" (Mackie, 8) and accused of claiming to be the messianic king (v.59-66). In Matthew 26:57-68 Jesus is on trial before Caiaphas the high priest. They ask him if he is the messiah, and Jesus responds, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." What Jesus is saying here is, "The moment you kill me is the moment I become the divine king and you show yourself to be a beast" (Mackie, Lecture). The moment they kill Jesus, they show once again, but in much more grotesque way that they have become Egypt (Matt. 2) and Babylon (Daniel). It begs the question, "Who is really on trial here?" Jesus, here describes who he is from Daniel and Isaiah showing that his plan to defeat evil, to conquer the beast, is to let it kill him. They claim Jesus is guilty of blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), and they begin to spit on him and strike him (Isa. 50:6). Verse 69-75 Peter denies Jesus. In chapter 27:1-2 the conspirators deliver Jesus to Pilot, and verses three through ten describe the events of Judas' regret and suicide.

Chapter 27:11-26 tell of Jesus' Roman trial, before Pilot. Pilot caves to the demands of the Jewish leaders (even though he finds no fault in Jesus {nor does his wife who receives a frightening dream v.19}) and their claims that Jesus is a royal rival to Caesar (27:11-14) (Mackie, 8). "King of the Jews" is a politically loaded term. Pilot makes an attempt to release Jesus, but the people chose Barabbas. The idea of Jesus' death as substitutionary can't be missed here (Isa. 53). Pilot washes his hands as a symbol that he is "innocent" of Jesus' blood and the Jews accept this, and accept responsibility for Jesus' death, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (v. 25). It is doubtful Pilot knows the irony of his symbolic action of hand washing (Deut. 21:6-8; Ps. 26:6; 73:13). In verse 24-26 Jesus is handed over to be scourged (Isa. 50:6; 53:5) and crucified.

Chapter 27:27-56 tells of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus is first mocked and beaten, but this time by gentiles, not Jews (v. 27-31). As part of their mockery, he is given a crown, robe, and scepter (ironic enthronement imagery). Afterward he is led away to be crucified (Isa. 53:7). Verse 32-44 tell of some of the horrors of crucifixion. Physical pain, suffering, rejection and mockery are highlighted with many echoes of Psalms 22 and 69. Verse 45-56 record the death of Jesus on a Roman cross. It becomes dark and there is an earthquake (Amos 8:9; Joel 3:16, symbols of judgment), the temple curtain is torn in two (open access to the Father now through the death of the son, Holy of Holies laid bare), and dead saints are resurrected and start walking around (Isa. 26:19). Once again, a gentile sees what the Jews couldn't, even at Jesus' death and in these signs, "When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (v. 54). Dr. Mackie comments, "Jesus' trials and execution are crammed with 'royal-enthronement' irony: Death and Resurrection is the paradoxical way the suffering servant is exalted over the nations" (8).

Chapter 27:57-28:20 record Jesus' burial, resurrection, and commissioning of the disciples. Jesus was really dead and buried (28:1-10), but rose from the grave as Lord and king (28:11-20). Chapter 28 shows Jesus' earlier predictions of his death and resurrection to be true, in turn also

showing him to be the exalted and enthroned son of man from Daniel 7:13-14, given authority over all things. Because Israel's leaders have rejected Jesus and God's kingdom, it is handed over to the apostles (21:43). With this authority, Jesus then sends out his followers to announce the kingdom and teach people how to follow (i.e. Sermon on the mount stuff) the risen Lord with the promise that he will be with his people (Isa. 7:14, Immanuel) on their mission, and soon empowering them through the Spirit (28:18-20, Acts 2).

Key Themes:

Jesus as True Israel

Matthew is determined from beginning to end to show that Jesus, fulfills the mission that Israel was supposed to accomplish, but failed. He is the son of David and Abraham, the promised "seed" (Gal. 3:6-29). From the events surrounding his birth (chs.1-2, flight to Egypt and return to Israel (ch.2), baptism (ch.3), temptations (ch. 4;15; 26), giving of a new Torah (5-7 especially, but also the big blocks of teaching noted above), fulfilling the requirements of the Torah (we see Jesus do this all the way through the book of Matthew), and being the Passover lamb (Matt. 26:17-30 representative for the many to do what they could not (Isa. 53), Jesus shows this to be true. Where Israel failed, Jesus prevailed, showing his claims to be Daniel's "son man" figure (Dan.7), and Ezekiel's "good Shepherd" figure (Ezek. 34) to be true.

Gentile Inclusion

Perhaps the most profound example of this in Matthew is the five Canaanite women from the genealogy in chapter 1 and Jesus' healing of the woman in chapter 15 (Mackie, 2). They highlight the role of the messiah to be a blessing to all nations, not just Israel (Isa.2, 42, 49, 56). This is also seen in the feeding of the 4,000 on the Gentile side of the sea (ch.15), gentiles coming to Jesus to be healed (8:5-13; 15:21-28), Daniel's son of man imagery (a ruler over all nations), and Jesus as the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12,15,17,22; Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3).

The Paradoxical and Upside Down Kingdom of God/heaven

Through parables, healings, and other teachings, Jesus continually demonstrates how the kingdom of God came in unexpected ways, to unexpected people (trace who gets healed ch.8-10 and elsewhere), and how those that should have gotten it didn't, those closest to Jesus even missed what was happening (16:13-20). This is seen especially in chapters 14-20. In this section Jesus shatters the expectations of what others thought the messiah would be and do. He redefines what it means to be messiah, and reshapes how people are to think about what it means to be part of the New Covenant people. Greatness comes through serving, the first shall be last and the last first. The mark of a true believer is fruitfulness, humility, and self-sacrificial love. Peter, along with many others was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah's death and resurrection which Jesus foretells three different times in this section of Matthew (16:21-27; 17:12; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Life through Death

This theme is seen most proudly in the final three chapters of Matthew, but the entire book is full of "fulfillment of prophesy" language that points to Jesus as being the promised suffering-divine-

messianic- shepherd- king from the prophets (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3 Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11;53 ; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23) that would usher in the New Covenant and the kingdom of God. The Last Supper demonstrates the culmination of this (26:17-30). Jesus rescues from the slavery of sin, and he is himself the Passover lamb. Jesus uses bread and wine as profound symbols of his death that is soon to take place. The “bread” being broken was an image of his body. He had been providing the bread in the wilderness (14:13-21; 15:32-38), a means of life, now he is providing bread in a new way. He is the bread that will bring life through suffering and physical death. Matthew highlights how Jesus’ death, his “...blood... poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (v.28). This is smothered with Old Testament imagery: Exodus 24:7-8 (blood of the covenant), Isaiah 53:10-12 (a death that brings forgiveness) and Jeremiah 31:31-34 (New Covenant, forgiveness of sins) (Mackie, Lecture). By consuming the elements, the disciples partake in his death and experience the forgiveness that it brings. Verse twenty-nine looks forward to the great wedding banquet in the future (Isa. 2:6-8; Matt. 21:33-46; 25:1-13; Rev. 19).

Implications for Today:

Matthew has massive implication for today. Its message is the only hope for the world. It is because of Jesus that we can have a relationship with God, to be forgiven and restored, sons and daughters of the Lord most high. Sin doesn’t have to be our default anymore. Those who trust in Jesus have the power and ability to live out his teachings. It is because of someone else’s faithfulness to the great commission that believers exist today (Matt. 28:18-20). We are all products and beneficiaries of Jesus’ command 2,000 plus years ago to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. So we are to continue to being home to the world and tell the Jesus story.

Jesus’ death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21). He suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man’s place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus he fulfilled the demands of God’s righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). After His ascension, Christ instated the New Covenant by pouring out the promised Holy Spirit on what is known as the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). In 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 Paul teaches the Corinthians that the age of the fleshly heart is now, and that life characterized by the law alone is over. The book of Hebrews alone speaks robustly of the completeness of the forgiveness of sins promised in New Covenant prophecies (1:3; 2:17; 8:12; 9:15, 26, 28; 10:12, 17, 18, 26). The rest of the New Testament texts show how to live out the elements of New Covenant (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). How does one participate in the New Covenant? By being “in Christ” (Eph. 2:13) and being made wise to salvation through the gospel message (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8,3:23, 6:23, 10:9-10,13; Cor. 5:21). Jesus drew near to his creation as the God-Man to reveal who God is (Col. 1:15; Jn. 14:8-9), bring glory to the Father (Jn. 17:1-6), and buy back humanity (Mk. 10:45, Col. 2:14-15). Knowing this gives us a hope for the future, and power to overcome the sin and wickedness we see in our own lives and in the world. Jesus gives us a new way to be human, or better, to be truly human again. He teaches how a redeemed person is to operate in justice and righteousness, think, be motivated, and serve. Because of Jesus, those who repent of their sin and believe in him receive the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and have the promise of eternal life with him and the father.

Study Questions:

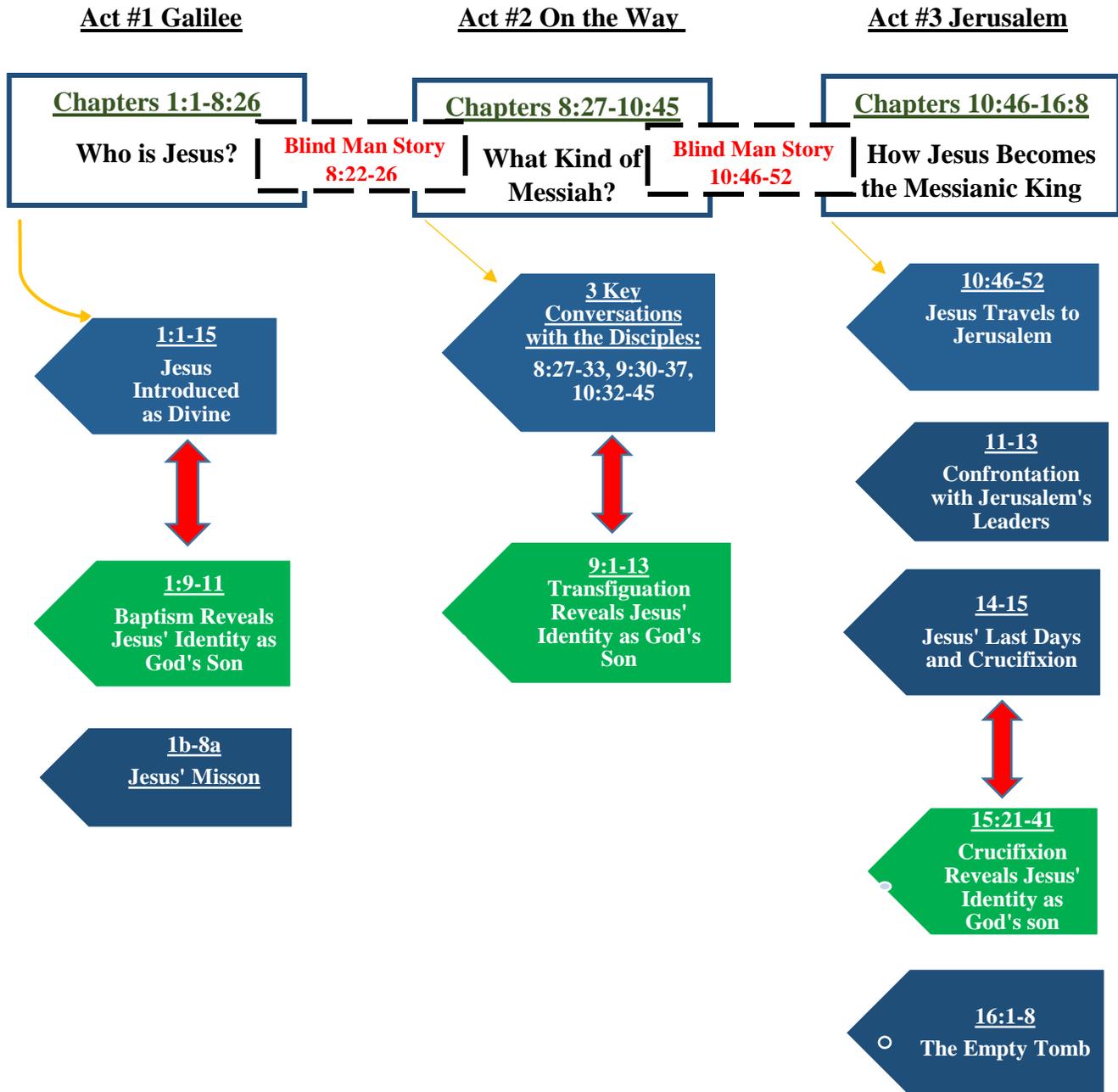
1. What does the first verse tell us about where to place Jesus in the story or Scripture?
2. How does Jesus' birth narrative in chapters one and two show him to be reenacting the story of Israel, especially the Exodus event?
3. What are some lessons we can learn from Matthew's accounts of Jesus being tempted?
4. What is Matthew trying to show us, in Jesus' treatment of the law? How does Jesus see himself in relation to the law?
5. What are some of the Old Testament portraits that find fulfillment in Jesus, or put another way, what Old Testament characters is Jesus the anti-type of?
6. What is the significance of the Passover meal? What do the elements represent and why are they such profound images?
7. Before we point our fingers at the disciples and Pharisees, what are some ways in which our society misunderstands Jesus today? What about in the church? How about in our own lives?
8. What is the significance for us today that Jesus has "fulfilled" the law?
9. Reflect on this question: "Are there those in our lives whom we deem undeserving of God's generosity, or salvation"? This could be in our overt actions and attitudes, or our apathy, and disinterest in sharing the gospel.
10. Which one of Jesus' parables stuck out to you the most? Was it because you learned something new, felt convicted, or were encouraged etc.? Let's have a couple people share.
11. Did the upside down kingdom of God surprise you as you read Matthew? Do you think our society today finds it illogical and contradictory to their experience of the world?
12. How has reading the Gospel of Matthew shaped or changed how you've thought about your walk with God, and bring his kingdom and presence to the world?

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The Book of Mark

Structure



Main Idea: The Gospel of Mark gives an account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the son of God, and how he brought the paradoxical kingdom of God to earth as the suffering servant messiah to save people from their slavery to sin, and rule over the world as Lord and king.

Chapters 1:1-8:26: Who is Jesus?

The first of the three big sections in the book of Mark, explores what the narrator reveals about Jesus' identity (1:1-13), forcing the reader to question who Jesus is as he brings the kingdom of God to earth. Dr. Tim Mackie explains reading the Book of Mark like this, "Reading Mark is about watching people wake up to a truth you already know from the first sentence (a storytelling technique called 'dramatic irony')" (10). The narrator tells you who he thinks Jesus is, and invites you to read the story and decide for yourself (through the journeys of others who get it, don't get it, or are unsure) who this Jesus is. This is his persuasion technique. The book of Mark is crafted to put tension between the reader (to whom Jesus' true identity has been revealed) and almost all the other characters (those who don't understand who Jesus is).

In chapter 1:1-15 Jesus is introduced as divine. Verse one reads, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This is the only time the narrator shares his point of view in the entire book. These first fifteen verses deliver to us Mark's core convictions about Jesus, before it is revealed to anyone else in the story (Mackie, 2). In verses two and three, Mark quotes a blend of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 (which is also alludes to Exodus 23:20). This is Mark's version of saying, "This is part of a larger story, the continuation of Israel's story." Mark places Jesus in the role of Yahweh in these quotations, by the way he has crafted his narrative. His choice of these quotations places the story of Jesus as the messiah and son of God in the context of the emerging themes from these Old Testament passages, namely: a new exodus, the coming kingdom of God, servant(s), and the New Jerusalem (Mackie, 2). Commentator Richard Hays puts it this way,

Mark is explicitly asking the reader to look to Israel's scriptures as the primary context for comprehending the story of Jesus. The reader is invited, or more accurately, *driven* to interpret everything that follows in relation to the scriptural narrative matrix anticipated by these opening verses. (24)

Verse four through eight introduces John the Baptist and his mission. John goes into the wilderness as a sign-act (Ezek. 3-5; Jer. 13). He was the Elijah who was to come (Mal. 4:4-6, flip just a few pages back in your Bible), he even dressed like him! (v.4; 2 Kings 1:8). He was trying to restart the story of Israel by calling people to confess their sin, repent, and be baptized as a symbol of their commitment (Deut. 30; Dan. 9; Micah 7:18-20). So when the author quotes Isaiah 40:3 (and others), he is saying this is the guy who is paving the way for the messiah. John portrays Jesus' coming as the day of the Lord, and Jesus' (as opposed to John's) baptism as bringing New Covenant blessings (v.8, Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).

Verses nine through eleven give us the account of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (the first of three 'revelation stories', see 9:1-13, the transfiguration and 15:21-41, the crucifixion) (Myers). There are many Old Testament allusions taking place here that link Jesus with Israel's story: the anointing of David (1 Sam. 16:1-13 {spirit of God came upon him}), crossing the Jordan River (Josh. 2-4), and the hovering of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2 {at creation}) (Mackie, 3). So we have a new Joshua, who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, to carry out the beginnings of a new creation. Verse ten says the heavens were "torn" open (Isa. 64:1-3, God coming down). So deeply profound is the divine speech in verse eleven, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." This is a combination of three Old Testament quotes (Psa. 2:6-7; Gen. 22:2; and Isa. 42:1) (Mackie, 4). They actually go in order as it reads in Greek, "σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου" (You are my son { see Psa. 2:6-7}) "ὁ ἀγαπητός" (the beloved {see Gen.22:2}), "ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα" (in you I am pleased {see Isa. 42:1}). Psalm two describes the Davidic- messianic-warrior king, Genesis 22 is the only other occurrence in the Bible of

another “beloved son”, and tells the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his only son Isaac (until God intervenes= seed of promise given over to death and rescued from it), and Isaiah 42 speaks of the suffering servant of Yahweh empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring restoration and justice to the nations in the giving up of his life (Mackie, 3). It’s an incredibly rich verse that says so much about Jesus, his mission, and empowerment to carry out that mission.

Verse twelve and thirteen speak of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, portraying him as the New Adam (V. 13; Gen. 2:19-20; Isa. 11) and a new Israel. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by Satan during his 40 days spent there. The number “40” is significant. It ties Jesus to Moses (Deut. 9:9, 40 days) and Israel (wilderness wandering the book of Numbers= 40 years). Mark is less descriptive here than the accounts in synoptic gospels, but the outcome is the same: Where Israel failed, Jesus prevailed.

In verse fourteen and fifteen we are told the core message that Jesus preached (and would later accomplish). This message was that the kingdom of God had begun for all those who would repent and believe. The kingdom of God here is spoken of in terms of reign rather than realm. Jesus is heaven breaking into life here on earth to bring salvation. Jesus’ announcement rings with language from Isaiah 40:9-10 and 52:7, as well as Daniel 7:22 (Mackie, 3). What is implicit here, and made more explicit in the cross and resurrection is that Jesus is the object of our belief and repentance. As the one who announces the kingdom of God, he is also the one who secures our place in that kingdom. These first fifteen verses set the stage for everything else that unfolds throughout the rest of the book.

The second half of chapter one (v.16-45) all the way through chapter 8:26 demonstrates how Jesus brings the kingdom of God into broken people’s lives, overwhelmingly through healing stories (chs. 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10). A couple of things to notice are how Mark will “sandwich” a central story between two similar stories (Fowler). This occurs seven times in the book of Mark, and twice in this section (3:20–21, 22–30, 31–35 and 5:21–24, 25–34, 35–43) (Mackie, 8). Additionally, pay attention to the speed or haste at which the writer composes the first two acts (look for “immediately” throughout the text). These chapters include stories of Jesus exercising power and authority which cause people to question his identity, and strangely, Jesus tries to keep his identity under wraps when people do “see” or experience who he is (at least in the first two acts in Mark). There is a pattern to the stories in this section: people are amazed (1:22,27; 2:12; 4:41; 5:15,17,42; 6:2,51; 7:37), they have questions (1:27;2:7,12,16,24; 4:41; 6:2;7:5), and Jesus’ warnings to keep quiet (1:23-28, 34, 40-45; 5:42-43; 7:25-26, 35-36; 8:26) mainly about his identity (Mackie, 4-5). This is called the “messianic secret” (Mackie, 10). Jesus knows people will misunderstand who he is and how he will accomplish his mission (ch. 8-10), and they do just that (1:22, 27; 2:12; 4:41; 5:42; 6:1-3; 7:37). Many of them, including the disciples, (see ch. 8b-10a) are looking for a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah, like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. These chapters show the diverse responses to Jesus bringing the kingdom, and force the reader to decide for themselves, how they will respond to this Jesus.

In chapter 1:16-20 Jesus calls the first disciples. Chapter 1:21-3:35 portray Jesus on a mission to prove the claims Mark has made about Jesus as the messiah and son of God to be true. In chapter 1:21-28 Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit, on the Sabbath, in a story that highlights Jesus’ power and authority. Mark often highlights (here and elsewhere) how people are perplexed, fascinated, and amazed with Jesus whether in his teachings or miracles, but it doesn’t necessarily push them to belief or faith in him. The first to recognize Jesus for who he was were demons (see also 3:11-12).

Verse 28 tells us that after this event Jesus' fame began to spread. The same day Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. These events are no doubt the reason many came to him to be healed of various illnesses the next day (v. 29-34). In verses 35-39 we see the character of Jesus in the midst of this newly acquired fame; he goes to pray. Peter and the gang show their misunderstanding of Jesus' mission, and Jesus corrects them. He is not here just to be a miracle machine, but to preach the good news of the kingdom of God (v. 38; Isa. 61:1). The miracles are signs that the kingdom has begun to break out. So they go on to ride circuit throughout the synagogues in Galilee, preaching and casting out demons. In verses 40-45 Jesus, filled with compassion, touches the "unclean". He heals a leper, and tells him to tell no one, but to go do what Moses commanded (Lev.14) and show himself to the priest. The man doesn't listen to Jesus, and speaks freely about his healing. Jesus' fame grows so much he can't enter any town, and is forced to stay in "desolate places". People began coming to him rather than him going to them.

In chapter 2:1-12 Jesus heals a paralytic man, when his friends do a demo job on someone's roof and lower him down through the whole in the ceiling. Interestingly, Jesus forgives the man's sins first, highlighting again that he is not simply here to rid people of their physical elements, but their spiritual sickness primarily. Jesus' miracles were not "cool parlor tricks", he was doing stuff in character with messianic kingdom, that people would know that he had authority to forgive sins too. He doesn't give the man a theological quiz, rather the actions of the men show the disposition of their hearts. This causes some commotion with the scribes, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). In a sense they are right to question him (Psa. 32:5; Isa. 43:25). Jesus responds by asking them what is easier to say, "your sins are forgiven, or... walk" (v.9)? The answer is obvious, and Jesus does both. The healings (ch. 1-8) are saying something about Jesus as the "temple" (Matt. 12; 26; Jn.2; Acts 6:14) and the Son of Man (Dan.7). The source of divine holiness is walking around (Jesus) not contracting the disease, or destroying people, but cleansing, healing, and restoring, and doing so outside the "establishment", because he is the "greater than" temple (Matt. 12). He is doing things only Yahweh can do, and what only the institutions are supposed to do. This story is the beginning of the theme of the opposition of the religious leaders to Jesus and his mission. In Mark's first act, Jesus clashes with them over fasting (2:18-22) working on Sabbath (2:23-28), healing on Sabbath (3:1-6), casting out demons (3:22-30), and ritual hand-washing (7:1-13).

In chapter 2:23-3:6 Jesus asserts himself as Lord of the Sabbath, and again identifies himself as Daniel's "Son of Man" (Dan. 7). Mark shows the boldness and gentleness of Jesus in the next few verses. Jesus proves these claims by healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (3:1-6), and from here the conspiracy to destroy Jesus begins (v.6). Chapter 3:7-12 speak of further healings. Verses 13-19 describes the calling of the twelve disciples.

In verses 20-21 we encounter the first "Markan sandwich", the exorcism controversy, sandwiched by Jesus' confrontations with his family (3:20-21, 22-30, 31-35) (Mackie, 9). In verses 22-30 Jesus is accused by the religious elite, of being possessed. They claim it is by the power of evil, something demonic/satanic that he heals (v.22). Interestingly the religious elite, the ones who should have recognized the messiah, don't. Jesus tells them they don't make sense, why would Satan drive out Satan? However, if it is by God that Jesus is able to do what he does, then the kingdom of God has indeed come. Jesus then talks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The primary messianic credential is the Spirit of God. Jesus does the miracles by the power of the spirit, he is the king right in front of them, and they attribute it to Satan. If one takes the voice of the Spirit who is convicting of sin and

pointing to Jesus, and that person says “No! That’s Satan”, what a hardening of heart is taking place. It is calling evil good and good evil (v.33-37; Isa. 5:20). To reject the messiah, Jesus, is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4:1-34 contain Jesus’ parables about the kingdom of God. Dr. Mackie comments, “The kingdom parables show how Israel’s rejection of their king is paradoxically the very means by which God’s kingdom is coming into reality through Jesus” (Mackie, *Matthew*, 7). The parable of the Four Soils in verses one through nine demonstrates how the kingdom is accepted by some and rejected by others. Notice how the first three soils are useless (Jesus explains the parable in v.13-20). Verses 21-25 record the Parable of a Lamp under a Basket. This is about the fact that the kingdom of God won’t be a secret forever. The disciples are to be a light, to reveal the truth of the gospel. In verse 26-34 we receive the parables about seeds and growth. The kingdom is like a mustard seed, it has a small beginning and a big end. They speak about the spiritual growth of a person as well.

Chapters 4:35-8:26 display the powers of the kingdom of God over different aspects of our world, through the person of Jesus. Jesus displays his power over nature by calming the storm and walking on water (4:35-41; 6:45-56), power over demons (5:1-20 {notice Jesus is on the gentile side of the lake}), and power over death in the healing of Jairus’ daughter (5:21-43) {notice it is ‘sandwiched’ by the healing of the bleeding woman}, Mackie, 9). Chapter 6:1-6 recounts that those in Jesus’ hometown, those who should have known him best, are offended by him and are full of unbelief, to the point Jesus couldn’t minister there. This continues the “power” theme, but focuses on the limits of that power. Jesus says, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” (v. 4; Jer. 11:21). Mark shows us again how those who should know and understand Jesus, are actually not the ones who do. In verses seven through thirteen John the Baptist’s death is sandwiched by the sending out and return of the disciples (6:7–13, 14–29, 30–44) (Mackie, 9). He calls the Twelve (he is the new Israel, so this makes sense {12 tribes}), and gives them authority (v.7) to do the same things he is doing (v.12-13, preaching and healing) to be priests to the nations (Mark, 4:21-25; Isa. 2:1-5; 60-62). Verses 14-29 recount the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist. John dies because he speaks out against a political sex scandal taking place between King Herod and his brother’s wife. This grieves Jesus so he tries to get alone, but as we see in verse 30-44 (the feeding of the 5,000), Jesus has compassion on the crowds who followed him. His heart moves toward their situation and not his own. The “shepherd-less sheep” motif is prominent throughout Scripture: 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2; Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34, and this is what fuels Jesus’ compassion to meet their needs. This story plays on the shepherd imagery (feeding the sheep of Israel, Ezek. 34 and 37) and the figure of Moses and the Manna from heaven (Exod. 16). There are echoes of creation here too it seems, as bread doesn’t just multiple itself; more bread and fish was miraculously created. In verses 45-51 Jesus walks on water displaying his power over nature once again, and offering the disciples yet another reason to believe and have faith in him. To close the chapter, Jesus heals even more people in Gennesaret (v. 53-56).

In chapter 7:1-23 Israel’s religious leaders question Jesus about his disciples’ behavior. Jesus lashes back at them that they care more about their man-made traditions than the laws of God, and quotes Isaiah 29:13 and Ezekiel 33:31, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (v.6-7). In verses 14-23 Jesus teaches that the fundamental problem of humanity is a wicked heart, for, “from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come

from within, and they defile a person” (v. 21-23). Jesus’ verdict of the human heart is the same as that of Moses and the prophets (Deut. 30:1-6; Jer. 17:9), only the renewal of the covenant can bring hope (Mackie, *Matthew*, 7). The stories of the faith of the Syrophenician Woman, and the healing of her daughter (7:24-30) along with the feeding of the 4,000 gentiles (similar to feeding the 5,000 and hitting on those same themes about Jesus) in chapter 8:1-9 show Jesus’ shepherding mission and activities to all peoples, Jew and non-Jew alike. Sandwiched by these two gentile stories, is the healing of a deaf and dumb man (7:31-37). Even if people are deaf and dumb, Jesus can heal them, he can heal anyone. Whether this is physically deaf or spiritually (like the Pharisees and some in the crowd).

In chapter 8:14-21, Jesus rebukes the disciples bluntly for not understanding what his miracles and teachings were about. They were still being influenced too much by the thinking of the world, by thinking like the Pharisees. Those who belong to the kingdom of God have a different attitude and mindset, that of Christ’s.

There are two stories about Jesus healing blind men (8:22-26 and 10:46-52). They frame the second act of Mark, and form an *inclusio* around this center section of Mark’s gospel (Mackie, 5). The first healing is particularly strange as it happens in two stages (8:22-26). We are not told why this healing took place like it did. It is a real healing, however, narratively it functions also as commentary, as a symbol of the disciples’ spiritual blindness (Mackie, 5-6). Throughout the narrative so far, they only kind of see Jesus for who he is, even though he explains the parables to them, and they are eyewitnesses to his healings and other powerful acts (like the man’s fuzzy vision). The man going from blind, to fuzzy vision, to seeing clearly, is also a picture that marks the spiritual journey of the disciples: where the disciples had been, currently are, and would eventually get to.

Chapters 8:27-10:45 What Kind of Messiah?

This second act in Mark, the middle section, is framed by the stories about two different blind men (8:22-26 {explored above} and 10:46-52), with the Transfiguration in the middle, and houses three conversations of Jesus with his disciples (8:27-33, 9:30-37, 10:32-45) (Mackie, 5). This section seeks to answer what exactly it means it means for Jesus to be the messiah. The three conversations Jesus has with the disciples share a pattern: Jesus predicts his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34), the disciples misunderstand what he is saying and meaning (8:32-24; 9:33-34; 10:35-41), then Jesus tries to correct them (8:34-9:1; 9:35-37; 10:42-45) (Mackie, 10).

In chapter 8:27-30 Peter identifies Jesus as the messiah, but after Jesus’ first prediction of his death (8:27-9:1), Peter rebukes Jesus for not being the kind of messiah that he thinks Jesus should be. But Jesus corrects him sternly. The messiah isn’t coming the way the world would have him too. Peter, along with many others was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah, like Jesus was trying to demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah’s death and resurrection which Jesus foretells three different times in this section (the second act). Jesus also outlines the requirements for discipleship: denial of self, taking up their own cross, following Him, and not being ashamed (v.34-38).

Chapter 9:1 gives the intro into the Transfiguration (9:2-13) the second revelation story) of Jesus (Mackie, 1). It reads, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” Those Jesus is talking about in verse one we learn are Peter, James, and John. Jesus is transfigured before them, and is described as looking like the “ancient of days” from Daniel (7:9, describing God), and standing with him are Elijah and

Moses (the law and the prophets). A voice from heaven, this time from a cloud, repeats what he spoke in chapter one at Jesus' baptism, but the phrase, "listen to him" is added (v. 7). At this, the men fall on their faces, Jesus tells them to get up, but when they open their eyes, only Jesus is standing there. Jesus has been portrayed as "like" or even "greater than" various Old Testament characters, but here now Mark is saying even more. Jesus eclipses them, he completely transcends them.

In chapter 9:14-29, immediately after the transfiguration, Jesus heals a demonized boy that the disciples were unable to help. Jesus is grieved by the unbelief and opposition he finds (v.19), and adds prayer to the list of requirements/costs of discipleship mentioned above. Mark 9:24b should encourage us and be our prayer as well, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Chapter 9:30-37 records Jesus' second conversation with the disciples, and repeats the pattern of the first conversation. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, and the disciples don't understand and are afraid to ask (v. 30-32). Their misunderstanding is portrayed further in the fact that in the next verses they were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus corrects them adding to our list servanthood, and humility as requirements on the path to true greatness as a disciple of Christ.

In Chapter 9:38-40 Jesus teaches that no one has a monopoly on the kingdom of God. Someone was casting out demons beside the Twelve, so John was concerned, but Jesus corrects him, "For the one who is not against us is for us" (v. 40). In verse 41-50 Jesus speaks of the temptation to sin, and through use of hyperbole, demonstrates that the value of the kingdom of God is so immeasurable that no sacrifice is too great to make for it. In Jesus' reference to "hell" in verse 48, he quotes Isaiah 66:24, drawing this judgment imagery from there. Jesus uses salt as a metaphor for purification (v. 50 alludes to Ezek. 43:24 where salt is sprinkled on the burnt offering). Those who have a kingdom mindset like Jesus has been teaching, won't argue about who is the greatest, but rather will live at peace.

Chapter 10:1-10 records Jesus' teaching on divorce. It can be summed up this way: the kingdom of God demands lifelong faithfulness to one husband or wife, and harkens back to a Genesis one and two view of marriage. This teaching is followed by Jesus receiving and blessing the little children (v. 13-16). It isn't by accident that this takes place; children are often harmed the worst by divorce. Jesus also highlights how one's trust and faith must be like that of a child to enter the kingdom of God. Verse 17-31 gives the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler in which at its core shows that salvation is impossible apart from God; it cannot be earned. The journey of being a disciple is costly, Jesus doesn't lower his standards for anyone, but the life of a Christ follower will be rewarded (v.28-31).

In chapter 10:32-47 Jesus foretells his death and resurrection a third time, and the familiar pattern is repeated: foretelling, misunderstanding, and correction. The conversation that takes place is a bit astonishing considering the prior conversation about greatness in the kingdom of God. James and John ask if they can sit at Jesus' right and left in the kingdom. So Jesus asks them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (v.38). In Mark 10:37-45 the cup imagery is a metaphor for Jesus' death. In Jeremiah 25, the cup is the image representing God's wrath against Israel and the nations. It is full of wine, and Jeremiah is told to take it to Israel and all of the nations the Lord tells him to, and make them drink, and get drunk on it. Jeremiah is to Jerusalem what Jesus is to Jerusalem, except that Jesus won't hand the cup to the nations like Jeremiah, rather Jesus takes the cup and drinks it himself, and it kills

him (Mackie, Lecture). He dies in our place, for our sins, on our behalf so that we may be forgiven, justified before God, through repentance and faith.

This section is also pulling on Exodus imagery in which going through the parting of the Red Sea was Israel's baptism. The disciples are thinking about sitting next to Jesus in his glory, meaning in heaven one day, but what is so profound here is that Jesus is saying he is going to be sitting in his glory when he's on the cross. The ones sitting at his right and left then are the two robbers (15:27) (Mackie, Lecture). This is an exaltation by death, the suffering servant from Isaiah 52-53 and the son of man from Daniel seven. Jesus sees himself as all of these figures, merging the suffering servant with suffering son of man in Daniel seven (Mackie, Lecture). He is the suffering one on behalf of the many. In Daniel seven, the son of man is vindicated to share in God's own rule before all the nations because he is faithful to his mission and is in fact God himself. Jesus sees his death (Isa. 53; Dan.9:26) as necessary to establish the New Covenant (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36) and inaugurate God's kingdom (Mackie, 10).

Chapters 10:46-16:8 How Jesus Becomes the Messianic King

This third and final act in the book of Mark is about how Jesus becomes the promised messianic king. Whereas the first two acts cover about three years, the third act covers a time frame of only seven days, Jesus' last days in Jerusalem (Mackie, *Mark* Lecture). Up until this point Jesus has tried to keep his identity under wraps, but now his focus is entirely different. It starts by telling the second blind man story, the latter part of the *inclusio* framing the second act. Chapter 10:46-52 describes the healing of blind Bartimaeus. This is a real healing. It was both physical (he recovered his sight v.52) and spiritual, (followed Jesus, became his disciple, v. 52). Narratively speaking, as commentator David Garland points out, it is also symbolic,

The second story of Bartimaeus' healing, however, does not symbolize what *has happened* to the disciples, but rather what *is possible* for the disciples, what must yet happen. The disciples cannot understand Jesus and the cross until after the resurrection, when he unleashes a new power into their hearts and minds. (436-37)

In chapter 11:1-11 Jesus enters Jerusalem. Jesus' style of entry into the city was a fulfillment of prophesy (Zech. 9:9; Isa. 62:11). This is the first mention of Jesus riding any kind of animal, it was for a purpose, and Mark shares that with the reader. It appears the crowd understood what was happening in this "sign-act" of Jesus because they begin praising the messiah (quoting Psalm 118:26, 148:1; and Ezek. 37:24-25 {recall David and Shepherd imagery}). If the ruckus Jesus was causing in the streets wasn't getting enough attention, his soon to follow temple stunt definitely did.

Jesus' temple stunt is sandwiched by the fig tree incident (11:12-14, 15-19, 20-25) (Mackie, 9). In verse 12-14 Jesus curses a fig tree, "may no one ever eat fruit from you again" (v. 14). It looks perfectly healthy and full of leaves, but has no fruit. This is followed immediately by the story of Jesus cleansing the temple (v.15-19). Jesus is enraged at what the temple has become, so he "purifies" it, because it wasn't fulfilling its purpose, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." (v. 17, quoting Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11. Notice also the allusion in v.15 to Zech. 14:20-21). In his rampage, he turns over tables, pushes people out, and essentially stops the sacrificial system from working. Verse 20-25 contain the second fig tree story. This is a bizarre story of Jesus cursing a fig tree, and of it withering and dying. This story taken on its own doesn't seem to make much sense; it seems random. However, when taken in context (Jesus cleansing the temple) it begins to make more sense. The fig tree is a symbol of the temple, a healthy-

looking tree full of leaves, but lacking fruit (just like the temple, see Mic. 7:1; Jer. 8:13). Jesus finds no fruit where it should be most visible. The temple looked pretty, but Jesus saw through the veneer and used the fig tree as an object lesson for the disciples, showing that the temple is about to become, withered like the fig tree. The age of the temple is about to pass away. He also uses it to teach them that there is power in faith and prayer. Effectual prayer is prayer that prays God's thoughts after him, that prays his will (it is not unqualified, whatever we want), and is unhindered because it comes from a forgiving heart.

In verses 27-33 Jesus' authority is questioned by Israel's leaders, which leads into a parable (12:1-12). The theme of the first parable could be stated in a question, "Who are the true people of God?" The Tenants of the Vineyard pulls heavily on the understanding of the imagery in Isaiah 5:1-7. It is about Israel and its leaders' failure to live up to God's expectations. More specifically the focus is on Israel's leaders, who like the death of the landowner's son in the parable, were about to kill God's son showing that they had rejected the prophets and God himself like their ancestors before them. Therefore, the ones rejecting God will one day be rejected by him in return. The true people of God are revealed here to be those "producing fruit" (via the Isa. 5:4, 7 imagery).

Chapter 12:13-34 highlight three confrontations Jesus had with the religious leaders, which were initiated by his opponents, and all to try and trap him so they could have some sort of legal or legitimate claims over him to put an end to him. The first encounter was over taxes (12:13-17), the second resurrection (12:18-27), and the third the greatest commandment (12:28-34). In verses 35-37 Jesus is the approacher this time, and asks the religious leaders a theology question about the "Son of David", which no one answers. Jesus is showing how the messiah is David's son, but not merely his son, not less than, but more than. He is also divine (Psa. 110; Dan. 7). This leads into Jesus' warning to beware of the scribes (v. 38-40, the attitude and posture one shouldn't take), and the story about the widow's offering (v.41-44, the mentality of the kingdom of God to be aspired to).

Jesus foretells, in chapter 13, the destruction of the temple (v.1-2), signs of the end of the age (v. 3-13), the abomination that makes desolate (v. 14- 23), the unexpected coming of the son of man (v. 24-27), a fig tree lesson (v.28-31) and the temporal unknowability of "The end" (v. 32-37). A lot of imagery is drawn from Isaiah 13 and 34, and Daniel 7, 9, 11, and 12 and Zechariah 14 (describing the fall of Jerusalem in terms of the fall of Babylon and Edom, as well as Jesus' exaltation as Daniel's son of man) (Mackie, 8-9). This is a notoriously difficult passage to interpret, with varying legitimate interpretations pertaining to when these events were to take place (in the time of the disciples or at Jesus' second coming or both). It seems to me that, verses 1-31 speak about events taking place during the current generation and the generation after Jesus death, and verses 32-37 speak of the second coming the "last" generation. The "signs" Jesus gives are simply things that happen every day. They are repeated events and cycles in the world, that will always take place until the consummation of all things. Knowing these things Jesus has revealed he doesn't want people to depend on the temple or its religious leaders, or be panicked by political upheaval, natural disasters, the destruction of the temple, or false prophets, but to depend on him eagerly and expectantly await his coming again, and proclaim his story in word and deed until he returns. Keep doing kingdom stuff.

Chapter 14 and 15 are all about Jesus' last days and crucifixion. Chapter 14 opens with another "Markan sandwich" as Jesus' anointing for death is enclosed by the Jewish leaders plotting against him (14:1-2, 3-9, 10-11) (Mackie, 9). In verse one and two Israel's leaders plot to kill Jesus. Jesus is anointed with oil by a woman in Bethany (v.3-9), and as Jesus interprets, it is to prepare him for his

burial (v.8). Jesus honors the woman, and corrects his disciples for judging her, for she is actually the one who gets it right (the reoccurring theme of the unexpected being the ones who actually recognizes Jesus, pops up here). Judas goes to the high priest, asks what he will receive if he betrays Jesus, and they promise to give him money in return for his services (v.10-11; Exod. 21:32 and especially Zech. 11:12, the rejected shepherd).

Verses 12-25 record Mark's version of the Passover meal, and the Last Supper. Jesus' death is the Passover offering that ushers in the New Covenant of God's kingdom (Mackie, 10). The Passover retells the story, every year, of rescue from slavery, and its most powerful image is of the lamb (Exod. 12). That imagery is huge here. Jesus rescues from the slavery of sin, and he is himself the Passover lamb. Jesus uses bread and wine as profound symbols of his death that is soon to take place. The "bread" being broken was an image of his body. He had been providing the bread in the wilderness (6:30-44; 8:1-9), a means of life, now he is providing "bread" in a new way. He is the bread that will bring life through suffering and physical death. This is smothered with Old Testament imagery: Exodus 24:7-8 (blood of the covenant), Zechariah 9:11 (freeing prisoners) and Jeremiah 31:31-34 (New Covenant) (Mackie, 11). By taking the elements, the disciples partake in his death, and experience the New Covenant blessings that it brings (after Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the spirit). Verse twenty-five looks forward to the great wedding banquet in the future (Isa. 2:6-8; Matt. 21:33-46; 25:1-13; Rev. 19).

Verses 26-31 foretell of the scattering of the disciples as fulfillment of prophesy (Zech. 13:7) carrying on the theme of a rejected and suffering messiah (see Mark's second act). Peter is particularly highlighted here, perhaps to highlight that the leader and one who seemed to understand Jesus the most out of the disciples, he too will fall away and deny Jesus.

Verses 32-42 bring us the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is tested once again (1:12-13), this time not in the wilderness (Moses, Israel in the Book of Numbers), but in a garden (Adam and Eve Gen. 3). In Genesis three there are humans tested in a garden, but they fail. Mark shows that where Adam and Eve failed in their garden, Jesus persevered in his. When Jesus says, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36), it seems to me that he is talking about the same cup he mentioned to the disciples earlier in Mark 10:38 when he said, "are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (In context, who will sit next to him in his kingdom). What is the cup he is referring to? Remember the cup from chapter 25 of Jeremiah? The cup is the image representing God's wrath against Israel and the nations. It is full of wine, and Jeremiah is told to take it to Israel and all of the nations the Lord tells him to, and make them drink, and get drunk on it. Jeremiah is to Jerusalem what Jesus is to Jerusalem, except that Jesus won't hand the cup to the nations like Jeremiah, rather (as we shall soon see) Jesus takes the cup and drinks it himself, and it kills him (Mackie, *Jeremiah* Lecture). The level of loyalty and trust between the father and the son is beyond words; it's amazing. The Father and the son's wills fuse together, like they always have, in this ultimate test.

In verse 43-52 Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Jewish leaders as fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:6, 7; Isa. 53:2, 3; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 13:7). Verse 53-65 describe Jesus' trial before the high priest. The trial of Jesus is sandwiched by the two denials of Peter (14:53-65, 66-72; 15:1-15) (Mackie, 9). Mark describes Jesus to be innocent, even though many bore false witness against him (Psa. 27:12; 35:11). Finally they ask him if he is the messiah, and Jesus responds, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 62).

What Jesus is saying here is, “The moment you kill me is the moment I become the divine king and you show yourself to be a beast” (Mackie, *Daniel* Lecture). The moment they kill Jesus, they show once again, but in much more grotesque way that they have become like Edom and Babylon (13:24-25). It begs the question, “Who is really on trial here?” Jesus, here describes who he is from Daniel and the Psalms (Psa.110) showing that his plan to defeat evil, to conquer the beast, is to let it kill him. They claim Jesus is guilty of blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), and they begin to spit on him and strike him (Isa. 50:6). Verses 66-72 describe Peter’s denial of Jesus.

Chapter 15 describes Jesus’ roman trial, death on the cross and burial. Verses one through fifteen recount Jesus’ Roman trial, before Pilot. Highlighted is the Jewish leaders’ accusation that he is a royal rival to Caesar (v. 2-3) (Mackie, *Matthew*, 8). “King of the Jews” is a politically loaded term. Pilot makes an attempt to release Jesus, but the people choose Barabbas. The idea of Jesus’ death as substitutionary can’t be missed here (Isa. 53). Pilot eventually caves to the demands of the Jewish leaders, has Jesus scourged (Isa. 50:6; 53:5), and hands him over to be crucified (v.15).

Jesus’ mock coronation is sandwiched by the trial and execution (15:6–15, 16–20, 21–32) (Mackie, 9). Jesus is mocked and beaten, but this time by gentiles, not Jews. As part of their mockery, he is given a crown, robe, and scepter (ironic enthronement imagery). Afterward he is led away to be crucified (Isa. 53:7 imagery). Verses 21-41 describe Jesus’ crucifixion and death (The third revelation story) . Mark especially highlights Jesus’ suffering in terms of rejection and mockery, with many allusions and echoes of the Psalms (22:1, 7, 18 ; 35:25; 40:15, 69, 109:25) and Lamentations (1:12; 2:15). Jesus breathes his last breath (v. 37) and immediately the temple curtain is torn in two (open access to the Father now through the death of the son, Holy of Holies {Exod. 26:31-33} laid bare). Once again, a gentile sees what the Jews couldn’t, even at Jesus’ death and in these signs, “And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’ (v.39). Dr. Mackie comments, “Jesus’ trials and execution are crammed with ‘royal-enthronement’ irony: Death and Resurrection is the paradoxical way the suffering servant is exalted over the nations” (*Matthew*, 8). Jesus ironically becomes Israel’s king, in the event of the cross. Verse 42-47 describe Jesus’ burial.

The oldest manuscripts of Mark we can get our hands on end at chapter 16:8 with the empty tomb and fearful disciples. Mark has no appearance of a risen Jesus story, simply an empty tomb and the fact that Jesus had indeed risen from the grave. Dr. Mackie comments, “...16:8 ends with the disciples dismayed at the empty tomb. A powerful ending to a Gospel where Jesus is mysterious and breaks everyone’s categories... ending at 16:8 puts the reader in the same position as the disciples who are awaiting the appearance of the risen Jesus” (11).

Key Themes:

“Don’t tell anyone, say nothing”

Repeatedly, in the first act especially, in the book of Mark, after healing someone, Jesus tells them to be quiet (1:25-28; 1:34; 1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). This is called the “messianic secret” (Mackie, 10). They don’t listen to him though. It seems peculiar, because it is. From our point of view, if someone is trying to start a movement, shouldn’t they want fame and followers? But Jesus lives in a different time, a Jewish place occupied by Rome. It’s as if Jesus is trying to fly under the radar until his hour is at hand (which seems to be marked by the healing of blind Bartimaeus in chapter ten before his entry into Jerusalem). We also see in the narrative that Jesus is concerned far more about preaching the

good news of the kingdom than merely healing folks. Perhaps Jesus is trying to prevent people coming to him only as healer and not savior.

People Misunderstanding Jesus

Throughout Mark, people are constantly misunderstanding who Jesus is (1:22, 27; 2:12; 4:41; 5:42; 6:1-3; 7:37). His own family doesn't understand who he is (3:21). This theme gets played out most prominently in the life of the disciples (chs.8-10). The three conversations that take place here between Jesus and the disciples share a pattern: Jesus predicts his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34), the disciples misunderstand what he is saying and meaning (8:32-24; 9:33-34; 10:35-41), then Jesus tries to correct them (8:34-9:1; 9:35-37; 10:42-45) (Mackie, 10). Peter, along with many others, was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah, like Jesus was trying to demonstrate and teach. They wanted and/or were expecting a conquering messiah, not a servant. They were expecting Jesus to bring about the great Day of the Lord in power, not for him to bring the kingdom like a mustard seed (Mk.4). This theme begs the question of the reader, "How will you respond to Jesus?"

Jesus as Israel's "surprising" Divine- Suffering-Messianic King

Mark reveals Jesus as Israel's messiah in chapter 1:1-13, but very few people in the story actually understand this (see above theme). Outside of the demons, and Jesus' own confession (14:62) Jesus is revealed as the son of God most explicitly in the three revelation stories: his baptism (1:9-11), his transfiguration (v. 9:1-13) and his crucifixion (15:21-41) (Myers). The first two stories, God himself announces Jesus as his son, but in the third story it comes on the lips of a Roman soldier. The messiah isn't coming the way the world would have him to. That is the entire point of the second act of Mark (8:27-10:45). Peter, along with many others was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 messiah, like Jesus was trying to demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah's death and resurrection which Jesus foretells three different times in the second act. Jesus saw it necessary to his mission that he die to inaugurate the kingdom of God and establish the New Covenant (10:45; 14:17-25) (Mackie, 10).

Mark also portrays Jesus as Israel's (and the nations') shepherd, and Daniel's son of man (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3 Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4,12-13; Isa. 11; Jer. 23:5, 30:9; Ezek. 34:23, ch.37; Mk.6:34), the suffering servant of Isaiah (ch.42,53 in particular), a new Adam, and a new Israel (1:13; Gen. 2:19-20; Isa. 11), and greater than the law and the prophets (9:1-13).

The "unexpected" Kingdom of God

If how Jesus came as the messiah was surprising it would make sense that the kingdom in which he brought near (1:15) would seem somewhat upside down as well. Through parables, healings, and other teachings, Jesus continually demonstrates how the kingdom of God came in unexpected ways, to unexpected people (trace who gets healed throughout the narrative), and how those that should have understood it didn't. Those closest to Jesus even missed what was happening. He redefines what it means to be messiah, and reshapes how people are to think about what it means to be part of the New Covenant people. Greatness comes through serving, the first shall be last and the last first. The mark of a true believer is fruitfulness, humility, and self-sacrificial love. Jesus was constantly challenging Israel's institutions and redefining them: fasting (2:18-22), working on Sabbath, (2:23-28), healing on Sabbath (3:1-6), casting out demons (3:22-30), ritual hand-washing (7:1-13),

seriousness about sin (9:41-50), divorce (10:2-12), clearing the temple (11:27-33) paying taxes (12:13-17) etc. (Mackie, 10). Jesus also highlights how one's trust and faith must be like that of a child to enter the kingdom of God, in chapter ten, and in the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler, we are shown that salvation is impossible apart from God; it cannot be earned. The journey of being a disciple is costly (8:34). Jesus doesn't lower his standards for anyone.

Implications for Today:

There many implications for today that can pulled from Mark's Gospel, however I will leave that to more thorough exegesis, and fly at the 30,000 level here. One of the amazing features about the book of Mark is that it forces us to decide what we think about this Jesus. He is loved by some, misunderstood by most, and hated by those who should have recognized him with the most ease. Jesus performs miracles, teaches, and lives out the life he is calling others to live, yet so many people remain indifferent. The crowds are often "amazed", but for the majority of spectators, well, they remain just that. They don't actually believe, trust, and follow the messiah. Much like the 10 lepers from Luke chapter 17. Jesus heals all ten, but only one comes back and worships him. Only one recognizes who Jesus is, and moves toward the savior, who has already moved toward him. Mark shatters the notion that if only we could have seen Jesus actually do these things we would believe, because even his disciples couldn't and didn't (at least not completely and for a long time until he opened their eyes). Jesus as the one who brings the kingdom, secures our place in it through his death and resurrection. He is the object of our repentance and faith. Being a disciple requires pursuing a life that is consistent with Jesus' teachings, a pursuit of holiness empowered by the Holy Spirit and in concert with his sanctifying work in us. There is not a place for nominal Christians in this gospel. The mark of a true believer is fruitfulness, humility, and self-sacrificial love. The life of a disciple requires: denial of self, taking up their own cross, following Him, and not being ashamed of Jesus, a life of prayer, humility, and servanthood (chs. 8-10). It is a costly endeavor. The gospel of Mark makes us come to terms with the fact that whatever groups' response to Jesus in the narrative we adopt and identify with (Pharisees/religious leaders, disciples, spectator, healing beneficiaries etc.) as our own, has consequences. What we do with Jesus matters. Like the narrator, we are compelled by the great rabbi and messiah to bring the message of good news to our own spheres of influence and so spread the kingdom of God, seeking to bear fruit in all that we do. Jesus' death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21). He suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus he fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). This is good news worth sharing, and it is a message that demands a response. "Who do you say that I am?" –Jesus (Mk. 8:29)

Study Questions:

1. What are the events that surround the three revelation stories in the gospel of Mark?
2. How does Mark's three-act structure shape how we read the story? What questions is it asking us to consider?
3. What is the fundamental message Jesus is preaching?
4. Why is it that Jesus tells those he is heals to be quiet, or silent?

5. What is the significance of the Passover meal? What do the elements represent and why are they such profound images?
6. Before we point our fingers at the disciples and Pharisees, what are some ways in which our society misunderstands Jesus today? What about in the church? How about in our own lives?
7. Did the kingdom of God surprise you as you read Mark? Do you think our society today finds it illogical and contradictory to their experience of the world?
8. Did Mark's portrait of Jesus cause you to see Him in a new way? How so?
9. Reflect on this question: "Are there those in our lives whom we deem undeserving of God's generosity, or salvation"? This could be in our overt actions and attitudes, or our apathy, and disinterest in sharing the gospel.
10. Which one of Jesus' parables stuck out to you the most? Was it because you learned something new, felt convicted, or were encouraged etc.? Let's have a couple people share.
11. How has reading the Gospel of Mark shaped or changed how you've thought about your walk with God, and bringing his kingdom and presence to the world?

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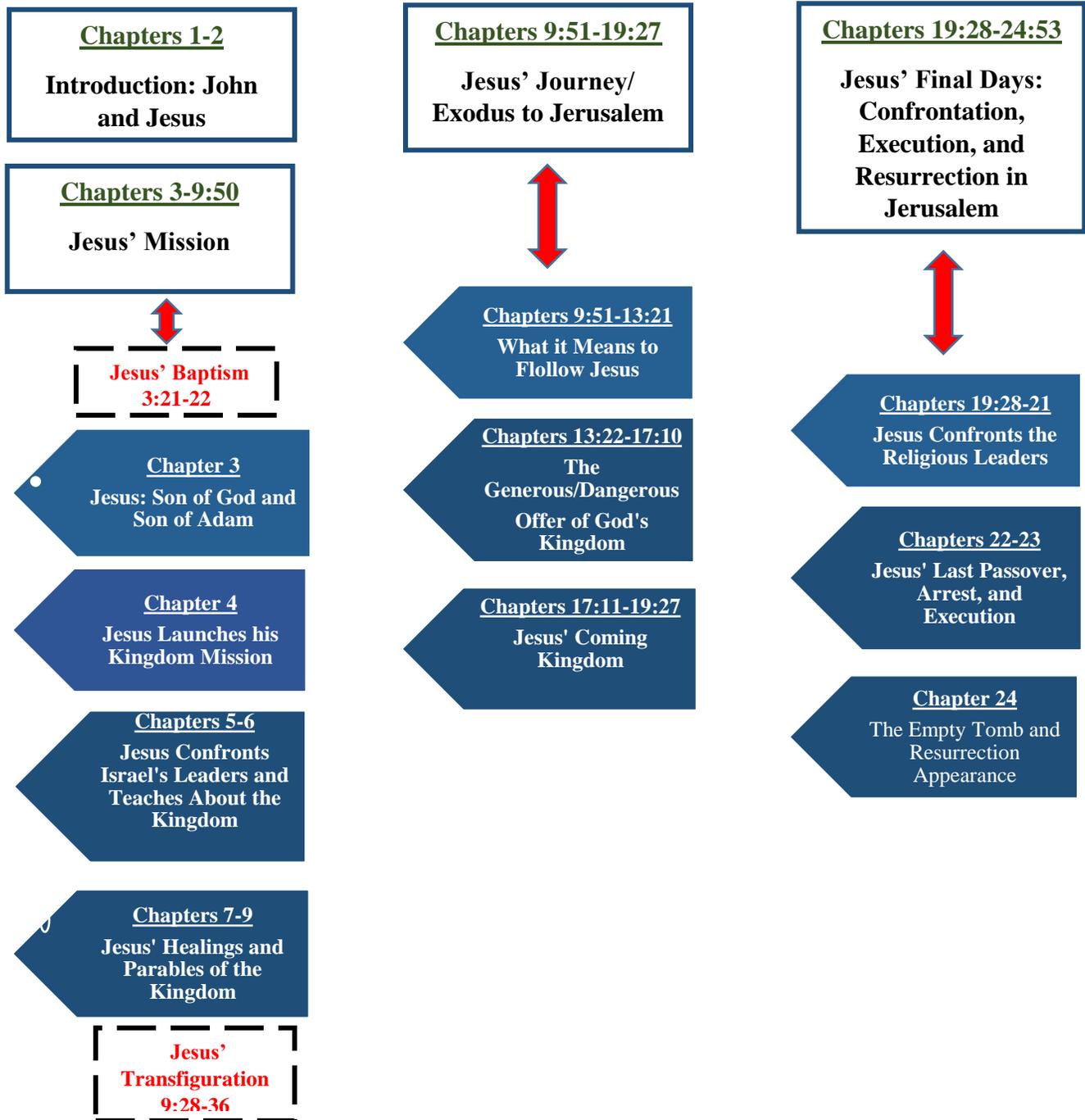
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The Book of Luke

Structure



Main Idea: The gospel of Luke shows how Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, fulfills the Old Testament prophecies regarding the covenant between God and Israel; and how he brought the paradoxical kingdom of God to earth as the suffering servant messiah to release people from their bondage to sin, giving them freedom and hope as their Lord and king.

Chapters 1-2: Introduction: John and Jesus

The first two chapters tell Jesus' birth narrative, in the context of the continuing story of Israel, and God's repeated fulfillment and faithfulness to his promises. The first four verses are Luke's prologue in which he tells us how and why he wrote his account of the life of Jesus. First, it's important to note that Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2 show that these two works were composed by the same author (Luke) and are meant to be read together (i.e. volume one {Luke} and volume two {Acts}). Secondly, Luke was not one of the Twelve disciples (but he was a companion and co-worker with the apostle Paul, see Col. 4:14 and Philemon v.2), so he compiled material from sources and reports from eyewitnesses of the events, "...for the purpose of helping followers of Jesus understand his significance and story with more certainty" (Mackie 1).

In chapter 1:5-38 the births of John the Baptist and Jesus are foretold, and form parallel stories. In chapter 1:5-25 an angel of the Lord promised a son to Zechariah (a priest) and his wife Elizabeth (v. 11-20). However, we are told in verses five through seven that Elizabeth has been barren her whole life, and both her and Zechariah are, "advanced in years", the same exact expression used to describe Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18:11. Zechariah and Elizabeth are taking on the Old Testament portrait of Abraham and Sarah (Mackie, 2). The angel, Gabriel (v.19), tells Zechariah they are to call the child "John" (v.13), that John is to be a Nazirite (v.15; Num. 6:3), he will be filled with the Holy Spirit (v.15) "even from the womb" (Isa. 49:1; Jer. 5:1), and he will be the Elijah who was to come (v. 17; Mal. 3:1; 4:6). Zechariah, unlike Abraham, lacks faith, and Gabriel causes him to be mute until the child is born (v. 20; Ezek. 3:26; 24:27). Here we have the introduction of an important theme for Luke: the proud or those of high social status eat humble pie (Mackie, Lecture). Verses 21-23 describe the peoples' response to Zechariah in the temple, and in verses 24-25 Elizabeth becomes pregnant with John and says, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people" (v.25). Her expression and Luke's narrative portray Elizabeth as the next installment of miraculous births to barren women throughout Scripture (Sarah {Gen. 11:30}, Rebekah {Gen. 25:21}, Rachel {Gen. 29:31}, Samson's mother {Judg. 13:2}, and Hannah {1 Sam. 1:2-5}).

Chapter 1:26-38 describe Gabriel's appearance to Mary, the mother of Jesus. It's a parallel encounter to that of Zechariah, however, Mary is shown to be humble, and having faith unlike Zechariah, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). This introduces the important theme in Luke of the humble being exalted. Mary receives the promise of a child, but not just any child, even though she is a virgin (v.26-33, Isa. 7). She will become with child through the work of the Holy Spirit (v.35), "...therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." She is told to call the boy Jesus, and that her son will be given the throne of his father David (2 Sam. 7:11–13, 16; Psa. 89:4; 132:11; Isa. 9:6, 7,11; 16:5; Acts 2:30; Rev. 3:7), and reign over the house of Jacob forever (Dan. 2:44, 7:14-27). Mary's miraculous conception is described in the terms of God providing a deliverer through her in the portrait of women before her: Sarah (Gen 17-18, 21); Rebekah (Gen. 25:21); Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:31-30:24), Samson's mother (Judg. 13); Hannah (1 Sam. 1-2). However,

Mary's pregnancy both belongs to the series of famous mothers of deliverers in the Hebrew Scriptures, in that it is enabled by a miraculous act of God, but it also transcends the series, in that her pregnancy is virginal. In Elizabeth and her son the storyline of Israel's scriptures culminates, while in Mary and her son the new creation begins. It is not surprising, therefore, that, while Mary does stand in the succession of biblical mothers who conceive through God's power, she is more especially and more emphatically portrayed by Luke as in the succession of human agents of divine deliverance from their enemies. (Bauckham, 58).

Jesus is the promised deliverer (Isa. 11) to be born to a no name girl, from a no name town, through an act of the Holy Spirit. In verses 39-45 Mary visits Elizabeth in a beautiful encounter in which Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, baby John leaps for joy in her womb upon Mary's visitation, and Elizabeth declares Mary is the "blessed one" (v.42 Judg. 5:24).

Verses 46-56 give the account of Mary's response to Elizabeth, in a song or poem often referred to as "The Magnificat". The main theological themes of Luke are contained within this poem: salvation is from Yahweh, the mighty acts of Yahweh/"arm of the Lord", God sees the lowly, he exalts the humble, he humbles the proud, and he keeps steadfast love and is faithful to his covenant promises. It is symmetrical, having a mirrored design and as Dr. Mackie comments, "Mary's Song is also a creative collage of intertextual echoes from salvation songs all over the Hebrew Bible" (p.5-6). The mother of Jesus knew her Bible; nearly every line of this poem is linguistically and ideologically drenched in the ancient Scriptures: v. 46-47 (1 Sam. 2:1; Hab. 3:18; Psa. 35:9), v.48 (1 Sam. 2:11; Gen. 3:13; Psa. 72:17), v.49 (Deut. 10:20-21, Psa. 111:9), v. 50 (Psa. 103:17), v.51 (Exod. 6:1; Isa. 51:9; Psa. 118:15, 89:11), v.52-53 (1 Sam. 2:7-8), and v.54-55 (Isa. 41:8-9; Psa. 98:3; Mic. 7:20) (Mackie, 5-6). It is clear in her song that Mary sees the reversal of her lowly status as being bigger than herself. Bauckham comments,

Mary, in her 'low status' (v. 48) is clearly paradigmatic of those whom God exalts. But she does not only represent them. In her own exaltation by God, from low status to being the mother of the Messiah, she becomes the means of the exaltation of the lowly in her generation through the coming of the Messiah. This is why the acts of divine "reversal" and salvation can be described in the past tense, as one single act of salvation for God's people. Mary's becoming the mother of the Messiah is the beginning of the exaltation of the lowly and the humiliation of the exalted in Israel that her son will accomplish" (p. 70)

Verses 57-66 show God's promise of a son to Zechariah (v.5-25) to be fulfilled with the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah is loosed from being mute (from this humbling), and breaks out in song (v. 67-80) and in the Spirit, just like Mary earlier had. Zechariah's poem sings with language from a number of Israel's prophetic hope passages: v.68 (Exod. 4:31; 6:6), v.29 (2 Sam. 22:3; Psa. 132:13,17-18,148:13-14, v.70-71 (Psa.18:17), v.72-73 (Mic. 7:20); v.74-75 (Mic. 4:10), v.76-78 (Mal. 3:1, 4:2; Mic. 7:18), and v.79 (Isa.9:2) {Mackie, 7-8). It is clear from this poem that Zechariah saw the unique role his son would play as the forerunner of the promised messiah, Jesus. The rest of the book of Luke describes how these themes from the first chapter unfold, particularly the "reversal" like Mary's on a larger scale.

Chapter two tells of the birth of Jesus. Verses one through six give the details of his birth, highlighting that he is from the house of David and born in Bethlehem, showing God to be true to his promise of a son (1:26-38). Jesus' birth place is important, to put Jesus in the slot of continuing the story of Israel, because the messianic shepherd king was spoken of in the prophets as being born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2 and Ezek. 34:23). Verses eight through twenty-one tell of the encounter between the shepherds, who visit Jesus and the angels. In Matthew's account there are only "wise men", and in Luke's account, only shepherds. This keeps with Luke's theme of the lowly and poor being included, seen, and exalted by God. An angel announces to them that a savior is born, the messiah has come (v. 11; Isa. 9:6). Immediately after this pronouncement the lone angel is joined by a multitude of other

angels and they sing, breaking out in song like Mary and Zechariah (v. 14; Psa. 85:10; 148:1 Isa. 9:6, 7). In verses 15-21 the shepherds travel to see Jesus, and find him exactly where the angels had described, and they worship him.

In verses 22-37 Jesus goes to be presented at the Temple according to the Law of Moses (Exod. 13; Lev. 12). In verses 25-38 we are told of Jesus and his family's encounter with Simeon and Anna at the temple. It was revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would see the messiah before he died (v.26). Once again God is shown to be faithful to his promises. He too, adds to the musical with his own poem (v. 29-32), with echoes from the servant songs of Isaiah, and highlighting Gentile inclusion in what God is going to do through this Jesus (see Isa. 42:6,49:6, 52:10, 60:3; Psa. 98:2). In verses 36-38 Anna blesses Jesus as well. Verses 39-52 show that Jesus grew up as a normal faithful Jewish boy would have in the home of a devout Jewish family, and his love for his heavenly Father and the Scriptures.

In all of the main stories in the first two chapters, a pattern appears: God makes a promise to a character, he fulfills that promise, and they respond in praise. Also pay attention to how much Luke speaks of the "empowerment" of the Holy Spirit in these chapters (and throughout the rest of the book) Additionally, Luke turns up the volume on Jesus being the promised deliverer of his people, in these first two chapters, an important set up for the following chapters.

Chapters 3-9:50: Jesus' Mission

In this section Jesus announces and brings the kingdom of God to the outcast, sick, hurting, and the poor in the region of Galilee. Chapter three describes John the Baptist's ministry, and records the baptism of Jesus and genealogy of Jesus, but it begins by telling us who the big power players are politically, and religiously, in Jesus' day, that will be important as the story progresses (v. 1-2).

In verses two through twenty-two, events and struggles surrounding John's ministry and mission are highlighted along with Jesus' baptism by John. John goes into the wilderness as a sign-act (Ezek. 3-5; Jer. 13). He was the Elijah who was to come (Mal. 4:4-6, flip just a few pages back in your Bible), he even dressed like him! (v.4; 2 Kings 1:8). He was trying to restart the story of Israel by calling people to confess their sin, repent, and be baptized as a symbol of their commitment and repentance (Deut. 30; Dan. 9; Micah 7:18-20). So when the author quotes (v.4-6) Isaiah 40:3 (see also Isa. 42:16, 45:2,49:11, 52:10, 57:14; Psa. 98:2-3), he is saying this is the guy who is paving the way for the messiah, the one who is bringing salvation to the house of Israel and the nations. John portrays Jesus' coming as the day of the Lord, and Jesus' (as opposed to John's) baptism as bringing New Covenant blessings (v.16-17, Mal. 3:2-3, 4:1; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). Unlike the other synoptic gospels, Luke highlights in more detail, in verses seven through seventeen, what John was teaching and preaching in the wilderness. He taught that baptism was useless, a waste of time, if one's life wasn't marked by repentance expressed in concrete actions (v.7-9), and in verses 10-14 John describes what that might look like for various people. In verses 15-20 John denies that he is the messiah, and sees himself as the author sees him, the forerunner to the messiah.

Verses 21-22 describe Jesus' baptism, and in Luke it seems like he does it almost in passing, however this doesn't make it any less profound. So deeply reflective is the divine speech in verse twenty-two, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." This is a combination of three Old Testament quotes (Psa. 2:6-7; Gen. 22:2; and Isa. 42:1) (Mackie, *Mark* 4). They actually go in order as it reads in Greek, "σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου" (You are my son {see Psa. 2:6-7}) "ὁ ἀγαπητός" (the beloved {see Gen.22:2}), "ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα" (in you I am pleased {see Isa. 42:1}). Psalm two describes the Davidic- messianic-warrior king, Genesis 22 is the only other occurrence in the Bible of another "beloved son", and tells the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his only son Isaac (until God intervenes= seed of promise given over to death and rescued from it), and Isaiah 42 speaks of the suffering servant of Yahweh empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring restoration and justice to the nations in the giving up of his life (Mackie, 3). It's an incredibly rich verse that says so much about Jesus, his mission, and empowerment to carry out that mission.

In verses 23-38 Luke gives us Jesus' genealogy. His genealogy is both similar and different to Matthew's (1:1-17), and is concerned with different theological claims about Jesus' identity (Mackie, 8). Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam, whereas Matthew's only goes back to Abraham. They are identical from Abraham up to David, but then they part ways and head down separate paths, until they meet up again with both containing Zerubbabel (but break off again until Jesus' earthly adoptive father, Joseph). Matthew follows the royal Davidic line through Solomon, but Luke follows the line of a David's barely known ninth son Nathan (Mackie, 9). This is all to highlight Luke's theme of the humble and lowly being exalted. Whereas Matthew stressed the royal kingly aspect of the messiah coming from the house of David, Luke turns up the volume on the messiah coming from humble origins. Richard Bauckham states,

It seems that Luke wants the descent from David to evoke not the high status of royal descent, but the low status of David's humble origins... This embodies an interpretation of the prophecies of the Davidic messiah, according to which the Messiah is to come not from the line of David's royal successors but from David's own family origins in Bethlehem (see Isaiah 11:1-5 and Micah 5:1-2)... The new king is not to be born in the royal palace in Jerusalem, but in insignificant Bethlehem, where David's own story began... among the ordinary people. (73-74)

These genealogies help us to understand Jesus's human and divine identity. Jesus is the "New David" (Isa. 11), but he is more than that, "He is the consummation of human history" (Bauckham, 365). He is the God-man, Yahweh in human form, the messiah come to bring blessing to all humanity as the fulfillment of all God's previous covenants with Israel (Gen. 12,15,17; Exod. 19-24; 2 Sam.7; Jer. 31; Ezek.36).

Jesus' testing in the wilderness in chapter four (v.1-13) proves him to be the true Israel, and the suffering messiah. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by Satan, and after fasting for 40 days, he is put to the test. The number "40" is significant. It portrays Jesus as a Moses-like figure (Deut. 9:9) and Israel (wilderness wandering book of Numbers 40 years). Satan attacks Jesus' identity, "If you are the son of God..." (v. 3 and 9). The reader was just told in chapter three that Jesus is the son of God. Further he says things like, "make some food out these rocks, show how powerful you are, and worship me I'll give you everything", using scripture to provoke Jesus (Psa.91).

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16 (also echoes of 1 Sam. 7:3; and Isa. 7:12). In doing so he is refusing to come to power and rule the world the way Israel's kings had in the past, giving into satanic temptation to grab power through selfishness, manipulation, cruelty, wickedness, etc. Jesus knew his Bible. He knew from the book of Daniel, that when humans forget they are under God's authority and on his mission, they don't rule beasts, they become them. When humans want to become powerful apart from God, in reality they become beasts. Jesus doesn't give in, and he overcomes the temptations of Satan. He prevails where Israel had failed. In his temptation, he showed that he would not take the easy road out, but trod down the treacherous trail set before him (Isa. 42).

In verses 14-21 Jesus gives his inaugural speech, in his home town, Nazareth. His theme is the good news of freedom for the poor and oppressed, which he reads from the scroll of Isaiah (58:6, ch.61; and an echo of Isa. 42:7, 49:8 and Psa. 146-7-8) at the synagogue. Isaiah 61 is the central poem in of all the servant poems. It essentially combines all the servant poems of Isaiah together. Isaiah 58 in its original context was a critique on Israel's leaders. When Jesus says in verse 21, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," what he means is that he is Isaiah's suffering servant come to bring good news to the poor and freedom to the prisoner, and the oppressed. The word "freedom" in Greek is ἄφεσις which means "forgiveness, pardon from sin, liberty, or release" (DBL). Its Hebrew counterpart דְּרוּר which speaks of Jubilee liberation (Lev. 25:10),

This (ἄφεσις) is the common word for "forgiveness" in Luke (1:77 or 3:3), but the word's meaning is broader: *release from burden or bondage*. The word in Isaiah 61 is rooted in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25), and is about *release from the social consequences of a society's collective sin: freedom from debt, slavery, poverty, and oppression*. (Mackie, 11)

The poor, πτωχος, "refers to more than economic status, but a person's wider social location in terms of family heritage, land ownership, vocation, gender, ethnicity, education, and religious purity: in Jewish literature it refers to *anyone of low status, or who lives outside the socially accepted boundary lines*" (Mackie, 11). Jesus doesn't let social constructs and man-made boundaries effect his mission. Quite the opposite, Luke stresses the point that Jesus came for the "outsiders". As we shall see his mission is directed toward the "poor".

Verses 22-30 describe how the peoples' excitement about Jesus turns to hostility. The people want proof that he is a prophet after the claims he has made about himself and what they heard he did in Capernaum. They disbelieve, and Jesus says, "...no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." (v. 24). Jesus goes on to tell them that when Elijah and Elisha were in a similar situation they had to perform their mighty acts outside of Israel (1 Ki. 17:8-16; 2 Ki. 5:1-14). Those who should have known him best, who should recognize him as the messiah are offended by him and are full of unbelief, to the point Jesus couldn't perform miracles in his own hometown, and they actually try to kill him! (v.29). Verses 31-44 recount Jesus' first healings and casting out demons, showcasing his power over sickness and evil, and the natural and spiritual realms. The authority in which he taught and preached is highlighted in this section as well. People recognized something different about what he said and how he said it. In verse forty-four Jesus restates his purpose: to preach good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus' Nazareth speech sets the schema for his teaching and healing ministry in chapters five through nine. In chapters five and six Jesus teaches about the kingdom, brings it into people's lives, and confronts Israel's religious leaders. In chapter 5:1-11 Jesus calls the first disciples (fishermen). In verse 12-17 he cleanses a leper, touching the "unclean". He tells him to tell no one, but to go do what Moses commanded (Lev.14) and show himself to the priest. The man doesn't listen to Jesus, and speaks freely about his healing, thus Jesus' fame keeps growing.

In verses 17-26 Jesus heals a paralytic man, when his friends do a demo job on someone's roof and lower him down through the hole in the ceiling. Interestingly, Jesus forgives the man's sins first, highlighting again that he is not simply here to rid people merely of their physical ailments, but also their spiritual sickness. Often the two are tied together. The Bible doesn't separate these categories like the Western world does. Jesus' miracles were not "cool parlor tricks", he was doing stuff in character with messianic kingdom, that people would know that he had authority to forgive sins too. He doesn't give the man a theological quiz, rather the actions of the men show the disposition of their hearts. This causes some commotion with the scribes, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 21). In a sense they are right to question him (Psa. 32:5; Isa. 43:25). Jesus responds by asking them what is easier to say, "your sins are forgiven you, arise and walk" (v.23)? The answer is obvious, and Jesus does both. The healings here and elsewhere are saying something about Jesus as the "temple" (Matt. 12; 26; Jn.2; Acts 6:14) and the Son of Man (Dan.7). The source of divine holiness is walking around (Jesus) not contracting the diseases, or destroying people, but cleansing, healing, and restoring, and doing so outside the "establishment", because he is the "greater than" temple (Matt. 12). He is doing things only Yahweh can do, and what only the institutions are supposed to do. This story is the beginning of the theme of the opposition of the religious leaders to Jesus and his mission.

Jesus calls Levi, the tax collector in verses 27-32, showing his attitude toward sinners. Levi accepts the call and throws Jesus a dinner party with all of Levi's tax buddies. Jesus shows the expansiveness and inclusion of all people groups in his call to follow. Levi is among the "poor"; though he is not economically poor, he is still a social outcast in Jewish society. The religious leaders are outraged at Jesus' actions, in which he responds, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (v. 31-32). Jesus is then questioned about fasting (v. 33-39), and responds with a parable about old and new garments and wineskins. Jesus used them as metaphors for how the Pharisees legalism was incompatible with the gospel.

Jesus asserts himself as Lord of the Sabbath in chapter 6:1-11, and again identifies himself as Daniel's "Son of Man" (Dan. 7). Mark shows the boldness and gentleness of Jesus in the next few verses. Jesus proves these claims by healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (v.6-11), and from here the conspiracy to destroy Jesus begins (v.11). Verses 12-16 describe the calling of the twelve disciples. In doing so Jesus begins to form a "new Israel" (12 disciples =12 tribes of Israel). This is a rag-tag bunch of guys consisting of fisherman (working class), tax collectors (wealthy, but also traitors and outsiders), and rebels (former revolutionaries against Rome). Even within the Twelve

the diversity doubtless had its struggles, so that Jesus' teachings to the crowds that follow would have been convicting and challenging for them as well.

Jesus delivers his "Sermon on the Plain" in chapter 6:17-49. In verse 17-19 the crowds begin to gather. Matthew and Luke both have the call of the disciples prior to this gathering, where as in Mark the call comes after the gathering. The way Luke tells the story, it was not just the Twelve who heard this teaching. The whole sermon is about a reversal of worldview. Jesus teaches us how to live as New Covenant believers under his rule and authority. This signifies Jesus bringing the Torah to fulfillment and giving a "New Torah" for the inaugurated kingdom of God. This entire section details the ethics of the kingdom and shows how Jesus' teaching is, "now the standard of divine justice by which God's people are called to account" (Mackie, *Mathew* 6). The Beatitudes (6:20-23) speak of the kind of people to whom the kingdom comes (think of the first people Jesus came to in chapter 4-5). The Beatitudes are not a formula for gaining favor with God. Jesus is actually taking the "blessed life" or the "good life" from Psalms and Proverbs, and flipping it on its head for effect, showing us that the kingdom comes in a surprising way, to the destitute and the unfortunate as well. In verses 24-26, Jesus contrasts what he just said about the people of the Kingdom, with the proud. The coming kingdom of God produces two types of people, there is no middle ground. Jesus' teaching on loving enemies comes in verses 27-36. Jesus says this because that's what he does, and will continue to do, not just in this narrative, but currently today as well (Col. 1; Rom. 5; Eph. 2). The kingdom of God rejects violence and social hierarchies that promote injustice and abuse. The way one gains status in the kingdom of God is through humility and repentance (v.36-42; see also 9:46-48; 14:7-11; 18:9-14). In verses 39-49 Jesus uses short parable-like sayings such as a tree and a house as metaphors for following him, and what kind of character a disciple must have. Following Jesus requires a total life transformation that results in radical obedience. In the subsequent chapters Jesus puts his money where his mouth is.

Chapter seven contains three stories about Jesus healing and/or including social "outsiders" in his mission to bring the kingdom of God to humanity: the centurion and his servant (7:1-10), raising a grieving widow's dead son (7:11-17), and giving dignity, healing and honor to a prostitute amidst her ridiculers (7:36-50).

Verses 18-35 tell the story of John the Baptist's response to Jesus' ministry so far. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, as he sits in prison, is questioning if Jesus is the messiah. Notice that Jesus doesn't rebuke John. John knows what is supposed to happen when the messiah comes, and Jesus isn't quite fitting his idea of what the messiah is supposed to look like. He had even preached that he was coming (ch.3). Jesus quotes Isaiah in his message to John (Isa. 35:5-6 and 61), which John would have known. He also would have known that they spoke of judgement, not just healing and restoration, but Jesus doesn't quote that part to John; he leaves it out. First fruits of messianic age are here, but the judgements are not yet. Jesus tells John that he is the messiah, but that his expectations are skewed. Previously it was John who bore testimony about Jesus, now Jesus bears testimony about John, beginning in verse twenty-four. Jesus says that he was the one who was to prepare the way for the messiah, quoting Malachi 3:1 (v.27) and that no one was ever born greater than John (v.28). Jesus thinks very highly of John who at the moment is having some doubts.

In Jesus' address to the crowds about John the Baptist, Jesus says, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (v.28). What does Jesus mean? What is he saying about the kingdom? First, John was the greatest, because he is the one who introduced Jesus. Everything he ever said about Jesus was true. There was one man on the entire stage of human history who said, "Here he is; he is the one!" That's what makes him the greatest. However, the least in the kingdom are greater than he (v.28). This is true, because now that messiah has come, and kingdom of God people can point out Jesus more clearly than John ever could have because of their place in salvation history. They can point to Jesus like those before never could (this becomes especially true after Jesus death, resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit).

In chapters five through seven Luke highlights that the opposition to Jesus' ministry comes primarily from the religious leaders, mainly because he challenged their value systems and world view which included how they perceived: blasphemy against the one God of Israel (5:21-22), eating with tax-collectors and sinners (5:30-35), violating Sabbath traditions to heal the "poor" (6:1-5 and 6:6-11), and welcoming prostitutes into his social sphere (7:39) {Mackie, 12}. In chapter seven Luke shows how Jesus was shattering and redefining who the messiah was to be both from supporters (John the Baptist), and opposers (Pharisees/religious elite).

In chapter 8:1-21 Jesus teaches in parables. The parable of the Four Soils in verses four through seven demonstrates how the kingdom is accepted by some and rejected by others. Notice how the first three soils are useless (Jesus explains the parable in v.9-15). The parable of the Lamp under the Jar is contained in verses 16-18. This is about the fact that the kingdom of God won't be a secret forever. The disciples are to be a light, to reveal the truth of the gospel. In verses 19-21 Jesus uses his family as an illustration of how people should respond to him. If one responds in obedience they become "family". For the remainder of the chapter (v. 22-56), Jesus displays the power of the kingdom of God over the natural world and death (calming the storm in v. 22-25 and healing the bleeding woman and raising Jairus' daughter from the dead v.40-56) and the demonic (healing the man with a demon v. 26-39 {notice he's on the gentile side of the lake}). In each story Luke is highlighting the theme of inclusion in the kingdom of the outsider.

In chapter 9:1-9 Jesus sends the Twelve out on mission to do the same things he is doing. He gives them authority to heal and cast out demons. They are now to act on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Plain (6:17-49), to be "lamps" (8:16-18), and priests to the nations (Isa. 2:1-5; 60-62). In verses 10-17 Jesus feeds the 5,000, which plays on shepherd imagery (feeding the sheep of Israel Ezek. 34:23) and the figure of Moses and the Manna from heaven (Exod. 16). There are echoes of creation here too it seems, as bread doesn't just multiple itself; more bread and fish was miraculously created. In verses 18-27 Peter confesses Jesus as messiah, Jesus foretells his death (Isa. 53 imagery), and shows the requirements of being his disciple (denial of self, taking up their own cross, following Him, and not being ashamed etc.). Jesus teaches how, contrary to what many thought, the messiah will be victorious through suffering and the giving of his own life in self-sacrificial love. The conception for many was the portrait of a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 and Daniel 7 messiah like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah's

death and resurrection which Jesus foretells here. Verse 27 reads, “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” Immediately after Jesus says this, Luke gives us the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (9:28-36). Those Jesus is talking about in verse 28 we learn are Peter, James, and John.

Jesus’ transfiguration occurs in chapter 9:28-36. Jesus is transfigured before them, and is described as looking like the “ancient of days” from Daniel (7:9, describing God), and standing with him are Elijah and Moses (the law and the prophets). What is unique to Luke is verses 30-31, “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” The word “departure” in Greek is “ἔξοδος” (exodus). Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus, about the exodus (the new/greater than exodus, for a new Israel) he is going to perform in Jerusalem. A voice from heaven repeats what he spoke in chapter 3:22 at Jesus’ baptism, but the phrase, “listen to him” is added (v. 35). At this the men are terrified as they enter the cloud (a symbol of God’s presence throughout the Bible {see Exod. 24:15-16}), and after the divine voice had spoken they only see Jesus standing there. Jesus has been portrayed as “like” or even “greater than” various Old Testament characters, but here now Luke is saying even more. Jesus eclipses them, he completely transcends them. The baptism and transfiguration of Jesus form a rough inclusio around this section, and the claims it makes about who Jesus is.

Immediately after the transfiguration, Jesus heals a demonized boy that the disciples were unable to help (v.37-43). Jesus is grieved by the unbelief and opposition he finds. Jesus foretells his death a second time in verses 43-45, but the disciples don’t understand and are afraid to ask him about it. Their misunderstanding is portrayed further in the fact that in the next verses they were arguing about who was the greatest. Verses 46-48 record the quarreling of the disciples as to who is the greatest. Jesus picks up a child, and uses the child as an object lesson saying, “he who is least among you all is the one who is great” stressing the theme of the servant, the lowly, and the humble being exalted. In verses 49 and 50 Jesus teaches that no one has a monopoly on the kingdom of God. Someone was casting out demons beside the Twelve, so John was concerned, but Jesus corrects him saying, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.” (v. 50, see also 11:23). With these final teaching moments Luke closes the second section of his narrative and Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

Chapters 9:51- 19:27: Jesus’ Journey/ Exodus to Jerusalem

The narrative thus far has been setting the reader up for this transition point, Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. In chapter 9:51 Jesus “sets his face to go to Jerusalem” which begins his march to death (Isa. 50:7). Throughout chapters 9-19 Luke gives landmarks to let us know where the journey has progressed in route to the destination (9:57, 10:1, 38; 11:53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31, 35; 19:1, 11, 28). This section consists primarily of Jesus’ further teachings, parables, and continued mission to the poor, highlighting many of the same themes from the first two sections of the book. Dr. Mackie points out that, “The travel section consists mostly of Jesus’ teaching and parables, so Luke portrays discipleship to Jesus as “learning on the go” (p. 13).

Chapters 9:51-13:21 are about what it means to follow Jesus. In chapter 10:1-16 Jesus sends out the 70 (or some translations have 72) to do what he had been doing, announcing the kingdom, healing, and casting out demons (similar to the sending out of the Twelve earlier). The number “70/72” is symbolic, and should make us think of the number of elders who aided Moses (Exod. 24:1. See also the table of nations in Gen. 10). Verses 17-24 recount their return. In chapter 10:25-37 Jesus gives the parable of the Good Samaritan which is not so much about who is my neighbor (like the man asked) as much as it is about what Jesus is saying in his parable (are you acting like a neighbor to all people {Deut.6:5; Lev.19:18}, even the outsider?). Next Jesus eats with Martha and Mary (v.38-42). In this encounter Jesus teaches that we ought not be too busy doing stuff for him, that we substitute that for a real, genuine, and intimate relationship with him.

In chapter 11:1-13 Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray in Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer (see also 18:1-8). Jesus has a run in with the Pharisees in verses 14-54. The religious elite accuse Jesus of being in league with Satan (v. 14-28). They claim it is by the power of evil, something demonic/satanic that he heals. Interestingly, as the religious leaders, they are the ones who should have recognized the messiah, but they don’t. Jesus tells them they don’t make sense, why would Satan drive out Satan? However, if it is by God that Jesus is able to do what he does, then the kingdom of God has indeed come. Jesus does these miracles by the power of the Spirit, he is the messiah right in front of them, and they attribute it to Satan. In verses 29-32 Jesus speaks about the sign of Jonah, and relates the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish, to his own death and resurrection that will soon take place. Jesus is portrayed as a greater than Jonah and Solomon here. Jesus’ teaching on light and darkness (v.33-36) sounds similar and different to his earlier parable about a lamp (8:16), but serves more as a warning against spiritual blindness and hardheartedness. In verses 37-54 Jesus is at the dinner party of a Pharisee and begins to critique the religious elite. Jesus reproves the religious leaders for distorting what it means to be the people of God. They live lives of total hypocrisy, and Jesus’ tone is harsh. This section reads much like the judgement passages of the prophets.

In chapters 12:1-11 Jesus teaches to trust in God’s care and provision even when facing persecution, and is linked to the previous section above regarding the Pharisees. Verses 12-34 contains Jesus’ first teaching on wealth and possession, a reoccurring theme. The kingdom of God should transform how Jesus’ followers relate to wealth. Dr. Mackie states that, “Luke contains more teaching of Jesus on money than any of the other Gospels. Our relationship to our resources is the most reliable indicator of our true allegiance and devotion (12:13-31; 16:1-10; 16:19-31; 18:18-30; 19:1-10; 19:11-27) {12}. In this first teaching Jesus shows us that a person’s life is more than their material possession, and how we are to trust ultimately in our heavenly father for what we need a day at a time, because worry and anxiety produce no yield. Jesus doesn’t teach laziness, but correct priorities and abstinence from the “rat-race” of life dominated by consumerism and acquisition of excessive wealth. Verses 35-48 speak of the need to be ready for the coming of the son of man (Dan. 7). The parables in verses 42-48 refer to the time period of the disciples after Jesus’ ascension. True disciples will be found doing the work of the kingdom when Jesus returns. Jesus tells us that he came to divide, not bring peace (v. 49-59). The gospel requires people to make a decision; the time to respond to Jesus is now. The baptism Jesus speaks of (v.50) is what Mark and Matthew talk about (also connected with

cup of God's wrath imagery from Jer. 25) as well, it is a metaphor for the suffering of Jesus. One can't remain neutral when it comes to Jesus and his sacrificial death. They must make a choice.

Jesus teaches about the need for repentance in chapter 13:1-9. In verse one through four Jesus explains how all are guilty before God and need to repent. In verses six through nine Jesus gives a parable describing how Israel looked like a healthy tree, but was producing no fruit, however, God (the owner) was willing to give them a chance to repent once again, but after that it will be on their hands. In verse 10-17 Jesus heals the woman with the disabling Spirit on the Sabbath. The two parables in verse 18-21 speak of how the kingdom of God though is starting small, will grow and become massive and widespread. It has a small beginning and a glorious fulfillment to come.

Chapters 13:22-17:10 explore the generous, but dangerous offer of God's kingdom. In chapter 13:22-30 Jesus speaks about entry into the kingdom of God. For Jesus, salvation and judgement cannot be separated. Those who respond to Jesus' message in repentance, are the ones who receive admittance into the kingdom of God. The gate is narrow, and admission is limited. Chapter 13 ends with Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken" (v.34-35). Jesus alludes to a plethora of Old Testament passages (Deut. 32:11-12; Psa. 118:26; 147:2; Prov. 1:24; Ruth 2:12; Isa. 64:11; Jer. 12:7; 22:5). He is angry and devastated. This section showcases a passionate Jesus.

Chapter 14:1-24 places Jesus at the dinner table of another Pharisee. In verses one through six Jesus challenges the religious leaders and heals a man on the Sabbath, presumably at their dinner. This leads into two parables: the Parable of the Wedding Feast (v. 7-11) and the Parable of the Great Banquet (v.12-24). The first is about the humble being exalted and the proud being humbled. Jesus' comments about doing good just for the earthly reward, instead of doing good to those who can't repay you, leads into the second parable which is about how the religious leaders were treating God's invitation to them in the person and work of Jesus (but also Israel throughout its entire history), but the "poor" were now receiving the kingdom. It's a parable that also express the causes of Jesus' lamentation at the end of chapter thirteen. In verses 25-35 Jesus outlines the costs of discipleship and points out that they shouldn't be taken lightly, but considered thoroughly. One must deny themselves and give up their personal desires to follow Jesus. Jesus wants wholehearted disciples who will persevere, not those who will quite half-way through and lose their salty taste.

In chapter 15 Luke really turns up the volume on the gospel being for the outsider through three parables that are all interconnected. Jesus tells two parables in verses 1-10, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Jesus tells these stories as a critique on the religious leaders. They are grumbling (v.2), over Jesus' relationships and accusations with sinners, when they should be rejoicing that sinners are coming to salvation, because heaven does. In verses 11-32 Jesus tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son (unique to Luke). It makes the same point as the other two parables, but at greater length. The parable really is a challenge and invitation for the Pharisees to change their minds about the outsiders, the sinners, and the outcasts in God's kingdom agenda.

Chapter 16 is dominated by Jesus' warnings about affluence and wealth. He begins with the Parable of the Dishonest Manager (v.1-13). It is a parable about faithful stewardship, and handling what we have been given wisely. We are not to forget that we serve God not money. In verse 14-18 Jesus exposes the Pharisees' greed as being inconstant with the law, and even more his teachings; for their greed invalidated their piety. In verse 19-31 Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It speaks once again of the humble being exalted. It also teaches that failure to respond to God and his Word, or to walk in his ways, and to show mercy and love to the "poor" has consequences. The last verse carries a huge punch, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." (v. 31). In this parable, those who close their ears to God's Holy Scriptures (a critique on the Pharisees), wouldn't be moved even if someone was raised from the dead (what Jesus was soon to do).

In chapter 17:1-10 Jesus teaches the disciples about temptations to sin (17:1-4), the power of faith (v. 5-6), and their duty as servants of the kingdom (v.7-10). Chapters 17:11-19:27 are about Jesus' coming kingdom. In chapter 17:11-19 Jesus heals ten lepers. Only one of the ten, a Samaritan (an outsider), comes back and expresses gratitude to Jesus for his healing. Jesus had already spoken of the coming of the kingdom and of the Son of Man (9:26; 10:9, 11; 12:40), but does so again in verses 20-37 (see also Matt. 24 and Mark 13). In chapter 18:1-8 Jesus delivers the Parable of the Persistent widow, which functions to close his teaching about the future (17:20-37). It is similar to the parable in chapter 11:5-8 (part of Jesus' teaching on prayer). The parable is meant to teach persistence and patience in prayer and waiting upon the Lord, for he will bring justice to his elect (v.7). Jesus poses the question, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (v.8). The emphasis is on our faithfulness, not God's. When Jesus returns, will we be among the faithful? The parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector (v.9-14) is also about prayer. It is about the character in which one prays and picks up the theme of God hearing and seeing the outcast, because of their humility, but closing his ears to the proud and so-called self-sufficient. In verses 15-17 the children come to Jesus. Children are part of the kingdom as well, moreover; it is those who have the reckless abandon and mindset of a child that receive the kingdom. The two previous accounts highlighted the type of attitude a member of the kingdom of God should have. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler (v. 18-30) picks up that theme as well. At its core it shows that salvation is impossible apart from God; it cannot be earned. The journey of being a disciple is costly, Jesus doesn't lower his standards for anyone, but the life of a Christ follower will be rewarded (v.30). In the closing verses of chapter eighteen (v. 35-43) Jesus heals a blind man, who is persistent (a theme in this section), recognizes who Jesus is ("Son of David" a name for the messiah {Isa. 11:1-10; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24}), his faith makes him well, and he becomes a disciple of Jesus (again the lowly being recognized, touched, healed, exalted etc.).

In chapter 19:1-10 Jesus brings the kingdom to the "poor" once again in the story about Zacchaeus the tax collector. Though Jesus' teaching about wealth and the rich may have seemed bleak, Zacchaeus shows that God can save anyone, all things are possible with God. Verses 9b-10 read, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The language of Ezekiel's shepherd (ch.34) and Daniel's Son of Man (ch.7) are explicit here, and Jesus implores these images to sum up his purpose in coming to earth. The

Parable of the Ten Minas (v. 11-27) was given in response to the people thinking that the full established kingdom of God was about to take place once Jesus reached Jerusalem (v.11), as a reminder that the Messiah was going to suffer and die. The Parable is really a call to faithfulness and readiness, and expresses Jesus' authority in judgement (his is shown to be just and fair). The "ready/faithful" use their gifts responsibly, adventurously, skillfully, and to glorify the master until he returns. With the close of Jesus' parable, Luke's gospel moves into its final section, as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem.

Chapters 19:28-24:53: Jesus' Final Days: Confrontation, Execution, and Resurrection

In chapter 19:28-40 Jesus enters Jerusalem. Jesus' style of entry into the city was a fulfillment of prophecy (Zech. 9:9; Isa. 62:11). This is the first mention of Jesus riding any kind of animal, it was for a purpose, and Luke shares that with the reader. It appears the crowd understood what was happening in this "sign-act" of Jesus because they begin praising the messiah (using language from Psa. 118:26 and 148:1). Luke alone records the Pharisees response to Jesus' entry, "And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (v.39-40; Hab.2:11). The mood shifts in verses 41-44 (another unique story to Luke), as Jesus is portrayed like Jeremiah weeping over the city of Jerusalem (9:1 and 13:17) and like Moses pointing out covenant rebellion and ignorance of God's plans (Deut. 32:28-29) {Mackie, 13-14}. In his sorrow-laden prophecy over the city, Jesus uses language from the prophets to describe what is to befall Jerusalem (Jer. 6:15, Isa. 29:3-4, Ezek. 4:2). All of this would take place because Israel had failed to recognize that God had come as savior in the person of Jesus. Jesus announces judgment, but he also will suffer through it as well on the cross. This is the second time Luke shows Jesus' broken heart toward the city (see 13:34). The mood shifts again in verses 45-48. Jesus is enraged at what the temple has become, so he "purifies" it, because it wasn't fulfilling its purpose, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers" (v. 46, quoting Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11). In his rampage, he pushes people out, and essentially stops the sacrificial system from working. Verses 47 and 48 describe Jesus teaching in the temple "daily" after this incident, and it creates two responses. Some hang on every word he is saying, and others (the religious leaders) plot to destroy him.

Jesus is teaching in the temple in chapter 20:1-21:4. In chapter 20:1-8 Jesus' authority is questioned by the religious leaders which leads into the Parable of the Tenants (v. 9-19). The theme of the parable could be stated in a question, "Who are the true people of God?" The Tenants of the Vineyard pulls heavily on the understanding of the imagery in Isaiah 5:1-7. It is about Israel and its leaders' failure to live up to God's expectations. More specifically, the focus is on Israel's leaders, who, like the death of the landowner's son in the parable, were about to kill God's son showing that they had rejected the prophets and God himself like their ancestors before them. Therefore, the ones rejecting God will one day be rejected by him in return. The true people of God are revealed here to be those "producing fruit" (via the Isa. 5:4, 7 imagery). The remaining verses in this section highlight two confrontations Jesus had with the religious leaders, which were initiated by his opponents, and all to try and trap him so they could have some sort of legal or legitimate claims over him to put an end to him. The first encounter was over taxes (20:19-26), the second about the resurrection (20:27-40). In

verses 41-44 Jesus is the approacher this time, and asks the religious leaders a theology question about the “Son of David”, which no one answers. Jesus is showing how the messiah is David’s son, but not merely his son, not less than, but more than. He is also divine (Psa. 110; Dan. 7). This leads into Jesus’ warning to beware of the scribes (v. 45-47, the attitude and posture one shouldn’t take), and the story about the widow’s offering (v.21:1-4, the mentality of the kingdom of God to be aspired to).

In chapter 21:5-38 Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple and what the days surrounding the fall of temple and Jerusalem would look like (see also Matt. 24 and Mark 13). Jesus uses imagery from all over the prophetic books to describe what is to soon take place (Isa. 13-14, 34,63; Hos 9; Dan.7, 9, 11, 12; Zech. 14; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15). Verse 32 gives us a hint that in Jesus’ mind these “last things” will take place within the days of the apostles. However, they are also the experience of every Christian until the second coming of Christ, so Jesus’ words here are very applicable and powerful for today. The “signs” Jesus gives are simply things that happen every day. They are repeated events and cycles in the world, that will always take place until the consummation of all things. Knowing these things Jesus has revealed he doesn’t want people to depend on the temple or its religious leaders, or be panicked by political upheaval, natural disasters, the destruction of the temple, or false prophets, but to depend on him eagerly and expectantly await his coming again, and proclaim his story in word and deed until he returns. Keep doing kingdom stuff.

Chapter 22:1-38 recounts the events of and surrounding the Lord’s Supper. In verses one through six the religious leaders are plotting to kill Jesus and Judas goes to the high priest, asks what he will receive if he betrays Jesus, and they promise to give him money in return for his services (v.3-6; Exod. 21:32 and especially Zech. 11:12, the rejected shepherd). Verses 7-38 record Luke’s version of the Passover meal, and the Last Supper. Jesus’ death is portrayed as the Passover offering and the new Exodus that ushers in the New Covenant of God’s kingdom (Mackie, 15). The Passover retells the story, every year, of rescue from slavery, and its most powerful image is of the lamb (Exod. 12). That imagery is huge here. Jesus rescues from the slavery of sin, and he is himself the Passover lamb. Jesus uses bread and wine as profound symbols of his death that is soon to take place. The “bread” being broken was an image of his body. He had been providing the bread in the wilderness (9:10-17), a means of life, now he is providing “bread” in a new way. He is the bread that will bring life through suffering and physical death. This is smothered with Old Testament imagery: Exodus 24:7-8 (blood of the covenant), Zechariah 9:11 (freeing prisoners) and Jeremiah 31:31-34 (New Covenant) (Mackie, *Mark* 11). By taking the elements, the disciples partake in his death, and experience the New Covenant blessings that it brings (after Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the spirit). Verse eighteen looks forward to the great wedding banquet in the future (Isa. 2:6-8; Matt. 21:33-46; 25:1-13; Rev. 19). In verses 31-34 Jesus foretells Peter’s denial, and in verse 35-38 Jesus announces that the time has come for him to be “numbered with the transgressors” as Isaiah’s suffering servant (Isa. 53:12).

Verses 39-59 take us to the Mount of Olives. Jesus is tested once again (4:1-12), this time not in the wilderness (Moses, Israel in the Book of Numbers), but in a garden (Adam and Eve in Gen. 3).

In Genesis three there are humans tested in a garden, but they fail. Luke shows that where Adam and Eve failed in their garden, Jesus persevered in his. When Jesus says, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” (v.42), it seems to me that he is talking about the cup from Jeremiah 25. The cup is the image representing God’s wrath against Israel and the nations. It is full of wine, and Jeremiah is told to take it to Israel and all of the nations the Lord tells him to, and make them drink, and get drunk on it. Jeremiah is to Jerusalem what Jesus is to Jerusalem, except that Jesus won’t hand the cup to the nations like Jeremiah, rather (as we shall soon see) Jesus takes the cup and drinks it himself, and it kills him (Mackie, *Jeremiah* Lecture). The level of loyalty and trust between the father and the son is beyond words; it’s amazing. The Father and the son’s wills fuse together, like they always have, in this ultimate test.

Immediately after this scene, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Jewish leaders as fulfillment of prophecy (v. 47-53, see Psa. 22:6, 7; Isa. 53:2, 3; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 13:7). Peter denies Jesus in verse 54-62. Verses 63-71 describes Jesus Jewish trial. The counsel asks Jesus if he is the Messiah and the Son of God to which Jesus replies, “If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (v.67-69). What Jesus is saying here is, “The moment you kill me is the moment I become the divine king and you show yourself to be a beast” (Mackie, *Daniel* Lecture). The moment they kill Jesus, they show once again, but in much more grotesque way that they (Jerusalem and its leaders) have become like Babylon from (ch. 13, Daniel 7).

In chapter 23:1-5 Jesus is brought before Pilate. Highlighted is the Jewish leaders’ accusation that he is a royal rival to Caesar. “King of the Jews” is a politically loaded term. Pilate however finds no guilt to implicate Jesus, and hands him over to Herod (v.6-16). Jesus is shown to have nothing to say to Herod, who only wanted to see him perform some tricks. Verses 13-16 show that neither Herod nor Pilate found any charges legitimate against Jesus; he was innocent (a theme throughout the passion narrative of Luke: 22:52-53; 23:4; 13-15; 20-22; 39-42; 47-48). Dr. Mackie points out that Luke has adapted the portrait of Jesus’ innocence to mirror David’s innocence as he fled from Saul (1 Sam. 19:4-5; 20:1, 32) {16}. The chief priests have become like Saul, out to destroy the New David. In verse 18-25 Pilate caves to the demands of the Jewish leaders and hands Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate makes an attempt to release Jesus, but the people choose Barabbas. The idea of Jesus’ death as substitutionary can’t be missed here, the innocent dying in the place of the guilty (Isa. 53).

Verses 26-42 describe the crucifixion of Jesus. Verses 26-31 recount people mourning for Jesus as he is led away to his death (Isa. 53:7 imagery), but he tells them not to weep for him but for themselves, because of the coming judgment that is to befall Jerusalem (Jesus uses imagery from Isa. 2:9; Hos, 10:8; Ezek. 20:27 and 47). In verses 32-42 Jesus is crucified along with two thieves. Highlighted is Jesus’ suffering in terms of rejection and mockery by both Jews (religious leaders) and Gentiles (soldiers), with many allusions and echoes of the Psalms (22:1, 7, 18 ; 35:25; 40:15, 69, 109:25) and Lamentations (1:12; 2:15). Luke points out Jesus’ innocence once again, this time on the lips of one of the thieves (v. 40-41), who recognizes who Jesus is and receives eternal life (lowly being exalted again). Verses 44-49 describe Jesus’ death. The temple curtain is torn in two (open access to the Father now through the death of the son, Holy of Holies {Exod. 26:31-33} is laid bare). Jesus cries

out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (v. 46, see Psa. 31:5), and breathes his last breath. Immediately upon his death, a centurion (a gentile) praises God and recognizes that Jesus was truly innocent (v. 47). Jesus’ burial and the events surrounding that are described in the remaining verses of the chapter (v. 50-56).

Chapter 24 is about Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Jesus was really dead and buried (23:50-56), but rose from the grave as Lord and king (24:1-12). These verses show Jesus’ earlier predictions of his death and resurrection to be true, in turn also showing him to be the exalted and enthroned son of man from Daniel 7:13-14, given authority over all things and all people. In verses 13-35 Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Dr. Mackie comments, “The disciples journey of recognizing Jesus as the crucified messiah is portrayed as an ironic reversal of the human redefinition of good and evil in Genesis 2-3” (17). Jesus shows the disciples who he is from the law and the prophets (v. 27, Jesus doing Biblical Theology), and as they are sharing a meal, Jesus breaks bread (recall the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper), they recognize who he is, and he vanishes from their presence (v. 30-31). The two rush to tell the others and explain what just took place (v. 32-35). In verses 36-49 Jesus appears to the disciples. In verses 45-49 Jesus tells us what the Scriptures are all about and what climax of redemptive history is, how that effects his people, and what they are to do with it,

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. (See. Acts 1:8; Isa. 32:15).

With these final words Jesus ascends into heaven in verses 50-53, bringing a close to Luke’s first volume, with the disciples eagerly awaiting the Holy Spirit’s coming in Jerusalem.

Key Themes:

Exaltation of the Humble and Lowly and the Proud Humbled: Inclusion of the outsider and the Gospel for the “Poor”

Like most of the themes in Luke, this one finds its beginning in chapters one and two (the birth narratives of Jesus and John). Luke contrasts Zechariah (a priest man of high social class) and Mary’s (a no name girl with low social status) responses to their sons of promise. Mary is humble and trusting, and so exalted; Zechariah is disbelieving, and so humbled. The geology in chapter three highlights Jesus’ humble origins. His inaugural speech in chapter four tells us his mission is to bring freedom and good news to the poor (any social outsider). Jesus is shown to move primarily toward the outsiders of society in his healings throughout Luke’s gospel (see healings and teaching in ch.5-9 and 13-18). They are continually shown to be the ones who respond to him in repentance and faith, and are the ones who exhibit the attitude that those who belong to the kingdom should have, even when dying for their sins on a Roman cross (23:40-41, the thief on the cross next to Jesus). Jesus shows no interest in religious piety and those who act as though they are self-sufficient, but lack repentance, mercy and love.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is mentioned more in Luke than any of the other gospels (nearly 30 times). This makes sense, when we take into account Luke's second volume, the book of Acts, which is all about the work of the Spirit through the apostles. Luke emphasizes the role of the Spirit in the events leading up to Jesus' birth and in empowering Jesus for his kingdom mission. It is the main credential for being the messiah (Isa.61). All of Jesus' works and miracles are linked to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is also longed for and anticipated by the disciples (New Covenant promise Jer. 31, Ezek. 36).

Money, Possession, and Wealth

Luke contains the most teachings of Jesus on the issues of material wealth than any other gospel (12:13-31; 16:1-10; 16:19-31; 18:18-30; 19:1-10; 19:11-27). How we steward what God gives us is a great indicator of our true devotion and allegiance to either God or the world. It can be a stumbling block for entering the kingdom (the rich young ruler) or a means of blessing others (Zacchaeus).

Opposition from Israel's Leaders

Luke continually shows Jesus being rejected by the religious leaders. The religious elite are having their worldviews challenged and their beliefs of what the messiah would be, totally upended. Like their forefathers in the prophets, they had substituted taking care of the poor, and relationship with God, for false piety. In their attempts to be righteous on their own accord, they had actually become merciless and hard-hearted. So much so, that they kill an innocent man rather than face their own sins and shortcomings. The conception for many was the portrait of a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 and Daniel 7 messiah like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. The kingdom comes through Jesus, the messiah's death and resurrection.

Enthronement through Death

Throughout the gospel Luke portrays Jesus' victory over sin and death, and exaltation coming through suffering. Jesus sees himself as the suffering servant of Isaiah (ch. 40, 42, 53, 61) and Daniel's son of man (Daniel 7) who is to inaugurate the kingdom of God by dying as a substitute for humanity's sins, to seek, save, and redeem the lost (Ezek.34), and to serve (Lk..22:27). Luke's theme of the lowly and humble being exalted finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Implication for Today:

Luke's gospel paints a compelling and convicting picture of Jesus and what it means to be the people of God. There is no grey area, either you're with Jesus or against him. What Jesus requires of his disciples is impossible without the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Luke almost paints a negative picture of what being a disciple will require; it looks like a rough life! The way Luke writes his narrative forces us to be compelled and allured by the person of Jesus, rather than promises of

prosperity and ease in life. The life of a disciple is not easy, but worth it. It is a costly endeavor. The gospel of Luke makes us come to terms with the fact that whatever groups' response to Jesus in the narrative we adopt and identify with (Pharisees/religious leaders, disciples, spectator, healing beneficiaries etc.) had consequences. What we do with Jesus matters. The kingdom belongs to those who persevere to the end. It belongs to the humble and repentant. Jesus through his death and resurrection provides us a new way to be human, the power to overcome sin and to have a relationship with our heavenly father. Those who belong to Christ, don't have to mistreat others, be dominated by sex, money, and power, but are free to serve, love, and show mercy to the poor and to those who cannot pay them back. Jesus' inaugural speech in chapter four still rings true for people today, and as his ambassadors of earth we are to point others to the one who has come to freedom to the prisoner and oppressed, sight to the blind, and good news to the poor (ch.4; 58:6, ch.61; and an echo of Isa. 42:7, 49:8 and Psa. 146-7-8). We should be compelled by the great rabbi and messiah to bring the message of good news to our own spheres of influence, and so spread the kingdom of God, seeking to bear fruit in all that we do. Only when we submit to Jesus' paradoxical kingdom can we see him for who he really is. Being a disciple requires pursuing a life that is consistent with Jesus' teachings, a pursuit of holiness empowered by the Holy Spirit and in concert with his sanctifying work in us. There is not a place for nominal Christians in this gospel. The mark of a true believer is fruitfulness, humility, and self-sacrificial love. The life of a disciple requires denial of self, taking up our crosses, and following Jesus, because he is the great messiah, savior, and king of the universe worthy of our honor and praise.

Study Questions:

1. Name a few of the key themes of Luke's gospel that are introduced in the first two chapters?
2. What key theological point is Luke making with his genealogy? How is it different than Matthew's?
3. What is God claiming about his son at Jesus' baptism in his allusions to three Old Testament passages?
4. What is Jesus claiming in his inaugural speech in chapter four when he reads from the scroll of Isaiah?
5. In the gospel of Luke, what does he mean by "the poor"?
6. Which one of Jesus' parables did you find convicting or impactful as you read Luke's account of the teachings of Jesus?
7. How has Luke's portrayal of Jesus captivated you in a different way than the other gospels?
8. How should Luke's emphasis on Jesus moving toward the poor and outsider, effect how we interact with those in our communities?
9. What can you do to create opportunities to serve and develop relationships with those who can't pay you back or who are on the fringes of society?
10. Think for a moment to yourself, are there people in your life right now that you have written off as undeserving of God's grace or beyond his reach?

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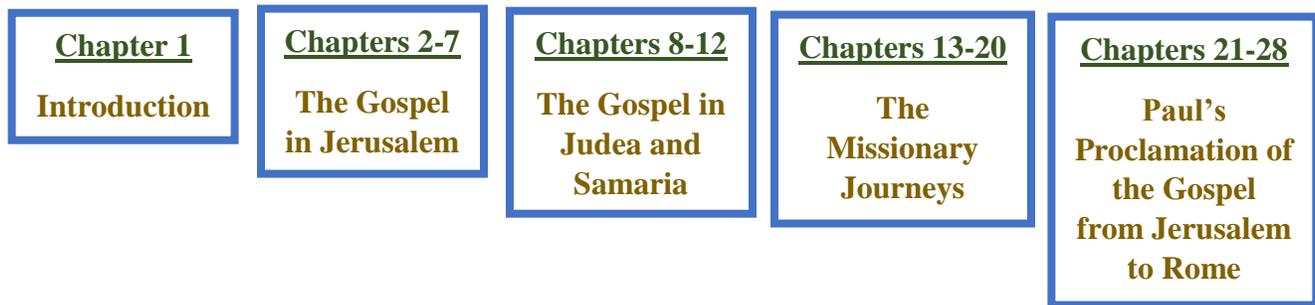
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The Book of Acts

Structure



Main Idea: Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit who comes upon the disciples, empowering them to carry on the work He had begun, bringing the gospel of the kingdom to the nations.

Main Idea Explained

The book of Acts picks up where the gospel of Luke left off (see Lk. 24:45-53; Acts 1:1-4), anticipating the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' words at "the Ascension" (Acts 1:6-11) serve as the book's Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) as the disciples eagerly await the Holy Spirit (the prophetic hope of old {Num. 11; Jer. 31; Ezek.36; Joel 2, Jn. 3}) who is promised again here in verse eight. This section also affirms that the power for growth and the spread of the gospel are going to be dependent upon the Spirit's arrival. In chapter two the author records the events surrounding the coming of the Holy Spirit in the event known as Pentecost. This event depicts the Holy Spirit filling those who were awaiting his coming, in language used to describe other theophany's from the Old Testament (Exod. 19). However, instead of God's glory filling a physical temple, His Spirit fills believers showing them, as New Covenant believers, to be the new temple (Exod. 40; 2 Chr. 7; Acts 2:1-13). At Pentecost Luke records that, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" and "each one was hearing them speak in his own language" (v.4 and 6). This is a reversal of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Where at the Tower of Babel there was mixed language and confusion, here there is clarity and unity that the good news of the gospel may be proclaimed to all the nations of the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. The remainder of chapter two records Peter's sermon, in which he proclaims the gospel message with boldness and clarity, and thousands were added to the church as a result (Acts 2:41,47)

Chapters three through the first part of chapter eight recounts the gospel in Jerusalem, which is met with mixed results, and culminates in the martyrdom of Steven. This event, to the demise of those opposing the gospel, actually served as a catalyst to the spread of the gospel among the nations, highlighting the seemingly paradoxical theme of growth under persecution, and Holy Spirit enablement to persevere through trials.

Chapters 8-12 tell of the gospel spreading to Judea and Samaria with famous stories such as the conversion of Saul (ch.9) and Peter's encounter with the Gentile Cornelius (9-11). In these stories the Holy Spirit invades lives and changes them completely, first of a hard-hearted Jew (Paul), and second of a seeking Gentile (Cornelius). These stories show us how no one is beyond God's ability to save, and pictures Jew and Gentile barriers being removed as well (Eph. 2:11-22). They are reconciled to

each other unified in one body, the body of Christ. In Cornelius being indwelt by the Spirit it shows that he was forgiven and cleansed, without being circumcised, without becoming a Jew first (giving us the proper interpretive application of Peter's dream in chapter 10). In chapter eleven, through the work of the Spirit the first multi-ethnic church is born in Antioch.

Chapters 13-22 record the missionary journeys of Paul, his companions, and colleagues. In chapter 15 Luke records the deliberation and outcome of the Jerusalem Council. This is a ground-breaking event, because in this meeting, it was established that one does not need to be Jewish to be a Christian. Membership in the kingdom of God, to be a child of God, one need not be ethnically Jewish or observe the Torah, but simply placing trust in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, and obeying his commandments. What happened in the story with Peter and Cornelius (Acts 15:7-21) is now recognized as being universally acceptable for all gentiles to whom God grants salvation. The Holy Spirit indwelt Gentiles, meaning there had to be cleansing, forgiveness, and repentance, yet all this took place without circumcision! Therefore, the conclusion was drawn, that being Jewish was not a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Worth noting, God's plan of salvation all along has been to include Gentiles. Some prophetic books like Jonah, Obadiah, Amos, and Zechariah turn up the volume on this theme louder than others, but it is a common theme amongst the prophets (Isa.56:1-8, 66:18-24; Ezek. 47:21-23). God's coming kingdom will include peoples from all nations who repent, believe, and follow his ways. The missionary journeys then display how the Spirit worked through God's people to establish the church all over Asia Minor.

Chapters 21-28 record Paul's proclamation of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. In chapters 21-22 Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, while chapters 23-26 record Paul's trials before the governors Felix and Festus, King Agrippa, and the Sanhedrin. Paul's time in chains we learn is what enables him to write his letters to the churches under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The narrative concludes with this statement, "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (v.30-31). Thus, further showing the Holy Spirit's influence and power amidst persecution and adverse circumstance to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Acts in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Perhaps most profoundly, the book of Acts sees the Old Testament promises about gentiles being fulfilled. We see this particularly in the sermons in Acts, for what they preach is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. As mentioned earlier, we see in Acts two, a reversal of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Steven in Acts 7 basically gives a biblical theology of Israel's entire past pointing out the central problem with her: she habitually resisted Yahweh. In Acts 15 James the half-brother of Jesus, uses Amos nine to justify and legitimize the salvation Peter described that came upon Cornelius the gentile and his household. Through the gospel we also see the image of God (Gen.1:26-28) being renewed and displayed in and through God's people, the body of Christ, God's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural church.

In Relation to the Rest of the NT

One can't speak about the book of Acts without mentioning its predecessor, the Gospel of Luke. There are intentional connections, parallel ideas, and key themes that tie together these two

works that are undeniable. Acts is simply the continuation of Luke's Gospel in which the Apostles are portrayed as doing similar things to what Jesus did in the gospel of Luke. The book gives us a powerful glimpse into the beginning stages of the continuation of the work of Christ after his ascension, the initial stages of the fulfillment of the great commission (Matt. 28: 16-20).

Additionally, Acts is like the book of Genesis, for the birth of the church age. That is, nearly every epistle finds its historical background and context within this narrative arc. Further, most every theological theme found in the epistles, can be traced back to the book of Acts (and for many, even further back than this!).

Key Themes and Application

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is mentioned more in Luke than any of the other gospels (nearly 30 times). This makes sense, when we take into account Luke's second volume, Acts, which is all about the work of the Spirit through the apostles. Luke emphasizes the role of the Spirit in the events leading up to Jesus' birth and in empowering Jesus for his kingdom mission. It is the main credential for being the Messiah (Isa.61). All of Jesus' works and miracles are linked to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is also longed for and anticipated by the disciples (New Covenant promise Jer. 31, Ezek. 36).

This theme is covered more thoroughly above (see main idea section), as the entire book of Acts is primarily about the work of the Holy Spirit through God's people, to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. From the book's own Great Commission (Acts 1:4-11), to Luke's final words about Paul (28:28-31). He is the central element, the power of growth and the reason the spread of the gospel succeeded (and still succeeds to today!). It is the Spirit that changes the hearts of humanity, and it is his working in and through the apostles that any of us that call ourselves Christians can even do so today. Christ's church was not simply kickstarted by the power of the Spirit, and it has been and still is sustained by that same Spirit today. This should give us great confidence as we continue to share in the spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth as well. It is the Holy Spirit who transforms heart. We are responsible for the message, but it is God who saves people unto himself.

The Church

The birthplace of the church comes in the book of Acts, with the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). The church is a driving theme throughout the book, and Luke's burden to show us this is built into very fabric of its literary design. There are six summary statements throughout this narrative that mark section changes. They all read similarly, and give us an update about how the church is growing (6:7,9:31;12:24;16:5;19:20;28:30). Further within this framework, there are many other statements made about growth and those placing faith in Christ (nearly every chapter). To Jew and to Gentile the transforming work of the Spirit touches lives, and the church grows. As the gospel goes to new peoples and cultures, churches begin to form from the headquarters in Jerusalem (chs.2,15) to the first multi-ethnic, multicultural church in Antioch (ch.11), to all of the church plants in Asia Minor and Rome.

Even amidst persecution the church only thrives. In Acts 8:1 Stephen's execution leads to the spread of gospel in Judea and Samaria. Those scattered preached the word; persecution was a catalyst to the expansion of gospel. In Acts 11:19, referring to chapters seven and eight, Luke shows how in the

faithful preaching of the gospel, the hand of the Lord was with the apostles, and many were added during the dispersion. Persecution aided the spread of the gospel. In Acts 14:2, we see the same thing taking place. It's like in Exodus 1, the more Israel was oppressed, the more they multiplied and were spread! It seems to me that there is also a connection with creation mandate and great commission wrapped in this theme as well. As believers today, we are part of the church universal stated by these Spirit-empowered men. We have the obligation to learn from their wisdom, teach it to others, and participate and contribute to our local church bodies, as the proper response to our creator's wonderful grace bestowed upon us.

The Gospel and the Kingdom

Through parables, healings, and other teachings, Jesus continually demonstrated how the kingdom of God came in unexpected ways, to unexpected people (see Matt,8-10). In Matthew 14-20 Jesus shatters the expectations of what others thought the Messiah would be and do. He redefines what it means to be Messiah, and reshapes how people are to think about what it means to be part of the New Covenant people. Greatness comes through serving; the first shall be last and the last first. The mark of a true believer is fruitfulness, humility, and self-sacrificial love. Peter, along with many others was picturing a Psalm 2 and Daniel 2 type of messiah, not an Isaiah 53 Messiah like Jesus was trying demonstrate and teach. The kingdom came through Jesus, the Messiah's death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21-27), however, it is a kingdom that is "already not yet". Meaning, the kingdom is in the process of realizing itself, but there is more to come. We shouldn't expect to see everything yet, because there is more that needs to be done. The kingdom has been inaugurated, but we also wait in anticipation for the consummation, that which is yet to be realized (Luke 21:5-37; Acts 3:18-22). Acts is framed with this theme (1:6, 28; the proclaiming of the kingdom of God). Acts marks the beginning of the reign of the kingdom of God, through the church, the proclamation of the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostles carry on what their master had started. A major part of seeing the the kingdom spread was by establishing churches and preaching the gospel to every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Today, as the church, and body of Christ, we bring the kingdom of God to this world through our actions, words, and thoughts. Whether you work retail, construction, teach, do ministry, etc., the gifts you have been given, and your geographical location are not by accident, but are ordained by God so that his kingdom presence may be felt through you and infiltrate your spheres of influence for his glory.

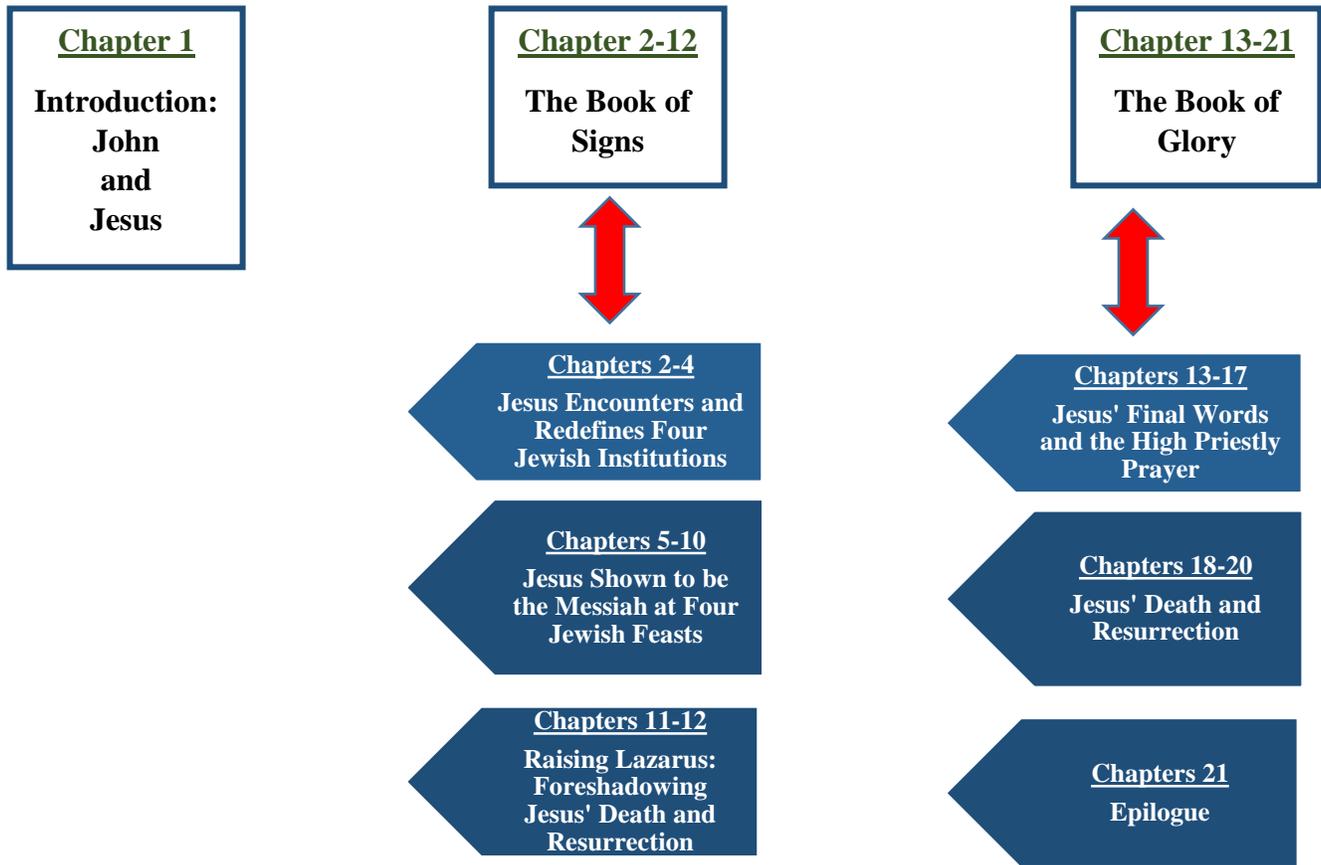
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The Book of John

Structure



Main Idea: I don't think I can state the main idea of this book better than its author, "... these (signs and stories about Jesus) are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31).

Chapter 1 Introduction: John and Jesus

Chapter one contains John's introduction to his gospel and is broken into two parts: the prologue (v.1-18) and the testimony of John the Baptist (v.19-51). In this introduction John makes an astounding claim regarding Jesus, in which will be his burden to further demonstrate throughout the rest of the book. That is, Jesus is the meaning of the universe. He is the creator God, become human to bring salvation to all humanity.

The first five verses are a poem describing Jesus (though he is not named until verse seventeen) as the divine word and wisdom as well as the creator of light and life, pulling imagery and borrowing language from Genesis 1:1-4, Psa. 33:6; Pro. 3:19; 8:20-23, 30 (Mackie, 3). This is a high claim about Jesus, as it places him as being equal with God (see John 8:58 and 17:5). God's word brings about the creation of everything (Gen. 1-2). The "Word", is spoken of here as being Yahweh, but distinct from

Yahweh (see this idea expressed further in Col. 1; Heb. 1; and “the angel of the LORD” in the OT). The title, “Word” is an expression used for Jesus elsewhere (1 Jm. 1:1; Rev.19:13). John introduces an important theme in these first few verses that will be developed throughout his gospel, which is “light” and “life” contrasted with “darkness”. Verses six through thirteen introduce us to John the Baptist, a witness to the light (the “Word” i.e. Jesus) and messenger from God (v. 6-8; Mal. 3:1).

In verses nine through eighteen we learn that Jesus is the “true light” and the “Word become flesh” (see Jn. 6:51; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7, 8; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7) to dwell among his people and to reveal the father. “Who is Jesus?”, was and is relevant to every human being (v.4-5 and 9 light bringing life). Verses 10 and 11 introduce the main conflict we will see throughout the book, people not recognizing Jesus for who he is, even his own (particularly highlighted in John are the Jewish religious leaders). John tells us that some did believe, and those who did believe in Jesus, did so by and through faith (Like Abraham, Gen. 15) becoming children of God. One does not have to be born Jewish to become a part of the new family, only born of God (v. 13). The new family is entered into by faith. Thus, the conflict throughout John will be one of a battle between two “seeds” (Gen. 3:15), the seed of faith (Jesus’ seed) vs. the seed of human will (Satan’s seed, ch.8). In verses 14-18 John is claiming that the divine temple presence, glory of God, and the divine attributes of the Father (Exod. 25:8-9,33:20-22, 34:6-7; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1, 37:6-7) are revealed and embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, first explicit use of Jesus’ name (Mackie, 4). Important to notice, there is not “but” in verse 17. Jesus doesn’t abolish the Torah, he fulfills it, becoming the “New Torah” (Matt. 5-7; Gal.3).

The remainder of chapter one (v. 19-51) records John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus, and the calling of the first of Jesus’ disciples. Priests and Levites are sent from Jerusalem to inquire as to who this Baptizer claims to be (v. 19-28). They ask John if he is the Messiah, the Prophet (Deut. 18:18, 18), or Elijah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6) who was to come, to which John denies each claim. He is trying to draw attention away from himself. In response he says he is the voice crying out in the wilderness from Isaiah 40:3. He is the one preparing the way for the Messiah. He is reenacting Joshua and the Red Sea (Josh 3-4) in the River Jordan. In verses 29-34 John the Baptist makes some astounding claims about who Jesus is. In his testimony, John credits Jesus with being the Passover lamb, Isaiah’s suffering servant, and the Son of God on whom the Spirit resides (Gen. 22:8-14; Exod. 12:3; Isa. 11:1-2, 42:1-2, 53:7-12; Psa. 2:7) {Mackie, 4-5}. The Baptizer does not shy away from who he knows Jesus to be, the long-awaited Messiah.

In verses 35-51 Jesus calls the first disciples. The first disciples of Jesus, were already disciples of John the Baptist, Andrew Simon Peter’s brother and an anonymous disciple (his identity is revealed later). They heard John’s claims about Jesus, and they followed him. In verse 38 they ask Jesus where he is staying (μενω, “abiding”), to which he replies, “come and see” (v. 39), and upon seeing where he “abided” they “abided” (v. 39). Apparently for the author, fundamental to being a disciple of Jesus means abiding with him. The phrase “come and see” gets repeated in verse 46, but on the lips of the disciples as they seek to share their findings in the person of Jesus.

In verses 43-51 Jesus calls Philip and Nathaniel in a strange, but proudly deep story. Philip tells Nathaniel that they (the disciples) had found the one that Moses and the prophets and spoken of (v. 43-46). Nathaniel has his doubts, but accepts Philip’s invitation to “come and see” (v.46). Nathaniel’s conversation (v.47-51), “...to become a disciple of Jesus offers a paradigm for the restoration of Israel to recognize their divine king” (Mackie, 5). When Jesus says, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom

there is no deceit!” (v. 47, see Gen. 27:35 and Zeph. 3:12-15) the word play here is lost in English. Jacob means “deceiver” and is given the name Israel later in his life (Gen.35:10). So essentially what we see in Jesus’ words and encounter with Nathaniel in these verses is that Nathaniel is the anti-Jacob, or the one healed of his “Jacobness”, thus made able to see the messiah for who he is, “...Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49; see 1 Kings 4:21, 25; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 3:8-10; 9:9; Mic.4:4). Nathaniel represents the new Israel, the ideal disciple (Mackie, Lecture). Upon seeing and encountering Jesus, he recognizes who he is and worships him. The fig tree in the story is also significant, as it was a symbol of peace and New Covenant hope.

Verse 51 brings the Apostle John’s claims in his prologue to its climax with Jesus words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Jesus is claiming here that he is Daniel’s “Son of Man” and the heavenly temple from the story of Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28 (Mackie, 6). Dr. Mackie observes that in,

Genesis 28:12 the word “stairway” (Heb. *sullam* סללם) occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, and but its root (Heb. *SLL* = סלל “to lift up, exalt”) appears in a noun “elevated road/highway” that is common in Isaiah to describe the road on which Yahweh will travel to come and restore Zion to become the New Jerusalem {see Isa. *Raised up roads and exalted servant texts in Isaiah* (Isa. 40:3-5;62:10;52:13) compared with *The “Son of Man lifted up” texts in John* (1:51; 3:14-15;8:28;12:32)} (6)

If one is like Nathaniel (a healed Jacob), they will see heaven being rejoined to earth in the son of man, in Jesus crucified.

It is appropriate here to introduce John’s use of the number “7”. There are many groups of “7’s” throughout this gospel, and chapter one introduces us to two of them. Firstly, there are two sets of “7” days in the gospel of John. He has constructed the, “...first and last movements of his account to fall into two matching weeks of seven days each. These are the only clusters of chronological notices in the entire book” (Mackie, 8). In chapter 1:19-28 the first day begins (highlighted is Jesus baptism and the anointing of the Spirit) and the 7th day lands on Jesus’ first sign act, at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11) (Bauckham, 134-135). John’s second week (the final week) begins in chapter 12:1-11 (day one, highlighted is Jesus’ anointing by Mary), and culminates in Jesus final sign act, and his breathing the Spirit upon the disciples (Bauckham, 134-135). The two weeks mirror each other in many ways.

Secondly, Jesus is given seven titles in chapter 1:19-51: the Lamb of God (v.29 and 36), the son of God (v.34 and 49), the son of man (v.51), Rabbi (v.38 and 49), king of Israel (v.49), Jesus of Nazareth (v.45), and Messiah (v.41). What John is claiming in these titles is that, “The fully human Jesus from Nazareth, is the messianic king and teacher of Israel and the son of God who will die for the sins of the world” (BP). It’s an astounding and profound claim, in which John sets out to prove throughout the rest of this narrative.

Chapter 2-12: The Book of Signs

Jesus encounters and redefines four Jewish institutions in chapters two through four: a wedding (ch.2a), the temple (ch.2b), the Rabbinic office (teachers/leaders) {ch.3}, and a sacred well (ch.4). Jesus’ famous turning of the water into wine story, appears in chapter 2:1-11 in John’s gospel. It is said to be the marker of, “the beginning of his signs”, his first sign (v.11). Jesus was at a wedding in Cana when he is approached by his mother, because the wine has run out, to which Jesus replies, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (v.4). This is the first appearance of the

“hour” theme in John (see 7:30; 8:20; 13:1), linked intimately with the underlying theme of providence in this gospel. Jesus’ mother tells the servants to do what he tells them to do, so they take these huge jars with the capacity to hold 20 or 30 gallons, normally used for purification, and they fill them with water, draw of it out, and take it to the caterer (v.6-8). The master of the banquet is amazed and says, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now” (v. 10). Now there is more than meets the eye happening here. Jesus creates an overabundance of stellar wine out of water, and that’s amazing in and of itself, however, it is also very symbolic. The abundance of good wine is a common symbol of the messianic kingdom in the Old Testament (Gen 49:10-11; Isa 25:6-8; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11) {Mackie, 11}. Wine is a symbol of celebration, festivity, and pleasure. Jesus is bringing the messianic kingdom. Wine is also, in the synoptic gospels, an image of the New Covenant and a symbol for blood. It seems to me that Jesus is employing all of those images here, especially when taken with his statement to his mother. His “hour” not yet coming, is his death, not his performing signs. Mary didn’t force the hand of her son prematurely. Water and blood (“wine”) appear again together in the passion narrative (19:34) when Jesus is speared in the side and blood and water flow out of him. Just as Jesus provided an overabundance of wine at the wedding, he provided his own blood (“wine”) on the cross for humanity.

In chapter 2:13-22 Jesus takes on the temple. John highlights that it’s Passover time. Unique to John is that Jesus makes a weapon (v. 15) and that he is particularly upset with the money changers (v.14-15). Jesus is enraged at what the temple has become, so he “purifies” it, because it wasn’t fulfilling its purpose. In his rampage, he pushes people out, and essentially stops the sacrificial system from working. Yahweh’s house was supposed to be a temple not a shopping mall (v.16-17; see Psa. 69:9). In verses 18-21 Jesus links the destruction of the temple to his death and resurrection (foreshadowing his 7th sign). These verses also pick-up the themes of the “lamb of God” (1:29) and further the temple imagery of chapter 1:14 (Jesus =temple=the place where God’s glory dwells) {Mackie, 11}.

Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, during Passover takes place in 2:23-3:21. It seems to me that verses 23-25 serve as an introduction to the story that follows in chapter 3:1-21 (Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus). Essentially, they describe how many people believed in Jesus, because of his signs, but how Jesus knew what people were really like. He knew what was “in man”. He knew people’s hearts and motives. This flows straight into verse one of chapter three, “Now there was a man...”

Nicodemus comes to visit Jesus at night (v. 2), which John highlights again in chapter 19:39, but for a different reason as the narrative shows (for the man who once came by night, now helps bury Jesus in broad daylight). Given the introduction, above the reader is led to question Nicodemus’ motives. Whatever they are, it is clear that Jesus isn’t playing any games. He tells Nicodemus that one must be born “from above” (v.3), of “water and the Spirit” (v.5) to see the kingdom of God, which in John is synonymous with eternal life. If we follow Jesus’ lead in what he says in this conversation, and go back and read his allusions to Ezekiel 36:25-27 and 37:9, we really see the significance in what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is referring to the new heart and new spirit passages in Ezekiel, and the valley of dry bones imagery. Jesus is saying one cannot enter the kingdom of God without receiving the things Ezekiel talked about. It seems to me, the “water” here is not a reference to the commonly held views of physical birth, but rather the sprinkling of clean water from Ezekiel 36 that symbolically cleanses, and purifies. It is an image of sins being forgiven, which is then followed by the giving of a

new heart and a new spirit. “Born from above” seems to be referring to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Jesus is showing Nicodemus things he should already know as Israel’s teacher. In verses 13-15 Jesus references Moses and the lifting up of the serpent incident from Numbers 21:9 and Daniel’s Son of man (ch.7) to explain his own death (being lifted up on a cross) as bringing eternal life, his purpose in becoming incarnate. The theme of “provision” is in view here again (remember the wedding, ch.2). Verse 16 (connected to claims 1:12), explains the nature, character, and purpose of God’s love. To Nicodemus, a Jew, “world” (see 1:29 Lamb of God) would be an appalling statement. However, God’s love come in Jesus his son, produces two kinds of People: believers and unbelievers (v.17-18). Verses 19-21 describe these two camps and pick up the theme of light and darkness from the prologue (1:4-9). In the prologue, light meant life, and here “truth” is added to the mix. People who love the darkness do so because they think it hides their evil (Isa. 30:10; Jer. 5:31; Job 24:13). They hate the light because it shows them who they really are. These images must have been very powerful for Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night (in the dark, but meeting with the “light of the world” {8:12}).

John the Baptist gives testimony about Jesus for the second time in verses 22-30, culminating in the Baptizer’s comments that, “He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease” (v.30). John lovingly corrects the worry of his disciples, who see Jesus gaining followers, by pointing them back to Jesus. This was how it was always supposed to go. Verses 31-36 are the author’s comments on Jesus’s ministry so far. The first three verses of chapter four serve to place Jesus in a new location based on the previous conversation, and to set up Jesus’ fourth encounter with a Jewish institution.

Chapter 4:4-42 recounts Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan women at Jacob’s well (see Gen. 33:19; 48:22). The disciples go into town to buy food while Jesus is resting near a well when a woman comes to draw water from the well. Jesus asks her for a drink, and the tension rises. John tells us why in verse nine, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” She basically tells Jesus to get it himself to which Jesus replies that if she knew who he was she would ask him for “living water” (v. 10-15 see also 7:38 and Jer. 2:13, 17:13). Again the “water” and “provision” motifs emerge (Isa. 49:10; 6:35, 51, 58; 7:37). The imagery is Edenic, of the water that flows from temple bringing life eternal (Ezek. 47). In verses 16-18 Jesus confronts the woman’s sin, by inviting her into confession, and then her response leads into Jesus’ statement that salvation is from the Jews (v. 22), but that the hour is coming when the true worshippers of God will worship “in spirit and truth” (stated twice in two verses v.22-23). Highlighted here is gentile inclusion, in God’s kingdom riffing off of the kingdom being entered into by faith language from the prologue (1:13). The woman responds again to Jesus that when the Messiah comes he’ll be able to tell us all things (v.25) to which Jesus replies, “I who speak to you am he” (v.26). At this the disciples show back up and are perplexed that Jesus would be talking to a woman. The woman goes back into town, leaving her jar behind and repeats a phrase to the people of the town we’ve heard twice already, “Come and see” (v.29). In verses 31-38 Jesus has a teaching moment with the disciples, and in verses 39-42 we are told that many Samaritans believed because of the woman’s testimony (v.39) and because of hearing Jesus’ words (v.41) culminating in their confession, from the lips of Samaritans, “...and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” (v.42). This points back to the “lamb of God” imagery and title from chapter 1:29 (see also ch. 3:17).

In verses 43-54 Jesus heals a Roman official’s son. This story, along with the wedding story from chapter 2:1-10 form an *inclusio* around chapters two through four. The wedding was in Cana, and now Jesus has come again to Cana (v.43-46). The Roman’s son is ill an approaching death, so his father asks Jesus to intervene, and he does (v.47-50). The man believes Jesus, and his son is healed at

the very hour Jesus spoke to the man, before they parted ways (v. 52-53). John tells us this is Jesus' second sign (of seven). With the close of chapter four, Jesus' encounters with the four Jewish institutions comes to a close

In chapters five through ten Jesus is shown to be the Messiah at four Jewish feasts, in which he gives new meaning. Chapter five is all about the Sabbath. In verses one through eighteen Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath which causes some controversy (v. 19-47). This is Jesus' third sign (see 6:2). Jesus explains and summarizes his actions in verses 17 and 36-37 stating that God (his Father) works on the Sabbath and so does he. The intimate relationship between the father and the son from the prologue is expressed again (see also 3:35; 10:17; 15:9, 10; 17:23-26). The son only does what he sees the father doing. This outrages some, because to call God his father, Jesus is claiming to be equal with God. In verses 19-47 one can see why the religious leaders would come to such a conclusion. Jesus says things like: he gives life just like the father (v.21, remember "living water" from ch.4), that he is the Son of Man (Dan. 7 and 12, authority to Judge), and that all of the Scriptures bear testimony about him (v.39 and 45). He chastises the religious leaders for not believing in him (v.38, 41, 47) disbelief is a common theme in John). In saying that Moses wrote about him (v. 45-47), Jesus is claiming to be the greater than Moses prophet from Deut. 18:15. However, if they don't believe Moses, Jesus says they won't believe him either.

Chapter six is centered on the Passover feast. Jesus is pictured as affecting a "New Exodus". In verses 1-15 Jesus feeds the 5,000 (his fourth sign). This plays on shepherd imagery (feeding the sheep of Israel, ch.10; Ezek. 34:23), and the figure of Moses and the Manna from heaven (Exod. 16; Psa. 78). John highlights how Jesus is like Moses providing for a rebellious Israel with echoes of several passages from the Torah throughout this section of the narrative (Exod. 6; Num. 11; Deut. 18 and 33). There are echoes of creation here too it seems, as bread doesn't just multiply itself; more bread and fish was miraculously created. There is an overabundance once again (recall the wedding from ch.2), which plays into the "Jesus as provider" motif in John's gospel. Verses 16-25 tell of Jesus walking on the water (interestingly not among John's designated 7 signs), and it interrupts the feeding story. Why does John do this? Dr. Mackie comments that, "Jesus is portrayed as a new Moses, leading his people through the dangerous waters to the other side" (p. 13, Exod. 14). In verses 26-71 Jesus uses the bread from the feeding as an image to make claims about himself.

In verse 35 Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (his first of 7 "I am" statements). Jesus redefines what "true" "bread from heaven" is, using imagery and language from Isaiah 55 (Mackie, 13). In Isaiah 55 the bread is God's word, and we know from chapter one that Jesus is "the Word". Jesus is the Word incarnate. In verse 51 Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Jesus uses bread for an image of his death. The people are appalled at this statement, and Jesus takes it a step further in saying, "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (v.53-54). Jesus is not only the provider of bread (v.1-15), but the bread himself (Suffering Servant Isa.53, Passover Lamb ch.1:29; Exod. 12-13). Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, are intimately woven together with belief in him, abiding in him, and fellowship with him and his people (v.40, 47, 51, 54, 56). These are symbols of Jesus' sacrificial death that brings life to the world, as the ultimate Passover provision. The bread and wine (an image of blood and the New Covenant) are the elements that would later make up the Christian Eucharist. Commentator Gerry Wheaton adds, "In John 6, eating the paschal lamb (Jesus) indicates membership in the new

covenant community. Those who would participate in the new exodus deliverance that Jesus brings must eat the paschal meal he provides by believing in him as the crucified Son of God and experiencing abiding fellowship with him” (88). The final verses of chapter six describe Jesus’ debriefing with the disciples after his astounding claims (v. 59-71).

Chapters 7-10a record the events surrounding Jesus’ interaction with people during the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), a celebration remembering God’s provision for Israel in the 40 years spent in the wilderness. In chapter 7:1-10 we are told again that some are seeking to kill Jesus, and we receive insight into how Jesus’ siblings viewed him, “For not even his brothers believed in him” (v.5). Verses 10-13 speak of the speculation about Jesus. Jesus begins to teach in verses 14-24, responding to the skepticism, and challenging his source of authority. People wonder about Jesus’ identity and if he truly is the Messiah given his previous comments in the last section. Highlighted here is the theme of providence, as those seeking to arrest and kill Jesus didn’t, even with him in their midst (“his hour had not yet come” v.30,44). During these encounters Jesus is portrayed as the divine wisdom from Proverbs chapters one (recall chapter J. 1) that is calling Israel to repentance (Mackie, 15).

The next three verses (37-39) are a crucial text in the Gospel of John. Jesus says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” There are several different and legitimate interpretations of this passage. However, given the context of the feast and what it celebrates, as well as the grammar; it seems to me that Jesus is portraying himself as the rock in the wilderness that gets struck (killed), to provide God’s people with living water (Mackie, 17). Interestingly, the apostle Paul says similar in 1 Cor. 10:4. John picks up the water imagery and theme here (see ch.4:10 and 6:35), but adds even more depth to it in recording these words of Jesus. Echoes of the Psalms and Isaiah (Psa.78:15-16,19:20 and 105:41; Isa. 48:21) are at play, but most profound is the imagery of Moses striking rocks in the wilderness (Exod. 17:6-7 and Num. 20:1-13) to provide lifesaving water. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is commonly referred to using the imagery of a rock, “Rock” is used as a title even for him (Deut. 32:4; Psa. 78:25, 95:1; Isa.44:8) {Mackie, 18}. Some commentators believe this is directly linked to the blood and water flowing from Jesus’ side in chapter 19:34, that the piercing of his side brings about the fulfillment of these verses in the seventh chapter of John and other “living water” statements (Wheaton, 156-157). The living water Jesus provides is eternal life given through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in him. The closing verses of chapter seven describe the responses and division among the people regarding Jesus (v.40-51).

The earliest manuscripts we have do not include chapter 7:53-8:11 (The woman caught in Adultery). In chapter 8:12-59 the Festival of Lights (emphasizing the pillar of fire in the wilderness), at the Feast of Tabernacles is highlighted. Jesus’ second “I am” statement is contained within these verses. In verse 12 Jesus says, “I am the light of world...” An astounding claim, given the context, as the pillar of fire in Exod. 13:21-22 was the light that guided God’s people during the Exodus (See also Gen. 1:3 connection). John’s light motif from chapter one is further colored in. Three times (of the seven) in this section Jesus refers to himself using the divine name “I AM” (Exod. 3:14; v.24, 28, 58), perhaps the most provocative being, “...before Abraham was, I AM.” In Jesus’ debate with the Jewish religious leaders, a tale of two seeds emerges, like from chapter one. Jesus and his father are contrasted with the Jewish leaders and their father, who Jesus says is the devil (v. 44). Jesus uses powerful imagery from Genesis 3-4 to describe their deception and corruption (Mackie, 20). Again, Jesus having a target on his back is highlighted here (v.20, 37, 40), as well as the unbelief motif.

Chapter 9:1-10:21 is centered on the Sabbath again. Jesus heals a blind man (v.1-12) which is both a physical and real healing, but is also a symbol of darkness, in which Jesus overcomes as the “light of the world”. Jesus made this claim in chapter eight and now he shows it to be true, and defines what it looks like for him to be the light of the world in healing the man born blind. This was Jesus’ fifth sign (of seven), which led to much controversy (v. 13-41) as most of Jesus’ healings did. Like his healing of the paralytic in chapter five, this too was on the Sabbath. The Pharisees interrogate the man, and show themselves to be the truly blind ones. Jesus’ healings soften some and harden others, they produce worship of him by some, and hatred of him by others. In chapter 10:1-21 Jesus gives his famous shepherd speech. In John 10:10 Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.” He is pulling this imagery from Ezekiel 34 (as well as Isa. 40 and Zech. 13:7). In Ezekiel 34:23-24 God says he will set over his people one shepherd, His servant David (the title used for the messianic king in Isaiah 11, Hosea 3:4, and Jer.30:9) who will be empowered by the Spirit of God, like Moses and Joshua were (Num. 11; Deut. 34:9), bringing true justice, righteousness, and peace. Jesus is claiming in John that he is the messianic-shepherd-king from Ezekiel. He is intentionally choosing this metaphor to express who he is and what he is, from the prophets. Just like in Ezekiel’s day Israel’s leaders had become bad shepherds, and Jesus sets himself up against them, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v.11). Two more of the seven “I am” statements of Jesus appear in these verses: the gate for the sheep (v.7, Psa. 118:20) and the good shepherd (v. 11, Ezek. 34). Again, the theme of providence is highlighted as Jesus says no one takes his life, but that he lays it down of his own accord (v.18). Verses 19-21 highlight the further division his teachings are creating.

The rest of chapter ten (v. 22-42) is given in the context of the celebration of Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication). Dr. Mackie explains that it, “...was the celebration of the renewal of Jewish worship in the temple after its three-year defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164 B.C. He was overthrown by the Maccabean revolt see (1-2 Maccabees)” (20). The volume is turned up on Jesus’ claims about his identity with the father in these verses. Jesus is said to be “the consecrated one” (v.36). Meaning that he is the dedicated, set apart, and holy son of God sent into the world. Jesus again evades those trying to capture him (v.39). The unbelief and hardening of the Jewish religious leaders, and the belief of the common folk and outsiders is highlighted as well (v. 40-42).

Chapter 11 is primarily about the death and resurrection of Jesus’ friend Lazarus. The first sixteen verses give us some background information for the story, that is very important to grasp the situation at hand. Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary send Jesus a message that Lazarus is ill and it’s not looking good. Jesus however, waits a couple of days, before going to Bethany to see Martha and Mary. Now this may seem odd, but recall in the narrative how the heat has really begun to be turned up toward Jesus and his ministry. Nearly everywhere he goes there are those who seek his life, which is why he had to withdraw to the wilderness (end of chapter 10). Jesus knows that going back to Jerusalem will lead to his certain death. Not only does he know this, but the disciples express this concern for his life and theirs as well, twice in these verses (v. 8 and 16). However, Jesus loves his friend, and the “good shepherd” (10:1-21) lays down his life for the sheep (see also 15:13).

The story of Jesus actually raising Lazarus from the dead is recounted in verse 17-44. We learn that Lazarus has been dead for four days by the time that Jesus arrives. Lazarus’ sisters are broken and in mourning, expressing how much they wish Jesus would have been there, because then their brother wouldn’t have died. John points out Jesus’ compassion and tenderheartedness, turning up the emotional volume in the language. Additionally noteworthy is that there were those who opposed Jesus attending the sisters as well. It is into this environment that Jesus makes his fifth of seven “I am”

statements, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (V.25-26, See also Dan. 12:1-3). Jesus doesn’t just have the ability to heal, but to give life, which he proves by resurrecting Lazarus from the dead in an act that foreshadows his own resurrection that is to come (v.38-44). The remaining verses in chapter eleven (45-57) show that Jesus has just signed his death warrant by performing his sixth sign. In their plotting to kill Jesus, Caiaphas the high priest says more than he knows in his politically shrewd comment, “... You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (v.49-50). John tells us that Caiaphas unknowingly prophesies Jesus’ sacrificial, substitutionary death (Isa.53). Verse 52 highlights the “family of God” theme from the prologue, which includes the nations, not just ethnic Israel. Jesus skips town because of the heat (v.54), but returns to Bethany shortly after (ch.12) forming an inclusion around the Lazarus story, with the two Bethany stories.

Chapter twelve brings a close to Jesus’ public ministry and starts the second series of seven days (the Passion Week). In verses one through eight Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with oil, which Jesus interprets for us as preparing him for burial. Mary’s heart and character are contrasted with Judas Iscariot’s (the Lord’s betrayer), showing us once again the difference between the “two seeds”, and how people very close to Jesus, had very different responses to him. In verses nine to eleven we’re told that the same people who want to kill Jesus, also want to kill Lazarus, because he is gaining a significant number of Jesus followers. The more Jesus displays his power and glory, the more it hardens some, but softens and enlivens others. Jesus’ triumphal entry comes next (v. 12-19). John describes Jesus’ style of entry into the city as fulfillment of prophesy (Zech. 9:9; Isa. 62:11). This is the first mention of Jesus riding any kind of animal, it was for a very distinct purpose, and John shares that with the reader. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem as Israel’s king. It appears the crowd understood what was happening in this “sign-act” of Jesus because they begin praising the messiah, however, John tells us that the disciples did not (v. 16) until after his glorification. Up until this point either on the lips of Jesus, or in the mouth of the narrator, Jesus’ “hour” has been spoken of as not yet. However, this is no longer the case, his hour has now come (v.23). John goes out of his way to show how the Jewish religious leaders reject Jesus and how the “Greeks” (v.20) are also a symbol the inclusion for “all people” (v.32) in Jesus’ work of salvation. In verses 25-26 Jesus clarifies those to whom receive eternal life, those who serve and follow him. A voice from heaven (like at the baptism and transfiguration) validates Jesus’ claims and requests. Verses 30-36 show how Jesus’ exaltation and being glorified come through his death on the cross, “lifted up on the earth”. This should make us think back to chapter 3:14 which contains Jesus’ comments on Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, referring to himself. The “lifting up” of Jesus onto the cross is, “his paradoxical exaltation (3:14; 8:28; 12:32) {Mackie, 22}. In verse 35 and 36 Jesus uses “light” and “darkness” imagery, he is the light that is with us for just a little while longer. Those who believe in the light become “sons of light” (v.36). Following these things, John quotes Isaiah 6 and 53 to describe the unbelief that was taking place as well as how Jesus will be glorified, through the event of the cross. John is saying something very profound and scandalous here. He is saying that when he saw Jesus on the cross he saw Yahweh’s glory. The remaining verses of chapter 12 (v. 44-50) record Jesus’ words about his mission. He came to save the world, to bring light into the darkness that by believing in the light, one no longer has to stumble in the darkness. Those who truly believe are those who hear Jesus’ words, keep them, and obey them.

With the close of chapter Twelve the first movement of John's letter, the Book of Signs, comes to a close as well. The basic pattern of all of the stories as we look back over chapters 2-12 go like this: (1) Jesus makes claim about something or himself, or performs a sign and (2) people misunderstand or become angry and hardened, but (3) some believe and understand, just not the people you would expect (BP). It forces the reader to come to a decision about who they think Jesus is, but also invites the reader into the final movement of the narrative to see how the rest of the story unfolds.

Chapter 13-21: The Book of Glory

This final movement of John's gospel focuses in on Jesus' last days, the crucifixion, and his resurrection from the dead. Chapters 13-17 record Jesus' farewell speech and the high priestly prayer, chapters 18-20 record his death and resurrection, and the final chapter (21) functions as an epilogue to the narrative.

Chapters 13-17 really anchor in on just a handful of core themes and ideas, but they are very important. Jesus is only with his disciples at this point, his public ministry has ended (ch.12). Interestingly, John does not have a last supper as do all three of the synoptic gospels. Instead he has the washing of the disciples' feet in chapter 13. This is a symbolic act that portrays Jesus humbling himself, lowering himself to raise others up, and defines the meaning of love which is a major theme in this section. It is a pointer forward to Jesus' ultimate act of humility and humiliation on the cross. In verse 13 we receive Jesus' sixth "I Am" (divine name claim). Jesus is teacher and Lord, and thus in demonstrating his character in the washing of the disciples' feet, they are to go and do the same, culminating in Jesus' command to love (v. 34-35, see also Lev. 19:18; 15:12-17). Disciples of Jesus are marked by their love, that is how others are supposed to know you are a Jesus follower. In the midst of Jesus' powerful symbolic portrayal of love John inserts and introduces the parallel stories of two betrayers, Judas and Peter, leaving the reader to wonder what is going to happen to Jesus' closest companions once he's gone. Jesus' going away is highlighted multiple times in this section (13:33, 36; 14:3, 12).

In chapter 14 Jesus describes how he is "the way the truth and the life" in his sixth "I am" claim (v.6). In verses one through four Jesus says he is going away to prepare a place for his people. This is not a literal place. Jesus was a carpenter's son on earth, but he's not going to heaven to build his people their own personal mansions or something of that nature. The "Father's house" (v.2) is the temple and that is the imagery Jesus is using here. Remember, Jesus said his body was the temple in chapter two. How Jesus is preparing a place for us, the action he will perform to secure our place with the Father, is the cross. Jesus' actions explored in the themes emerging from the Book of signs (ch. 2-12) culminate in this sixth "I am" claim.

John also highlights the oneness and mutual indwelling that the father and son share (14:10-11; 17:20-23) and which Jesus invites his followers into through the indwelling of the Spirit (14:16-17, 20; 17:20-26) {Mackie, 21}. In chapters 14-16, in particular John brings to the forefront Jesus' invitation into the intimate inter-Trinitarian love. This is accomplished through the work of the Spirit as disciples of Jesus "abide" in him. (Mackie, 21). Perhaps most profound in this section, is Jesus' promise to the disciples, and believers today, that he will be present with them through the Spirit as an advocate, guide, teacher, and illuminator after the ascension, as they carry on his mission (14:16-21,25-27; 15:26; 16:7,12-24). Jesus is the one who brings the promised "New Spirit" from Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36-37). The primary emphasis of the remainder of chapter 15 through the end of chapter

16 is on the inevitability of persecution and trials in the life of the believer, but to hold on to hope in the promises of God, because Jesus' death and resurrection make victory possible (15:18-16:4; 16:17-28) {Mackie, 21}.

The high priestly prayer in chapter 17 is a beautiful look into the heartbeat of the Trinity and the others-centered love that exists amongst the Godhead. Verses one through five describe how Jesus' pathway to glory is the horrific trail that leads to the cross. The bestowal of eternal life, comes through his glorification on the cross, and makes God known (v.2-3). Verses six through nineteen record Jesus' prayer for the disciples in which he asks the Father to help them abide in him, protect them, sanctify them by his word (Jesus is the word), and create unity amongst them. In verse 19 Jesus says, "and for their sake I consecrate myself ..." reminding us of the only other time the word "consecrate" is used in John's gospel (Hanukah story 10:36). Where as in the Hanukah story Jesus says the Father has consecrated him, Jesus says here in chapter 17, "I consecrate myself" highlighting the unity of purpose between the father and the son. In the atonement, the Father and the Son partner together (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 5:5-8; Col. 3:16; Rev. 6:16-17). The remaining verses switch focus to those who come to faith Jesus, from hearing the testimony of the disciples (v.20-26). Unity is again stressed with the highest example given, that between the father and the son. The glory of Christ should bring unity; unity within a faith community attracts and leads others to faith. In this prayer Jesus invites his followers into the same intimacy and relationship he has with the Father (Mackie, 21).

Chapters 18-20 contain John's passion and resurrection narratives. Chapter 18:1-11 describes Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Jesus' seventh "I AM" statement is found in verse five, and repeated in verses six and eight. John doesn't want the reader to miss that the arrestors are taking away the one and only "I AM" (Yahweh, Exod. 3:14). Peter tries to stop them, but Jesus rebukes him and says, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (v. 11). In this statement Jesus is pulling imagery from Jeremiah 25 and Isaiah 51 about the wrath of God. Verses 12-27 depict Jesus' trial before the Jews. Again Caiaphas' prophesy is brought to our attention from chapter 11:50 (v.14). The denial of Jesus by Peter is intermingled with Jesus' Jewish trial scene (v. 15-18), sort of a back and forth action between a group who has always denied Jesus, and a follower of Jesus, who is about to deny him.

Chapter 18:28-19:16 records Jesus' trial and sentencing before Pilate. Verses 28-32 are highly ironic. The Jewish leaders were worried about remaining pure to be able to eat the Passover meal, so they remain outside of the governor's headquarters, while at the same time trying to kill an innocent man, Jesus. John's comment in verse 32 shows the primary reason why the Jews just didn't kill Jesus themselves, God's sovereign plan (12:32). Verses 32-38 record Jesus' private conversation with Pilate, in which Jesus explains his purposes in coming into the world, to make truth known (v. 37). Pilate makes an attempt to release Jesus because he finds no fault in him, but the people choose Barabbas. The idea of Jesus' death as substitutionary can't be missed here, the innocent dying in the place of the guilty (v.38-40; Isa. 53). Pilate then hands Jesus over to be flogged (Isa. 50:6; 53:5) and the Romans mock coronation of Jesus serves as a crude irony, because it actually is enthronement imagery as we have seen throughout the narrative. Jesus will be sitting in his glory when he is on the cross. John highlights Jesus correcting Pilate on his view of authority (v. 11, sovereignty theme), and he seeks to release Jesus multiple times, but never does. Pilate caves to the demands of the Jewish leaders and their claims that Jesus is a royal rival to Caesar ("King of the Jews" is a politically loaded term). Pilate is portrayed as a weak people pleaser in John, a conflicted man who eventually gives into self-preservation over justice, and hands Jesus over to be crucified (v.16, Isa. 53).

Chapter 19:17-37 describes the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. In verses 17-24 Jesus is crucified at Golgotha between two others, with a sign above his head reading, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” in all the common languages of that area. The soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothes (v.24), as fulfillment of what is written in Psalm 22:18. Verses 25-27 record Jesus’ tender rendering over the care of his mother to the disciple whom he loved. In his most dire hour, Jesus was still others-centered in his love. Jesus’ death is described in verses 28-37. Jesus declares, “It is finished”, breathes his last breath, and gives up his Spirit (v.30, see 17:4). Jesus is pierced by a spear in which blood and water flow out of him (think about all of Jesus’ mentioning of blood, water, bread, wine etc. up to this point) {v. 31-37}, as opposed to the other two executed along with Jesus, who had their legs broken. John says this was in order to fulfill Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, and Zechariah 12:10, regarding no broken bones, and the pierced one messiah. Chapter 19 closes with the burial of Jesus (v.38-42), in which two men are named, one of them Nicodemus (Ch. 3 and 7, a Jewish religious leader turned follower of Christ), as those who take care to give Jesus a proper burial.

Chapter 20 is resurrection focused, which is Jesus’ seventh and final sign. Verses 1-10 show that the tomb in which Jesus was laid, was empty, and verses 11-29 showcase the sweet return of the shepherd to his sheep, and their various responses and encounters with him. Jesus commissions the disciples, by breathing on them and telling them to receive the Spirit, and to carry on his mission to the world (v.20-22). The resurrection of Jesus from death and the grave is shown to compel belief, (v. 2, and especially v.24-31 in Jesus’ encounter with Thomas and his command to believe), and John shows his intentions in writing this book to be for that very purpose, to force his readers to make a decision about Jesus, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (v. 30-31). The resurrection shows Jesus’ claims to the son of God who would conquer sin and death through self-sacrificial love to be true.

The final chapter is the epilogue of John’s gospel. It functions as a picture of discipleship. What are Jesus followers supposed to do now that Christ has died and been resurrected? Simply listen to him and obey his commands, for that is the most effective way to bear fruit and promote human flourishing (v.1-14). Remember John’s insertion of two betrayers? Verses 15-19 describe the restoration of one of them, Peter. Judas is never mentioned again after Jesus’ arrest in the gospel of John, but Peter is in a profound way. Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep (ch. 10), and to follow him. Peter had been among his first followers, so it seems to be that Jesus is saying following him is a continual calling, not a one-time event. The close of the book of John (v. 20-25) gives us insight into who this mysterious, anonymous, disciple that “Jesus loved” character is. It is in fact the author himself, the apostle John an eyewitness to these events, disguised in the narrative until now. He closes with these words, “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (v.25). However, what is written here we are told is so that, “...you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).

Key Themes

The “7’s”

The number seven is symbolic of wholeness, or completeness, and it is all over the gospel of John. Jesus is given seven titles in chapter 1:19-51: the Lamb of God (v.29 and 36), the son of God

(v.34 and 49), the son of man (v.51), Rabbi (v.38 and 49), king of Israel (v.49), Jesus of Nazareth (v.45), and Messiah (v.41). These tell the reader exactly who the author is claiming Jesus to be, and describing his mission and character. The two big movements of the book are set within two matching weeks of seven days each starting in chapters 1:19-28 and 12:1-11 respectively. Jesus says, “I am the ___” seven times: (1) “bread of life” (6:35, 41, 48, 51); (2) “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5); (3) “gate for the sheep” (10:7, 9); (4) “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14); (5) “the resurrection and the life” (11:25); (6) “the way and the truth and the life” (14:6); (7) “the true vine” (15:1, 5). Jesus also takes the divine name “I AM”, seven times (4:26; 6:20, 8:24; 8:28; 8:58, 13:19; 18:5). He does so to describe his nature, character, and mission. Dr. Mackie comments regarding this feature, “Throughout the Gospel, Jesus takes the divine name (“I am” in Exodus 3:14) and the monotheistic claims of Moses (Deut. 32:39) and Isaiah (Isa 43:10, 25; 45:18, 22; 46:9) and uses them to describe himself” (21). John also records seven signs done by Jesus: (1) Water turned into wine (2:1-11), (2) Healing of the official’s son (4:46-54), (3) Healing the crippled man on the Sabbath (5:2-9), (4) Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-15), (5) Healing the blind man on the Sabbath (9:1-2), (6) Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45), (7) The Resurrection of himself (20:1-31). It’s a brilliant feature in John that invites rereading, and aides in remembering the events and the significance of the stories. Though seemingly short and simple they are deeply profound and require meditation of the reader to fully grasp what is being claimed.

Providence and Sovereignty

John’s gospel perhaps the most of all the gospel accounts turns up the volume on this aspect of God. Throughout the narrative Jesus, or the author will mention Jesus’ “hour” (close to 25 times). Those who seek to arrest, kill, or do both to Jesus are portrayed as not carrying out their desires, because it was not quite the “hour”. In chapter eleven Jesus goes to “awaken” Lazarus, knowing that he is signing his death warrant, but also because he knows that no one can take his life until his “hour” has come. Jesus comments frequently in John that his death is not going to be an accident, or unfortunate, but something he allows so that he can die for the sins of the world. The good shepherd lays down his life willingly (10:15-17; 19:10-11). Caiaphas claims that it is better for one to die for the many (11:49-50), Jesus’ high priestly prayer (ch.17), his rebuke of Peter in the garden (18:11), and Jesus correcting Pilate’s misunderstanding of authority (19:11) among others, display this common theme that is pervasive throughout John.

Unbelief/Belief, Abiding and the True People of God

This gets played out in many different ways in John. John in particular highlights the motif of needing the Holy Spirit (ch.14) to bring illumination in order to fully grasp who Jesus is through the various stories and characters who consistently misunderstand or only partially see Jesus for who he really is. This is particularly highlighted in chapters 2-12. Dr. Mackie comments that, “It’s a narrative realization of the prologue’s statement that ‘he came to his own, and his own did not recognize him’ (1:10)” (22). A third of these occurrences refer to even the disciples. In the narrative, it is not just that people misunderstand, but as the ministry of Jesus blossoms, it does two things: it produces followers and haters. There is no middle ground. His message hardens some and softens others. Those who repent, believe in him, and abide in him are the children God. John tells us that believers, become part of the family through faith (Like Abraham, Gen. 15). One does not have to be born Jewish to become a part of the new family, only born of God (1:13). The new family is entered into by faith. Thus the conflict throughout John is one of a battle between two “seeds” (Gen. 3:15), the seed of faith (Jesus’

seed) vs. the seed of human will (Satan's seed, ch.8). However, it is not just those who believe, but those who persevere, who abide in Christ that are said to inherit eternal life and participate in the inter-Trinitarian love. Abiding is a key characteristic of a Jesus follower, one is not a "Christian" if they do not abide, John is clear on this point. Abide "μείνατε" appears 14 times in the Gospel of John all within the context of true followers of Christ. Jesus powerfully explains what it means to abide in the vine allegory in chapter 15:1-17. Keeping Jesus' word (like in chapter 13 which is summed up in self-sacrificial love, see also 15:12-17) through the power of the Spirit is the primary way in which we relate to and know God, and abide in him.

Eternal Life

"Eternal life" is mentioned almost 40 times in the Book of John. To gain eternal life, is to give allegiance to Jesus as Lord and king of the universe, but to reject the Son of God is to remain under God's wrath (3:36). All of the "I am the ____" claims, his signs, and the preeminence (see prologue) of Jesus, demonstrate how he is the giver of life, and as the ultimate fulfillment of these things, has the exclusive rights over salvation (ch.14 and 17). Jesus summarizes eternal life this way, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (17:3).

Light and Darkness

This theme has its beginning on the first page of John. Chapter 1:1-13 places Jesus in the role of the divine word and wisdom as well as the creator of light and life, pulling imagery and borrowing language from Genesis 1:1-4, Psa. 33:6; Pro. 3:19; 8:20-23, 30 (Mackie, 3). This is a high claim about Jesus as it places him as being equal with God (see John 8:58 and 17:5). God's word brings about the creation of everything (Gen. 1-2). In chapter eight Jesus says he is the light of the world. In chapter 12 Jesus says those who believe in the light become sons of light. He has come so that we no longer have to stumble in the darkness, but may walk unencumbered in the light (Ps. 36:9; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Mal. 4:2). Jesus is the "true light" and the "Word" who became flesh (see Jn. 6:51; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7, 8; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7) to dwell among his people and to reveal the father.

Jesus and Glory

In John's prologue, he claims that the divine temple presence, glory of God, and the divine attributes of the Father (Exod. 25:8-9,33:20-22, 34:6-7; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1, 37:6-7) are revealed and embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Mackie, 4). The word "glory/glorify" appears 35 times in John's gospel. The emphasis is on the fact that Jesus is God's glory incarnate, and that his ultimate act of glory is when he's nailed to the cross and lifted up for the world to see. It's a profound statement about how God loves, and his kingdom values. Through the narrative John demonstrates this theme through Jesus' teachings and signs and through the actions and responses of the various characters.

Implications for Today:

John doesn't hide his agenda in writing this piece of divinely inspired art. He doesn't try to cram as many stories about Jesus as he can into his book, or quote the maximum amount of Old Testament prophecies, allusions, connections to Jesus, etc. What he does is unique and extraordinary. It's simple to read but so deeply profound, it takes more than a lifetime to understand all that is being

said. John selects just a few examples of Jesus' ministry, a few conversations he had with people, and minimal quotation of Old Testament texts to make his claims. He is primarily working the reader by sharing his personal encounter with Jesus, his testimony. I wonder if we view sharing the gospel in our lives this way. Do we craft our presentations simply, but deep, and from our own experiences with Jesus? Does his beauty compel us to a life that longs to bring others to an abiding faith in him? John says he wrote this work so that we may believe and have life (20:30-31). As John highlights, there is middle ground, there is belief that leads to life, and unbelief that leads to death and every human being belongs in one of those two camps. The others-centeredness of the Trinity should motivate us to make Jesus known to the world in our actions and deeds, to invite them to "come and see" (1:39, 46).

I think the imagery surrounding the concept of "abiding" in Christ is significant for today especially in our post-modern culture. It is not just those who believe, but those who persevere, who abide in Christ that are said to inherit eternal life and participate in the inter-Trinitarian love. Abiding is a key characteristic of a Jesus follower; one is not a "Christian" if they do not abide. John is clear on this point. Abide "μείνατε" appears 14 times in the Gospel of John all within the context of true followers of Christ. Jesus powerfully explains what it means to abide in the vine allegory in chapter 15:1-17, those who abide in him through the Spirit bear fruit and thus glorify the father. Keeping Jesus' word (like in chapter 13 which is summed up in self-sacrificial love, see also 15:12-17) is the primary way in which we relate to and know God. Perseverance and what we do with our lives matters. John urges his readers to be convinced by his words and to believe, but quickly moves to what "belief" truly entails. It looks like a life totally surrendered to God, committed to making him known, obeying his commands, and marked by self-sacrificial love and humility.

Allow John to set you at the feet of the Rabbi. Take in the smells, ponder the images, meditate on the teachings, and at the end, ask yourself if John has succeeded in convincing you to believe that you may have life. "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God'" (Jn. 6:68).

Study Questions:

1. What is John trying to convey in his use of the title "Word" for Jesus in the prologue?
2. What do the 7 titles given to Jesus in the prologue say about his identity?
3. What are the four institutions and four feasts John writes about in chapters 2-10? Let's take turns naming a few, and giving a one-sentence summary of their significance as we go.
4. The story of Lazarus is placed in the middle of John, as a hinge point for the ministry of Jesus. Why do I say that? What is so important about this story and its placement?
5. What are the seven signs that Jesus performs in the gospel of John? What do they tell us about the kingdom of God?
6. How does one receive eternal life?
7. What does John mean by "believe"? How does one abide in Christ? What does that look like for you personally?
8. How does knowing that you have been invited into the inter-Trinitarian love of the Godhead affect how you love and serve others?
9. Hearing Jesus' prayer in chapter 17, how does it offer hope and security to you as a 21st century believer?

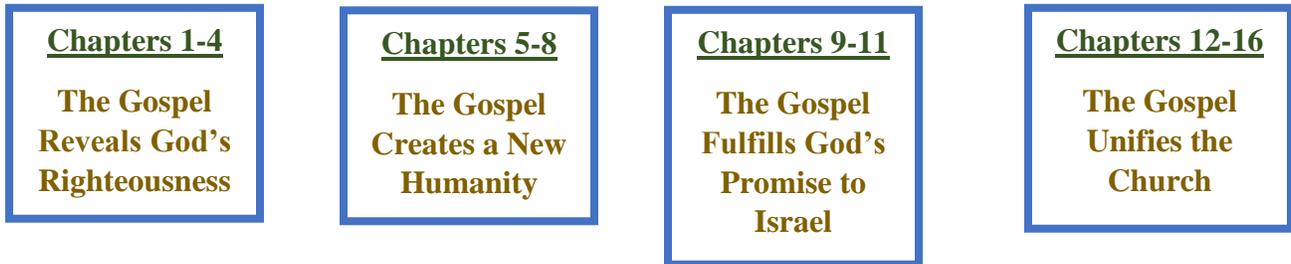
10. Jesus attests that the Spirit will empower believers to carry on his mission by being witnesses to and of his word, and by serving. How have you seen the Spirit's work in your life this week to accomplish these things?

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The Book of Romans

Structure



(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: The book of Romans is Paul's systematic explanation of the gospel, and how through Jesus' work on the cross and the sending of the Spirit, both Jew and Gentile may now be a part of the New Covenant people of God.

Main Idea Explained

This letter of Paul is all about the gospel. There are many sub-themes to be sure, but they all are birthed out of a deep understanding of how the gospel touches every aspect of one's life. These other ideas and themes are, but implications of the gospel itself, the logical outworkings of this life-changing reality.

Chapters one through four develop Paul's argument about how the gospel reveals God's righteousness. Chapter 1:1-17 sets the stage for the rest of the letter, giving us one of the only places in Scripture that tells us exactly what the "gospel" really is, in a succinct fashion. Along with 16:25-27 these verses form an inclusio framing Paul's letter with the key themes he develops between these two passages. In them we learn that the gospel is the power of God to save humanity, and reveals his righteousness. After defining what the gospel is, for the remainder of chapter one (v.18-32) Paul speaks of God's wrath upon the unrighteous (which is everyone apart from Christ). It seems that for Paul, before he can speak of the good news of the gospel, he must tell his readers about their need for the gospel, exposing the human condition that plagues all of humanity. Paul explains how we are all trapped in sin, even Israel (Paul's emphasis in 2:1-3:8). In chapter 3:9, Paul begins to declare the good news, that is though no one is righteous, they can be made righteous through faith in Christ. For, in Jesus' death on the cross he has justified sinners. Justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ to the believer (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:21), in which God declares that the believer has been accepted as His child, adoption, (Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), forgiven of their sin (Acts 10:23; Rom. 3:23-26; 1 Jn. 1:9), and exonerated from condemnation (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 5:1, 8:1). Chapter four begins to tackle the issue of who exactly is in God's family. Paul explains that those who are truly the children of God are those who place their faith and hope in his son, Jesus.

In chapters 5-8 Paul teaches us how the gospel creates a new humanity. Paul begins by stating that "justification by faith" means that we now have peace with God through Jesus (5:1). He then moves on to comparing Adam and Jesus. Through the first Adam, sin, death, and judgment came upon the world and its inhabitants, but through Jesus, the "New Adam", comes life, love, and the ability to live according to the will of the Father. Chapter 6 goes on using the imagery of baptism to show us that

we have been brought from death to life, and that what is true of Jesus is also true of us. Those who believe and embrace the gospel, have died to sin and are now slaves of righteousness (ch. 6). In chapter 7 Paul then shows the internal aspect of being a Christian in very real, raw terms, “I do not do what I want, but do what I hate ... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (7:15 and 19). Paul is being brutally honest with a truth that can be frustrating and hard to swallow at times: The Christian life is one that will always be a struggle against sin. Chapter 6 is a theological truth, but there is an “already not yet” aspect of sanctification (Mathews Lecture). We’re saved (justified), but we’re also being saved (progressively sanctified) all the time. The reality of a changed identity is that it’s still waging battle against sin. The Law exposes our propensities and inclinations to sin that we must seek to put to death. In God’s grace we’re able to be more like Christ, being progressively sanctified as we walk in newness of life and in the righteousness of God. Chapters 6-8 present an amazing picture of the struggle and battle of the Christian life and sanctification (becoming more like Jesus).

Chapters 9-11 go on to explain how the gospel fulfills God’s promise to Israel. This is a highly debated and controversial section in the New Testament. In this section Paul is dealing with Israel’s promises and their current reality. Paul explains how the gospel is deeply rooted in the promises of the Hebrew Bible. He goes on to explain how not all who are Israel are “true” Israel. Paul explains this by showing how God throughout history has chosen a sub-set, a group within Israel, the line of promise to be his people, which now includes the Gentiles. Therefore, true Israel, are those who recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah and place their faith and trust in him. Those are the new covenant people of God. This being said, it doesn’t seem to me like Paul is preaching “replacement theology” here. The church doesn’t replace Israel. The point Paul is trying to make is that God has not abandoned Israel and his promises made to them. There will be a faithful remnant God saves (elect Jews) of which Paul himself is a member! However, the Jewish people are being held responsible for their large-scale rejection of Christ, but they are not totally rejected. We would be wise to remember the pattern set forth in the book of Acts, Jewish rejection of the gospel (broadly speaking) in leading to the gospel being taken to the Gentiles (the nations). Important to glean from this is that Jew and gentile, will and do, belong and have a place in the new covenant people of God, through faith in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

In chapters 12-16 Paul concludes his letter by teaching us how the gospel unifies the church. Chapters 12-13 teach us how a heart transformed by the power of the gospel produces a life of love that is able to interact in love and service despite being immersed in a secular culture and under foreign governmental authorities. For Paul, theology always has practical applications. Theology is incomplete if lacking the questions, “so what?” and “how does this play out in everyday life?”. Chapters 14-16 focus on healing the ethnic divisions, and how both Jew and Gentile alike are to show grace in “grey” areas, or better non-essential issues to the faith. For in living lives of love and service, we truly live out our new humanity and honor Christ, as we allow the Spirit to mold us and shape us into living out the realities of the gospel more prominently in our lives each day.

Romans in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

The book is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. If we say Romans is all about the gospel (which I think it primarily is, though there are nuances to that), then we also commit ourselves to

teaching that the gospel is not a new concept original to the New Testament writer. Paul relies heavily on the Torah and the Prophets to explain the gospel. In fact, one-third of Paul's OT quotations from all of his letters combined can be found in the third section of Paul's letter to the Romans (chs. 9-11) {Moo Lecture). One's understanding of the Torah and Prophets (Isaiah in particular) significantly impacts how this letter is read, as the themes of "gospel", "law", and "righteousness" are prominent throughout, and their interplay in Paul's writings is integral to grasping his theological assertions and commitments.

In Relation to the Rest of the NT

All of the New Testament letters flow out of the realities, truths, and prophetic fulfillments that we find in the gospels. The main goal of Romans is to talk about the gospel, and the aspects of living out the reality of God's revelation in his son. Paul's whole discussion depends on Jesus as described in the gospels. Paul's own conversion forced him to face the reality of who Jesus was. The person of Jesus changed Paul's paradigm for understanding God's redemptive work. Because of the events we find in the gospels, Paul is then able to explain the theological significance and implications of Jesus and his gospel within the context of all scripture. The book of Acts continues the story of Jesus and his kingdom through the Spirit's empowerment, delineating the narrative perspective from which Romans (and the other epistles) are written. Key themes and concepts found in Romans also are more thoroughly developed in other letters of Paul, or by other New Testament authors as well {Ex. Unity in the church (1 Cor, Eph.) or legalism (Gal.)}.

Key Themes and Application

The Gospel

This theme is covered above in the "*Main Idea Explained*" section, as the entire letter is centered on the gospel.

Righteousness and Justification

Romans 3:21-26 is the central passage for this theme. There are OT passages in the background here that we need to be aware of as well (Gen. 15; Isa. 51). Justice and righteousness are much more closely related in Greek than English; they are the same root in Greek, and so are intimately connected (BDB). The term "righteousness of God" is used eight times in Romans. Given the context and argument being made in Romans three, it seems to me that the righteousness Paul is talking about here is something God has done in us through Christ. Through Jesus the Messiah, God is accomplishing salvation on behalf of his people. Justification, declared righteous given right standing before God, is the imputed righteousness of Christ to the believer (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:21), in which God declares that the believer has been accepted as His child, adoption, (Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), forgiven of their sin (Acts 10:23; Rom. 3:23-26; 1 Jn. 1:9), and exonerated from condemnation (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 5:1, 8:1). Romans 1-3:20 tells how dire our situation is. All humans are under sin's power. We are incapable of coming to God on our own, and are unable to produce a remedy for the human condition; therefore, God must reach down to us. He did just this in sending his son, Jesus. The good news is that God has revealed righteousness to everyone who has faith in Christ. It's not just for Jews. Redemption is for Jew and Gentile, by faith alone in Christ alone.

We therefore cannot boast in anything, but the grace of Christ. As we share the gospel with others it should be our goal to show them the compelling love of Jesus, along with our inadequacies, and so paint a compelling picture of the significance of the person and work of Christ. Being like Paul, may we not limit the gospel to getting people to pray a prayer one time, but show them how it impacts every fiber of one's being, and has implications for the average day-to-day life of the believer. My we offer hope in our presentations, and remember it is God who saves. We are the waiters not the chef, we just have to get the meal to the table without messing it up, and the Word of God will do the rest.

Unity

Chapters 12-16 really dive into this theme. The death and resurrection of Jesus are part of the believer's history (Jew or Gentile) as a person as much as their birth, high school graduation, marriage, etc. Every believer has been united with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and is a beneficiary of what his death, resurrection, and glorification have accomplished (Rom. 6:1-14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 2:4-10). Therefore, we are to act in love and seek unity to live out the "one-anothers" of Scripture, and use our gifts for the benefit of others and the glory of God. Because when Yahweh looks down from heaven he doesn't see this church or that church, this group or that culture, he sees His church, all those bought by the blood of his son, the bride of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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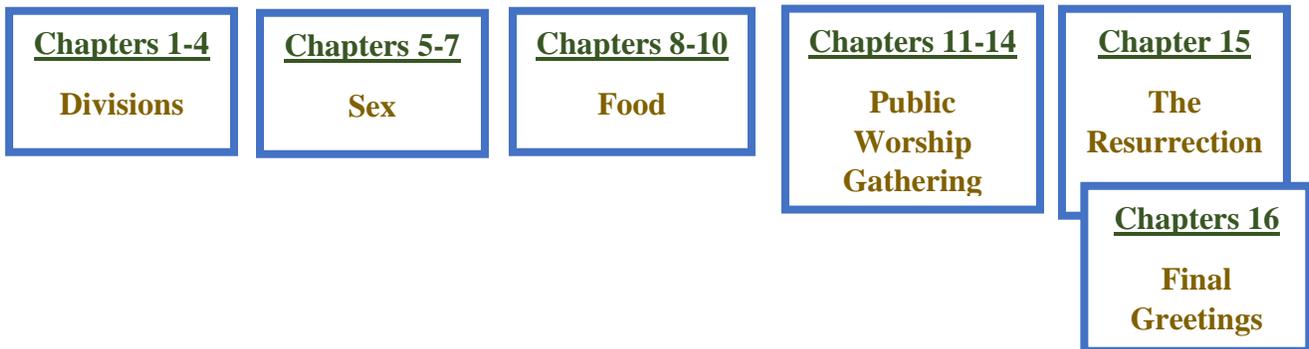
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The Book of 1 Corinthians

Structure



(The Bible Project and Class Lecture)

Main Idea: 1 Corinthians challenges us to view every aspect of life through the lens of the gospel, and by learning to do so in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, we begin to foster unity, integrity, love, and hope amongst the body of Christ, and show the world what the kingdom of God is really like.

Main Idea Explained

Paul founded the church in Corinth, after his visit to Athens (Acts 18:1–7). Its origins can be traced to Paul’s own preaching in the Jewish synagogue there whose leader was among one of the first converts (Acts 18:8). As is common in Paul, the thrust of his purpose in penning these words can be found very early in this letter. 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 contains the central message of the book and the key themes that are further developed in subsequent chapters (for example unity, fellowship, resurrection, coming of Christ, wisdom, perseverance, etc.). It would be helpful to point out a pattern within the design of this letter before proceeding further. In each major section (there are 5 total, minus Paul’s final remarks). Paul first defines the problem, then moves to respond with how the gospel impacts these situations, teaching us how we are to respond as children of God. The gospel message has wide-stretching arms and engulfs all of the Christian life as there is nothing that does not bear its weight.

The first four chapters really hone in on the divisions that are disrupting the church in Corinth, and how the gospel speaks to these issues. The main issue is the idolizing of Christian leaders and the intellectually elite (1:10-2:5), in which Paul corrects in comparing human wisdom with divine wisdom. God reveals his wisdom through the Spirit. Man’s wisdom is a derived wisdom. God has merely chosen to impart his wisdom through the apostles; it is not their own. The Corinthians had a wrong view of how one is to view their leaders. The New Covenant community does not belong to individual teachers, but the teachers belong to the community, “... They belong not to the teachers, but to the Messiah, Jesus who belongs to God” (Winter, 1167). The church is a community of people centered on the person and work of Jesus, centered on the gospel. The gospel unites; it does not divide, because there is only one great shepherd (Ezek. 34; Jn. 10; Heb. 13). This section could be summed up as a case study on the right attitude one should have toward ministry.

Chapters 5-7 broadly speaking, primarily cover the topic of sex, but have implications for many moral integrity issues. Much of chapter five is about the legitimacy and authority of the church in

disciplining its members when they are living in continual unrepentant sin. This argument builds on Matthew 18 and can be found in Titus 3:10-11 as well. If church discipline isn't done then many will think that the particular sinful situation (in this case an incestuous sexual relationship) isn't that bad, or even okay to do it because nobody did anything about it. Paul won't have that, and uses the analogy of leaven in bread. Like leaven, sin will spread if not dealt with appropriately. Church elders are to correct and remove wrong conduct and doctrine, but it is not to be done in anger. Discipline should be for restoration and repentance; we should want restored relationships and faith. Chapter 6:9-20 tells us that this type of discipline and Christian ethics applies to all areas of life, not only sexual matters (see also Rom. 1:18-32). Chapter seven is the longest discussion of sexuality, marriage, singleness, gender roles and related matters in all of Paul's letters. It contains vital information on issues not touched upon anywhere else. What we do with our bodies matters to God, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Jesus died for our sins (sexual and other). This section shows us how the gospel impacts how we treat one another, and how the gospel shapes our world view, to look more like Jesus'.

Chapters 8-10 speak on the topic of food, or perhaps better, as Winter states, "Gospel obligations in a pluralistic world" (1174). The main issue being dealt with is eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul delves into a complex argument that boils down to what seems to me to be just one thing essentially: Edification, and not being a stumbling block to others is more important than your personal liberty (10:23-11:1). Loving others well is more important than satisfying our own desires, even when they are not in and of themselves sinful wants. The gospel requires this kind of radical living, but also supplies the means to the end that it asks for through the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5)

This same core principle is taking place in chapters 11-14 as well, just in the context of the public worship gathering, particularly highlighting communion (ch.11) baptism (ch.12), and spiritual gifts (chs.12-14). The local church is to habitually practice the sacraments of baptism (Matt. 28:19; Rom.6) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25). They are continuing practices of the church given by Christ himself (Luke. 22:17-20, 24:44-53).

The primary spiritual gift is the Holy Spirit Himself (Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28; Jn. 14:14-16; Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:14). As Paul teaches us, the gifts of the Spirit are any ability, natural or supernatural, that are animated by the Holy Spirit in the believer, and used for serving Jesus and promoting the mission of God (1 Cor. 12 and 14; see also 1 Pet. 4:10-11). The Spirit bestows gifts on every believer (1 Cor. 12:7), in a diversity of ways (Rom. 12:6-8) as He so chooses (1 Cor. 12:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Those gifts known as the *sign gifts* are continuing works of the Spirit which must be used according to biblical principles and patterns (1 Cor. 14:39; 1 Thess. 5:19-22; 1 John 4:1-4). The Spirit works in all who are saved to bring unity and edify the church. In chapter twelve Paul tells us there is but one Holy Spirit (v.1-13) and one body of believers (v.14-32; the famous body metaphor). In chapter thirteen he further illuminates that our gifts are to be used for the benefit of others and the glory of God. They are to be exercised in love and within the context of committed relationships. The absence of love ruins our ministry effectiveness and causes divisions, which is why it must be present in all that we do, serving as our primary motivation. As Winter summarizes,

Chapters 11-14 reflect the theological conviction that this is not 'my' or 'our' church but God's gathering, that Christ's action or self-giving is to be reflected in relationships and the meeting of needs;

that there is to be the participation of men and women; and that the building up in an orderly way of those who gather is a primary concern. (1183).

Chapter 15 records Paul's defense of the indispensability of Christ's resurrection and the implications it has for the life of the believer. Paul correctly goes as far as to say the Christian faith without the resurrection is meaningless. Jesus' victory of sin and death through the cross and resurrection is what brings hope to the world and power for living today. The gospel has no meaning or power apart from the reality of resurrection. Crucifixion without resurrection would only be a tragic martyr story (Blomberg, Lecture). It was his death and vindication (by rising from the dead) that we have atonement for sin. There is no hope for us or the world if this is true (Rom. 10:10 likewise highlights this reality). Our coming bodily resurrections depend upon this truth. Paul encourages us that this is in fact a reality for those who have faith in Jesus. We can look forward to new resurrection bodies as well, resting in the fact that we, because of Christ, have victory over sin and death (15:20-22; Rom. 5). Chapter 16 ends the letter with Paul's closing remarks.

1 Corinthians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

It's important to remember that Paul's theology is always deeply rooted in the Old Testament, no matter what letter he writes, this is his framework from which he builds upon. Let's look at just a few examples from 1 Corinthians. In chapter 1:18-20 Paul quotes Isa. 29:14, and borrows from the themes from Isaiah as a whole, particularly highlighting here the contrast of wisdom of the world and divine wisdom. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 carries this on as well (alluding to Isa.64 this time). This tells us that Paul isn't coming up with some new concept, but rather his theology of wisdom comes from the book of Isaiah.

In chapter 6:16 Paul cites Genesis two for his basis on teaching about sexuality. In chapter 8:4 he alludes to the prophet Isaiah again (Isa. 44:24; 44:9) regarding his teaching on Idols. Chapter 9:8-12 quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 for his rationale that ministers of the gospel ought to be paid for their labor (as it is speaking not as much about oxen as it is human relationships). Chapter 15 records Paul's argument for the indispensability of the reality of Christ's resurrection and its implications for the believer, and quotes again from Isaiah, but also from Hosea and Genesis to nuance and lend authority to his argument (Gen. 2; Psa. 8; Isa. 35:8; Hos. 13:4).

In Relation to the Rest of the NT

1 Corinthians challenges us to view every aspect of life through the lens of the gospel. The Gospels' climatic event (death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah), is what makes the Christian faith, what it is. Without these monumental events Christianity is meaningless (1 Cor. 15). Because Christ was vindicated in rising from the dead, there is hope for the world. We find these events in the four Gospels, and without their truths, Paul's writings would be meaningless as well.

Acts 18 gives us insight into the roots of the Corinthian church and some of the particular issues that arise in Paul's letters. Paul's letter to the Romans was a broad theological treatise, while 1 Corinthians narrows its focus to a few key issues, offering pastoral advice and counsel. Other letters will contain many of the same themes, some in more detail, and others with less, because these were circulating letters, occasional letters. They are not meant to say everything that could be said on a

given subject, but they are what the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write. In conjunction with all of the NT writings, 1 Corinthians adds to the symphony exactly what God intended it to.

Key Themes and Application

The Gospel

1 Corinthians challenges us to view every aspect of life through the lens of the gospel, highlighting some key issues such as unity (chs.1-4) sex (chs.5-7), food (chs. 8-10), worship gatherings (chs.11-14), and the centrality of Christ's resurrection (15) and the gospel come to bear on these situations. This theme is chased out thoroughly in the *main idea* section above.

Unity/Disunity: Pride, humility, and Spiritual Gifts

One of the major nuances to purging the church of disunity is the commitment of its members to operate in humility and lay down their pride. The first four chapters emphasize the need for unity not divisions. We are all coworkers in the Church of Jesus Christ (ch.3), and he has blessed his church with a rich diversity of gifts (chs.12-14). Diversity doesn't mean disunity; we should celebrate our diversity and use our gifts for the benefit of others. No one has all of the gifts, and everyone has a gift which they are to put into the service of the kingdom of God. The church is to be a community of people centered on the person and work of Jesus, centered on the gospel. The gospel unites, it does not divide, because there is only one great shepherd (Ezek. 34; Jn. 10; Heb. 13).

The primary spiritual gift is the Holy Spirit Himself (Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28; Jn. 14:14-16; Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:14). We should never forget this. As Paul teaches us, the gifts of the Spirit are any ability, natural or supernatural, that are animated by the Holy Spirit in the believer, and used for serving Jesus and promoting the mission of God (1 Cor. 12 and 14; see also 1 Pet. 4:10-11). The Spirit bestows gifts on every believer (1 Cor. 12:7), in a diversity of ways (Rom. 12:6-8) as He so chooses (1 Cor. 12:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). The Spirit works in all who are saved to bring unity and edify the church. In chapter twelve Paul tells us there is but one Holy Spirit (v.1-13) and one body of believers (v.14-32; the famous body metaphor). In chapter thirteen he further illuminates that our gifts are to be used for the benefit of others and the glory of God. They are to be exercised in love and within the context of committed relationships. The absence of love ruins our ministry effectiveness and causes divisions, which is why it must be present in all that we do, serving as our primary motivation.

Resurrection

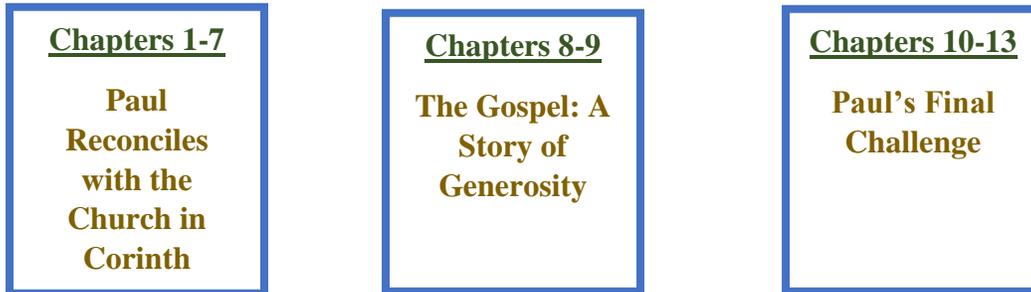
Paul defends the indispensability of Christ's resurrection and the implications it has for the life of the believer in chapter 15. Christian faith without the resurrection is meaningless. Jesus' victory of sin and death through the cross and resurrection is what brings hope to the world and power for living today. The gospel has no meaning or power apart from the reality of resurrection. Crucifixion without resurrection would only be a tragic martyr story (Blomberg, Lecture). It was his death and vindication (by rising from the dead) that we have atonement for sin. There is no hope for us or the world if this is true (Rom. 10:10 likewise highlights this reality). Our coming bodily resurrections depend upon this truth, because without Jesus' resurrection we are all still dead in sin. Paul encourages us that this is in fact a reality for those who have faith in Jesus (15:20-28; Rom.5). We can look forward to new resurrection bodies as well, resting in the fact that we, because of Christ, have victory over sin and death (15:20-22; Rom. 5).

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The Book of Second Corinthians

Structure



(The Bible Project and class Lectures)

Main Idea: 2 Corinthians challenges us to view life through the lens of the cross, and embrace the upside down, paradoxical message it tells about the lifestyle that brings glory and honor to God, through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

Main Idea Explained

2 Corinthians could be justly summarized as Paul's defense of his ministry and the integrity of the gospel he preaches. Chapters one and two form the introduction of this book in which Paul greets, thanks, and prays for this church in Corinth acknowledging the pain and struggle that has been taking place (1:1-11), before diving into the first (and longest) major section of the letter (1:12-7:15).

It is clear in chapters two and three that some reject Paul because of his suffering, poverty, and less exciting public speaking skills than other leaders and teachers. They became ashamed of him when they encounter other rich, successful teachers, who Paul calls "peddlers of God's word" (2:17). This is a distorted view because that is not what truly matters. Paul points out, true Christian leadership is not about status or self-promotion. Paul depicts himself and the other apostles as slaves to Jesus who is leading them in a triumphal procession. The job description of Christian leaders isn't to be impressive, but to point others to Jesus, that they may be captivated by him. Additionally, we learn that the Corinthians have been demanding letters of recommendation of Paul to prove his credentials, which should make the reader think, "Are you kidding me!" Why? Because Paul himself planted this church (Acts 18)! Paul argues that the Corinthians themselves are his letter of recommendation (3:2-4) and quotes from Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 saying that God's Spirit has written his letter of recommendation on their hearts as the New Covenant people of God (Mackie). They shouldn't need anything other than this. From here Paul launches into a discussion comparing the Old and New Covenants (3:7-18; see also the book of Hebrews). He explains how the Old Covenant, the Laws of Moses, failed to produce righteousness, by an allusion to Moses' veiled face because of the radiating glory of God that shown from it (Exod. 34). The glory was hidden, and the glory was a fading glory. The Old Covenant was glorious, but a fading glory, always meaning to point toward something else greater than itself, the New Covenant (Mathews, Lecture). The New Covenant is even more glorious, it is eternal, transformative, and effective at producing righteousness by the power of the Spirit. However, the same veil remains for those who don't turn and repent, because sin is blinding. The New Covenant is not something "New" per se, one doesn't see something new that wasn't there before, but

God lifts the veil so that we might see what was always there from the beginning (Paul's conversion in Acts 9; Num. 11; Deut. 10 and 30; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).

In chapters four through seven Paul explains the paradox of the cross and how it ought to affect our very way of life to its core. The paradox of the cross is this: Jesus the messiah was exalted and glorified through his suffering and death (Isa. 52-53; Dan. 7; Matt. 27-28). Paul's argument here is that his life which has been one marked by suffering, poverty, and humility actually authenticates his ministry, because it was to serve for the benefit of the Corinthians. Just like Christ's self-sacrificing humiliation, and self-giving love on the cross bought the forgiveness of sins for humanity, so Paul has sought to reflect his savior's example in his ministry and way of life. So, when they disapprove of Paul they disapprove of Jesus too in a very real sense.

Chapters eight and nine speak of how the gospel ought to make us a more generous people. Jewish Christians in Jerusalem at this time are suffering from a widespread famine, and Paul is trying to raise funds to support them (see Rom. 15:23-33 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Paul explains that this love gift would go a long way in showcasing the unity amongst believers (particularly Jew and Gentile) in Jesus the Messiah. We learn, however, that many of the other churches were thrilled to give, but the Corinthians not so much. Paul then launches into an explanation as to why the Corinthians should give generously, and it's not about the money at all. Paul simply uses financial metaphors to make a point about the motivation and heart behind generosity in general. He is telling the gospel through the use financial metaphors. Chapter 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich". Jesus gave up his high status, his glory and riches and became lowly, poor, and died so that others who are impoverished through sin and death could be exalted and wealthy through God's grace (Mackie). Being a Christian means, that the paradox of the cross leads you to be more generous like your savior is generous. God values humility and weakness, because his love and power were made known through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus (Rom. 1 :16).

Chapters 10-13 record Paul's final challenge and warning to the Corinthian church. Chapters 10-12 describe the main source of conflict, the "super apostles", the "peddlers of God's word" (chs. 2; 11:5; 12:11). These teachers have slithered their way into influencing the church in Corinth profoundly, and they challenge and ridicule Paul. He responds by comparing credentials, to which he has many! However, in 11:30 Paul says they don't really matter, because it's not about us, but about Christ working in us, for as Paul proclaims,

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness ... But he (God) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9-10)

Paul concludes his letter in chapter thirteen by warning the Corinthians to examine their hearts and their lives (13:5). How they are acting is showing that they don't understand who Jesus is and they are not living like transformed humans who have been changed by the gospel. He closes, exhorting to love in peace, and prays for restoration and God's blessing over them.

2 Corinthians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

As in all of Paul's letters, his theology is always deeply rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. Perhaps the most profound of the OT by Paul in this letter is his argument in chapter three where he defends himself against the church demanding that he have letters of recommendation to validate his ministry. Paul argues that the Corinthians themselves are his letter of recommendation (3:2-4) and quotes from Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 saying that God's Spirit has written his letter of recommendation on their hearts as the New Covenant people of God (Mackie). They shouldn't need anything other than this. From here Paul goes into a discussion comparing the Old and New Covenants (3:7-18; see also the book of Hebrews). He explains how the Old Covenant, the Laws of Moses, failed to produce righteousness, by an allusion to Moses' veiled face because of the radiating glory of God that shown from it (Exod. 34). The glory was hidden, and the glory was a fading glory. The Old Covenant was glorious, but a fading glory, always meaning to point toward something else greater than itself, the New Covenant (Mathews, Lecture). The New Covenant is even more glorious, it is eternal, transformative, and effective at producing righteousness by the power of the Spirit. However, the same veil remains for those who don't turn and repent, because sin is blinding. The New Covenant is not something "New" per se, one doesn't see something new that wasn't there before, but God lifts the veil so that we might see what was always there from the beginning (Paul's conversion in Acts 9; Num. 11; Deut. 10 and 30; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).

Further, in chapter six Paul speaks about being unequally yoked to unbelievers, in which he quotes a tapestry of OT Scriptures to make the point that the people of God are to be distinct from secular culture in obedience to God, seen in how they live their lives and love others, because they are his temple (Exod. 4:22, 6:7,29;45;Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:9 and 33; Ezek. 11:20,20:34, 41; Isa. 43:6, 52:11; Zeph. 3:20; 2 Sam. 7:8, 14; Hos. 1:10). Also, the theme paradox of the cross, the fact that Jesus the messiah was exalted and glorified through his suffering and death (Isa. 52-53; Dan. 7; Matt. 27-28) also has its origins in OT prophesy.

In Relation to the Rest of the NT

Acts 18 gives us insight into the roots of the Corinthian church and some of the particular issues that arise in Paul's letters to the Corinthian church. 2 Corinthians at its core is Paul's defense of his ministry and the gospel. How he draws meaning and significance out of his poverty, suffering, and humility is in the cross of Christ, to which we must look to the four gospels for the full portrait of the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul assumes an understanding and acceptance of the reality of the Holy Spirit empowering believers to live lives worthy of the gospel and generating hope for the future (2 Cor. 1, 2, 3,4,5,7,13 see also Acts 2). Themes such as "the gospel" (Romans),"false teachers" (Gal. 4-6; 2 Pet.2), and the continuity between the Old and New Covenants (the Book of Hebrews) can be found in many of the epistles as well.

Key Themes and Application

False Teachers

This whole letter is a defense of Paul's ministry to those who have been led away by the "super apostles'" teaching. Chapters 3,6 and 10-12 describe the main source of conflict, the "super apostles",

the “peddlers of God’s word” (chs. 2; 11:5; 12:11). These teachers have slithered their way into influencing the church in Corinth profoundly. They challenge and bad mouth Paul, because of the suffering and poverty that came along with his ministry. Chapter 3:7-18 hints that they insisted on the permanent validity of the Mosaic Law. Chapter 4:2 describes them as individuals who use disgraceful methods, tampering with God’s word. In chapters 11 and 12 Paul tells us they preach another gospel, boast in their heritage, charge a lot of money for their knowledge, and brag about the “special” revelations they have received. How they are acting is showing that they don’t understand who Jesus is and they are not living like transformed humans who have been changed by the gospel. The worst part is that they are leading others to do the same, which Paul must correct (see next theme).

The Gospel and The Paradox of the Cross

Paul systematically responds to the attacks that are aimed at him. Paul compares the Old and New Covenants in chapter 3:7-18 (see also the book of Hebrews). He explains how the Old Covenant, the Laws of Moses, failed to produce righteousness, by an allusion to Moses’ veiled face because of the radiating glory of God that shown from it (Exod. 34). The glory was hidden, and the glory was a fading glory. The Old Covenant was glorious, but a fading glory, always meaning to point toward something else greater than itself, the New Covenant (Mathews, Lecture). The New Covenant is even more glorious, it is eternal, transformative, and effective at producing righteousness by the power of the Spirit. However, the same veil remains for those who don’t turn and repent, because sin is blinding. The New Covenant is not something “New” per se, one doesn’t see something new that wasn’t there before, but God lifts the veil so that we might see what was always there from the beginning (Paul’s conversion in Acts 9; Num. 11; Deut. 10 and 30; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).

Paul explains the paradox of the cross and how it ought to affect our very way of life to its core (chs.4-7). The paradox of the cross is this: Jesus the messiah was exalted and glorified through his suffering and death (Isa. 52-53; Dan. 7; Matt. 27-28). Paul’s argument here is that his life which has been one marked by suffering, poverty and humility authenticates his ministry. How so? Because it served to the benefit of the Corinthians. Just like Christ’s self-sacrificing humiliation, and self-giving love on the cross bought the forgiveness of sins for humanity, so Paul sought to reflect his savior’s example in his ministry and way of life. So, when they disapprove of Paul they disapprove of Jesus too in a very real sense.

He is relating the gospel through use of financial metaphors. Chapter 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”. Jesus gave up his high status, his glory and riches and became lowly, poor, and died so that others who are impoverished through sin and death could be exalted and wealthy through God’s grace (Mackie). Being a Christian means, that the paradox of the cross leads you to be more generous like your savior is generous. God values humility and weakness, because his love and power were made known through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus (Rom. 1 :16).

To put the nail in the coffin, Paul shares what the Lord himself said to him,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (12:9-10)

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The Book of Galatians

Structure

Chapters 1-2

**Intro:
Deviation from
Paul's Gospel
is Desertion
from the One
True Gospel**

Chapters 3-4

**Paul's Gospel
Defended from
Experience
and Scripture**

Chapters 5-6

**Freedom from
the Law and
Freedom in the
Spirit**

(Mathews, 18)

Main Idea: The book of Galatians calls the church to embrace the gospel of the crucified and risen savior Jesus, the Messiah, and in doing so they are set free from following the laws of the Torah, because of the cross work of Christ, remembering that Jesus alone fulfills the Law and justifies believers.

Main Idea Explained

The primary issue in Paul's letter to the Galatians is: What is the true gospel? In the same vein, Galatians has nearly a singular focus, and that is: What is the relationship between the law and the gospel (See Rom. 3-4). We receive this purpose statement in chapter 1:6-9. Astonished that they have deserted the one true gospel (the one Paul had brought to them and taught them {Acts 13-14}) he then, in chapters one and two, defends his message and authority (1:10-2:15). It is clear that this "other gospel" is one that is teaching that non-Jewish Christians must observe the laws in the Torah to be Christian. Paul had been commissioned by the risen Jesus (Acts 9), vetted by the Jerusalem apostles (2:1-10), and even called out Peter (a Jew) out on his hypocrisy in Antioch (2:14). Paul continues arguing that requiring people to follow the Law is wrong because it betrays the gospel message (2:16). He defends this claim by explaining and applying the doctrine of justification. To be justified is to be declared righteous before God (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:21), to be in a right relationship with him, forgiven of sin (Acts 10:23; Rom. 3:23-26; 1 Jn. 1:9), and exonerated from condemnation (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 5:1, 8:1). Further, it means one is given a place in God's family accepted as His child (Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), which results in life transformation by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. No one can be justified by observing the Torah, but only through faith in Jesus. To revert to the Law is folly. We are justified only through trusting in what God did through Jesus, not what we do for ourselves. As Dr. Mackie points out, "The heart of Paul's gospel is: When people trust in Jesus, what's true of him becomes true of them (2:19-20)" (BPV). The work of justification is only something Jesus could do for us, not something we could ever do for ourselves. If we are justified by works of the Law then Jesus died for no purpose,

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal. 2:19-21)

In chapters three and four Paul continues his argument based on his personal experience, but also in Scripture, focusing heavily on God's covenant with Abraham (see Gen. 12, 15, 17, and 22). Abraham, long before the Mosaic Law was given, was said to have been justified by faith (Ge. 15:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul continues saying that it is those who have faith that are Abraham's offspring, including the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:7). The gospel from the beginning always declared justification by grace through faith, including Jew and Gentile alike. As Dr. Mackie comments that from the beginning, "God's purpose was one large multi-ethnic family relating to Him (God) on the basis of faith" (BPV).

Chapter 3:10-14 then tells us that Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse for us, and in dying on the cross removed the curse over us that the Law made. It is in and through Christ that the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit unleashed upon all who have faith in Christ. Chapter 3:19 then asks the important question: Why the law then? (see also Rom. 7-8). Paul answers by saying that the laws were given to Israel long after the God's covenant with Abraham. If we read the Torah closely we'll see that God always intended the laws to be temporary. That being said, they are very important and good! They played positive and negative roles. They called out the sin, rebellion, and evil within humanity while at the same time, "Acted like a strict school teacher to keep Israel in line until the offspring came (3:24)" (Mackie). Jesus was the true, faithful Israelite, who fulfilled the law by loving God and neighbor (Lev. 19; Deut. 6). He died to take the curse of Israel's sin upon himself and bring redemption (Mackie). Through Jesus, God's blessing is gifted to all (3:28) regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender, etc. For Paul then, requiring observance of the Mosaic Law by Christians doesn't make any sense. If we do, that is to effectively say, "Jesus didn't fulfill God's promise or deal with our sins". Further, to do so neglects the freedom that Jesus gained for us and limits God's blessing, denying the reality of God restoring blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3).

Chapters five and six respond to the question: How will people know the will of God apart from the Law? Paul's answer is through the transformative work of the Spirit. New Covenant believers have freedom from the Law in the Spirit. The laws are not bad, they're actually good, but they don't give us the power to actually do them. The gospel message however offers us hope teaching that Jesus fulfilled the Laws on our behalf. Not only that, he also lives in us through the Spirit, and works in our hearts to shape us into his image, new creatures who love our creator and our neighbors. Paul then goes into an argument about our old humanity (full of immorality, sin, evil, and destruction), which Jesus put to death on the cross (5:24; Rom.6). Jesus' life becomes part of our story, and the Holy Spirit works in us so that we become more like Him, living lives that exude love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It's not automatic though; fruit requires cultivation. It takes effort, which is what Paul means when he says, "stay in step with the Spirit" (5:25). It takes intentionality, we must learn to say no to old habits, and form new ones, as we are carried along by the Holy Spirit who makes us into people who love God and others. This offers a helpful critique of those who think grace gives license to sin and be lazy! The latter half of chapter six then contains Paul's final summary to the Galatians. Dr. Mackie summarizes God's goal for his church from the book of Galatians this way, "The new multi-ethnic family of the Messiah, full of faith in Jesus, loving God and others in the power of the Spirit" (BPV).

Galatians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

It would be difficult for the reader of Galatians to understand the thrust of its message without a basic knowledge of the Old Testament. The defining question of this book is: What is the relationship between the law and the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9; Rom.3-4)? One has little to no context for understanding Paul's argument without knowing the overarching narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the Torah, but even more specific, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12,15,17,22). In Galatians Paul explains how justification was always by faith not by works of the Law. That being said, the Law was really good, but it could not give the power to obey its own demands or fix the human condition, but because Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf our story becomes his story. What is true of him becomes true of us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who works through us, we are progressively sanctified, becoming more like our savior (Gal. 5).

In Relation to the NT

Acts 13-14 gives us some context as to the church circumstance and their locations for Paul's letter to the Galatians. The gospels in particular are very important, because Paul's whole argument involves the Law and the gospel. Without the gospels the stories and context for the sinless life, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth would be nearly absent. This would pose a problem, because Paul's argument depends entirely on the work Jesus accomplished on behalf of sinful humanity. Without out these truths, humanity would still be lost in sin with no savior. The foundation of Paul's argument is the narratives which the gospels record. Romans 3-4 and 7-8 are particularly important in adding further nuances and depth to Paul's argument in regard to the relationship between the Law and the gospel, and the purpose of the Law to begin with. The concept of this new multi-ethnic family of the Messiah is linked to theme of "unity" found throughout many of Paul's letters (see the letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians etc.). Additionally, key doctrines and theological truths found in the other epistles, such as justification (2:16), adoption (4:7-9), new creation (6:15), union with Christ (3:27), Holy Spirit empowerment (5:22) etc., can all be found within this powerful letter.

Key Themes and Application

Justification by Faith not by Works of the Law

Nearly the entire letter, is about defense of this doctrine. Galatians is his argument for this foundational Christian truth. Paul argues that requiring people to follow the Law is wrong because it betrays the gospel message (2:16). He defends this claim by explaining and applying the doctrine of justification. Justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ to the believer (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:21), in which God declares that the believer has been accepted as His child, adopted, (Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), forgiven of their sin (Acts 10:23; Rom. 3:23-26; 1 Jn. 1:9), and exonerated from condemnation (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 5:1, 8:1). No one can be justified by observing the Torah, but only through faith in Jesus. To revert to the Law is folly. We are justified only through trusting in what Jesus has done, not by anything we do ourselves. The work of justification is only something Jesus could do on our behalf, because if we are justified by works of the Law then Jesus died for no purpose (Gal. 2:19-21). Further, Paul argues in chapters three and four that Abraham, long before the Mosaic Law was given, was said to have been justified by faith (Ge. 15:6; Gal. 3:6). Paul continues saying that

it is those who have faith that are Abraham's offspring, including the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:7). The gospel from the beginning always declared justification by grace through faith, including Jew and Gentile alike. This means that believers are totally indebted to God for their relationship with him. Humanity can do nothing to cure their disease or to overcome the curse. What a relief it is that Christians do not have to follow Mosaic Law. However, we are under a far more serious law, because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). This means that we do not have a license to laziness or to sin, but a serious obligation to keep in step with the Spirit (5:16 and 25), not to earn salvation, but as the proper response to grace received.

Abrahamic Covenant

In the Abrahamic covenant however, we see God's choice of Israel as his special people called out from among the nations and through whom the messiah would come. God promises him three things: to make him into a great nation, make his name great, and bless him (Gen. 12:2-3). Verse three of chapter twelve then explains God's intentions in fulfilling this covenant with Abraham. This is to be a great nation, be personally blessed, and to be a blessing to others. Essentially, God's promises to Abraham can be clustered into three main categories: land; seed; and blessing (personal and the nations). Or as I like to think of it: people, place, and presence of God with his people (Deut. 4:37). The New Testament explains how the coming of Jesus as the anticipated messiah relates to the Abrahamic Covenant. The coming of Christ was in accordance with the covenant with Abraham as he is "the Seed" (Gal. 3:6-29). The real game-changer in the New Testament is that the children of Abraham now includes Gentile believers, because of their union with Christ. Jesus as the Christ is the "Seed" who brings the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant to Israel and the Gentiles (Gal. 3:16; Gen. 22:17b-18). The Abrahamic Covenant is called 'eternal' from the beginning, so it isn't abrogated in Christ, but fulfilled. (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron.16:17; and Psa. 105:10). Although Abraham experienced personal blessings from Yahweh, in the past, and some Jews and Gentiles enjoy spiritual blessings presently, the full and final fulfillment of the covenant, promises, await the future coming of Jesus. The New Testament, as did the Old, views the complete fulfillment of the Lord's promises to Abraham as a future event (Matt 8:11; Acts 3:19-26; Rom 11:25- 32).

One of the greatest things to be gleaned from Paul's use of God's covenant with Abraham for ministry is to really get people to understand that the entire Bible is Scripture and one unified story that points to Jesus. The Old Testament is important, and we cannot understand much of the New Testament without it. Paul in his letter to Timothy wrote,

and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (1 Tim. 3:15-17)

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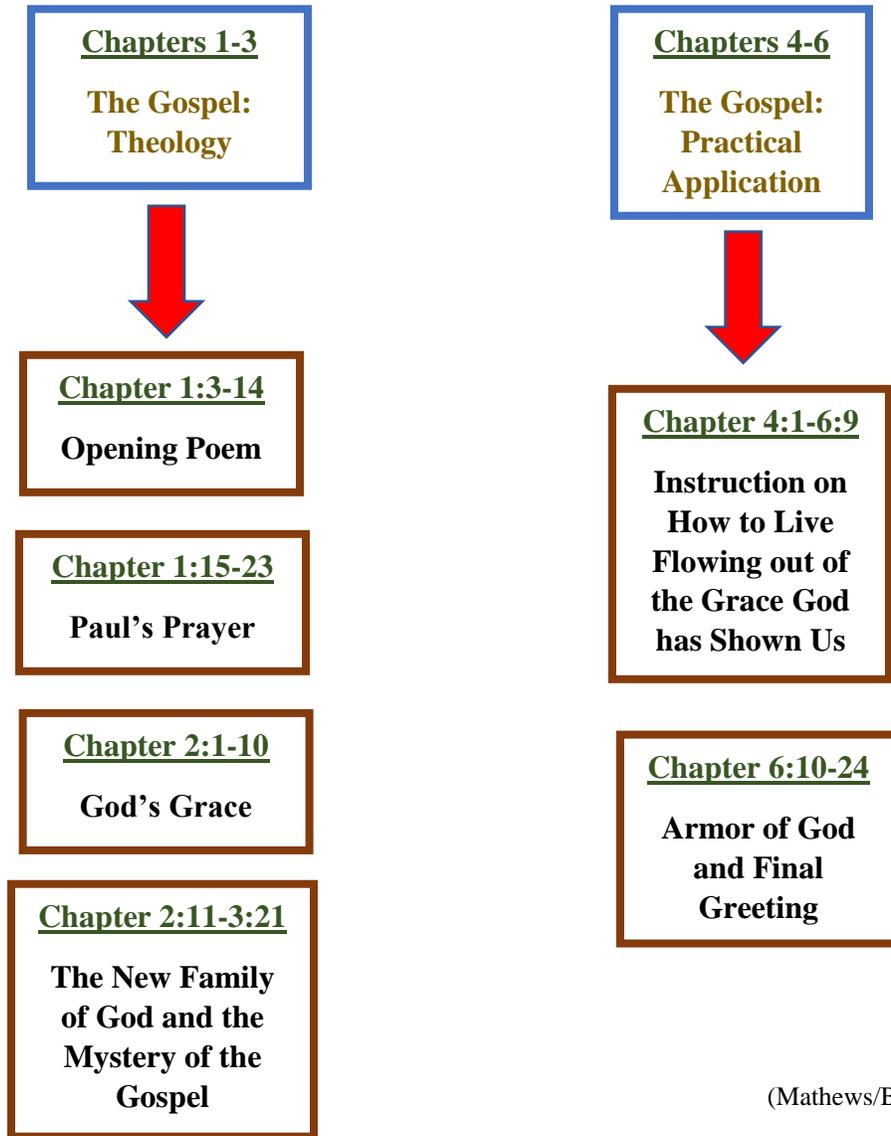
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The Book of Ephesians

Structure



Main Idea: Ephesians highlights God's powerful work done for us in Christ, and what it accomplished for us and is accomplishing in and through us, by exploring the theological realities of this great work and how to live out the gospel in love and unity as we embrace these theological truths.

Main Idea Explained

Perhaps more than any other letter in the New Testament, Ephesians shows a clear example of the relationship of doctrine to practical life application that should flow out of embracing doctrine. This letter of Paul can be simplified by breaking it down into two distinct sections with several sub-sections, that is: Theology (chs.1-3) and Practical Applications (chs.4-6). In this short, powerful letter Paul shows us how the story of the gospel should impact every facet of our lives.

The first two verses of the letter clue us in as to who wrote this letter and who were its recipients (Paul and the church at Ephesus). In chapter 1:3-14 is preserved a beautiful and powerful poem (written in the style of the Psalms) praising God for what he has done in Jesus and how it was planned before time began, and is linked to his promises of old (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7; Isa. 11; 52-53). Essentially, Paul summarizes the gospel message once again in these verses. A unique feature about this poem is that it includes all three members of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit), highlighting the unity within the trinity. The “plan”, though once a “mystery” (1:9; 3:3-10; 5:32; 6:19), has now been revealed to, “unite all things in him (Jesus), things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10). Through the work of Christ, both Jew and Gentile alike have been redeemed and have stake in God’s new covenant family through faith in Jesus, as adopted sons and daughters (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2). In closing, verses 13-14 speak to the beautiful reality of assurance, as believers are “sealed” by the Holy Spirit, upon conversion. Chapter 1:15-23 then records Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians that they grow in wisdom and knowledge through the unfolding work of the Holy Spirit in them.

Chapter 2:1-10 is all about God’s grace. Humans, before God’s intervention, are dead in trespasses and sins, blinded by evil, spiritual forces, slaves to their own evil desires, and by nature children of wrath (vv.1-4). The situation is dire until we reach verse five which begins “But God...”. Being rich in mercy and love God made us alive with Christ (new humans), when we were lost in sin, “by grace you have been saved” (v.5 and 8). Paul tells us that it is by grace we have been saved through faith in Jesus, not by works, so that we can take no credit for our being saved. This however, does not give us an excuse to not pursue God, love our neighbor, or be lazy, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (v.10). We are saved for a purpose (Deut. 6:5-9; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 12 and 14; James 2:18). In verses 11-22, Paul teaches us that Gentile peoples who were once separated from God are now a part of the new multi-ethnic covenant family of God (Mackie). In doing so he uses a plethora of Old Testament quotes, allusions, and metaphors (Psa. 118; Isa. 28,57; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 9:10). Part of the reason Christ died was to break down the horizontal barriers between people groups and culture and create a unified humanity that could live in peace (vv. 16-18). Therefore, Gentiles are no longer considered aliens, but have been brought near, given access, “in one Spirit to the Father” (v.18). Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ, the dwelling place and temple of God, His church.

Chapter three records Paul’s unique role in revealing the “mystery” of the gospel, that is that Gentiles are included in God’s New Covenant Family (v.6), and how thankful he is to see this phenomenon taking place before his eyes (3:1-13). Secondly, it contains another one of Paul’s prayers in which he challenges the people to be rooted and grounded in love, a love that reflects an understanding of the love of Christ for them that motivates toward holiness (3:14-21). It is a stunning prayer that is worth modeling, as it pushes us to know the love of Christ, be rooted in it, grounded in it, and growing in maturity and what we are intended to be as the church.

Chapter four marks a transition point in the letter from a mainly theological, or doctrinal emphasis (explaining the gospel), to more practical outworkings of embracing these theological truths delineated in the first three chapters of Paul’s letter. In other words, it is a challenge to respond to the gospel story in their own personal lives. In chapter 4:1-16 Paul’s focus is entirely on unity in the body of Christ, the church. In verses four through six Paul vividly explains this truth, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one

baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”. However, within this unified group of people there is diversity. Unity doesn’t mean uniformity; each one of us is blessed with different gifts and abilities that we are to use to build up His church (vv.11-12). In this section Paul uses the metaphor of the human body for the “building up” of the church, where Christ is the head and each member an integral piece making up the body, the church. Jesus creates a new humanity in which Christ is the head.

In chapters 4:17-6:9 the emphasis is on how to live as new transformed human beings through the power of the Spirit. Chapters 4:17-5:20 command us to walk in our newness of life, being characterized by our love, putting off our old humanity and putting on our new humanity. In doing so, we imitate the God who made us, the God who is restoring his image in us. Paul elaborates in this section the differences between the new and old humanity. It goes something like this: instead of lying, we tell the truth, we replace anger with peace, thievery with generosity, gossip with encouragement, revenge with forgiveness, promiscuity with self-control, and drunkenness with the Holy Spirit (Mackie). These things are signs one has received the Spirit, because they go contrary to our instincts and nature. Living life, by putting on the “New Humanity” will cause us to live lives that are others-centered and full of thanksgiving and generosity. This leads into Paul’s next section (5:21-6:9) which discusses how we are to operate in the various relationships we as humans form. It teaches us how the gospel speaks to our relationships, particularly within the Christian home and with emphasis on the marriage relationship. The wife is to respect her husband and allow him to be responsible for her, while the husband is to love his wife and lay down his life for her. In doing so, the husband reflects Jesus’ self-sacrifice for his bride the church; and the wife in allowing her husband to love and take care of her mimics the church in allowing Jesus to love here and make here new (Mackie). Paul then applies this concept of love, respect, submission, and self-sacrifice to other relationships.

In the closing section of Ephesians, Paul reminds his readers of the reality of Spiritual evil. As Christians our battle is not against things we can always see and understand, as Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Therefore, we are commanded to put on the armor of God (6:10-20). Paul pulls all of his images and their meanings from the prophet Isaiah and how he portrayed the messianic king that was to come (see Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 59:17). Paul’s point in explaining this metaphorical suit of armor is that we need to put on the characteristics of the messiah as his new humanity so that the gospel message permeates every aspect of our lives. Paul’s letter concludes with a final greeting and encouragement to the church (6:21-24).

Ephesians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Paul’s use of the Old Testament in this letter is quite profound, and pronounced. As with each of his letters Ephesians is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, and stands as Paul’s theological framework for his arguments and logic. In chapter 2:11-22, Paul teaches us that Gentile peoples who were once separated from God are now a part of the new multi-ethnic covenant family of God (Mackie). In doing so he uses a plethora of Old Testament quotes, allusions, and metaphors (Psa. 118; Isa. 28,57; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 9:10; 2 Sam. 7; 2 Kings 8:). These references are used to describe the coming together of the nations centered on the Messiah, making what we know today as the church. In

Paul's instruction on marriage and other relationships (5:30) he quotes Genesis 2:24 as the basic teaching on what marriage is. In the final chapter of this letter we are commanded to put on the armor of God (6:10-20). Paul pulls all his images and their meanings from the prophet Isaiah and how he portrayed the messianic king that was to come (see Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 59:17). Paul's point in explaining this metaphorical suit of armor is that we need to put on the characteristics of the messiah as his new humanity so that the gospel message permeates every aspect of our lives.

In Relation to the NT

Though the canonical gospels were not written at the time this letter was written, Paul's arguments and theology are based on the events that we now have recorded for us in them. Chapter 1:3-14 speaks loudly to this truth. Paul cannot even start his letter without meditating on the gospel message and praise God for what he has done in Christ. Chapter two tells us that it is because of God's grace that Gentiles and Jews alike make up the New Covenant family of God. Chapter three prompts us to be strengthened by the Spirit and grasp the love of Christ for us (all rooted in the narratives of the gospels). In chapters four through six Paul then tells us how to live as new transformed human beings through the power of the Spirit, by embracing the realities he has laid out in the first three chapters. In Acts two the Holy Spirit was given, and in Acts 19 the church at Ephesus comes into the story, and we learn that Paul stayed there for about two years, and later writes this letter to them from prison (Mathews). Ephesians has a lot of overlap with Paul's letter to the Colossians, as Colossians deals with many of the same themes but teases them out a little further. Ephesians does not appear to be written as a response to any certain situation in particular, but is more like the book of Romans in its generalities. The "body" metaphor for the church is found throughout the letters of Paul (Eph. ;Col; 1 Cor.; Rom.), as is the theme of unity (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Col. 3), and gentile inclusion (Gal.; Eph. 2; Rom. 9).

Key Themes and Application

Unity and The Church

In chapter 2:11-22, Paul teaches us that Gentile peoples who were once separated from God are now a part of the new multi-ethnic covenant family of God (Mackie). In doing so he uses a plethora of Old Testament quotes, allusions, and metaphors (Psa. 118; Isa. 28,57; Mic. 5:5; Zech. 9:10). Part of the reason Christ died was to break down the horizontal barriers between people groups and culture and create a unified humanity that could live in peace (vv. 16-18). Therefore, Gentiles are no longer considered aliens, but have been brought near, given access, "in one Spirit to the Father" (v.18). Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ, the dwelling place and temple of God, His church. In chapter 4:1-16 Paul's focus is entirely on unity in the body of Christ, the church. In verses four through six Paul vividly explains this truth, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all". However, within this unified group of people there is diversity. Unity doesn't mean uniformity; each one of us is blessed with different gifts and abilities that we are to use to build up His church (vv.11-12). In this section Paul uses the metaphor of the human body for the "building up" of the church, where Christ is the head and each member an integral piece making up the body, the church. Jesus creates a new humanity in which Christ is the head.

Armor of God

Within Paul's reminder about the reality of spiritual evil that opposes the gospel, we are commanded to put on the "armor of God" (6:10-20). Paul pulls his images and their meanings from the prophet Isaiah and how he portrayed the messianic king that was to come (see Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 59:17). Paul's point in explaining this metaphorical suit of armor is that we need to put on the characteristics of the messiah as his new humanity so that the gospel message permeates every aspect of our lives, and so that we might persevere to the end.

Old Self/ New Self: The New Humanity in Christ

In chapters 4:17-6:9 the emphasis is on how to live as new transformed human beings through the power of the Spirit. Chapters 4:17-5:20 command us to walk in our newness of life, being characterized by our love, putting off our old humanity and putting on our new humanity. In doing so, we imitate the God who made us, the God who is restoring his image in us. Paul elaborates in this section the differences between the new and old humanity. It goes something like this: instead of lying, we tell the truth, we replace anger with peace, thievery with generosity, gossip with encouragement, revenge with forgiveness, promiscuity with self-control, and drunkenness with the Holy Spirit (Mackie). These things are signs one has received the Spirit, because they go contrary to our instincts and nature. Living life, by putting on the "New Humanity" will cause us to live lives that are others-centered and full of thanksgiving and generosity. This then leads into Paul's next section (5:21-6:9) which discusses how we are to operate in the various relationships we as humans form, as transformed persons.

"Mystery" of the Gospel

This theme is pervasive throughout Ephesians from beginning to end (1:9; 3:3-10; 5:32; 6:19). What God has done in Christ goes back to the beginning of time. The mystery is that Gentiles are included in salvation and God's kingdom. The mystery is something that had been hidden, but now it is revealed, to "unite all things in him (Jesus), things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). Through the work of Christ, both Jew and Gentile alike have been redeemed and have a stake in God's new covenant family through faith in Jesus, as adopted sons and daughters of the Lord (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2).

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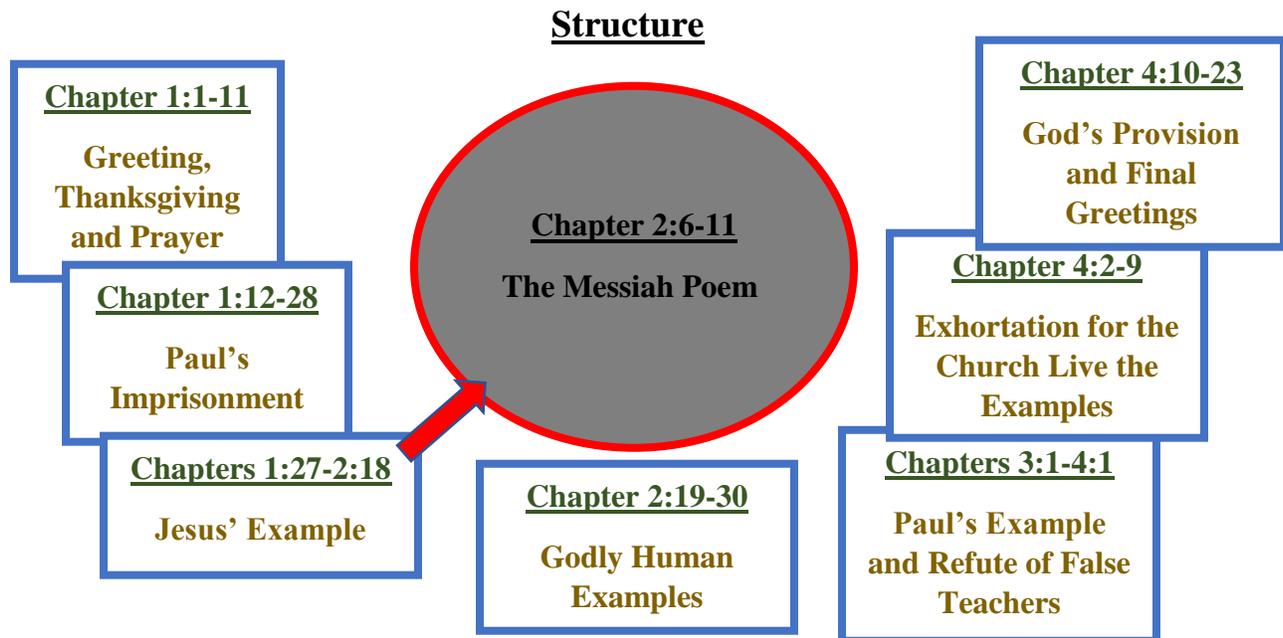
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The Book of Philippians



(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: The letter to the church at Philippi is a call to imitate Jesus' way of life, even in suffering for it. It is in this that we embody the essence of the gospel itself.

Main Idea Explained

Philippians does not develop one argument or idea from beginning to end, rather it has many essays that surround the poem or hymn in chapter 2:6-11 (Mackie). This song retells the story of Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. In each short essay surrounding this poem, Paul takes up key words or ideas from the hymn to show how living as a disciple of Christ means seeing our own stories as, "a lived expression of Jesus' story" (Mackie).

In classic Pauline style chapter 1:1-11 contains a greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer. It is a prayer of gratefulness asking and confident that God who began a good work in them will continue to grow them so that they produce greater and greater expressions of faithfulness and love as they live their lives (1:6). Important to notice is that this is not only about thanking God for what he has done, but Paul also prays for the Philippian church. It is an amazing prayer for others, and one that we would do well to imitate. Paul doesn't pray for the Philippians to have an easy life free from trials, rather he wants them to grow in knowledge, so that they can bear the fruit of righteousness in Christ.

In the next section (1:12-26) Paul speaks about his imprisonment. Paul comments that being in prison hasn't been such a bad thing, but not because prison isn't awful; it is! Rather, it is a good thing because the imperial guard gets to know the gospel, and it has emboldened others to speak out for the sake of God's kingdom as well. It is here that we receive the famous line from Paul, "... to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). He explains that to be executed means being in the presence of Jesus, which would be better for him, but release means planting more churches and Christian communities which would be better for others. Dr. Mackie comments, "Dying for Jesus is not the true sacrifice for

Paul, rather it is staying alive to serve others. That is Paul's way of participating in the story of Jesus, staying alive for the benefit of others". This is a challenging and profound thought. The whole purpose of his ministry is to live the gospel (Mathews).

The final verses of chapter one through chapter 2:18 contain Paul's exhortation for the church to imitate Jesus in his sacrificial love and obedience to God (1:27; 2:6-11). Life is to be shaped by the gospel, and suffering for the sake of Jesus is a way of living out His story in our own lives. This is most profoundly played out in the Messiah poem in chapter 2:6-11, the focal point of the entire letter. In its broadest context, this passage fits into Paul's exhortation section of the letter (1:27-2:18; see also 4:2-9). The narrower context, is that of unity and Christ's example of humility (2:1-11). Verses one through four contain Paul's exhortation to unity within the body of believers, while verse five serves as a hinge point connecting the previous verses with those that follow. Verse five shows believers what type of attitude they are to exhibit among each other; they are to imitate Christ's exemplary attitude of humility and self-sacrificial love. It is both a highly doctrinal and ethical passage. Verses 6-11 speak to both the dimensions of Jesus' humility (v.6-8) and his exaltation by the Father (v. 9-11), in one of the New Testament's most profound Christological passages, richly laden with Old Testament echoes particularly Genesis 1-3 (Adam and the Fall) and Isaiah 40-55 (suffering servant poems). It is a beautifully condensed version of the gospel story.

After putting forward Jesus as the primary example of how people are to conduct their lives, chapter 2:19-30 records Paul's use of two human, but very godly, examples, his colleagues Timothy and Epaphroditus. We learn that these are men who live out Jesus' story in their lives, which are marked by putting others' needs above their own, and even risking their lives for the spread of the gospel and for the sake of others. Therefore, their lives are worthy of imitation as well.

In chapter 3:1-4:1 Paul puts his own life forward as an example. He first warns against false teachers, but quickly moves to speaking about righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus (3:1-11, see Galatians). Paul puts forth his credentials, not in a boastful way, but to say that it counts for nothing; it can't earn you favor with God. Paul counts all his zealous self-righteousness as rubbish (3:8-10). He's given it all up to become a servant and imitate Jesus and his self-giving sacrificial love. He places his hope in Jesus' work and in his love to bring him out the other side to resurrection life with his savior. In 3:20 Paul states that our citizenship is in heaven and on earth, and that heaven will one day come "from there to here" and bring about a kingdom that will be marked by justice, love, and the New Creation (Mackie). All of these examples Paul brings before us, including himself, are to encourage us to follow those who set the right pattern (3:17-4:1); we aren't in this thing alone or without example (Mathews).

Chapter 4:2-9 is Paul's challenge to live the example, displayed throughout this letter in multiple examples (Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul). Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to apply what he has just said (vv. 2-3), and then moves to a more general application to all. That is, to find joy and peace in all circumstances, to pray and meditate on the gospel and let it shape our thinking. There is always something we can find to complain about or worry about, but a Jesus follower knows that all of life is a gift and can choose to see beauty and grace in any life circumstance (Mackie). In chapter 4:10-23 Paul closes his letter. The focus is God's provision and contentment. We are to strive to let hardships be teachers rather than to destroy us, because no matter our circumstances the true key to contentment is dependence upon the savior through whom Paul says, "I can do all things through him

who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). The letter concludes with a final greeting reminding the Philippians that they are partners on this journey, and of Paul’s thanksgiving, love, and care for them.

Philippians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

As is common in Paul, his use of the Hebrew Scriptures in his theology is vital to understanding the deeply profound significance of what he is teaching. Perhaps most significant in this letter are the echoes of Genesis and Isaiah found in the Messiah hymn in chapter 2:6-11. Genesis 1-3 (Adam and the Fall) and Isaiah 40-55 (suffering servant poems), are backdrops within the “holy of holies” of Christological passages in the New Testament. Before becoming human the messiah existed in a state of glory and equality with God. Unlike Adam who tried to seize equality with God, the messiah Jesus chose not to exploit his equal status for his own advantage, but rather he emptied himself of his high status, by adding to himself a human nature, becoming human. He became a servant, and allowed himself to be humiliated, and he was obedient to his father’s will by going to his death on the cross to atone for sin and redeem humanity (Isaiah’s suffering servant). The Messiah’s death, through the power and grace of the Father Jesus’ shameful and humiliating death was reversed in his resurrection from the dead, and God has exalted his son above everything and everyone, giving him the divine name! In explaining this Paul also quotes Isa. 45:23, which along with Paul’s argument above proclaims that the one true God consists of God the father and Jesus (Paul believes in the Triune God, but that is not his point here). Jesus is Yahweh, he receives the divine name from the Father, who restores Jesus’ co-equal status with him in his exaltation from death.

One other passage worth considering is 3:1-4:1. Paul’s argument in his letter to the Galatians, which is deeply rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12,15,17,22), should be in our minds here.

In Relation to the NT

To gain contextual understanding for this letter, one must start in Acts 16 in which Paul planted the church in Philippi, the first Eastern European Jesus community (Mathews). Key themes such as unity (1 Cor. 10, 12; Rom. 12; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 2,4; Col.3), the gospel (all of Paul’s letters), deity and humanity of Christ (Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:5; Gal. 4:4), Christian living (Rom. 12; Eph. 3-6; 2 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-3) etc. can all be found in other letters of Paul that add to a more robust understanding of Paul’s teachings as a whole, and the theology of the New Testament in general. Though not circulating at the time (at least in written form) the four gospels give us the background and information on the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that is fundamental for understanding all of Paul’s writings and the implications of the gospel for the Christian life.

Key Themes and Application

The Messiah Hymn and Glory of Christ

Philippians 2:6–11 is one of the most informative proclamations in the Bible on the nature of Christ’s incarnation. It declares, “...his preexistence, his equality with God, his identity with humanity, and the costly nature of that identity” (Thielman, 109). The connections between 2:6–11 and the argument before and after it show that Paul is revealing Jesus’ incarnation and exaltation as an example of humility and obedience (2:3, 7–8, 12). Imitation of Christ’s attitude is what is meant in this

passage, rather than the particulars of his life. As Thielman shows, “In Corinth it meant not exercising rights within the church when to do so would cause another’s stumbling and destruction (1 Cor. 11:1). In Philippi it meant being loving, united, humble, and willing to put the interests of others ahead of one’s own (Phil. 2:2–4)” (125). The incarnation of Christ Jesus represented in this passage is exceedingly different than human nature. Humanity seeks to dominate each other, get a leg up on the competition, lie, steal, cheat, kill to take care of number one, and rise to the top. Jesus however, being infinite in power and knowledge and wisdom in being equal with God, entitled to whatever he wanted, could have exploited this privilege and power to dominate his creatures, just like the Greco-Roman gods and the gods of the OT. That’s not what he did though. Jesus considered his “goodness” an opportunity for service and obedience. His position, and identity as one in the form of God, and sharing equality with God, led him not to an attitude of dominance and cruelty but one of self-giving, servitude. Remaining who he was, fully God, Christ became what he was not, human. He did not lose his divine attributes, rather, he of his own will, gave up the independent exercise of those divine rights and privileges and emptied himself not by giving up deity, but by taking on a fully human nature (emptying by addition if you will), the form of a servant, and death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 8:9). Therefore, his deity was veiled, not forsaken. We are to embody this attitude, working out our salvation (2:12-18) by living a life worthy of the gospel (1:27-30) following Christ’s example of obedience and humility (2:5-11). Throughout this letter it is one of Paul’s main agenda items to show us the glory of God in Christ peppered throughout every chapter and most profoundly here in the focal point of the letter.

Following Examples

Most of this letter is about following, imitating, and mimicking examples. Chapter 1:27-2:18 is about following Christ’s example. In chapter 2:29-30 Paul puts forth Timothy and Epaphroditus as godly human examples, and in chapter 3:1-4:1 Paul puts himself forward as an example. Further, Paul in chapter 4:2-9 exhorts the Philippians to live these examples in their own lives. The point of all of this is to show that those who have faith, knowing who Jesus is and what he did, are transformed by the Spirit. They are also called to live lives that bring glory to God by displaying the gospel in all of life’s circumstances embracing the life of Jesus by allowing his story to become their own.

Prayer, Joy, and Rejoicing

Joy or rejoicing is another theme that appears throughout this letter. Paul prays with joy (1:4), he rejoices that Christ is proclaimed (1:18-19), and he is motivated by joy, particularly because of the Philippians and their joy and how their unity brings joy to him (2:2,17-18,27-29). In chapter 3:1 Paul commands the church to rejoice in the Lord. In chapter four we learn that joy and contentment come through looking upon our Savior and learning to trust him, as we pray and meditate on the gospel and let it shape our thinking. There is always something we can find to complain about or worry about, but a Jesus follower knows that all of life is a gift, and can choose to see beauty and grace in any life circumstance (Mackie). It’s not about being fake, but rather cultivating a deep sense of trust of who he is and his faithfulness. Joy is cultivated by thanking God and giving over our anxieties and worries to him, knowing he cares for us (Matt. 6:25-34; 1 Pet. 5:7). In chapter 4:10-23 Paul closes his letter concentrating on God’s provision and contentment. We are to strive to let hardships be teachers rather than to destroy us, because no matter our circumstances the true key to contentment is dependence upon the savior through whom Paul says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

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The Book of Colossians

Structure



Main Idea: Colossians is written to warn and encourage the church at Colossae to embrace the gospel as the center of all reality, and in doing be able to turn away from false doctrine as they live transformed lives through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them.

Main Idea Explained

Colossians is somewhat unique in that Paul is writing to a group of people he has never met, and to a church he didn't plant (2:1). In this letter he writes from prison, Paul's primary aim is to address a heresy and encourage his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to live out their "new self" (3:1-17).

Paul opens the letter in his typical format, with a greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer. This letter actually opens with two prayers (1:3-5; 1:9-10) in which Paul thanks God for the Colossians' faith, hope, love, and fruitfulness, and prays that they would grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding so, "...as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord ..." (1:10). It is a beautiful pastoral prayer worth emulating, and to pray particularly for and over others.

The Messiah hymn in chapter 1:15-23 (see also Phil. 2:6-11), is a profound Christological poem (see Jn. 1 and Phil. 2) about what Jesus did and accomplished through his work on the cross and resurrection from the dead. It is richly packed with Old Testament languages and images (Gen. 1, Exod. 40, Psa. 2,8,68, Prov. 3). The first stanza focuses on how Jesus is the very image of the invisible, creator God, the embodiment of Yahweh himself in human form. Paul claims that Jesus shares the divine identity of Yahweh, he is the author and king of creation, and is the one who brings about a "new creation" in those who believe in him. Paul also explains how Jesus is the head (and prototype), of a new humanity, the church, and how in him God's temple presence dwells, and in believers Christ dwells through the Holy Spirit (Mackie). All of this can be said to be reality, because in and through Jesus' death we have redemption; we are no longer aliens. Further, for Paul, all behavior and obedience is based in this reality. Paul roots his ethical teaching in the theological truth of the gospel. That is why his hymn is placed here early in his letter. He is equipping his readers to maintain the true gospel and be able to recognize false teaching. We would be wise to remember this section, as Paul will keep referring to this poem as he goes on in this letter.

In chapter 1:24-2:5 Paul then moves to show how this hymn influences his own experience of suffering in prison for the sake of the gospel message. Paul is being punished for sharing the good news of the gospel, but interestingly he doesn't see it that way. Rather his attitude reflects a deep understanding of what it means to follow Christ even in his suffering, for he sees his predicament as participating in Jesus' own story and suffering, an act of love for his brothers and sisters in Christ and for those who are still lost. In this short passage, Paul teaches us that hardships can actually be an occasion for joy, because, "the Messiah's multi-ethnic family is growing and the temple presence of Jesus dwells in his people, 'The Messiah in you all the hope of glory'" (1:27) {Mackie}.

The remainder of chapter two (2:6-23) records Paul's call to not give into the cultural and religious pressures that are tempting some to not follow Jesus, or distort the gospel message. Here, Paul speaks of two influences to resist: mystical polytheism and observance of the laws of the Torah (Mackie). It is not much of a stretch to assume that many if not most in this church had grown up worshiping multiple gods, having lived in a pagan city. It seems in Paul's diagnosis that many just simply included Jesus as another one of their gods among the variety of deities they already worshipped, along with angel veneration, and "secret knowledge". There was also pressure from the Jewish community to follow the laws in the Torah to be truly saved (see Galatians). However, Paul notes that to embrace these ideas, is compromising the heart of the gospel. It is an utter failure to not see who Jesus is and what he accomplished for his church on their behalf. He fulfilled the laws, for Jesus is the reality to which the laws pointed, which mind you, never had the power to transform the hearts of sinful humanity. His work lacks nothing! Therefore we are to be rooted and grounded in that reality for,

... you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col. 2:13-15)

Chapters three and four explain the new resurrection life that believers experience in their unity with Christ. Much of the letter is about the two juxtaposed philosophies of the false teachers and the greatness of Jesus. Chapter 3:1-4:6 contains the largest chunk of practical, ethical teaching in the letter to the Colossian church. The thrust of his teaching is that we live in the "already-not-yet", and should conduct our lives as such embracing the reality that Christ is reigning here and now. Knowing this, we should then exude lives marked by self-sacrificial love doing everything in justice and righteousness as the "new humanity" (3:1-17). As Dr. Mackie states, Paul's challenge to the church is, "Live in the present as the kind of human you will become one day" (BPV). As followers of Christ we are to put off the old self, which was filled with perverseness, immorality, and evil, and put on the new self, marked by faithfulness, love, generosity, and good works. This section reads much like Romans six and Ephesians four, and even picks up on the theme of Gentile inclusion in Paul's other letters (3:11, see also Galatians).

Moving forward, Paul begins to show us how the gospel is to practically play out in the structure of an ancient Roman household (3:18-4:1), which still speaks very much to us today. This is the second of Paul's household codes (see also Eph. 5:22-6:9). He explains how the real lord of the home is Jesus. Paul shows how the gospel speaks to our relationships, particularly within the Christian home and with emphasis on the marriage relationship. The wife is to respect her husband and allow him to be responsible for her, while the husband is to love his wife and lay down his life for her. In doing so, the husband reflects Jesus' self-sacrifice for his bride the church; and the wife in allowing her

husband to love and take care of her mimics the church in allowing Jesus to love her and make her new (Mackie). Paul then applies this concept of love, respect, submission, and self-sacrifice to other relationships. In this transformed household, children are not objects, but are gifts who are to respect their parents, and parents are to be patient and understanding with them. Slaves are not their property, but members of Jesus' family too, so masters are to treat them as such, while slaves are to respect authority. Paul is redesigning the familial structure around Jesus who operates out of self-giving love.

Chapter 4:2-18 forms the conclusion of the letter which at its core challenges the reader to remember and live out the reality that no part of our human existence remains untouched by the loving and liberating kingdom of Jesus, and as the church we will be transformed more and more into his image through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:29).

Colossians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Paul's use of the Hebrew Scriptures can be most clearly seen in the messiah poem in chapter 1:15-20 (see also Phil. 2:6-11; and Jn.1). It is richly packed with Old Testament language and images (Gen. 1, Exod. 40, Psa. 2,8,68, Prov. 3). The first stanza focuses on how Jesus is the very image of the invisible, creator God, the embodiment of Yahweh himself in human form. Paul claims that Jesus shares the divine identity of God, he is the author and king of creation, and is the one who brings about a "new creation" in those who believe in him. Paul also explains how Jesus is the head (and prototype), of a new humanity, the church, and how in him God's temple presence dwells, and in believers Christ dwells through the Holy Spirit (Mackie). It is a deeply profound passage, rooted in the Old Testament. Additionally, when Paul mentions his suffering as participating in Christ's suffering (like he does in 1:24-2:5), it is difficult not to think about the prophet Isaiah's "suffering servant" poems (Isa. 40-55). In chapter 2:6-23 Paul also, though more briefly than in Galatians, mentions the insufficiency of the law (harkening back to the Mosaic Covenant in Exod.-Lev.).

In Relation to the NT

Though the canonical gospels were not written at the time this letter was written, Paul's arguments and theology are based on the events that we now have recorded for us in them. The circumstances for Paul as he writes this letter are similar to other letters, as he has found himself imprisoned for the gospel (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). This is a unique letter in that Paul didn't know the people he was writing to and it was to a church he didn't plant (Mathews, see 1:7-8; 2:1;4:12-13). Perhaps the most obvious connection in Paul's letter to the Colossians with the rest of the New Testament, is the profound Christological poem found in chapter 1:15-20. Though not identical in content, there is much overlap with John chapter one and Philippians 2:6-11. The theme of unity and Gentile inclusion that runs through many of Paul's letters can be found in this letter as well (Gal. 3, Eph. 2, Col. 1:27 and 3:11). Paul deals with false doctrine and teachers (2:6-23), household codes (Col.3:18-4:1), being "in Christ" (3:3), and the new humanity/self (Col. 3:1-17) which can be found in several of Paul's other letters and picked up by other authors (Gal. 3; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 4-6; Rom. 6; 2 Pet.2; 1 Jn. 4; Rev.2,16,19).

Key Themes and Application

Supremacy of Christ

As Paul does in many of his letters, he begins by reminding his readers of the theological realities that are to shape their thoughts, attitudes, and actions. The practical out workings of the gospel are to flow out of our theological convictions. The Messiah hymn in chapter 1:15-23 (see also Phil. 2:6-11), is a profound Christological poem (see also Jn. 1 and Phil. 2) about what Jesus did and accomplished through his work on the cross and resurrection from the dead. It is richly packed with Old Testament languages and images (Gen. 1, Exod. 40, Psa. 2,8,68, Prov. 3). The first stanza focuses on how Jesus is the very image of the invisible, creator God, the embodiment of Yahweh himself in human form. Paul claims that Jesus shares the divine identity of Yahweh, he is the author and king of creation, and is the one who brings about a “new creation” in those who believe in him. Paul also explains how Jesus is the head (and prototype), of a new humanity, the church, and how in him God’s temple presence dwells, and in believers Christ dwells through the Holy Spirit (Mackie). All of this can be said to be reality, because in and through Jesus’ death we have redemption; we are no longer aliens. Further, for Paul, all behavior and obedience is based in this reality. Paul roots his ethical teaching in the theological truth of the gospel. That is why his hymn is placed here early in his letter. He is equipping his readers to maintain the true gospel and to be able to recognize false teaching. It’s like people who are trained to find counterfeit bills. They don’t spend their time looking at different fake bills all the time, rather they study real bills, know them intimately, and that’s how they spot false ones (Mathews). We are above all to be captivated by Christ. The gospel is not something we graduate from, but something that we are to be saturated with, soaking it up like a sponge that just can’t get enough. The gospel is like a mighty river, creating deeper and deeper groves in the canyons of our souls. The gospel is everything, and it is so beautifully displayed in this poem. Paul refers to this poem all throughout his letter.

“In” Christ

This a theme that is pervasive throughout the entire New Testament (1 Pet. 5:14; Phil 1:1; Rom. 8:1). Concurrent with conversion is the believer’s union with Christ (Col. 3:1-15). The death and resurrection of Jesus are part of the believer’s history as a person as much as their birth, high school graduation, marriage, etc. Every believer has been united with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and are beneficiaries of what his death, resurrection, and glorification have accomplished (Rom. 6:1-14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 2:4-10). To be “in Christ” means that God no longer sees our sin, but rather he sees the righteousness of Jesus (Eph.2:13; Heb.8:12).

The Colossian Heresy

The purpose of Colossians is to show the supremacy and adequacy of Christ over all other empty and meaningless human philosophies and religions. Paul captures this point and brings Jesus and his work as the main focus. The first two chapters are about who Christ is and why he is to be worshipped, trusted, and followed. The latter two chapters being about how to live in light of Jesus’ sovereignty. What has become known as the Colossian Heresy really consists of two categories: extreme Judaism and a mystical polytheism (syncretism). There are several issues in particular that Paul addresses: ceremonialism (Col.2:16-17, 11-15, 3:11), angel worship (Col. 2:18-19), and asceticism (Col. 2:20-23). However, Paul notes that to embrace these ideas, is compromising the heart

of the gospel. It is an utter failure to not see who Jesus is and what he accomplished for his church on their behalf. He fulfilled the laws, for Jesus is the reality to which the laws pointed, which mind you, never had the power to transform the hearts of sinful humanity. His work lacks nothing! Therefore, we are to be rooted and grounded in that reality for,

... you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col. 2:13-15)

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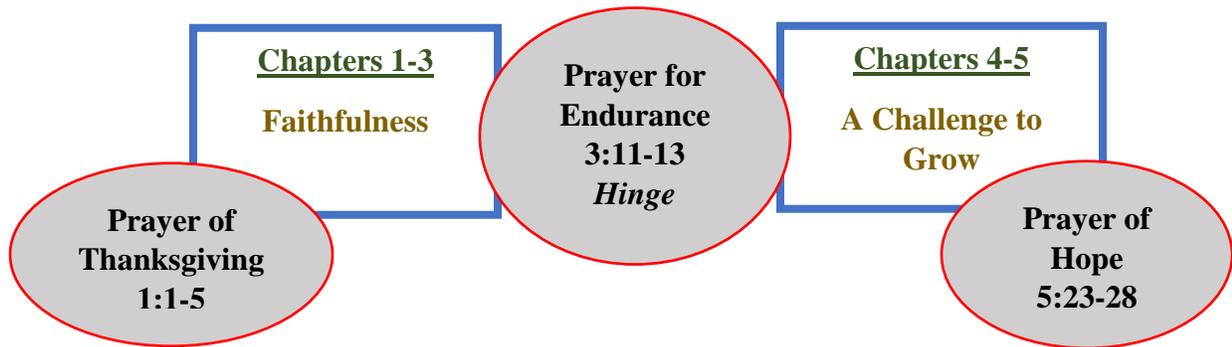
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The Book of 1 Thessalonians

Structure



(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: 1 Thessalonians celebrates faithfulness amidst persecution, and encourages continued growth into maturity by placing hope in Jesus' return to bring final justice and make all things new.

Main Idea Explained

As is typical in Pauline epistles, he begins with a greeting (1:1), thanksgiving, and a prayer (1:2-5). 1 Thessalonians is unique in that it is centered on three prayers (1:1-5; 3:11-12; 5:23-28), and the letter as a whole is framed by two of them (1:1-5; 5:23-28). In other words, there are three prayers that surround the two main sections: at the beginning of the letter, one marking a hinge point in the middle, and at the end (Mackie). All that Paul says, and expounds upon flows out of these prayers, making them vitally important for proper interpretation of the contents of this letter. The first major section in this letter is chapters one through three which is all about faithfulness. In the first of these prayers Paul thanks God for the faith, hope, and love that the Thessalonians are practicing. This sets the tone for the entire letter which is very positive and encouraging. This is a church that is having a missional impact in their community. They are living the message of the gospel even amidst persecution.

In chapter 1:6-10 Paul reminds them of their conversion, how the Holy Spirit transformed and changed their lives. They used to be idolatrous and immoral, worshiping a plethora of gods, and engaged in various sinful activities. However, now they have turned away from that lifestyle to the one true living God, and now with eager expectation have placed their hope in Jesus' return (1:9-10).

Chapter 2:1-12 recounts Paul's mission to the church in Thessalonica, but more than that it gives us a glimpse into his model for ministry (for his model pay special attention to 1 Thess. 2:1-3:13). Paul uses intimate language in this section, using familial relationships to describe his affection of this church. Verse eight of chapter two expresses this, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." Paul particularly highlights two things here. He teaches us that the essence of Christian leadership is not about power, but relationships, rooted in self-sacrificial loving service (Mackie). Secondly, he reminds us that he never asked for payment or material things (not that that's wrong, see 1 Cor. 9:9-18; 1 Tim. 5:17-18), but he refreshes their memory that he simply came to love and serve this church. In verses 13-16 Paul ponders their shared experience of persecution. Jesus met opposition that led to his death, by his own people the Jews, Paul is suffering at the hand of both Jews

and Gentile, and the Thessalonians too, are facing resistance from their Greek friends and neighbors. However, Paul takes comfort in the fact that their own personal suffering, "... is a way of participating in the story of Jesus' life and death" (Mackie). In chapter 2:17-3:10 the reader encounters Paul's pain over seeing this church's suffering, how he longs to come see them, and how he is encouraged by Timothy's report of their faithfulness.

The hinge or transition section of Paul's letter comes in chapter 3:11-13 in his prayer for endurance. Here Paul introduces the topics he is going to address in the letter's second half (Mathews). He prays that God will increase their love for each other and others and to strengthen their commitment to live godly lives. Further, he prays that the Thessalonian believers place their hope on the return Jesus and find joy in this reality.

Chapters four and five contain Paul's challenge for the church to grow in spiritual maturity. Chapter four (vv. 1-12) opens the second movement of the book with an exhortation for this church community to live lives that mirror Jesus' life and teaching. This involves a serious commitment to pursue holiness. Paul especially highlights sexual purity in this section. In contrast to the promiscuous culture that surrounded them, the Thessalonians are to follow Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:1-12), and experience the gift of sex within the safe harbor of a committed heterosexual marriage covenant relationship. Further, a life committed to following Jesus' teachings means a life that is also to be marked by love and service (vv.9-12). Here Paul emphasizes working hard, so the people will have resources to provide for themselves and to generously share with others who are in need.

Paul addresses questions the church has about the future hope of Jesus' return in chapter 4:13-18. There seems to be some confusion surrounding what will happen to those who die before Christ's return, so Paul encourages them in this section taking the opportunity to share that not even death can separate Christians from the love of Jesus (see Rom. 8). When he comes again Jesus will call the living and the dead to himself (4:16) and upon his arrival he will be met by his people (4:17). Here Paul uses a really neat image of a king's arrival met with a party, all to say Jesus' return will be like this too.

In chapter 5:1-11 Paul explains how this future hope should motivate faithfulness in the present, to live as if the day of the Lord (DOTL) is already here (5:4)! Although the evils of night surround them they are to live as if the light of God's eternal kingdom surrounds them, motivated by the hope of Jesus' return to set all things right (5:2-3). Chapter 5:12-27 contains Paul's final instructions and the final prayer. Verses 12-21 contain quite a few commands pertaining to holy living, all motivated by the future joy and hope of the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus. It gives practical ways to live out the theological realities Paul speaks of in community. In the final prayer (5:23-28) Paul prays for the Thessalonians' sanctification. It is a prayer filled with hope that God would saturate their lives with holiness, and that they would be completely devoted to God, and blameless until the return of Christ.

1 Thessalonians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Though not as pronounced, or explicit in this letter, Paul's theology is heavily influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures. In chapter one, Paul says that the Thessalonians have turned from false gods to the one true and living God (1:9-10), Exodus 20:3 and Isaiah 45:5-6 lurk in the background. When Paul speaks of suffering (2:13-16) and identifies with others' suffering, as being connected to Jesus' own

story, one can see the connections with the promised Messiah from the prophets (Isa. 40-55; Jer. 11-20; Ezek. 3-7, 24; Daniel's son of man in ch.7). However, perhaps the most easily recognizable use of the Old Testament in this letter is actually one of the key themes of the letter: The Day of the Lord. There is a two-fold nature to this day for it will both be a day of punishment of the wicked and blessing upon the righteous. The DOTL will address injustice and rebellion which prophets use to refer to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do this for all creation, no longer in miniature. However, God does this to bring about restoration and hope and to establish his perfect kingdom forever. Almost all of the prophets hit on this theme in their writings (Isa.; Jer.; Ezek.; and the most of The Twelve). Paul in 1 Thessalonians picks up this theme to offer a persecuted church hope and reassurance. One day Christ will return and set everything straight once and for all (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

Secondly, it's difficult to imagine that when Paul speaks of working hard, or loving our neighbors well, he doesn't have Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6 on his mind. Third, the "armor of God" appears in this letter as well (1 Thess. 5:8,23; see Isa. 59; Eph.6). Paul pulls his images and their meanings from the prophet Isaiah and how he portrayed the messianic king that was to come (see Isa. 11:5; 49:2; 59:17). Paul's point in explaining this metaphorical suit of armor is that we need to put on the characteristics of the messiah as his new humanity so that the gospel message permeates every aspect of our lives, and so that we might persevere to the end.

In Relation to the NT

The origin of the Thessalonian church community can be found in Acts 17, and helps give shape to the context of this letter. It is most likely Paul's first letter. The time he spent here was brief, because of upheaval and riots, which forced him to leave shortly after arriving. The purpose of both letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians) comes out of the activity happening in Acts 17. It is written to communicate things Paul couldn't say while he was there. The gospels play a significant role in this letter as well. Paul's teaching on sexual ethics is rooted in Jesus' ethic (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:1-12; see also 1 Cor. 6:18). Secondly, the DOTL from the Old Testament gets revamped throughout the New Testament in light of Jesus (Mk. 1:14-15; Rom. 1:1-5, Acts 17:7; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 6:4-5; 1Cor. 1:8, Phil. 1:6; 1Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:8). It reads similar to passages such as Matthew 24 and Mark 13. The Theme of, "Faith, hope, and love" is also seen prevalently throughout Paul's letters (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 5:8), and is captured in this one as well. The armor of God (mentioned above) appears in Ephesians 6 in a more developed fashion, further showcasing the unity amongst his letters.

Key Themes and Application

The Day of the Lord and the Return of Christ

This theme is crucial for both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In chapter 4:13- 5:1-11 Paul addresses the DOTL and the future hope of Jesus' return. The Old Testament prophets saw this day as the day God's promises would be fulfilled, when eschatological realities would be realized, when the Messiah would come, and God would establish his kingdom forever over all creation. Secondly, this day, however, would bring a lot of judgement, for the DOTL is also the day of reckoning for the unrighteous. The DOTL will address injustice and rebellion which prophets use to refer to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do

this for all creation, no longer in miniature. In the New Testament, this framework gets transformed in light of Jesus; the kingdom is “already, not yet”. Meaning, we live in the inaugurated, but not yet consummated kingdom of God. Some aspects of the New Covenant are realities we live in today, but others are yet to come like a restored creation and people of God, final justice, and the full unshackled kingdom of God.

Knowing that this is a reality, Paul explains how this future hope should motivate faithfulness in the present, to live as if the day of the Lord (DOTL) is already here (5:4)! Although the evils of night surround them they are to live as if the light of God’s eternal kingdom surrounds them, motivated by the hope of Jesus’ return to set all things right (5:2-3). We too are to embrace this reality teaching our Christ communities to not be afraid of this day, but embrace this truth and let it fuel our commitment and faithfulness to becoming more like Christ. His return should make our hearts excited, not ridden with fear, as we wait expectantly for his coming again.

Faith, Hope, and Love

This is a theme that is quite prevalent in Paul (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 5:8). These are virtues that believers are to exude. They are an integral part of what it means to walk in manner worthy of the Lord (Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3). These powerful words are also mentioned in the letters opening prayer and in the closing (1 Thess. 1:2-10; 5:8), forming an inclusio around the book.

Spiritual Maturity and Growth

We would be mistaken to read this letter and not find that righteous moral behavior is motivated by the anticipation of the return of Christ (4:1-8; 5:1-11). Following Jesus produces a counter-cultural way of life and calls us to be holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16). Chapter four (vv. 1-12) opens the second movement of the book with an exhortation for this church community to live lives the mirror Jesus’ life and teaching. This is a great passage to teach others what the will of God for them is. It’s not a secret, which is yet to be revealed, despite peoples’ often fixation on the “will of God”. This passage communicates very clearly that the will of God is holiness and sanctification for every believer. This involves a serious commitment to pursue holiness keeping in step with the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 5:8; 1 Jn.2:6).

Paul especially highlights sexual purity in this section (4:1-12). In contrast to the promiscuous culture that surrounded them, the Thessalonians are to follow Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:1-12), and experience the gift of sex within the safe harbor of a committed heterosexual marriage covenant relationship. Further, a life committed to following Jesus’ teachings means a life that is also to be marked by love and service (vv.9-12). Here Paul emphasizes working hard, so the people will have resources to provide for themselves and to generously share with others who are in need. Our natural inclination is not to serve, love, or give of our hard-earned wages. However, as a child of God, we are expected to live and be different, to be a dissenting voice in a culture centered on individualism, materialism, and hedonism. The spiritually mature recognize that all they have is from the Lord, and it was not given them to exploit others, but to humbly serve them in generosity and love.

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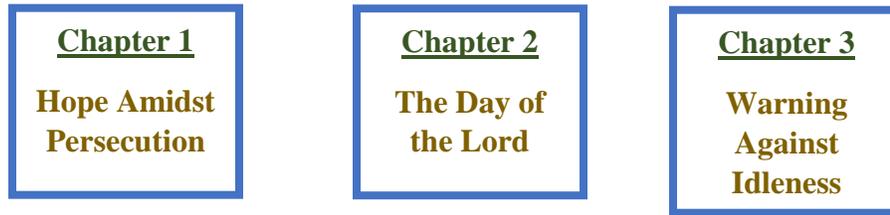
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The Book of 2 Thessalonians

Structure



(The Bible Project/Mathews)

Main Idea: Paul brings clarity to his previous teachings from his last letter about the day of the Lord and work, and encourages the Thessalonian church to remain faithful despite the intensified persecution they were experiencing.

Main Idea Explained

Things in Thessalonica had gotten worse since Paul's last letter to the Thessalonians. Persecution had worsened, and it seemed as though they had become more confused about the return of Jesus than comforted by Paul's words. This letter has a simple, but powerful design as there are three sections responding to three problems, each concluding with a closing prayer (Mathews).

The first section (1:1-3) opens with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the church's faith, love, and endurance even under intensified opposition and persecution. The rest of chapter one (1:4-12) focuses on Jesus' return that will bring final justice, to motivate perseverance and hope amidst their persecution. The Thessalonians are suffering because they have embraced the gospel, but Paul shows them that suffering is part of living out Jesus' story in our own individual lives (Mackie). Jesus became king over all creation through suffering and dying on a cross (Isa. 53; Dan. 7; Jn.19:18), so disciples of Jesus show their victory won by him through their endurance and trust in him to bring justice to their oppressors rather than to take vengeance into their own hands. Paul reminds them that this won't last forever, when Jesus comes he will settle accounts and make all things right, for evil will be banished away from God and his people (1:9). Notice here, that Paul does not speculate on what awaits those who reject the gospel, but merely states that their whole lives they wanted nothing to do with the triune God. In the end they get exactly what they want, autonomy from their creator, relational distance from the God who made them, for all eternity. Dr. Mackie comments, "For Paul this is the ultimate tragedy: to choose separation from Jesus, and reject the source of life and love, to their own undoing" (Lecture). Paul closes this section in verses 11-12 with a prayer that the Thessalonians' suffering would be used as a tool, through the power of God, to transform their hearts and bring honor to the Lord (see also Acts 14:22; Eph. 4:1; Phil.1:27; Col.1:10).

The second section of the letter (ch.2) seems to be written to address the theme of "the day of the Lord" (DOTL) from Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica, and to clear up some confusion that was taking place. It appears that someone in the church community had been spreading false information in Paul's name, claiming that the DOTL had already come (vv.1-4). This may have instilled fear and the misconception that they had been abandoned by God, or missed the return of Christ. Paul then moves to encourage them, summarizing his teaching on the issue. In this section there are many interpretive issues and debates over what exactly Paul means by the "man of lawlessness"

(v.3 and 8), and “the rebellion” (v.3). However, what can be said with certainty is that Paul uses Isaiah 13-14 and Daniel 7-12 to show us that the world will always keep producing rulers who rebel against God and exalt themselves above him like, Pharaoh (the book of Exodus), Nebuchadnezzar (the book of Daniel), the king of North (the book of Isaiah) did in the past. These give us images and they set out a repeating pattern that Paul saw fulfilled in his own day (Claudius and Nero), and he expected it to be repeated again (think in modern times: Hitler, Mao, Stalin, Hussein, war lords in Africa, and drug cartels in the Americas). This being said, Paul does teach us that history will culminate with such an ultimate rebellious ruler who will wreak havoc on this world, but not forever, as Jesus will confront the rebel and deliver his people (Mackie). It seems to me that the point is not to fuel speculation about end times events, rather Paul’s aim is to comfort the Thessalonians. Jesus’ teachings in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 show the events leading to his return as being obvious, so one need not to be afraid or worried that they’ve been “left behind” so to speak. Rather, encouragement and the need to stay faithful until Jesus returns to deliver them, is the focus for Paul here. In the conclusion of this section (2:16-17) Paul prays exactly this for these people, that God would comfort and encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus until he returns.

Chapter three, the concluding section of Paul’s letter, is essentially a call to work hard. It is an important text for a proper theology of work. Christians are not to be irresponsible or refuse to work, but rather they are to follow Paul’s lead as an example, and imitate Jesus’ self-sacrificial love and service (Jn. 13; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Thess. 4:10-12,5:14). The Christian ideal is that, “Jesus followers imitate his self-giving love by working hard, so they can provide for themselves and their lives can be a benefit to other people” (Mackie). Chapter 3:13-15 speaks of church discipline, and the letter concludes (3:16-18) with final prayer that during their suffering, the Lord would grant the Thessalonian church peace. Holding fast to the reality of Jesus’ return and all that means (judgement for some and blessing for others) should not breed speculation about apocalyptic charts and timelines. Paul’s intended purpose in teaching about these things was to give hope and inspire faithfulness in Christians facing ferocious opposition and persecution because of the gospel.

2 Thessalonians in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

As he did in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul speaks about final justice and the day of the Lord. This theme sprouts from its deep roots in the prophetic writings (Isa.11,13; Jer. 46; Ezek.13, 30; Amos 5; Obed. 15; Zeph.1; Mal.4; Joel; Dan.). One can’t hope to understand its full meaning and significance without the Old Testament’s development of this theme. The Old Testament prophets saw this day as the day God’s promises would be fulfilled, when eschatological realities would be realized, when the Messiah would come and God would establish his kingdom forever over all creation, making all things new. This day, however, would bring a lot of judgement, for the DOTL is also the day of reckoning for the unrighteous. Secondly, Paul uses Isaiah 13-14 and Daniel 7-12 to show us that the world will always keep producing rulers who rebel against God and exalt themselves above him. Genesis 1-2, and other passages like Psalm 8 show us what humanity was created to be. As people created in the image of God we are to rule and reign over all other creation. However, when humanity rebels they no longer rule over the beasts, they become beasts (see the Book of Daniel). In addressing these issues Paul grounds his teaching in the Scriptures of old.

In Relation to the NT

The backstory and context is the same as Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, therefore Acts 17 is an important text to have fresh in the mind. When Paul is speaking of end time events (see ch.2), it seems to me that his point is not to fuel speculation about end times events, rather Paul's aim is to comfort the Thessalonians. Jesus' teachings in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 show the events leading to his return as being obvious, so one need not to be afraid or worried that they've been "left behind" so to speak, as it appears some in Thessalonica were. The "lawless one" and his activity (2:1-12), is recognized later in Revelation (particularly chapter 13). The multiplicity of prayers found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians are typical of Paul in all his writings, although uniquely arranged in the Thessalonian letters. Further, Paul's teaching on work in chapter three has many parallels with 1 Thessalonians, and the command to not "grow weary in doing good" can be found elsewhere in Paul's writings (Gal. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:58). Lastly, the Thessalonians are suffering because they have embraced the gospel, but Paul shows them that suffering is part of living out Jesus' story in our own individual lives (Mackie). Jesus became king over all creation through suffering and dying on a cross (Isa. 53; Dan. 7; Jn.19:18), so disciples of Jesus show their victory won by him through their endurance and trust in him to bring justice to their oppressors rather than to take vengeance into their own hands. All of this is deeply rooted in the stories in the gospel accounts.

Key Themes and Application

Hope, Faith, Love, and Endurance

It is evident as one reads both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, especially side-by-side, that Paul's intention is to inspire faith and hope, not fear and uncertainty. One need only read the seven powerful prayers of Paul for this church contained in these letters to understand this is his emphasis (1 Thess. 1:1-5; 3:11-13; 5:23-28; 2 Thess. 1:1-3, 11-12; 2:16-17; 3:16-18). These letters are meant to encourage and challenge a healthy, but young church amidst persecution and trials to stay faithful until Jesus returns. These words are a theme that is quite prevalent in Paul (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 5:8) and virtues that believers are to exude as they place their hope in the Messiah's return.

Day of the Lord and the Return of Christ

This is a theme that's seed bed lies in the prophets of the Old Testament (see Isa.13; Jer. 46; Ezek.13, 30; Amos 5; Obed. 15; Zeph.1; Mal.4; Joel; Dan.). This theme is crucial for both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13- 5:1-11 Paul addresses the DOTL and the future hope of Jesus' return. The Old Testament prophets saw this day as the day God's promises would be fulfilled, when eschatological realities would be realized, when the Messiah would come and God would establish his kingdom forever over all creation. Secondly, this day, however, would bring a lot of judgement, for the DOTL is also the day of reckoning for the unrighteous. The second section of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians (ch.2) seems to be written to address the theme of "the day of the Lord" (DOTL) from Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica, and to clear up some confusion that was taking place. It appears that someone in the church community had been spreading false information in Paul's name, claiming that the DOTL had already come (vv.1-4). This may have instilled fear and the misconception that they had been abandoned by God, or missed the return of Christ. Paul then moves to encourage them, summarizing his teaching on the issue. It seems to me that the point is not to fuel speculation about end times events, rather Paul's aim is to comfort the Thessalonians. Jesus' teachings in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 show the events leading to his return as being obvious, so one need not to

be afraid or worried that they've been "left behind" so to speak. Rather, encouragement and the need to stay faithful until Jesus returns to deliver them, is the focus for Paul here. In the conclusion of Chapter two (2:16-17) Paul prays exactly this for these people, that God would comfort and encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus until he returns. Paul's intended purpose in teaching about these things was to give hope and inspire faithfulness in Christians facing ferocious opposition and persecution because of the gospel. As ministers (lay or vocational) if we teach text like these, and those receiving our words are driven to fear or dread, we have mishandled the text. The coming DOTL should bring joy, excite expectancy, and create a longing in our hearts for Christ's return.

Work

This theme is the focus of the final section of Paul's letter. Chapter three is essentially a call to work hard. It is an important text for a proper theology of work. Christians are not to be irresponsible or refuse to work, but rather they are to follow Paul's lead as an example, and imitate Jesus' self-sacrificial love and service (Jn. 13; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Thess. 4:10-12,5:14). The Christian ideal is that, "Jesus followers imitate his self-giving love by working hard, so they can provide for themselves and their lives can be a benefit to other people" (Mackie). Work ethic and integrity are important to God. Notice here that this is a rebuke of those not willing to work, not about poor people. Paul's concern is about the temptation for some to be idle. This is interwoven in context with the confusion about the day of the Lord that is apparent throughout the letter. The coming of Christ being imminent or having already taken place, could have possibly inspired some so think, "what's the point of working and everything that comes along with it, because Jesus is coming back soon". If Jesus is coming back soon, I don't need to do anything. More likely though, Paul is addresses their cultural patronage system. Dr. Mathews explains the dichotomy of the "haves and have nots" created in this system where the poor would be obligated to do things for their debtors that might not have been in line with the gospel, as payments on their debts (Lecture). However, Paul corrects this thinking by teaching us that we are to work, and work diligently while we are here. Work is a gift from God that allows us to provide for our own needs and generously give to those who need help, out of what God has so graciously blessed us with.

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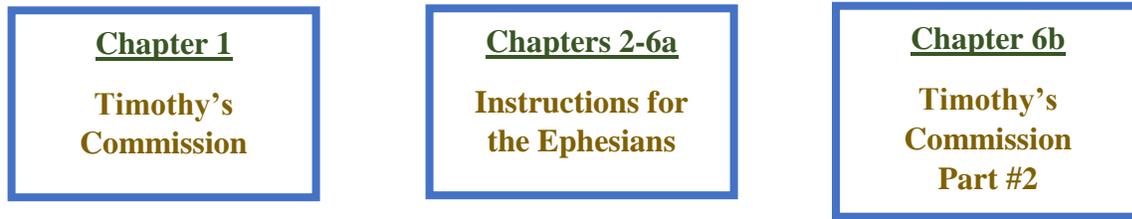
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The Book of 1 Timothy

Structure



Main Idea: Paul writes this letter to instruct Timothy on how to establish order in the church and combat false teaching, that the church may flourish being grounded in sound doctrine.

Main Idea Explained

Timothy, one of Paul's mentees, was tasked with leading the Ephesian church which was plagued by false teachers, in need of doctrinal guidance and correction, and lacking godly leadership. Paul wrote this letter to give young Timothy wise counsel on matters concerning church leadership and structure, confronting false teachers, and living a lifestyle for others to emulate.

The book is framed by two commissions to Timothy (chs. 1 and 6), and each of the major sections of the book conclude with or contain in their center a prayer (1:17;3:16; 6:15-16). Chapter one opens by stating why Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus. His task was to confront the corrupt teachers and their false doctrine. Paul says that these teachers are obsessed with speculating about the laws found in the Hebrew Bible such as the teachings on food, marriage, and sex, twisting to the point that they were not consistent with the teaching of Jesus or the apostles, by a long shot. The fruit of their labor had borne disunity and divided the church, nearly a sure-fire indication of their distortion of the gospel message (see 1 Cor. 10; Eph. 4; Col. 3; the gospel unifies). When authentic Christian teaching is present, it's consistent with Jesus' teaching, and results in love for God and neighbor and faith, not confusion. The purpose of the Law isn't to feed the speculative mind, but rather to expose the truth about the human condition; we're sinners in need of a savior (Rom. 3:10,23). As Dr. Mackie states, "Correct teaching will lead people to see the grace of God in the Messiah who came to save sinful broken people" (BPV). Chapter one ends with a prayer (1:17) that exalts Jesus over all creation and calls Timothy to boldly confront these false teachers.

Chapter two through the first part of chapter six addresses specific problems in the church caused by the false teachers, and how Timothy is to handle these situations. Chapter 2:1-7 is a call to prayer for peace and for governmental leadership as this will create the ideal environment for the gospel to keep spreading. God desires all to be saved (Ezek. 18:23), experience redemption, and to know they have a mediator in the God-man Jesus Christ. Praying and meditating on these things will keep them in their proper perspective. Verses eight through fifteen address issues related to worship and male/female roles in the church. First, these verses address men who were getting into angry, heated theological debates, Paul says they need to learn self-control and how to pray. From here he moves to address the women, who rather than treating church as a chance to show off, were to dress modestly and simply so as not to be seductive, or be poor stewards of their financial resources. Additionally, it maybe that they were trying to commandeer teaching positions and positions of authority in the church, and in doing so, leading others astray by teaching what the false teachers were

teaching. Therefore, Paul says they should not teach or lead in the church (2:12). He then goes on to explore the story of the Fall from Genesis chapter 3. Now, there are many different views about what Paul meant here as this is a key text for the hotly debated issue today dividing complementarians and egalitarians on the issue of male and female roles in the church and the family. Whatever view one holds, it is clear that Paul is saying these women in Ephesus need to submit to Timothy's leadership and learn sound doctrine, so that they may grow, "becoming like the outstanding female ministers that Paul mentions in his other letters, like Phoebe, Junia, Priscilla (Rom. 16:1,7; Acts 18:26)" (Mackie).

Chapter three is all about how Timothy, and we today, are to build ministry leadership teams within the church. The leadership crisis in Ephesus is addressed by Paul in instructing Timothy to select men of righteous character to help him as overseers of the church. Verses one through thirteen list the qualifications of elders and deacons, highlighting as of utmost importance, one's character. In verses fourteen and fifteen, Paul says he writes these things so that Timothy may know how one ought to behave in the house of God, the pillar of truth. The life we live together as the church is to be consistent with the story of Jesus, the gospel which is explored in the closing poem (v.16). It is a story about Jesus' life and work on the cross, exaltation and spread of the gospel to the world.

The entirety of chapter four is dedicated to addressing bad theology. The false teacher had been telling people to stop eating certain kinds of foods and to stop getting married. Paul goes as far as to say that their teachings were of demons and evil spirits; they were liars whose consciences had been seared. Paul won't have it and reminds Timothy how to fight against false teaching: focus on the gospel and the person and work of Christ. Paul also shows us in Genesis one that God's entire creation is good, including food and marriage and is to be received with gratitude and thanksgiving to the creator.

In the first sixteen verses of chapter five Paul gives instructions on care for widows. This ministry it seems, was being taken advantage of by well off young widows, perhaps some even from the troubled women from chapter two (Mackie). They were signing up for aid, but would then spend their days sleeping around and gossiping, and damaging the church's image and reputation. Paul advises that only widows with no family support and elderly qualify, and they should be taken care of by the church. Chapter 5:17-25 contains Paul's instructions to older men, who are giving the church a bad rap as well. He is to confront them in love, respecting their age, but not their misbehavior, because it is sin and needs to be addressed (Mackie). The first two verses of chapter six speak to master-slave relationships. The gospel does create equality, but transformation of Greco-Roman household culture doesn't happen overnight. Transformation should happen strategically so that unbelievers, "would be persuaded not repulsed by God's vision of the new family" (Mackie). In doing so, those enslaved would not compromise the mission of the gospel, for if Christians were to become associated with slave rebellions their mission would most likely be compromised (Mathews).

Chapter 6:3-20 contains Timothy's second commission: to confront the false teachers. Paul exposes their motives to acquire wealth off the backs of the people, by eliciting followers and charging them for their teaching. Paul says this betrays the message of the gospel. He follows this concern with a prayer in 6:15-16, and a challenge to Christians with wealth to be rich in good works, generous and willing to share out of their abundance (6:17-18). In conclusion Paul urges Timothy to, "guard the deposit" entrusted to him (v.20), meaning, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Timothy's commission (chs. 1 and 6) tells us that he was having to combat false teachers, who were spreading strange speculations about the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the teachings on food, marriage, and sex, twisting them to the point that they were not consistent with the teaching of Jesus or the apostles, by a long shot. This leads to explain that the purpose of the Law isn't to feed the speculative mind, but rather to expose the truth about the human condition; we're sinners in need of a savior (Rom. 3:10,23). As Dr. Mackie states, "Correct teaching will lead people to see the grace of God in the Messiah who came to save sinful broken people" (BPV). In chapter 2:8-15, a hotly debated passage, Paul uses Genesis three and the fall narrative to illustrate his logic when it comes to male and female roles in the church and authority. Chapter 4:1-16 is the section where Paul confronts the false teachers' corrupt theology, hitting on the same ideas from chapter one (see also ch.6). Paul alludes to Genesis one and creation when he says, "for everything created by God is good" (4:4). In chapter 5:1-16 Paul speaks of caring for widows. This is at the very heartbeat of God, to care for the needy, weak, and poor among us. Particularly in Deuteronomy the provisions for widows can be seen very clearly, so Paul isn't just making this up because he's a good guy. No, his theology has deep roots in the Hebrew Scriptures (see. Deut. 10, 14,24,26). Finally, in the concluding section of the letter, Paul calls the wealthy to be generous (6:17-18). Yahweh is generous. Therefore, his people are to be generous too. This is a theme that runs all through the Hebrew Bible (Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 15:7-8; Psa. 41:1-3; Prov.11:24-15).

In Relation to the NT

Paul meets Timothy in Lystra in Acts 16:1-3, (see also 2 Tim. 1:5) Paul mentored Timothy for years in missions, and Timothy was commissioned to confront leaders and fix things at the church in Ephesus by Paul. 1 Timothy carries many of the same themes found in other Pauline letters, but also elsewhere in the New Testament, such as false teachers (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Tit. 1:6-16; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn.4), need for unity (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 3:13-14), church structure/government (Acts 6, 14:23; Eph. 4; 1 Cor.12-14; Tit. 1), godly conduct (Eph. 4; Phil. 1; Col. 1), etc. All of this is centered on the realities of the gospel, which is the focus of all of Paul's prayers in this letter (1:17;3:16;6:15-16). The Messiah came to save sinful people like each one of us (see the Gospels) therefore it ought to shape every facet of our lives as we, with thanksgiving and gratitude, respond in love and generosity to the grace given us. Also worth noting, and more prominently seen in 2 Timothy, though beginning here, is this transition beginning to take place from the apostolic age, to the next generation of leaders, "entrusted with the deposit" (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Key Themes and Application

False Teaching

False teachers and prophets have always plagued God's people (Ezek. 13:9; Jer. 23:6), Jesus spoke of them being both present and to come (Matt. 7:15-20,16:11-12, 24:24), and the apostles spoke out against them (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Tit. 1:6-16; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn.4). Timothy's task was to confront the corrupt teachers and their false doctrine. Paul says that these teachers were obsessed with speculating about the laws found in the Hebrew Bible such as the teachings on food, marriage, and sex, twisting to the point that they were not consistent with the teaching of Jesus or the apostles, by a long shot. The fruit of their labor had borne disunity and divided the church, nearly a sure-fire indication of their distortion of the gospel message (see 1 Cor. 10; Eph. 4; Col. 3; the gospel unifies). When

authentic Christian teaching is present, it's consistent with Jesus' teaching, and results in love for God and neighbor and faith, not confusion. The purpose of the Law isn't to feed the speculative mind, but rather to expose the truth about the human condition; we're sinner in need of a savior (Rom. 3:10,23). As Dr. Mackie states, "Correct teaching will lead people to see the grace of God in the Messiah who came to save sinful broken people" (BPV).

Leadership in the Church

The qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1) is about as straightforward as it can get for the most part. There are no real interpretive issues there. Paul charges Timothy to find godly righteous men with integrity and good character to form his small leadership team. The more dicey matter, however, is gender roles and the egalitarian/complementarian debate that seems to be never-ending. The women in this church were causing problems just as much as the men. Paul appeals to Genesis 1-3 in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. He appeals to creation order and divine design. Equality of persons doesn't rule out different roles. Equal value, dignity, and worth doesn't mean there aren't different functions males and females are to perform. The secular world equates function with worth, but that's not true, that's not what the Bible teaches. Galatians 3:28, the Magna Carta of egalitarianism, they say means there are no gender distinctions in Christ (as far as authority and roles to be filled), but that is fundamentally flawed. Galatians 3:28 is about redemption, there are no gender distinctions in being part of Abraham's seed (Gen.12,15,17).

Paul's thinking here, I believe, is linked intimately with the household codes in Ephesians five and Colossians three. Christ is the head of every man, who is to lay down his life for the woman, taking responsibility for her, and placing her needs over his own. In response, the woman is to trust and respect her husband, allowing him to take care of her. Therefore, the two offices for oversight and care of the church are to be as follows: elders (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Tit. 1:5-9, 1 Pet. 5:1-4), and deacons (Acts. 6:1-7; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Elders are men who are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of the church through the activities of shepherding (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), teaching and correcting (Acts 6:3-5; Tit. 1:9), and equipping others to do ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). Deacons are men or women whose primary duty is to assist the elders in serving the body. They are selected by the local body and appointed by the elders on the basis of Scriptural qualifications (Deut. 1:13; Acts 6:3; Tit. 1:5-9). In other words, women are encouraged to minister in any office or ministry open to any other non-elder, assuming their qualifications and appropriate gifting, but the office of elder is reserved for men.

Timothy is to restore order and clarify the purpose of a church, by combating false teachers and appointing godly leaders who can lead this Jesus community forward and mature them in the realities of the gospel. As Dr. Mackie states, "What a church believes will shape how it lives. The church should be known for integrity and service to the poor out of devotion to King Jesus" (BPV).

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The Book of 2 Timothy

Structure

Chapters 1:1-2:13

**Timothy is to
Accept His Calling**

Chapters 2:14-4:5

**Timothy is to
Confront the False
Teachers**

Chapters 4:6-22

**Conclusion: Paul's
Last Words**

Main Idea: Paul challenges Timothy to accept his calling and confront false teachers, defending the faith in a time of doctrinal confusion, even amid trials and persecution.

Main Idea Explained

This is Paul's final and most personal letter. It reads like his final words before he dies, giving very personal and specific instructions to Timothy and the church at Ephesus. The letter's purpose is to prepare Timothy and the church to pass down the truth to a new generation, and to encourage them to endure suffering in the process of defending right doctrine (Matthews).

Chapter 1:1-2:13 is Paul's challenge to Timothy to accept his calling. In verses one through five, Paul thanks God for Timothy and his family, particularly Lois and Eunice (Timothy's grandmother and mother), for immersing Timothy in the Scriptures. Paul credits these women as having a major role in who Timothy is, his conversion, and faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. From here Paul moves to challenge Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul's imprisonment (1:6-18). There was a negative stigma Paul had gained from his times spent in prison, and no doubt it had made many of Paul's coworkers doubt his calling as an apostle. Paul mentions a couple here (Phygelus and Hermogenes {1:15} who deserted Paul because he was an accused criminal) {Mackie}. We will touch on this again in chapter four, but worth noting here as well, is the reality that embracing the gospel is risky and suffering is inevitable for a Jesus follower (v.9). Verses 8-14 is a key text about guarding the "good deposit", meaning sound doctrine. Doctrine is to be rooted in the gospel message, and Paul here sounds like he did in Romans and Ephesians in the explaining the gospel very theologically. He expresses confidence that, because of the Holy Spirit, the deposit will be taken care of as the baton is beginning to be passed onto the next generation of god-fearing leaders.

In chapter 2:1-13 Paul reminds Timothy that, "Jesus' grace is a source of power, which you're going to need because following Jesus is not easy; it's going to require everything that you have" (Mackie). Paul then goes on to develop the idea by using three clever metaphors to paint a portrait of a person who is committed to something (holiness, the kingdom of God, the spread of the gospel, etc.) and who is willing to sacrifice and endure for things of eternal significance (bring others into God's family, the hope of the New Creation). Paul compares this battle to being a soldier who is trying to please their commanding officer, an athlete who is training for competition, and a hardworking farmer. After these vivid metaphors Paul shows us how Jesus himself, who because of his commitment to the Father suffered crucifixion, and how similarly Paul himself is suffering in prison because of the gospel. Suffering, pain, and sacrifice are characteristic to the Christian's life; we will experience them. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is to be the basis for our hope (v.11-13, poem where Paul expresses

this). For believers, God has promised vindication and eternal life lived in his presence, however, for those who reject him, God will do the same in return, granting them their wish of a life lived apart from him. Paul closes this section with a beautiful poem in which he states that, humanity's unfaithfulness will never compel God to abandon his faithfulness, and calls Timothy to faithfulness knowing that it may come at a cost (Mackie).

Chapter 2:14-4:5 contains Paul's charge to Timothy to confront the false teachers in Ephesus (a major theme of 1 Timothy as well). His focus here is in dealing with opponents to the true teaching of the gospel (Mathews). Interestingly, Paul doesn't deal much with the teachers' bad theology, probably because Timothy already knows about it (and we have his first letter to Timothy), but he does give us one hint, that in conjunction with the issues from 1 Timothy, these false teachers are saying the resurrection has already taken place (2:18). Dr. Mackie comments, "We don't know if they are teaching Greek philosophy, that there is no bodily resurrection, or distorting Paul's theology of resurrection beginning now. Either way, the bottom line is: they've abandoned the hope of resurrection and the new creation" (BPV). These teachers and their followers have embraced a highly spiritualized religion that is disconnected from normal day to day life, so Timothy and his crew are called to teach the true gospel (2:2). In chapter 3:10-13 Paul commends Timothy for following his teaching, and reminds him that the godly will face opposition and persecution in this life. After saying these things, Paul then pens one of the key texts for the Christian doctrine of inspiration.

Paul talks about Scripture's nature and purpose in 2 Tim. 3:15-17, beginning with a profound statement, "and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v.15). Paul is talking about the Old Testament here, those were the Scriptures of his day, the New Testament cannon was not yet circulating and fully formed. The Hebrew Scriptures, Paul says serve to make saving faith in Jesus a reality. The apostle couldn't have placed the value of the Old Testament any higher. The whole point of the Scriptures is to tell us a unified story that leads to Jesus, and that has wisdom to offer the whole world (Mackie). Verses sixteen and eighteen address the doctrine of inspiration. Dr. Todd Miles wonderfully describes that, "Inspiration is a concurrent work between the Holy Spirit and a human author, in where the Holy Spirit so moved the human author that God gets exactly what he wants without overwhelming or destroying the personality or experiences of a human author" (4). God speaks to his people in his word for practical purposes such as: ...

"teaching, telling me things I didn't know before, challenging, getting in my face about the things I say I believe, but I don't actually live consistently with, they are used for correcting me, showing me my ways of messed up thinking and behaving, and training me in righteousness, showing me a new way to be truly human" (Mackie)

Paul closes the second section of his letter by charging Timothy to "preach the word" remembering what he has just said about the nature and purpose of the Scriptures (4:1-5). All of this is so that God's people will be prepared for doing good.

Chapter 4:6-22 forms the conclusion to the letter. Paul writes Timothy telling him he's probably going to die soon, so he asks Timothy to come see him, bring his coat because it's cold, bring his documents, and to watch out for a man named Alexander who is an extremely dangerous man who possibly got Paul imprisoned (Mackie). Paul concludes by stating that everyone has abandoned him

except Jesus, who has never left him and who will be with him even when he dies. Paul's ministry was marked by ongoing challenges, persecution, and suffering. He is a prime example of the truth that following Jesus, means inviting risk, tension, and persecution into your life (1:6-18;2:1-13;3:10-13;4:6-8). However, as Dr. Mackie states, "These experiences are not a sign of Jesus' absence, but rather in the dark and difficult moments Jesus' love and faithfulness become the most tangible and real" (BPV).

2 Timothy in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

In chapter 1:6-18 Paul instructs Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul's imprisonment. Suffering is part of the gospel, which Paul states in every chapter of this letter (1:6-18;2:1-13;3:10-13;4:6-8). The suffering Messiah was and is a key element to the gospel message and has its roots beginning as early as page three of the Bible (see Gen. 3:15; Isa. 52-53; Dan. 7). In chapter 2:7 Paul says that the Lord will grant Timothy wisdom (an allusion to Pro. 2:6). The idea that "understanding" is a divine gift is a theme found throughout the Old Testament (Exod. 31:6; 1 Kings 3:11-12; Dan. 1:17; 2:21). A few verses later (2:19) where Paul talks about "God's firm foundation", it is fair to say that Paul has Isaiah 28:16 in mind, that this foundation is a person, the Messiah. In the latter part of this verse Paul alludes to Numbers 16:5. In chapter 3:8 Paul references Jannes and Jambres, two individuals who opposed Moses, which is possibly a reference to Exodus 7:11 (Mathews). Chapter 3:11 hits on the theme of vindication for the persecuted (see Psa. 22 and 33). Paul's statement on the nature and purpose of the Scriptures (3:15-18) is a reference to the Hebrew Cannon. In chapter 4:14, Paul uses the biblical theme of retribution (Psa. 61:13; Prov.24:12). Paul's final words (4:9-18), contain echoes from Psalm 22, which expressed deep pain and sorrow, but also hope of vindication.

In Relation to the NT

Paul met Timothy in Lystra in Acts 16:1-3, (see also 2 Tim. 1:5). Paul mentored Timothy for years in missions, and Timothy was commissioned by Paul to confront leaders and fix things at the church in Ephesus. Paul is imprisoned possibly in Rome (Acts 28), or some other time (2 Tim. 4:13-15), we don't really know (Mathews). Paul is undergoing trial and it's not going well, and Timothy is still in Ephesus. Paul wants him to come be with him in prison, so he can pass along the church planting mission he started (Mackie). An important aspect of this letter as it fits into the cannon as a whole, is that this letter (along with Titus) perhaps shows the transition, the passing of the baton from the apostles to the next generation (Mathews). The gospels give context for the theological realities and outworkings of what Christ's work on the cross means for the church (see also, Eph. 4-6; Col.; Rom.6-8). The theme of false teachers is prevalent in 2 Timothy (see also, Acts 20:28-30; Tit. 1:6-16;2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn.4). As well as vindication for the persecuted and afflicted (Lk. 18:7; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Key Themes and Application

False Teachers

The theme of false teachers is prevalent in 2 Timothy (see also, Acts 20:28-30; Tit. 1:6-16; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn.4). The middle section of this letter, which takes up the vast majority of the epistle, is Paul's call to Timothy to put the false teachers in Ephesus in their place, to take them down so to speak (2:14-4:5). The context and content of their faulty teaching is heavily reliant upon what we learn has been taking place in the church from Paul's first letter to Timothy. These teachers and their followers have embraced a highly spiritualized religion that is disconnected from normal day to day life, so Timothy and his crew are called to teach the true gospel (2:2). Timothy and the elders are to hold firm and boldly proclaim the nature and purpose of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15-17), for they are what will affect gospel transformation in a person's heart, through the power of the Spirit. Paul closes the second section of his letter by charging Timothy to "preach the word" remembering what he has just said about the nature and purpose of the Scriptures (4:1-5). All of this is so that God's people will be prepared for doing good. Paul is telling Timothy to combat false teaching with the one true gospel. We are above all to be captivated by Christ. The gospel is not something we graduate from, but something that we are to be saturated with, soaking it up like a sponge that just can't get enough. The gospel is like a mighty river, creating deeper and deeper grooves in the canyons of our souls. As ministers as we read the Pastoral epistles we must realize that this will always be something we are dealing with whether overtly or subversively, within our church or outside in the communities we live in. Therefore, we must take Paul's warnings, encouragement, and instructions clearly because there are souls at stake.

Suffering, the Cost of Following Jesus, and Vindication

It is a reality that embracing the gospel is risky and suffering is inevitable for a Jesus follower (1:9). Suffering is part of the gospel, which Paul states in every chapter of this letter (1:6-18; 2:1-13; 3:10-13; 4:6-8). Paul doesn't beat around the bush. The suffering Messiah was and is a key element to the gospel message and has its roots beginning as early as page three of the Bible (see Gen. 3:15; Isa. 52-53; Dan. 7). In chapter 2:1-13 Paul reminds Timothy that, "Jesus' grace is a source of power, which you're going to need because following Jesus is not easy, it's going to require everything that you have" (Mackie). Paul compares this struggle to being a soldier who is trying to please their commanding officer, an athlete who is training for competition, and a hardworking farmer. After these vivid metaphors Paul shows us how Jesus himself, who because of his commitment to the Father suffered crucifixion, and how similarly Paul himself is suffering in prison because of the gospel. Suffering, pain, and sacrifice are characteristic to the Christian's life; we will experience them. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is to be the basis for our hope (vv.11-13, poem where Paul expresses this). For believers, God has promised vindication and eternal life lived in his presence, however, for those who reject him, God will do the same in return, granting them their wish of a life lived apart from him. Paul closes this section with a beautiful poem in which he states that, a humanity's unfaithfulness will never compel God to abandon his faithfulness, and calls Timothy to faithfulness knowing that it may come at a cost (Mackie). In the concluding section we see that Paul's ministry was marked by ongoing challenges, persecution, and suffering. He is a prime example of the truth that following Jesus, means inviting risk, tension, and persecution into your life (1:6-18; 2:1-13; 3:10-13; 4:6-8). However, as Dr. Mackie states, "These experiences are not a sign of Jesus' absence, but

rather in the dark and difficult moments Jesus' love and faithfulness become the most tangible and real" (BPV)

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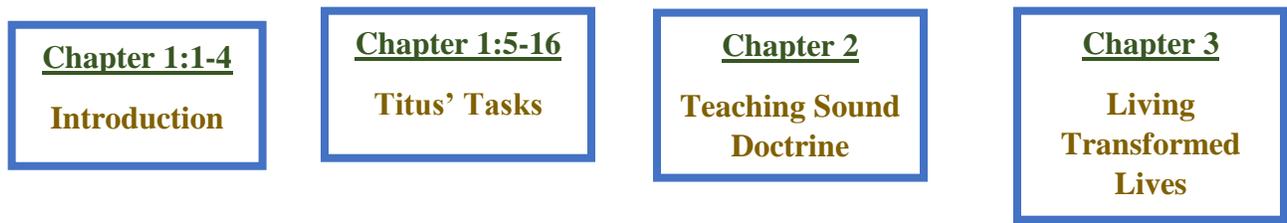
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The Book of Titus

Structure



Main Idea: Titus is tasked with bringing order and integrity to corrupted leadership within the church, and to teach the Cretans how the gospel message, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms lives.

Main Idea Explained

Titus was a coworker of Paul's (2 Cor. 8:23; Gal. 2:1-3), and at the time this letter was penned, ministering on the small island of Crete (Tit. 1:5). The design of the letter is simple and straight forward. There is an introduction (1:1-4) and three blocks of instruction from Paul (1:5-16; ch.2; and ch.3). Dr. Carl Laney puts the overarching theme of the letter like this: "The need for consistency between confession and conduct (1:16)" (Mathews). Titus was to appoint elders and revamp the structure and leadership of the Cretan churches, a people plagued by violence and sexual corruption (Mackie).

Chapter 1:1-4 forms the introduction and open greeting from Paul to his companion and mentee, Titus. Paul opens by reminding Titus that his message and purpose is about the hope of eternal life, in Jesus Christ. Paul highlights how this hope was promised by "the God who does not lie" (v.2). This is in contrast to the Cretans and their pantheon of gods (see 1:12-13). Dr. Mackie comments that a theme underlying the whole letter is, "the Cretans had assimilated their view about God with their views about the other gods they grew up with like Zeus. The God revealed in Jesus is totally different than Zeus. His basic characteristics are faithfulness and truth which means the Christian's way of life is about truth too" (BPV).

Chapter 1:5-16 contains the tasks set before Titus to accomplish in Crete. They include appointing elders (1:5-9) and confronting the corrupt leadership (1:10-16). This section has close ties with 1 Tim. 3:1-12 (leadership in the church), and the theme of false teaching in both of Paul's letters to Timothy (1Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 2:14-4:5). Additionally, the opposition Titus seems to be receiving the most heat from is the "circumcision party" (v.10), a group that sounds eerily familiar to the Galatians crew Paul speaks against (see Galatians). Further, they are motivated by money, not with zeal to see the gospel being expanded and believed in (v.11). Paul then quotes from one of their own poets, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (probably from Epimenides) {Mathews}. Though they claim to be of God their actions betray them (v.16).

The letter's third section records Paul's charge to Timothy to teach sound doctrine, and how this applies to the Cretan household. It seems this was necessary because the lives of many Cretan's within the church, were a mess. Paul highlights the result of this three times here: God's word is

discredited (2:5), people make evil accusations (2:8), the Christian message isn't compelling or attractive to anybody (2:10) {Mackie}. In doing this Paul exposes the reality that currently exists there. So, in classic Pauline fashion, he doesn't leave us hanging, but rather shows us what the ideal Christian-Cretan household who has embraced the gospel should look like (2:11-15). This family would be one full of integrity and self-control where older men and women mentor younger men and women, setting godly examples for them in thought and deed. Dr. Mackie comments, "The gospel must prove its redemptive power in the public square if it's really going to transform Cretan culture" (BPV). This will not take place through upheaval or becoming hermits, but rather the Christian life will be compelling when Christians fully participate in society (Mackie). Jesus' followers lives and homes should look similar on the surface to everyone else's, however, upon closer look, the unbeliever should also realize that the believer's life is based on something totally different than theirs. Verses 11-15 show us that the Christian's way of life is to be rooted in grace, which was manifested in the God-man Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the salvation of humanity to redeem us. This very same grace empowers God's people to say "no" to living lives inconsistent with the ways of God, and calls them as new creations in him. (Mackie).

Paul's final section of the letter teaches us about living transformed lives. In the first three verses Paul essentially says that Christians should make the best citizens: peaceable, submissive to authorities, hardworking, courteous, and non-slandering or full of gossip. Paul also notes how this is counter-cultural. The Cretans didn't grow up with these moral ethics (3:3), perhaps this would have seemed overwhelming or hopeless to them, but Paul doesn't leave them with a command, but quickly moves to linking them to the power source, the one who will help them accomplish their obligations detailed above. This source is the triune God (see the poem about the gospel vv.4-7), as Dr. Mackie notes, "Spirit-empowered faithfulness to Jesus will declare God's grace to the world". In the concluding verse Paul encourages Titus to help his people be devoted to good works, focused on the right things, says he's sending Titus some back-up, and says his final greetings.

Titus in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Perhaps the least amount of quotations, allusions, and echoes of any of Paul's letters can be found in Titus. This makes sense because Titus was Greek, and his audience was primarily Greek as well, however, it is not totally devoid of Old Testament appearances. In 1:2 it says, "God, who cannot lie", Numbers 23:19 affirms this. 1:5-16 deals with appointment of elders and Titus's call to confront the false teachers. These teachers are defined as the "circumcision group", which links this letter with that same type of crew in Paul's letter to the Galatians, which is smothered in Old Testament allusions and quotation, particularly the Torah, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.12,15,17,22), and the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19-20; Lev.). Titus 2:14 is perhaps the most easily recognizable verse where Paul pulls from Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6, Psalm 129:8, and Ezek. 36 and 37 highlight the shift from obeying the law to the law being written on the heart. In chapter 3:4-6 Paul uses language from Deuteronomy 9:5 and Joel 2:28 highlighting the theme of the Holy Spirit being poured out (see also Acts 2:17).

In Relation to the NT

Jesus' work on the cross and what it accomplished are central for this letter (as it is in all of Paul's letters), therefore the context and stories contained in the gospels are important for understanding the weightiness of Paul's statements about what Christ's death and resurrection have accomplished. When Paul says, "God, who cannot lie..." we can find the same statement in 2 Timothy 2:13 and Hebrews 6:18. In chapter 1:5-9 Titus is called to appoint elders the same as Timothy was (1 Tim. 3:1-12). Titus contains the theme of "false teachers" and is called to confront them (see also, Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim. 2:14-4:5; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn.4; Jud.). Ethical behavior is another theme that takes place all over Paul's letters, and is always rooted in theological, gospel realities. His imperatives are also rooted in indicatives. Particularly brought to light in this letter is how the gospel influences the household (Tit. 2-3; see also Eph. 5-6; Col. 3; 1 Tim. 2; 1 Pet. 2). The concept of the example we live showing the beauty of the gospel to others (2:10), is another theme that takes place across in the New Testament Scriptures (Matt. 7:15-20; Jn. 13:35; Gal. 5:6; Jam. 2:18; 1 Pet.2:12,3:16; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phil. 2:15; 2 Cor. 8:21; Rom. 14:18). This theme is linked all the way back to Exodus 19:6.

Key Themes and Application

Church Leadership and False Teachers

Much like 1 Timothy 3:1-12, Titus is tasked with appointing men with good character to the office of elder. Whereas Timothy was in Ephesus, Titus is ministering to the churches on the island of Crete, but his responsibility is the same. The qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1) is about as straightforward as it can get for the most part. There are no real interpretive issues there. Paul charges Titus to find godly righteous men with integrity and good character to form his small leadership team. I love that in both the letters to Titus and Timothy, the way the church is to combat false teaching is by having elders (men) and deacons (men and women), who can shepherd and lead the church, and are captivated by the gospel and its transformative power. These leadership texts are always in conversation with false teaching and sound doctrine. I think this is huge to realize in a day and age where right doctrine is being traded for cheap imitation, self-help, moralism, relativism, etc. The church is not the church because of the pastor, and the pastor was never intended do ministry alone. There is wisdom, experience, and safety in the many, when the many look like what we see Paul describing in the Pastoral Epistles. *(For more on these two themes see 1 and 2 Timothy Projects)*

Living Godly Lives

The concept of living an attractive, fruitful, and counter-cultural way of life, showing the beauty of the gospel to others (Tit. 2:10), is another theme that takes place across in the New Testament Scriptures (Matt. 7:15-20; Jn. 13:35; Gal. 5:6; Jam. 2:18; 1 Pet.2:12,3:16; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phil. 2:15; 2 Cor. 8:21; Rom. 14:18). This theme is linked all the way back to Exodus 19:6 where Israel is called to be a light to the nations. In doing so, others would be brought into the covenant community, and so fulfill God's promise to Abraham to restore blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). Chapter 2:11-15 shows us that the Christian's way of life is to be rooted in grace, which was manifested in the God-man Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the salvation of humanity to redeem us. This very same grace empowers God's people to say "no" to living lives inconsistent with the ways of God, and calls them as new creations in him. (Mackie). Paul's final section of the letter teaches us about living transformed lives (ch.3). In the first three verses Paul essentially says that Christians should make the best citizens: peaceable, submissive to authorities, hardworking, courteous, and non-slandering or full

of gossip. Dr. Mackie notes, “Spirit-empowered faithfulness to Jesus will declare God’s grace to the world” (BPV).

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The Book of Philemon

Structure



(Mathews)

Main Idea: This letter is about reconciliation and the gospel lived out through action.

Main Idea Explained

Paul pens this letter from one of his many imprisonments, probably around the same time frame in which he wrote the book of Colossians (Mathews). It is Paul's shortest letter, and his last letter in the New Testament Cannon (in regard to ordering, not date). This letter is written to the man Philemon, who became a believer under Paul (v. 19). Epaphras and Philemon later started a church in Colossae together (vv. 1-2; Col. 1:7) {Mackie}. Philemon, like many of his time, owned slaves. One of them was named Onesimus, who wronged him in some way, but we don't exactly know what conspired. What we do know is that Onesimus ran away, but met Paul, and was saved. Paul writes this letter to Philemon as a plea to reconcile with Onesimus and receive him back as brother in the Lord (vv.15-16).

Verses one through three contain the introduction and greeting of the letter, and verses four through seven record Paul's prayer of thanksgiving to God for Philemon's faithfulness and love. Verse six is the spring board from which Paul leaps into his request, in which he states that all of Jesus' followers are equal partners who share in the gift of God's grace and love (Mackie).

Verses eight through twenty comprise the bulk of the letter and form Paul's plea for Onesimus to Philemon. Paul says Onesimus has become "his child", that is he has led him to faith in Jesus, so now they are brothers. However, Paul knows they must resolve this conflict if they really are walk the walking so to speak, as Jesus' followers. Paul then states his bold request, worth quoting here, "For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (vv.15-16). This is a radical request. Freeing a slave and treating him as a family member was unheard of in the ancient world. Under Roman law Philemon had the right to take him back as a slave, or worse, have him beat or imprisoned, perhaps all the above! Paul is asking him not only to not do that, but to accept him back as a social equal (Mackie).

In verses seventeen through twenty Paul answers the question: why should Philemon fulfill Paul's request? In these verses we see the heart of Paul's gospel message being acted out. This brings up an interesting observation about this letter. It is the only letter where Paul doesn't explicitly mention Jesus' death and resurrection, and this is not without intent, "He doesn't need to explain it with words, because he's acting it out. Paul is embodying the meaning of the cross. He has made himself the place where Philemon and Onesimus are reconciled to God and then to each other" (Mackie). In this situation Paul is a "type" of Christ, placing himself in the position of mediator (Mathews). Dr. Mackie

states that in this situation, Paul is saying he will absorb the consequence of Onesimus' wrong doing, he will pay the cost, so Onesimus can be reconciled to his master Philemon (BPV). Why would he do this? Because, in the Jesus, God was reconciling people to himself, not counting their sins against them (2 Cor. 5:19). Further, all are equal before God, sharing in the same need for forgiveness. All are equal at the foot of the cross. There is no longer master and slave, only brotherhood, family according to the gospel (Gal. 3:25-29; Col. 3:11). Dr. Mackie comments, "In the gospel the master-slave relationship is irrelevant. Jesus' family is a new humanity of equal partners who share together in God's healing mercy, a new humanity" (BPV). In the Messiah there is simply the new creation. In verses twenty-one through twenty-five Paul closes the letter with final greeting, highlighting his confidence that Philemon will do even more than he has requested.

Philemon in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Perhaps I could be missing something, but it seems to me that this is the only letter of Paul that does not explicitly, or even implicitly quote or allude to any Old Testament passage(s). However, this letter does deal with issues that can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as reconciliation, slavery, and relationships. Paul acting as mediator and "type" of Christ, puts him in the mold of all the past "types of Christ" such as Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, David, etc.

In Relation to the NT

The context for this letter is rooted in Paul's letter to the Colossians which has its origins in Acts 19. Philemon was a prominent member of the church in Colossae. A believer's union with Christ is a prominent theme in Paul that can be found in this letter (see also, Rom. 6:1-14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 2:4-10). The doctrine of adoption, though not taught here is absolutely linked to union with Christ and the doctrine of justification which is integral to the gospel message (Adoption see, Gal. 4:7-9; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2). Paul acting as mediator is a beautiful representation of what Christ did for us on the cross. Christ suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus, he fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). Now seated at the right hand of the Father (Phil. 2:5-11; Hebrew 1:3, Acts 1:9-12), exalted above all creation (Col. 3:1; Eph. 1:20-21), Jesus acts as the only mediator between God and man, working on the behalf of believers as their arbiter and intercessor (Rom. 8:31-34; Heb.4:15, 7:25-26; 1 Tim. 2:5). Paul places himself in this role showing us how we can live out the story of Jesus in our own lives. If we truly believe what the gospel says, we'll desire to do the same. His story becomes our story.

Key Themes and Application

Reconciliation and Union with/in Christ

Really there are just a couple of themes here, and they are intimately connected, that is reconciliation and union with Christ. Jesus' death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21). Christ suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have

undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. Thus, he fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). In so doing he made possible a renewed relationship with him, a restoration of the purposed relationship between God and man (Isa. 43:21; Mic. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 5:8-11). In Philemon, Paul answers the, "So what?" question, the "How does this, apply to my life, past being a theological reality?" question. Interestingly though he doesn't do so in words as much as in action,

17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. (Phl. 17-19)

Philemon is the only letter where Paul doesn't explicitly mention Jesus' death and resurrection, and this is not without intent, "He doesn't need to explain it with words, because he's acting it out. Paul is embodying the meaning of the cross. He has made himself the place where Philemon and Onesimus are reconciled to God and then to each other" (Mackie). Concurrent with conversion is the believer's union with Christ (Col. 3:1-15). The death and resurrection of Jesus are part of the believer's history as a person as much as their birth, high school graduation, marriage, etc. Every believer has been united with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and are beneficiaries of what his death, resurrection, and glorification have accomplished (Rom. 6:1-14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 2:4-10). Paul shows us powerfully in this letter what that looks like in our horizontal (human) relationships in everyday life. We show others what God is like when step into situations like Paul did here. When we act like Jesus would in a situation, when we show grace where the world says we have the right not to, when we speak life and encouragement into the brokenhearted, that is when we can say we truly believe the gospel. Paul shows us here that the gospel is not simply something to be believed, though that is true. It is something else as well, something that moves us to actions that give this world just a taste of what the future fully restored kingdom of God will look like.

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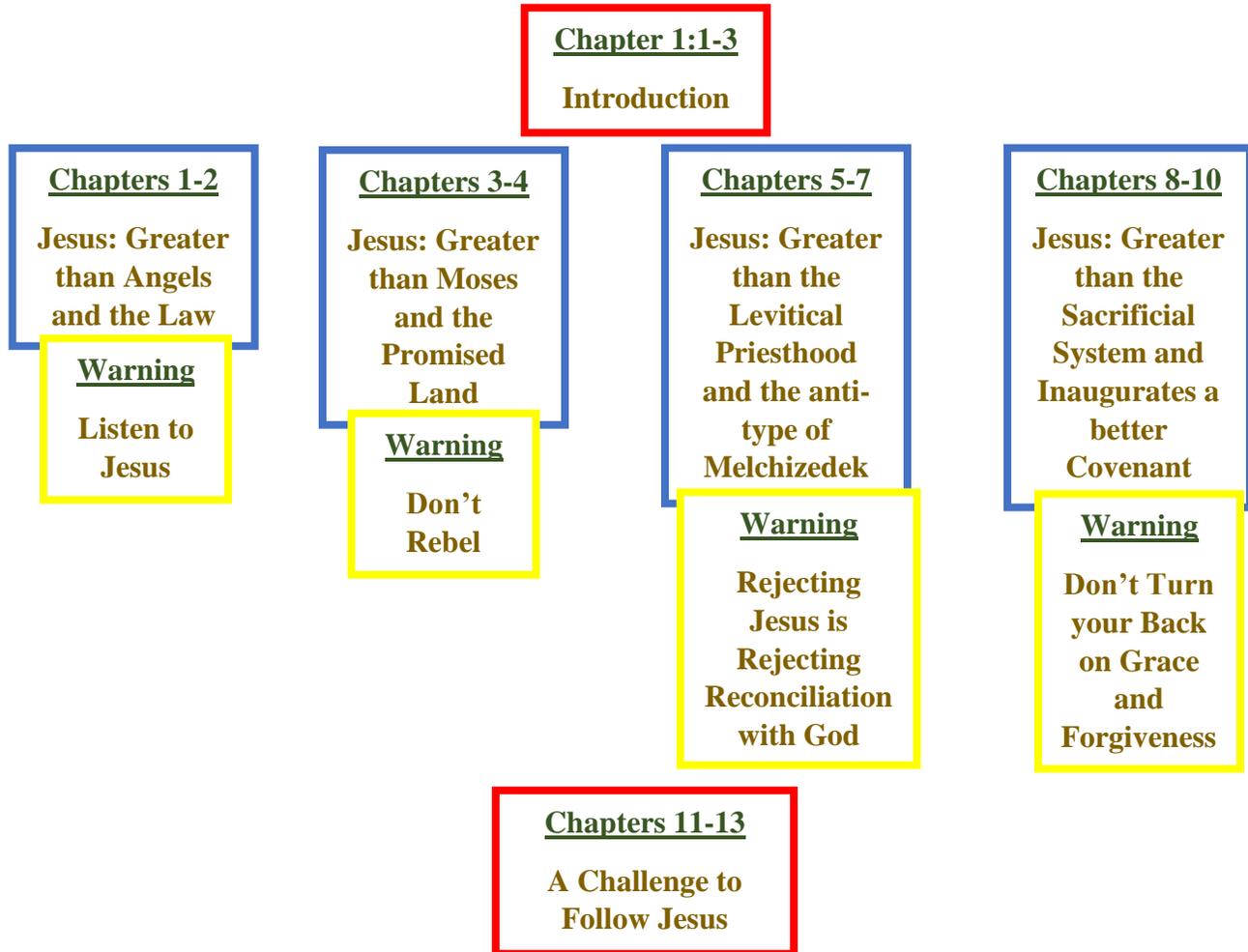
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The Book of Hebrews

Structure



(The Bible Project, Me)

Main Idea: Hebrews systematically shows us how Jesus is superior to all else, the ultimate revelation of God's nature and character, making it foolish to reject his love and grace and choose to chase after anything else besides him.

Main Idea Explained

We don't know who the author was or the recipients for that matter, but it is clear that he was very educated and steeped in a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, and expected that his audience was as well. We know that the audience was facing persecution (10:32-34), but that's it. The letter more accurately could be called a sermon or epistolary sermon, a sermon turned into a letter (Matthews). It reads more like sermon. There is an introduction and four major sections in which the author compares and contrasts Jesus with key people and events from Israel's history, each concluding with a warning passage (Mackie). The letter closes with a fifth section that challenges its readers to follow Jesus.

Chapter 1:1-3 forms the introduction to the letter and packs a punch right out of the gate. Along with Colossians one, John one, and Philippians two, this is one of the most Christological passages in the New Testament, essentially stating that there is no God apart from Jesus, he is God in the flesh, the ultimate revelation of the nature and character of the Father. Therefore, Jesus is superior to all the prior ways Yahweh had revealed himself to Israel (Mathews). The rest of this sermon explores this profound truth, and aims to show the reader why rejecting God's grace and mercy given in the gift of the Son is such a huge mistake.

The rest of chapters one through two compare and contrast Jesus to angels and the Law, showing how Jesus is greater than them both. This interplay may seem strange at first glance, but as Dr. Mackie comments, "In Jewish tradition the words of the Torah were delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai by angels. So, by saying that Jesus is superior to angels the author is claiming that Jesus and his message and good news are superior to all previous messengers of God's word" (BPV). This is rooted in the Old Testament passage of Deuteronomy 33, however, it seems to me that this idea is even more prevalent in the New Testament (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). The first warning flows out of this concept (2:1-4). Israel was commanded to heed the Law given by angels, so how much more should the readers of this letter listen to and obey the gospel message, and the teachings of God's son? More than on the grounds of just pure logic, the author argues the point that given Jesus' status as superior to the angels, how extraordinary is it that he gave that up to become human like us and die on a cross on our behalf (Col. 1; Phil 2:6-11; Heb. 2:17-18). Dr. Mackie adds, "In Jesus we see God's glory and his great humility, in how Jesus sympathetically joined himself to humanity's tragic fate" (BPV).

Chapters three and four compare and contrast Jesus with Moses and the promised land. Moses was the builder of the tabernacle, and led Israel through the wilderness. The author retells the wilderness wanderings and rebellions (see the books of Exodus and Numbers) highlighting how they had failed to enter the promised land because of their lack of trust in and faithfulness to Yahweh. The warning in this passage (intermingled throughout the entirety of chapter four), flows out of a theological interpretation of these events. Jesus is greater than Moses, he wasn't just a great teacher and leader like Moses, he is the very Word of God (Jn. 1). He didn't just build a tent like Moses, he creates a new humanity (Mackie). He didn't create a space for God's presence to dwell, he is the presence of God drawn near to his people (Col. 1 Phil. 2; 2 Cor. 5). How much higher are the stakes if we rebel against Jesus? Eternity, not just a piece of real estate, is what's at stake here. The warning essentially is to make sure we don't rebel like Israel did in the wilderness and so lose out on God's offer to enter the New Creation (Mackie).

Chapters five through seven show how Jesus is the greater than high priest, as he is compared to and contrasted with the Levitical priesthood and presented as the anti-type of Melchizedek. The priestly role was one of mediation; they represented the people to God, and offered sacrifices for sin (Atonement). The author of Hebrews though, shows us that the priests themselves were also morally flawed individuals just like people were, and had to offer sacrifices not only for others' sins, but also for their own. The sacrificial system should make us feel like the biblical authors are leaving us hanging. There has to be something more, enter Jesus. The author puts forth Jesus as the "greater than" high priest, but not from the Aaronic line, but mentions this obscure priest-king named Melchizedek from the time of Abraham (See Gen. 14 and Psa. 110). Psalm 110 explicitly states that the Messianic king will be a priestly-king in the order of Melchizedek (v.4). Melchizedek introduced a priesthood that is to be understood in contrast to Aaron's priesthood; one that would be future (Mathews).

Hebrews shows how this was fulfilled in Christ. The author's point is this, "Jesus is the ultimate priest king. He is morally flawless and he is eternally available, so he is superior to any other mediator who ever lived" (Mackie). The warning passage in this section (6:1-8), thus pleads to the reader not to reject Jesus, because to do so one rejects reconciliation with God simultaneously.

Jesus is shown to be the ultimate sacrifice and bearer of a better covenant in chapters eight through ten, in which he is compared to and contrasted with the sacrificial system and the Old Covenant. The preacher shows us how Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice in which he offered his life once for all sin. This act of love was sufficient to cover all the sins of the world once and for all. It's an incredibly profound statement. Up until Jesus, sacrifices were made not just on the day of Atonement, but daily, throughout the year, because of sin. Christ's sacrifice on the cross is shown to be superior to all prior animal sacrifices made in the temple. Jesus' sacrifice was permanent, and the foundation for the New Covenant spoken of in the prophets (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36). So, the warning here is to not turn away from Jesus, because to do so is to spit in the face of God, as he's trying to offer you his mercy, grace, and forgiveness (10:26-31).

Chapters 11-13 are essentially a challenge to follow Jesus. The author and preacher has just shown us how Jesus is the fulfillment of all these things mentioned above, that they pointed to him, but he does even more than that. Moving back and forth from exposition to exhortation he shows us why this all makes logical sense. Jesus is the better messenger (he is the word of God, see Jn.1), the better priest who offers a better covenant and a better sacrifice (7:11; 10:11-18). Further, in Jesus, we have hope for the future (the New Creation). Knowing this, we should follow the examples of faith and perseverance found all throughout the stories of the Bible (see especially ch.11), and we should remain faithful to Jesus and trust that despite the hardships and persecution we will face, God will not abandon his children; he will be true to his promises (10:32-39; 13:5). Dr. Mackie points out the two main goals of this book as: elevating Jesus as superior to all things and challenging the reader to remain faithful to Jesus despite persecution (BPV).

Hebrews in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Hebrews quotes or alludes to the Old Testament, more than any other book of the New Testament, save Revelation. It would be impossible to share all of these instances in a survey such as this, because they are many! So, simply mentioning a few must suffice. Dr. Mackie points out the two main goals of the book of Hebrews as: (1) elevating Jesus as superior to all things and (2) challenging the reader to remain faithful to Jesus despite persecution (BPV). It is to this end that every OT quotation is used. Psalm 110 is used prevalently throughout this letter (1:13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). It happens to be one of the most Christological-Messianic texts from the OT as well. Further, it is the only other occurrence outside of the book of Hebrews other than Genesis 14 (referred to in Hebrews as well) to the mysterious character Melchizedek. Passages from the wilderness wanderings in the book of Numbers, the law in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy (particularly the sacrificial system) are influential as well. Without the OT background and context of these stories found especially in the Torah, when the author makes his claims and argument, he would have no basis for saying such things. Jesus can be said to be the greater than Moses, the better priest, the ultimate sacrifice, and the greater hope precisely because of these stories found in the Hebrew Bible. Each comparison of OT figures or events to Jesus, garner their meaning from OT itself. The power and profundity of Hebrews would not

exist without the OT. We are indebted to God for granting us such an amazing explanation of how Jesus fulfilled the law, showing us the continuity between the OT and the NT. The author of this book shows us why biblical theology is so important, and how to read our Bibles for all they are worth.

In Relation to the NT

As with in any letter we encounter in the New Testament, Hebrews relies heavily on the knowledge of the cross work of Christ and what it accomplished and means for the believer. Without the gospels this letter would be meaningless. What connects Hebrews so well with the rest of the New Testament is its key themes, which show the continuity between the New Testament authors. Faith is the major theme in Hebrews, particularly chapter 11 which essentially is like Israel's top 20 hits in regard to faith. This is prevalent throughout the NT as well (Matt. 21:21; Acts 15:9; Rom. 1 and 3; 1 Cor.2; Gal.2:20; Eph.2; etc.). The supremacy of Christ is also a major theme in the book of Hebrews, perhaps the central theme from the introduction (1:1-3), to the arguments in chapters 1-10, to the benediction (13:20-21). This theme is vital to Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:15-18; 2:9), Philippians (2:6-11), and John's gospel and letters (Jn. 1; 1 Jn. 1). Also noteworthy are the themes of reconciliation (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18;), forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Acts 13:38-39), revelation (Jn.1; Eph. 4:17-32), perseverance (Rom.12:12; Rev.3:10) and suffering/ persecution (1 and 2 Thess.; Jam.1:13; Rev. 2:10). These are spoken on throughout this letter/sermon and make the claims about Jesus so powerful and profound.

Key Themes and Application

Supremacy of Christ

Along with Colossians one and two and Philippians two the book of Hebrews stands out as one of the most Christological passages in the entire Bible. Structurally it is designed to showcase Jesus Christ as being superior to all creation from beginning to end. The bones of this letter won't let us escape the author's persuasive argument. If Jesus is supreme over all things, then that means everything he established is supreme as well. His instructions, teachings, way of life, priesthood, sacrifice, kingdom, covenant, salvation, and "New Creation" surpass all forms of prior revelation, and "types" before him. We have explored this further in the "main idea" section above further. Particularly in chapter 1:1-13 though, this can be seen and sets the tone for the rest of the letter. Essentially, it states that there is no God apart from Jesus, he is God in the flesh, the ultimate revelation of the nature and character of the Father (using many OT citations including Deut. 32; 2 Sam.7; Psa. 2 and 110). Therefore, Jesus is superior to all the prior ways Yahweh had revealed himself to Israel (Mathews). The rest of this sermon explores this profound truth, and aims to show the reader why rejecting God's grace and mercy given in the gift of the Son is such a huge mistake. It doesn't make logical sense after reading this book. The Bible is to illicit two primary responses, belief and obedience, and that is what the author is aiming at here.

Jesus as High Priest

This theme is peppered throughout the book of Hebrews, but perhaps climatically so in chapter seven. We need to take a step back for a moment though. In Matthew 22:41 Jesus quotes Psalm 110, a text where David says the messianic king will also be a priest. This is profound, because offices that weren't supposed to mingle, David is claiming will one day in the Messiah be one. This may seem like a stretch, or that make us question, "Is their precedence for this?" It is a fair question to which the

answer is yes, there is. This is where the mysterious character of Melchizedek enters the argument put forth by the author (see, Gen. 14, and Psalm 110 for context). Hebrews seven systematically dissects the “mystery” surrounding this obscure reference, and it goes like this: vv.1-10 seeks to answer who Melchizedek is, secondly, why is Jesus not taken from Levi (v. 11-19), and in vv. 20-28 why is Jesus ultimate high priest? It seems to me that Melchizedek was a real person who prefigured the type of priesthood Jesus would one day institute. He was a “type” of Christ. Melchizedek was a king and a priest, without a genealogy (Gen.14). This a way of saying there is no mention of his heritage in the Scriptures, not that he’s some supernatural being, it seems to me. If one wanted to be a priest they had to prove they were Levite through and through, but it seems his qualifications didn’t come from his family lineage. Dr. Art Azurdia comments, “The author of Hebrews is saying that the priesthood of Melchizedek stands in defiance of the Levitical priesthood transcending ancestral lineage and temporal limitations. Built into the Old Covenant, there is a different priesthood” (Lecture). God designed a priesthood that would be better than that of Levi and Aaron, to foreshadow Jesus, for in Jesus there is a perfect fusion of king and priest. If the Levitical priesthood could accomplish salvation, why prophesy about a different priesthood and need for it in Psalm 110? Humanity must need a new priesthood.

The old system could not get the job done and by design, it seems, was attached to a covenant that has been replaced. Further, Scripture intentionally shows the sins of priests. They were inadequate, and so were their sacrifices. Hebrews 10 talks about this, that they could never make perfect, never take away sins. The sacrifices were ongoing and the continuation was not efficacious. God’s intention was always to prefigure, and foreshadow Jesus who would get the job done, who could accomplish the task because he was perfectly sinless. Chapter 8:7 states that if the Old Covenant was adequate, then the New Covenant wouldn’t need to be sought for. In speaking of a NC he makes the OC obsolete (NC texts, Deut.10:12-22; Jer. 31; Ezek.36). When Jesus said, “it is finished” God’s plan to save was accomplished. We can’t have it both ways. If the Old Covenant is enforced, Jesus is an imposter. However, if he is a different priest he has made the Old Covenant obsolete, for in his death and resurrection he inaugurated the New Covenant as the better-than priest, mediator, and sacrifice.

Faith

Faith is the major theme in Hebrews, particularly chapter 11 which essentially is like Israel’s top 20 hits in regard to faith. This is prevalent throughout the NT as well (Matt. 21:21; Acts 15:9; Rom. 1 and 3; 1 Cor.2; Gal.2:20; Eph.2; etc.). This isn’t blind faith, but a sturdy, eyes-wide-open type of faith. Chapter 11:1 reads, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This is not blind at all. Faith rests assured that God will be faithful to his promises, and so looks ahead with eager anticipation and confidence. Faith also embraces the reality and conviction that there is a spiritual realm, there is more out there than our eyes can see, namely a creator God who is holy, righteous, just and good and has exclusive claim and authority over all he has made. As Christians today when we say we have faith in God this is what we are claiming.

Warning Passages

Chapters 2:1-4; 6:1-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29 comprise the “warning passages” of this letter/sermon. The four major sections that form the body of the letter all conclude with warnings for the reader. Different scholars and commentators differ on how one should interpret these difficult passages. The issue is that at first glance it seems as though there is hint of a possibility that one might be able to drift away and lose their salvation. This seems like a contradiction to rest the of New

Testament revelation of eternal security. So, what is going on here? First of all, these passages are supposed to make us uncomfortable and challenge us, but not make us afraid or unsure of our standing with God. These passages must be understood within the context of the entire book, which presents these warnings in the context of salvation being sure (3:1; 6:9, 10-20; 10:10,14,32,34;13:5,20-21). Given the witness of all the Holy Scriptures from cover to cover, it is my conviction that genuine believers will persevere until the end, because Christianity is a status given to the elect by God in union with Christ (John 6:37; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). I believe the Spirit indwells every individual believer at conversion (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:19), incorporates them into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27), and regenerates them giving them a new heart with new desires (Ezek. 36:25-28; John 3:3-8; 1 Pet. 1:23; Tit. 3:3-7). He seals believers in their relationship with God for eternity (Jn. 14:7; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30) and begins the work of the assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:14-17; 1 Jn. 4:13), gifting (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12 and 14; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), and fruit bearing (John 15:1-5, 16; Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-17; 2 Pet. 1:5-9). This being said it seems to me in these warning passages, the ones who fall away are unbelievers who have never come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Romans nine talks about this in the context of not all who are Israel being “true” Israel (see also Gen.12,15,18; Rom. 2; Jn.).

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The Book of James

Structure



Main Idea: The book of James is a call and a challenge to live wisely and in wholehearted devotion to God.

Main Idea Explained

Though the author of the Book of James is debated, most believe him to be the half-brother of Jesus, one of the prominent leaders of the mother church in Jerusalem (see Acts 12 and 15; Gal. 1-2) {Mathew}. This letter reads much differently than Paul’s letter, which typically has a specific audience, follows a logical argument of some kind, starts with theological truth, then moves to real life application. James reads more like the wisdom literature in the Old Testament, and rather than develop a theological argument, he wants to challenge the readers on how they are to live their lives. After reading this powerful letter closely, one will realize that there are two dominate influences on James’ thinking and writing: Jesus’ teachings (especially the Sermon on the Mount {Mat. 5-7}) and the Book of Proverbs (especially chs.1-9) {Mackie}. James calls his readers to operate in wisdom, following Jesus’ way of life.

Chapter one contains the introduction to the letter. Much like many of the Old Testament books, the first chapter of James gives us the key words, themes, and ideas that get developed throughout the rest of the letter (chs. 2-5). After his greeting (v.1) he jumps straight into telling them that he knows from personal experience that life as a believer isn’t easy (v.2-4). The trials one faces in life, James teaches, are actually paradoxical gifts that can actually shape our character (Mackie). God can do amazing work inside of us amidst our suffering, and help us become “perfect and complete” (1:4). The word “perfect” is repeated seven times in the book, and as Dr. Mackie notes, “In Hebrew and in Greek it refers to wholeness. It means living an integrated life where your actions are always consistent with the values and beliefs that you have received from Jesus” (Lecture). No human being lives a consistent life all of the time, but the Holy Spirit works in and through us to make us more like our savior, Jesus. We are all more broken than we’d like to admit. However, we serve a God who is on a mission to restore fractured and broken people and to make them whole again. In verses five through eight we learn that this begins with wisdom, which God gives freely to those who ask in faith (1:6). In this context true wisdom means choosing to believe that God is good despite our circumstances. Verses nine through eleven speak of poverty (which should cause occasion to trust in God even more), and riches (which are fleeting and unsure). Verses 12-18 record James’ wisdom on trials, temptations, and the character of God. We shouldn’t accuse God for our circumstances, but rather trust him and remember that he understands and is with us through the pain and hardships of life. James sums up this section by teaching his readers that God who through Jesus has given us “new birth” to become a new

creation, they can place their total trust in his hands like Jesus did (Mackie) {see Jn.1:13; Gal. 4:19; 1 Pet. 1:3, 2; Rom. 8:19-23; Rev. 14:4}. Verses 19-27 close the chapter and introduction to this letter with what seems to me to be the New Testament version of the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9, look for the similarities and reference to it). Living as this new humanity spoken of above is a reality when we don't just listen to God's word, but do what it says. James calls God's word, "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (1:25). Here he is referring to the greatest command of the entire Old Testament, passed along to us also by Jesus (Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18), that he freed us to love God and love our neighbor (see Matt. 22:34-40). James then shows us what that love looks like: speaking lovingly and kindly to others, serving the poor, and living with whole hearted devotion to God alone (Mackie).

Chapters two through five record James' teachings about wholehearted devotion to God. They don't develop in a linear way per se, each teaching almost stands alone, and concludes with a catchy one-liner (Mackie). However, all of these teachings are connected through the shared key themes and words that get repeated throughout. Chapter 2:1-13 is about favoritism. We tend to show favoritism to people who can benefit us, and we neglect people who can't. James points out though, that this is the opposite of Jesus' teaching on love and care (Matt. 5:46-48). James goes on in chapter 2:14-26 to show the reader what genuine faith does and doesn't look like. It plays off of the "rich and poor" contrast mentioned above. James gets in our face and says if we say we believe in God, but neglect the poor and needy, our faith is dead. Our actions betray us because we don't show in actions what we profess to believe with our tongues. Genuine faith always results in obedience to God's demands in Scripture (Deut. 6:4-9; Jer. 11:6; Matt. 7:21-27; Lk. 6:46; Rom.1:5 and 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Chapters 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12 record James' teaching about our words. The brother of Jesus has some strong words for us. He says with the same mouth we praise God, we also cause pain (see Lk. 6:43-45), we judge people and gossip about them (Matt. 12:36-37), and we all tend to distort the truth to our own advantage. Dr. Mackie comments, "How we talk about people opens up a window into our hearts and core values. Our words tell the real truth about our character (Matt. 5:37)" (BPV).

Chapters 4:13-17 and 5:1-11 speak to the arrogance and danger of wealth (Mackie) {see, Matt. 6:19-21,28-34}. The kingdom of God and the gospel break down the barriers in our world that are created by social status and wealth. Wealth can create false security in a fleeting commodity; we have no idea what tomorrow will bring (4:13-17). Chapter 5:7-11 forms a contrast to worldliness. Rather than place our hope the things of this world, Jesus' followers are to live in patience and endurance placing their hope in Jesus who will one day set all things right (Matt. 24:13). This then should inspire a life of integrity (5:12) and faith-filled prayer, rather than trust in our own strength cunning (5:13-18; Matt. 21:21-22).

Chapters 3:13-16 and 4:1-10 speak about true and false wisdom (see Matt. 5:3-11), and having a divided heart (see Matt. 6:24) and the book concludes with a charge about restoring others (Matt.18:15). As Dr. Mackie observes, the book of James' wisdom is essentially a further outworking of Jesus' summary of the Torah, to love God and to love your neighbor (Matt. 22:34-40; see also Deut. 6:4-9; Lev.19:18).

James in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

It's safe to say that James was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience when he penned this letter. That doesn't mean that it is not relevant for today, or that there weren't gentiles among the recipients, but his letter reflects a deep and thorough knowledge of the Old Testament. Not just in the things he says, but in how James writes, he sounds a lot like the book of Proverbs, particularly chapters one through nine. The book of Proverbs shows people what it means to fear Yahweh, and how to live and act wisely in the world he created. Chapters one through nine record the wisdom speeches of the book of Proverbs. The first nine verses fittingly contain the introduction to the book. These first few verses tell the reader exactly what the rest of the book is going to be about, primarily three things: wisdom, instruction, and fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:2-7). The book of James is the New Testament version of Proverbs, full of metaphors and catchy one-liners, too many to reference here, but important to the message of his writing (see 1:5-8; 3:4, 13-18; ch.5). James speaks explicitly about wisdom, presenting it as a response to living a godly life. In the midst of trials, it is to be viewed as a gift of God, played out in virtuous action. Further, James relies heavily on Leviticus 19 in his letter, as it is referenced from beginning to end (Lev. 19:12 = James 5:12 swearing, Lev. 19:13 = James 5:4 rebuke against the wealthy, Lev. 19:15 = James 2:1,9 don't show partiality, Lev. 19:16 = James 4:11 don't speak evil against each other, Lev. 19:17 = James 5:20 bringing sinners back/restoration, Lev. 19:18 = James 5:9 vengeance against brothers, and Lev. 19:18 = James 2:8 love neighbor as self) {Mathews}. Chapter 2:18-26 references the Abraham stories as well (12 and 14-15).

In Relation to the NT

James' use of the Old Testament has two main influences (Leviticus and Proverbs). In relation to the New Testament, though written much earlier than the gospel accounts were, James relies heavily on his brother's teaching and essentially exposit further the implication of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7). James teaches us to: Rejoice in Trials (Jam.1:2 =Matt. 5:10-12), that Jesus will make us perfect and complete (Jam. 1:4 =Matt. 5:48), to ask our wise God to give good things (Jam. 1:5,17 =Matt. 7:7-11), to avoid sinful anger before a righteous God (Jam.1:19-20=Matt. 5:22), to be doers of the word not hearers only (Jam. 1:22 = Matt. 7:24-27, to cultivate in ourselves God's heart for the poor (Jam. 2:5=Matt. 5), Judgement and Mercy (Jam. 2:13= Matt. 5:7) and many more (Mathews). Secondly, readers of James will usually encounter in certain scholarship the debate of seemingly contradictory statements or beliefs between James and Paul. The key passage from which continuity between the authors can be defended is James 2:14-26. James teaches that you are justified by works; you don't have true faith if you have no works (appealing to Gen.15:6 and Abraham). Many think that Paul and James are at odds, that Paul said it is apart from works (Gal. 3:6, Rom.4:3). However, what James is saying is that there is a certain kind of faith that does not justify (2:19). Faith is not just an intellectual accent. Paul and James are simply combating different things, Paul, legalism and James, lawlessness. Faith requires action; it's not genuine if you don't do anything with it.

Key Themes and Application

Faith Expressed in Action and Living Wisely

Though weaved throughout James' letter, the key passage for this theme is found in chapter 2:14-26. It pulls its authority from Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (7:21-27). James gets in our face and says if we say we believe in God, but neglect the poor and needy, our faith is dead. Our actions betray us because we don't show in actions what we profess to believe with our tongues. Genuine faith always results in obedience to God's demands in Scripture (Deut. 6:4-9; Jer. 11:6; Matt.

7:21-27; Lk. 6:46; Rom.1:5 and 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). Genuine faith produces a life of increasing integrity, compassion, and concern for others' needs and troubles.

Wealth and Poverty

James' teaching echoes much of what we find in the book of Proverbs (see Jam. 1:9-11,27-28; 4:6,14-17;5:1-6). In the kingdom of God there is a reversal of fortunes, if you will. God opposes the proud and arrogant and exalts the humble and lowly (see Hannah's song 1 Sam. 2). This is one of the main themes in the books of Samuel as well. It is a paradigm for how God works in the world, and it is also a theme that speaks to his sovereignty quite profoundly as his providential hand works in our lives to accomplish his redemptive purposes. James says "pure religion" is taking care of orphans and widows, not ignoring or exploiting them. Chapter 2:1-13 is about favoritism. We tend to show favoritism to people who can benefit us, and we neglect people who can't. James points out though, that this is the opposite of Jesus' teaching on love and care (Matt. 5:46-48). Chapters 4:13-17 and 5:1-11 speak to the arrogance and danger of wealth (Mackie) {see, Matt. 6:19-21,28-34}. The kingdom of God and the gospel break down the barriers in our world that are created by social status and wealth. Wealth can create false security in a fleeting commodity; we have no idea what tomorrow will bring (4:13-17). Chapter 5:7-11 forms a contrast to worldliness. Rather than place our hope the things of this world, Jesus' followers are to live in patience and endurance, placing their hope in Jesus who will one day set all things right (Matt. 24:13). This then should inspire a life of integrity (5:12) and faith-filled prayer, rather than trust in our own strength cunning (5:13-18; Matt. 21:21-22).

Our Words

Chapters 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12 record James' teaching about our words. The brother of Jesus has some strong words for us. He says with the same mouth we praise God, with we also cause pain (see Lk. 6:43-45), we judge people and gossip about them (Matt. 12:36-37), and we all tend to distort the truth to our own advantage. Dr. Mackie comments, "How we talk about people opens up a window into our hearts and core values. Our words tell the real truth about our character (Matt. 5:37)" (BPV).

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The Book of 1 Peter

Structure

Chapter 1:1-12

Greeting and
Song of Praise

Chapter 1:13-2:10

A New Identity

Chapter 2:11-4:11

Suffering as a
Witness to Jesus

Chapter 4:12-5:9

Suffering and
Future Hope

Chapter 5:10-14

Closing Remarks

(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: 1 Peter offers hope to the persecuted church and gives instructions on how to live a godly life despite the trials and temptations one faces on this earth.

Main Idea Explained

Peter was one of Jesus' original twelve disciples and became a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church, the first formal Christ community (Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 1-10). Though Peter is the most likely author, this letter is written in Rome by a scribe, Silvanus (5:12-13), and intended to be a circulating letter to Christians living in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. The church was facing hostility and persecution (2:12, 3:16,4:16), so it seems Peter wrote to encourage them in their suffering. Dr. Josh Mathews says the theme of this entire letter could be summed up this way, "Better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Better to suffer than to sin" (Lecture). Worth noting, "unlike Paul, who often develops a theological point before applying it, Peter mixes doctrine and application. Nearly every paragraph opens with a command, which is then grounded by theology brought in along the way" (Carson, 140)

The formal greeting comes in chapter 1:1-2. Peter opens this letter by saying it is to the "elect" people of God who have been exiled and scattered among the world. Dr. Mackie points out that Peter makes clear throughout this letter that the people he is talking to are mostly Gentiles (see 1:14,18;4:3-4), but here he describes them using Old Testament descriptions that show how God chose Israel and Abraham (see Gen. 18:19 and Isa.41:8), and how Abraham was an exile and a wanderer (Gen. 23:4)" (BPV). It seems to me the purpose of this explicit language and comparison is to show those suffering that through Jesus they now belong to the family of Abraham and, "now they are exiles just like him. They are misunderstood, mistreated, and looking for their home in the true promised land" (Mackie).

Chapter 1:3-12 is a poem or song of praise about God giving us new birth, new life, and a living hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is inviting everyone into his family. A family characterized by its Jesus-centered way of life, its new identity as his children, and its hope for the future return of Christ. For people who have this hope, Peter teaches us that suffering and persecution actually can be strange gifts in a way. How so? His argument seems to say, because suffering burns away false hopes and distractions like a purifying fire, and it reminds us of our true home and hope

(Mackie). Paradoxically then our hardships, if we allow them to as a believer, actually deepen our faith (1:7) and make it more authentic, more genuine. After this powerful intro, Peter moves on to explore more deeply these ideas found in these first few verses in the sections making up the main body of the letter.

Chapter 1:13-2:10 elaborates on our new identity as members of God’s family. Believers having a new family identity is a key theme throughout the book. Peter uses even more Old Testament images than in the greeting 1:1-2, and applies them to non-Jewish Christians. There is much typology taking place here worth noting. To survey a few, the Gentile Christians are like the Israelites that left Egypt, because they too are to “gird up their loins” (1:13; Exod. 12:11) and leave their former way of life and embrace the new. They too are the holy people of God now (1:15-16; Lev. 11:44). They are a new people on a journey, a “new exodus”, and now celebrate a better Passover, as Jesus was the ultimate new Passover lamb (1:17-21; Exod. 12-15). Further, they are the people of the New Covenant having the Law written on their hearts and being shaped and molded by the Holy Spirit (1:22-25; Isa. 40; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36 and 37). They are the new temple built on Jesus himself (2:1-8; Isa. 28:16; Psa. 118:22), and finally they are a kingdom of priests representing God to the nations (2:9-10; Exod. 19:4-6). Dr. Mackie notes that, “By applying all of these amazing images to Gentile Christians, Peter is placing their suffering within a brand-new story” (BPV).

Chapter 2:11-4:11 teaches us how our suffering is a witness to Jesus. It is precisely because we are a part of God’s new covenant family that we can view suffering how Peter teaches us to here. Our new identity as a believer, gives us lenses in which we can view persecution in a way that gives it meaning and purpose in our lives. Peter shows how persecution can actually help bring clarity to the churches’ mission in the world, and aid in spreading the gospel. In chapter 2:13-17 he gets very practical and encourages them to submit to governmental authority, Roman rule in this case, even if it’s oppressive. Peter recognizes that how his brothers and sisters are being treated is unjust, but he reminds us that violence solves nothing, and rebellion betrays Jesus’ teachings and lifestyle, because he loved his enemies instead of killing them, but even more, he loved them so much he let them kill him. He gave up his life for them (Jn. 10). Chapter 2:18-3:7 highlights how Christians, though being fully liberated by the cross work of Christ, are to demonstrate their freedom, not through rebellion, but by resisting evil the same way Jesus did (Matt. 4), and by showing love, even to the persecutors, instigators, and inflictors (Jn. 3:16; Matt. 5-7). Peter urges us to believe that Jesus’ upside-down kingdom of hope and love will give us power to share the beautiful truth about the way of Jesus.

Future vindication is the focus for Peter in chapter 3:8-4:11. Peter understands humanity, so he reminds us of our future vindication, when God will settle accounts, bring final justice, and make things right. He reminds us that Jesus himself was persecuted and murdered by corrupt and sinful humans, but afterward was vindicated and given resurrection life by the Holy Spirit (Mackie). Now he sits exalted as king over all human and spiritual powers at the right hand of God the Father (Mk. 16:19; Acts 2:33; Phil. 2:6-11). Peter then moves on to explain how baptism points to the vindication of Jesus’ followers in that like Noah (Gen. 6-9 flood narrative) they have been saved through the waters (Mathews). This is not a magic ritual, but rather, a sacred symbol showing their change of heart and desire to be joined to Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:37-41; 16:14-15; Rom. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:21). Therefore, even if terrible atrocities befall us, our hope is in future vindication and exaltation alongside our savior Jesus.

The last major section of the body of Peter's first letter deals once again with suffering, but through the viewpoint of future hope (4:12-5:9). Peter reminds us that Jesus' followers should count it joy to be persecuted because of him, because he was persecuted too, and he will reward our faithfulness (Matt. 5:11-12). In chapter 5:1-5 Peter calls church leaders to care for their people, these suffering Christians, and to show the same kind of self-sacrificial servant leadership that Jesus did to his disciples and followers. He then moves to keep us in check regarding who our real enemy is (5: 6-9). As Dr. Mack Points out, "The hostility isn't merely cultural or political. There are evil spiritual forces at work inspiring hatred and violence in the world" (BPV). Christians are to resist this evil by staying faithful to Jesus and his teachings. Further, they are to anticipate his ultimate victory upon his coming again to bring final justice and vindicate his people.

Chapter 5:10-14 concludes this powerful letter with a prayer for divine strength (Mackie). 1 Peter is a powerful reminder of Christian hope amid suffering. God's people have been a misunderstood minority from the beginning and should expect to face hostility, because they have chosen to live under the rule of a different king, Jesus (Mackie). Persecution can become a strange gift because it offers us a chance to show others the grace of God and the love of Jesus both fueled by the hope of his return (Mathews).

1 Peter in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Peter uses many Old Testament passages to ground his theology in Scripture. The letters of Peter in particular use typology frequently. Though sprinkled throughout this letter, the introduction (1:1-2), chapter 1:13-2:10, and the conclusion (5:10-14) are perhaps the greatest examples of Peter's reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures to encourage and bring hope to a persecuted and suffering people. In the opening greeting Peter makes the claim that Gentile Christians are now part of the family God (see, Gen. 18,24, Isa. 41). Chapter 1:13-2:10 elaborates on our new identity as members of God's family. Believers having a new family identity is a key theme throughout the book. Peter uses Old Testament images and applies them to non-Jewish Christians. To survey a few, the Gentile Christians are like the Israelites that left Egypt, because they too are to "gird up their loins" (1:13; Exod. 12:11) and leave their former way of life and embrace the new. They too are the holy people of God now (1:15-16; Lev. 11:44). They are a new people on a journey, a "new exodus", and now celebrate a better Passover, as Jesus was the ultimate new Passover lamb (1:17-21; Exod. 12-15). Further, they are the people of the New Covenant having the Law written on their hearts and being shaped and molded by the Holy Spirit (1:22-25; Isa. 40; Jer. 31; Ezek.36 and 37). They are the new temple built on Jesus himself (2:1-8; Isa. 28:16; Psa.118:22), and finally they are a kingdom of priests representing God to the nations (2:9-10; Exod. 19:4-6). In the concluding section Peter sends greeting from the church in Rome which he calls Babylon. What he is doing here is adopting the tradition of the OT prophets for whom the name Babylon became an archetype for every and any corrupt nation (Jer. 50-51) {Mackie}. So, what Peter is implying is that Rome has become the new Babylon on the block, "where God's people are now exiled from their true home in the new creation" (Mackie).

In Relation to the NT

One of the amazing things about 1 Peter, as with some of the other epistles, is that Peter did life with Jesus. Like James, they shared meals together, cried together, laughed together, and did ministry

together. Peter was one of the Twelve disciples whose life can be read about in the four gospel accounts. Further, he became a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church, the first formal Christ community (Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 1-10). 1 Peter carries along several key themes that can be found in others letters, by different authors such as regeneration/new life/new I.D. (Jn. 1:13, 3:3-8; Eph. 2:4-5; Tit. 3:5; Jam. 1:18; 1 Jn. 2:29,3:9,4:7,5:1,4,18), suffering (Matt.10:22;Acts14:22;Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim.3:12; 2 Thess. 1:4-5), and future hope in Jesus' return and vindication of his people (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:27; 4:13- 5:1-11; Rev. 21:4).

Key Themes and Application

Suffering

The whole tone of the letter is framed by the theme of suffering and living in a situation of exile. In chapter 1:6-7 Peter likens suffering with purification of precious metals. The apostle wants their faith to be like those metals. That is to continue to be strong in suffering, and bring God glory in and through it allowing him to shape and mold them under the heat, more in to his image. In chapter 2:19-24 we see that suffering is something we should be grateful for as God looks highly upon those who suffer. Peter then gives Christ as an example of ultimate suffering, making the point, it seems to me, that suffering isn't always a result of sin (that's why he uses Christ as an example) {Mathews}. Our tendency is to be like Job's friends, but sometimes we suffer because we live in a broken world, not because of personal sin. 3:13-17 teaches us that it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, "Better to suffer than to sin" (Mathews). Once again Jesus is brought up as an example of suffering. It is within this context that we receive the instructions to have a reason for the hope we have in Christ. Why? It is because people will see us suffering with a hopefulness and joy that does not make sense, opening up opportunities to share the gospel with others. Lastly in this section Peter reminds us that suffering can tempt us to deviate from Godliness, therefore we must be on guard. Chapter 4:12-19 teaches us that we shouldn't be surprised when we suffer, but rejoice in the fact that we share in Christ's suffering. So, we continue doing good and avoiding sin, because we serve a God that we can trust fully to bring us out the other side, the dross gone, like refined and purged precious metals.

A New Life, A New Family Identity, and a Hope for the Future

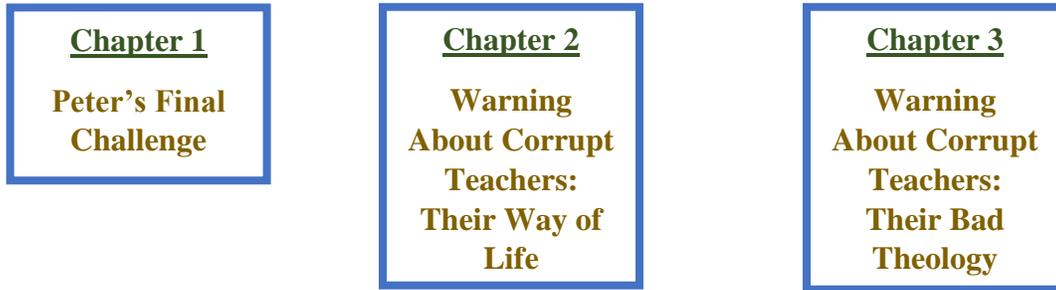
These interconnected themes are an artery of the New Testament (Rom. 6:6; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:3; Eph.1:5; Tit. 3:5). For Peter it is an important aspect of what it means to be a believer. Chapter 1:3-12 is a poem or song of praise about God giving us new birth, new life and a living hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is inviting everyone into his family. A family characterized by its Jesus-centered way of life, its new identity as his children, and its hope for the future return of Christ. For people who have this hope, even suffering and persecution can be gifts. How so? Suffering burns away false hopes and distractions like a purifying fire, and it reminds us of our true home and hope (Mackie). Paradoxically then our hardships, if we allow them to as a believer, actually deepen our faith (1:7). Christians are to resist evil by staying faithful to Jesus and his teachings as they anticipate his ultimate victory upon his coming again to bring final justice and vindicate his people (4:12-5:9).

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The Book of 2 Peter

Structure



(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: 2 Peter encourages believers to grow in their faith, and records how Peter combated false teaching in the churches that were leading some astray.

Main Idea Explained

Peter claims to be the author (1:1-2,16) and his second letter is addressed to the same network of churches in 1 Peter (1 Pet. 1:1;3:1). It is likely written from the same location, Rome (Mathews). Throughout the entire letter, Peter is countering accusations made by false teachers that have emerged within the church, against himself, the other apostles, and Jesus' teaching (1:16-20; 2:1-3;3:1-4). Peter's goal is to restore order and confidence to these church communities, in a letter that carries the tone of being a farewell speech (1:14).

Chapter one could be summed up as Peter's farewell speech to the churches. Verses one through eleven record Peter's exhortation to never stop growing and maturing as Christians. Peter opens with a powerful reminder that through Jesus, God has invited people to be participants in his own divine "nature" (v.4), that is, "to share in God's own eternal life and love" (Mackie). This is an incredible statement, and one that requires a life-long response on our part to develop a character like our savior's. That is why, after saying this, Peter then immediately lists seven traits to strive for (representative not exhaustive): goodness, knowledge, self-control, godliness, endurance, strong familial relationships, and love (Mackie). Continuing, chapter 1:12-15 contains the letter's purpose, "A memorial of Peter's teaching that can be passed on to later generations because he's not going to be around to give it much longer in person" (Mackie). Before he dies Peter wants to put to death the objections and accusations being made by the teachers who are distorting and perverting the gospel. The first of the three objections comes in the concluding verses of chapter one (1:16-20). The teachers' first claim is that the apostles made up everything; they fabricated the gospel. Peter responds by sharing his eyewitness account of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain from Mark nine where he saw Jesus exalted as king. Because of this, and the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, we have hope that God will one day restore our world and reign as our king. The future return of Christ will fulfill the promises of Scripture. It is here that next, Peter delivers one of the primary texts from which to defend our doctrine of inspiration (vv.19-21). The Old Testament prophecies are not fantasies, and the gospel is not a hoax. God himself has spoken to us in his word (Scripture) and in the Word (Jesus).

In chapter two Peter warns the churches about the corrupt teachers' way of living. In the opening verse we receive the second objection in the letter: a denial of a future day when God will

come to settle accounts (2:1-3). As Dr. Mackie notes, “This denial is what conveniently allows these teachers to ignore Jesus’ teachings about money and sex in particular” (BPV). These teachers are charging for their knowledge and sleeping around. Peter rebuts that God will meet their rebellion and sin with his justice (2:4-11). He does this by using several examples of divine justice from the Hebrew Bible: the Sons of God in Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch {extra biblical}), the flood (Gen. 6-8), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). If we think back we will remember that these are all stories about rebellion that led to judgement. However, we must not forget that God also was faithful to deliver his people amid chaos and sin. It is through these stories and what they represent that Peter connects the false teachers’ lifestyle to them. They scoff at God’s rule and authority and are leading others to think that God doesn’t care about their moral decisions (Mackie). They use the reality of freedom in Christ (5:1) and use it as a license to live their libertine lifestyle. Dr. Mathews comments that these teachers have distorted Paul’s message of freedom in Christ, and perhaps as Dr. Mackie explains, “This is why Peter is going to bring up Paul’s letters later in chapter three (see, Rom. 6)” {Mackie}. Peter notes that in reality, these teachers are slaves to their sin; they aren’t really free at all. In an allusion to Proverbs (26:11), Peter says they have become embodiments of the explicit images of a dog returning to its vomit, and a clean pig rolling in the mire.

Peter then address the teachers’ denial of a future day when God will set the record straight (3:1-4), the third objection in his letter. Perhaps of all the objections this one can resonate with readers the most, and reflect how we may feel at times. They, the teachers, say that generations keep coming and going without seeing the fulfillment of their desires and hopes, which begs the question, “Where is the promised return of Jesus?” Chapter 3:5-9 records Peter’s response to their objection. He begins by explaining how the world came into existence. By the word of God the earth was made. He alone brought something out of nothing and brought order out of chaos, and he can and will do it again. So, the real question then is, “Why is God taking so long?” (Mackie). With this question Peter reminds us that our human conception of time is extremely limited as we are finite beings. God has always been; he has no point of origin. The long expanses of time through which God works doesn’t always work neatly into the framework of our very short lives (Mackie). However, Peter points out that these long amounts of time, actually show God’s patience. Every generation is offered the chance to repent before God and receive his grace. Verse ten through thirteen really hone in on the Day of the Lord with images from Isaiah 34 and Zephaniah 3. The DOTL will be a day when the earth and all its works are exposed, a day of vindication for the people of God and final justice administered. This being said, Peter emphasizes God’s purpose in his all-consuming justice. It is not to do away with the material universe, but rather, “to expose evil and injustice and remove it so that a new kind of heavens and earth can emerge. One that is permeated with righteousness, full of people who love God and love their neighbor” (BPV). Verses fourteen through eighteen record Peter’s final words reminding the churches of their future hope.

2 Peter in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

For such a short letter, 2 Peter is filled with many uses of the Old Testament Scriptures. In response to the first objection in chapter 1:16-20 that the apostles made up the gospel story, Peter offers his eyewitness account of the transfiguration from Mark nine where he saw Jesus exalted as king (a fulfillment of OT prophecy, see Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah). Chapter 2:1-11 contains Peter’s response

to the second objection addressed in the letter, that there won't be a final day of reckoning. Peter rebuts that God will meet their rebellion and sin with his justice (2:4-11). He does this by using several examples of divine justice from the Hebrew Bible: the Sons of God in Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch {extra biblical}, the flood (Gen. 6-8), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). If we think back we will remember that these are all stories about rebellion that led to judgement. However, we must not forget that God also was faithful to deliver his people amid chaos and sin. It is through these stories and what they represent that Peter connects the false teachers' lifestyle to them. Further in chapter 2:12-22 Peter notes that in reality, these teachers are slaves to their sin, they aren't really free at all like they think they are. In an allusion to Proverbs (26:11), Peter says they have become embodiments of the explicit images of a dog returning to its vomit, and a clean pig rolling in the mire. In chapter three Peter uses language and images from creation (Gen. 1) the prophets, and the DOTL theme (Isa. 34 Zech.3) to respond and correct the skepticism surrounding Jesus' second coming. All of Peter's defenses of the gospel message are done so with the Hebrew Scriptures.

In Relation to the NT

2 Peter taps into some key themes from other New Testament letters such as the DOTL and the second coming of Christ (Matt. 7:22-23; Rom. 2:16; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5) false teachers (2 Tim. 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 4:1-6), and the doctrine of inspiration (Jn. 1,14:26; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; Tim. 3:14-17). Many scholars notice a lot of similarity to 1 Peter and Jude in particular (Mathews). In chapter 1:16-20 Peter recounts his eyewitness encounter of the transfiguration which can be found in Mark nine, Matthew seventeen, and Luke nine. In chapter 2:12-22 (see Rom. 6) and 3:14-18 Peter alludes to and speaks about Paul's writing as being authoritative, as being Scripture.

Key Themes and Application

False Teachers

Peter address three objections to the gospel brought forward by the false teachers in his second letter to the churches: (1) the apostles made up everything (1:16-20), (2) there won't be final day of reckoning (2:1-3), and (3) when/ is Jesus really going to return? (3:1-4). The entire letter is about setting these objections straight. We learned these teachers are charging for their knowledge and sleeping around (ch.2). To this Peter says that God will meet their rebellion and sin with his justice (2:4-11). He does this by using several examples of divine justice from the Hebrew Bible: the Sons of God in Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch {extra biblical}, the flood (Gen. 6-8), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). If we think back we will remember that these are all stories about rebellion that led to judgement. It is through these stories and what they represent that Peter connects the false teachers' lifestyle to them. They scoff at God's rule and authority and are leading others to think that God doesn't care about their moral decisions (Mackie). They use the reality of freedom in Christ (Gal. 5:1) and use it as a license to live their libertine life style. Dr. Mathews comments that these teachers have distorted Paul's message of freedom in Christ, and perhaps as Dr. Mackie states, "This is why Peter is going to bring up Paul's letters which they have distorted later in chapter three (see, Rom. 6)" {Mackie}. Peter notes that in reality, these teachers are slaves to their sin; they aren't really free at all. In an allusion to Proverbs (26:11), Peter says they have become embodiments of the explicit images of a dog returning to its vomit, and a clean pig rolling in the mire. To follow them will lead to one's own demise. We must know what the Bible says for ourselves and test everything according to God's word. The new or

the charismatic may seem attractive or exciting, but if it denies obedience to Scripture and is contrary to the gospel, it is like cancer to the soul and we mustn't allow it to captivate us.

The DOTL and the Return of Christ

This theme is crucial to the letter as a whole (see, 1:16,19; 3:1-13 in particular). The Old Testament prophets saw this day as the day God's promises would be fulfilled, when eschatological realities would be realized, when the Messiah would come, and God would establish his kingdom forever over all creation. Secondly, this day, however, would bring a lot of judgement, for the DOTL is also the day of reckoning for the unrighteous. The DOTL will address injustice and rebellion which prophets use to refer to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do this for all creation, no longer in miniature. In the New Testament, this framework gets transformed in light of Jesus; the kingdom is "already, not yet". Meaning, we live in the inaugurated, but not yet consummated kingdom of God. Some aspects of the New Covenant are realities we live in today, but others are yet to come like a restored creation and people of God, final justice, and the full unshackled kingdom of God. We too are to embrace this reality teaching our Christ communities to not be afraid of this day, but embrace this truth and let it fuel our commitment and faithfulness to becoming more like Christ. His return should make our hearts excited, not ridden with fear, as we wait expectantly for his coming again. Peter uses this theme to motivate faithfulness and to show us that how we live our lives truly does matter to God. His grace is an invitation to live in his freedom, but freedom doesn't mean autonomy, but rather discipline, trust, and faithfulness.

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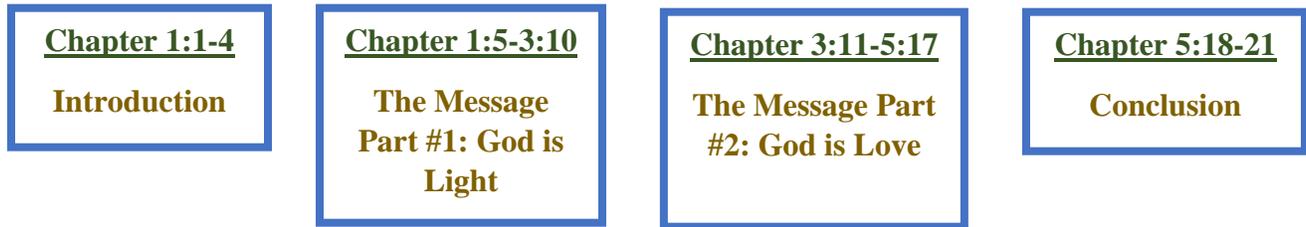
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The Book of 1 John

Structure



(The Bible Project)

Main Idea: 1 John calls believers to reflect the nature and character of God, particularly in their love and devotion to one another. 1 John also combats false teaching that is circulating and trying to make its way into the church.

Main Idea Explained

The author is technically anonymous, but widely accepted as the apostle John (see Jn. 21:20-24) as the connection in key themes, language, and ideas are all taken from the Gospel of John (see Jn. 13-17). A recent crisis seems to be on John's mind as he writes this. It seems that a group (called deceivers and anti-Christ in the letter) had left the church, adopted the heresy of denying Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (see 1 Jn. 2:18-23; 4:1-3), and were stirring up hostility (1 Jn.3:4-10) amongst the churches John resided over (Mackie). 1 John as well as 2 and 3 John were written to address these issues. John's task in his letters is to get these first-century Christians to stay faithful and true to what they already believe, the one true gospel. His writing is quite unique and he uses a style called amplification, and as Dr. Mackie notes,

John has just a few core ideas that he wants to communicate about life, truth, and love and he's going to cycle around these ideas repeatedly each time offering a little bit different of an angle or emphasis. He uses a lot of hyperbole, stark contrasts with simple images of light and dark and love and hate and good and evil. (BPV)

There is a clear introduction in chapter 1:1-4 and a clear conclusion in chapter 5:18-21, but the two main sections that make up the body of the letter, do not have a linear or ridged outline or flow of thought or argument that are typical of Paul's letters. John's letters are much different, but this doesn't mean that they were haphazardly thrown together or without intent. The two larger sections (1:5-3:10 and 3:11-5:17), Dr. Mackie points out, are each marked off by the phrase, "This is the message", and each is followed by a repetition of images about how God is "light" and then how God is "love" (BPV). It is within this organic, or fluid structure, if you will, that John brings us his simple, yet deeply profound teaching.

The introduction (1:1-4), is the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18), just in miniature (see also Gen. 1 and Prov. 8). John speaks of seeing firsthand along with the other apostles, "the word of life" that was with God in the beginning come in the flesh to bring eternal life into our world. It is this marvelous message, the gospel, that he and the eleven plus Paul have shared with them. It is through the sharing of the message of the gospel that people are brought into the family of God, and Jesus' story becomes their own when they place their faith and trust in him (Col. 3:3; Rom.10:9-15).

The first major section of the body of John's letter explains how the God revealed in Jesus is light (1:5-3:10). Chapter 1:5-2:11 is about "walking in the light" (1:7). Walking in the light for John means being holy as God is holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Pet. 1:15). Walking in the light means keeping Jesus' commands, and those who walk in the light are cleansed from their sin (v.7, 2:4 and 6; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). In verse eight through ten John points out perhaps what some of the false teachers were claiming, to be without sin. John says anyone who thinks this, does not have the truth in them, they deceive themselves, but those who confess their sin are cleansed from all unrighteousness (v.9). In chapter 2:11-17 John reminds the churches of Jesus' "old/new" command given to the disciples at the last supper. They were to love one another as he loved them (Jn. 13:34). Doing this, John says, is one major way to walk in the light. He goes on to say that the light is shining through because of Jesus, and now us, meaning the darkness is now beginning to pass away. God's children, already, in this moment have victory over the sin, evil, and death that reigns in the world (Mackie). This leads to John's challenge for the churches: Don't love the world (v.15-17). Why and what does he mean? It is passing away too like the darkness. John is speaking about the "world" as a way of life lived apart from God that distorts his will and ideals for humanity. I think it's fair to say he is speaking of the false teachers' way of life here as well, given the context. John warns the churches about these people who have left the communities (mentioned above) the deceivers and anti-Christ (2:18-27). John ends this section though, on an encouraging note as he expresses his confidence that those who still know the truth about Jesus and continue to abide in him, are children of God and loved by their heavenly Father. John closes by writing that we demonstrate that we are part of God's family when we do righteousness and when we love one another, unlike the deceivers who are creating anger, strife, and division (Mackie).

The second major section (3:11-5:17) is John's teaching about how God is love. God's children are to love one another, not be like Cain who out of his hatred killed his brother Abel (see Gen. 4; Heb. 11:4; Jude 11). In chapter 3:16 and 4:7-12 John defines what love is, the cross work of Christ. For Christians love is self-giving, self-sacrificing for the wellbeing of others. That's what Jesus did, and when we trust in that kind of love it changes us and enables us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love in the same manner. In chapter four John once again addresses the false teachers. They deny Jesus as the messiah while at the same time claim to speak on God's behalf. John won't have it and instructs us to test the spirits (4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29; Rev. 2:2). It is impossible for one to deny the messiah and speak for God. So, John goes on to explain how genuine believers will center their whole lives around Jesus, because that is where we see God's true heart revealed (Mackie). Remembering Jesus' love for us, will make the gospel the thing that grounds your entire life. This love comes from trusting in the God-man Jesus that we encounter in the Scriptures, who brings eternal life to sinners like us despite our failures and shortcomings.

Chapter 5:18-21 concludes John's first letter. We are to abstain from idols, from making God into our image, rather than the opposite, and to embrace the beautiful reality that to know Jesus is to know the Father, that Jesus and the Father are one, and so in knowing Jesus we know the one true sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe.

1 John in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

Interestingly in the Johannine epistles as D.A. Carson asserts, “The most striking feature relevant to our subject in these epistles is the absence not only of OT quotations but even of many unambiguous allusions to the OT” (1063). This being said there are a couple of likely references, rendering 1 John in particular, not devoid of Old Testament quotations, allusions, or echoes. The introduction in chapter 1:1-4 is strikingly similar to John’s gospel in chapter 1:1-18 which contains echoes of Genesis one and Proverbs eight about creation and wisdom. The theme of light and darkness, though connected more with the gospel of John, in 1 John 2:11, one could argue a connection to Isaiah 6:10. 1 John 2:27 seems to me to have New Covenant restoration in mind (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36-37). Lastly, 1 John 3:12 is the only explicit OT reference in this letter, in its mention of the biblical character of Cain from Genesis chapter four, who murdered his brother out of hatred.

In Relation to the NT

The connection in key themes, language, and ideas in 1 John are all taken from the Gospel of John particularly chapters 13-17 (Jesus’ final teachings) with the images of light and darkness, love and hate, good and evil. It seems to be written to address a form of insipient Gnosticism, similar to what Paul addresses in the book of Colossians. John is dealing with false teachers (1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21), a theme that is unfortunately popular in the New Testament writings (Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18). 1 John gives the most instruction on love of perhaps any of the NT books. The concept of loving God because he first loved us with a self-sacrificing love, and how love for God is shown in our love for others, is a clear concept in many other places in the NT as well (see, 1 Jn. 3:11-24; Jn. 13-34; Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 5:8; Jam. 2:14-26). Additionally, John agrees with James that faith without works is dead. That is, if we don’t love others well and care for them, we show that we don’t really love at all (1 Jn. 2:7-11; 3:11-24).

Key Themes and Application

Light, Love, and Obedience

The first major section of the body of John’s letter explains how the God revealed in Jesus is “light” (1:5-3:10). Chapter 1:5-2:11 is about “walking in the light” (1:7). Walking in the light for John means being holy as God is holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Pet. 1:15). Walking in the light means keeping Jesus’ commands, and those who walk in the light are cleansed from their sin (v.7, 2:4 and 6; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). We demonstrate that we are part of God’s family when we do righteousness and when we love one another, unlike the deceivers who are creating anger, strife, and division (Mackie).

The second major section (3:11-5:17) is John’s teaching about how God is love. God’s children are to love one another, not be like Cain who out of his hatred killed his brother Abel (see Gen. 4; Heb. 11:4; Jude 11). In chapter 3:16 and 4:7-12 John defines what love is, the cross work of Christ. For Christians love is self-giving, self-sacrificing for the wellbeing of others. That’s what Jesus did and when we trust in that kind of love it changes us and enables us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love in the same manner.

These teachings are simple to understand, but difficult to live out, because they mean dying to oneself for the benefit of others (Lk. 9:23; Rom. 6:11-14; Gal. 2:20). Loving God means doing what he says, and if we don’t obey him then we show that we don’t love or trust him (Jn.14:5 and 23, 15:10-14; 1 Jn. 5:3; 2 Jn. 1:6; Rom. 1:5). We must take our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5), remember we are the

temple of God (1 Cor. 3:19 and 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22), and express our faith in actions and love, not in empty words (Jam. 2:14-26; Gal. 5:6).

False Teachers

This is a theme that comes up often in the New Testament (1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21; Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18). John's instruction against false teachers, deceivers or antichrists (2:18-27) is dispersed throughout this letter. He speaks out against those who reject apostolic authority (1:1-4), who claim sinlessness (1:6-10), who don't keep the commandments (2:3-2:6;3:4-10;5:2-3), who hate their brothers (2:9-11;3:11-18), and who deny Jesus is the Messiah, God and come in the flesh (the heresy of Docetism, see 2:22-23; 4:2-3; 5:1,6-8) {Mathews}. John points to his authority as an apostolic witness (1:1-4; 4:5-14; 5:6-7), talks about how believers acknowledge sin (1:5-2:2), obedience as evidence of the reality of real, genuine faith (2:3-14), and how those who persevere in righteousness are the ones who overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:3), all in response to these false witnesses.

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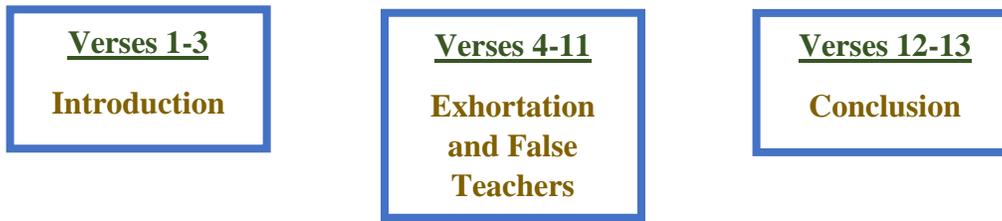
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The Book of 2 John

Structure



Main Idea: 2 John urges the church not to accept or support false teachers, and to keep God’s commandments, loving one another.

Main Idea Explained

Unlike 1 John where we were given no clues, the author is identified as “The Elder”, which though debated is widely accepted as the apostle John. Likewise, the recipients are more easily spotted in 2 John as the, “elect lady and her children”. We cannot say for certain who this was intended to be, but it is probably, “... probably a symbolic way of referring to a church with her ‘children’ being individual member of that church” (Mathews). In this letter John is writing a very summarized or condensed version of what he wrote in 1 John, almost a commentary on 1 John, or better, the *Readers Digest* version of 1 John. The purpose of the letter is to emphasize truth as correction for false teaching, a false teaching that was denying Jesus coming as God in the flesh (see 1 Jn. 2:18-23; 4:1-3). In verses 4-11 we are commanded to keep the “old commandment”, to love one another. Believers are to walk in truth and love. Verses seven through ten form the key passage for this text and encourage us to abide in Christ, watch ourselves (doctrine, attitude, actions, etc.), and reject false teachers, for it is in steadfast self-giving love and obedience that we show we understand the commands of God, truly loving him and our neighbor well.

2 John in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

It seems to me that there are no explicit Old Testament quotations or discernable allusions, or faint echoes in John’s second letter. The idea of keeping the Lord’s commands is a concept prevalent in the OT (Lev.22:31; Num. 15:40; Deut. 4:40; 30:11-14), however, much of what John writes is more intimately tied to his Gospel and his first and third letters, as well as other New Testament themes, than being reliant up the Hebrew Scriptures.

In relation to the NT

Most evident in 2 John is its connection to the Gospel of John and his other letters. Being that it is a condensed version of 1 John, it highlights the key themes from his first letter, particularly the themes of love (particularly 3:11-5:17, but talked about nearly everywhere in the letter) and false teachers (1 Jn.1:4-10; 2:3-11;3:4-18;4:2-14;5:1-8). False teachers is a theme that comes up often in the New Testament (1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21; Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18). Not

receiving false teachers is also a command we find in other epistles (Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10).

When John speaks of love here it is rooted in the passion narrative, as Jesus' death on the cross is the supreme example of self-giving love (1 Jn. 3:11-24). Believers are to reflect this kind of love (Jn. 13:34; 2 Jn. 5-6). When John says, "watch yourselves" and "full reward" in verse eight, meaning be faithful and obedient, keeping your eyes on the prize, Hebrews 10:35 and 1 Corinthians 3:8 echo the same sentiment.

Key Themes and Application

False Teachers

This is a theme that comes up often in the New Testament (1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21; Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18). Not receiving false teachers is also a command we find in other epistles (Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10), and is a big deal in this letter as it is addressed to a church (es) that will likely encounter these "deceivers" (v.7). These false teachers do not recognize Jesus as God come in the flesh, and those who follow in their footsteps are not abiding in Christ or being obedient to his commands. John is very serious at this point and says anyone who doesn't abide in Christ doesn't have God (v.9). Believers are to shun this false teaching and remain faithful, persevering despite opposition as they place their faith and hope in future rewards (v.8).

Love and Obedience

What could be said about 1 John could be said about 2 John as well in regard to this theme. However, John highlights in this letter more prominently, love for one another (v.4-11). That being said this love flows out of a fountain already plumbed in John's first letter. In 1 John 3:16 and 4:7-12 John defines what love is, the cross work of Christ. For Christians love is self-giving, self-sacrificing for the wellbeing of others. That's what Jesus did, and when we trust in that kind of love it changes us and enables us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love in the same manner. These teachings are simple to understand, but difficult to live out, because they mean dying to oneself for the benefit of others (Lk. 9:23; Rom. 6:11-14; Gal. 2:20). Loving God means doing what he says, and if we don't obey him then we show that we don't love or trust him (Jn.14:5 and 23, 15:10-14; 1 Jn. 5:3; 2 Jn. 1:6; Rom. 1:5). We must take our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5), remember we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:19 and 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22), and express our faith in actions and love not in empty words (Jam. 2:14-26; Gal. 5:6).

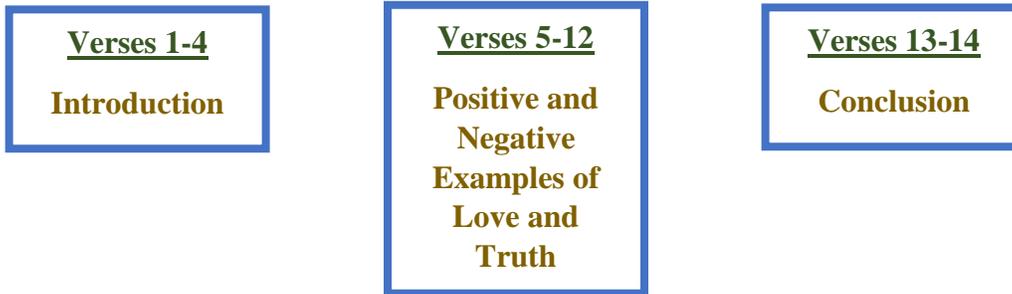
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The Book of 3 John

Structure



Main Idea: 3 John encourages us to practice Christian hospitality while exercising discernment and love, as John corrects the pride and arrogance found in one of this church’s leaders.

Main Idea Explained

Everything we said about 2 John can be said about 3 John in regard to authorship. Though debated, the author is widely accepted as the apostle John. The letter is addressed to Gaius (3 Jn. 1) and two others, Diotrephes and Demetrius, later in the letter (3 Jn.9 and 12). We don’t know much about these men, but they seem to be leaders in the local church. In the body of the letter (3 Jn. 5-12) a pattern can be discerned: *commendation* of positive example of truth and love followed by *condemnation* of negative example, and again *commendation* of positive example of truth and love (Mathews). John wrote this letter to commend Gaius and his congregation for accepting godly missionaries and itinerate preachers and showing love and care for them (3 Jn. 5-8). He also wrote to confront a prominent leader in the church, Diotrephes, who was acting like a jerk. He was being arrogant, prideful, inhospitable, and questioning apostolic authority (3 Jn. 9-12). John says in this letter that he will confront him to his face when he comes to visit them (3 Jn. 10). Verse eleven is the key passage in this letter, “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God”. Immediately after saying this John moves to his second commendation of a positive example of truth and love in Demetrius (3 Jn. 12). The people who are named are examples of the truth, either positive, or negative. Simply put, 3 John is the Elder’s encouragement to continue in love and truth, and to avoid evil and sin.

3 John in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

It seems to me that there are no explicit Old Testament quotations or discernable allusions, or faint echoes in John’s third letter. However, the concept of loving one’s neighbor and taking care of the sojourner is part of the Old Testament Law (Deut. 10:19; Lev.19:18 and 34). When John says, “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good” (11) there is possibly a faint echo of Psalm. 34:14, 37:27, and Isaiah 1:16, 17, or at least the same concept and similar language.

In Relation to the NT

Most evident in 3 John is its connection to the Gospel of John and his first two letters, particularly the theme of love and walking in the truth (Jn. 4:4, 8:31-32,14:16; 1 Jn. 3:18; 2 Jn. 4;3 Jn.

3-4;). Third John adds statements on Christian hospitality to keeping God’s commandments, born out of 2 John as a means by which we show our love for God and others (2 Jn. 4-11; 3 Jn. 5-12). Christian hospitality is a theme and command that is important to the New Testament as well (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:2). In 3 John 6 the author speaks about walking in a manner “worthy of God”. This is a concept also found in Paul (1 Thess. 2:12; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10). In verse twelve, in speaking of Demetrius, John says he has, “received a good testimony from everyone” hinting at his character matching that of an elder or deacon in 1 Timothy three and Titus one.

Key Themes and Application

Christian Hospitality

Christian hospitality is a theme and command that is important to the New Testament (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:2). In 3 John it is the primary thing with which the Elder encourages the people (3 Jn. 3-8). Their hospitality to these traveling missionaries and preachers is one way in which they show they are walking in the truth (2 Jn. 4-11; 3 Jn. 5-12), in contrast to Diotrephes who is inhospitable, arrogant, and prideful (3 Jn. 9-12). In caring for the needs of their fellow brothers they show their genuine understanding of what Jesus meant in John 13:34 about loving one another. A heart that has been transformed by the gospel acts, though inconsistently at times for sure, in ways that seek to fulfill Jesus’ command to love one another. If we have no real desire to put sin to death in our own lives and to serve others, then maybe we should reevaluate whether or not we truly understand what it means to be a Christian.

Walking in Truth and Imitating Good

These are both phrases that appear in this very brief letter (3 Jn. 3-4, 11). I think it is fair to say that John expects readers of this letter to have read his other letters and how he developed these ideas more thoroughly in them (see, 1 Jn. 1:5-2:11; 2 Jn. 6). Walking in “truth” and “light” and “his commandments” is the primary emphasis of John’s letters (1 Jn. 1:7,2:6; 2 Jn. 4-6; 3 Jn. 3-4). What is the point of all of John’s letters? True believers work out their faith in righteousness, justice, and love understand what has been accomplished for them on their behalf by Jesus on the cross.

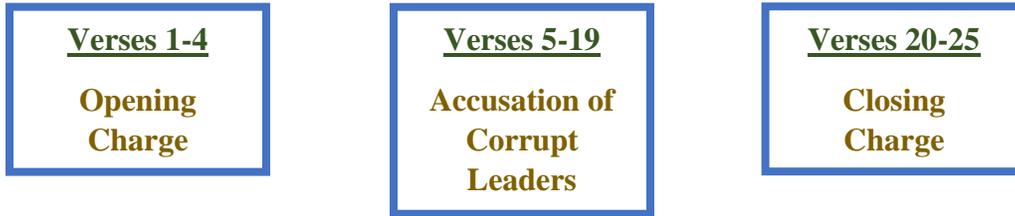
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The Book of Jude

Structure



Main Idea: In this letter Jude confronts corrupt teachers who are leading others astray, exposing them for what they truly are and what they represent, and encourages believers to stay faithful to Jesus.

Main Idea Explained

Jude was one of Jesus’ half-brothers (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) who became a believer after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:14). In 1 Corinthians 9:5 we learn that Jesus’ brothers, including Jude, became leaders and missionaries in the early church. We don’t know who the audience was, but it was most likely written primarily to messianic Jews given its contents, because his writing assumes a deep knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, as well as other popular Jewish literature (Mackie). Interestingly, Jude wanted to write a different kind of letter, but was led by the Spirit to pen this potent piece (vv.1-4). Jude had become aware of a crisis facing this particular church community, so he address the issues head on.

Verses one through four form the opening of the letter with a traditional greeting (vv.1-2) and then his opening charge to the church (vv.3-4). Jude’s plan was to write this church about their “common salvation”, but his intentions were interrupted by those who “pervert the grace of God” and “deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ”. They think they can live however they please and they reject the authority and teachings of Jesus. Jude doesn’t start off by telling them, “how to contend for the faith”, rather he first goes into why (Mackie). It is because of the corrupt teachers who have infiltrated this church (v.4). Fascinatingly, it is not their teaching that Jude hones in on, but their way of life. As Dr. Mackie notes, “Their moral compromise is what tells you they have bad theology” (BPV).

Jude moves from his introduction which tells us the reason for everything that follows, to the body of his letter containing his accusations against the corrupters (vv.5-19). Jude wants to remind this Jesus community that the appearance of these teachers should be no surprise, as he transitions into a longer warning to stay away from them and to not embrace their lifestyle. This is a densely packed passage full of powerful Old Testament stories and images. Jude first offers two sets of three Old Testament examples: “Rebellious people who in the past received divine justice (vv.5-10), and rebels who corrupt others (vv.11-13)” {Mackie}. In the first trio Jude delineates and recalls the story of Israel’s wilderness rebellion (Num. 14), rebellious angels (Gen. 6, 1 Enoch), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). What is the point of these seemingly random stories? These stories are about rebellion against divine design that led to sexual immorality, precisely what the false teachers are guilty of (see vv.3-4). Dr. Mackie notes a “bonus” example following this trio,

Jude brings up a bonus example from a popular Jewish text called *The Testament of Moses*. Like Enoch it was not part of the Old Testament Scriptures, and it was a creative retelling of Moses final days and words based on Deuteronomy. In the section Jude quotes from, Moses has died and there is a good angel, Michael who is refuting the devil's accusations against Moses, but decides to leave final judgment for God alone. (BPV)

This might seem odd to us, but for the original first century audience, it would have been easily understood, because they were much more familiar with the literature of that day than we are. Jude is using typology here to show that the behavior of these corrupt teachers is nothing new; it has an ancient pedigree. Rebellion against God's authority, sexual immorality, and rejecting God's messengers is common to every generation past, present, and future as well.

Jude begins his second trio of Old Testament examples in verse eleven through thirteen condemning those who corrupt others. This time his focus is on Cain, Balaam, Korah, and the context in which their stories lie. Each man led others into their personal sin and rebellion. They create chaos wherever they go with their perversions, so Jude concludes this section with more images from the Old Testament to describe the teachers, "They are like the bad shepherds of Ezekiel (Ezek. 34:2), like the clouds with no rain from Proverbs (Prov. 25:14), or like the chaotic waves from Isaiah (Isa. 57:20). Their self-absorption betrays their claim to follow Jesus." {Mackie}.

Jude concludes his accusation against the false teachers with two more warnings, one from of old (vv.14-15), and one recent to his time (vv.17-19). The first one comes from 1 Enoch which was a non-canonical early Jewish religious writing that claimed to contain the visions of Enoch spoken of in Genesis five (Mackie). As Dr. Mackie notes, "What is fascinating is that Jude quotes from the opening chapter of 1 Enoch which itself is quoting about a half a dozen other OT texts about the final day of the Lord's justice on human evil (Deut. 33:2; Zech. 14:5; Isa. 66:15-16)" {BPV}. His second warning however, comes from the apostles (vv.17-19). Jesus predicted (Matt. 7:15-19) and Peter (2 Pet. 2:1-3), John (1 Jn. 4:1-3), and Paul (2 Tim. 3:1-9) all echoed Jesus and experienced firsthand the rise of corrupt teachers and leadership within the church. Jude's point in all of this is that these teachers must be dealt with; they are cancerous to the church and the mission of the gospel.

Verses twenty through twenty-five record Jude's final charge to the church. Jude gave us the "why" we should contend for the faith in verse one through four and now he gives us the "how". The church is to build their foundation on the "most holy faith", which refers to the gospel message (Mathews). On that foundation, what Jesus accomplished in his life, death and resurrection, the church is to build itself upon through dedication to prayer in the Spirit, and devotion to love of God showcased in obedience. Believers are called to stay alert for the return of Jesus to bring final justice and set things right. In doing this, they will help each other stay faithful and filled with hope. Jude concludes his letter with one of the longest and most powerful doxologies in the entire Bible (vv.24-25).

Jude in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

There is much that could be said here in regard to this very short, but powerful letter of Jude. The author assumes a thorough knowledge of not only the Old Testament, but also other important Jewish literature such as, *The Testament of Moses* and *1 Enoch*. The style of Jude is unique with lots of literary figures of speech, and OT quotations from Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, Moses, Cain,

Balaam, Enoch, Adam, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Jude first offers two sets of three Old Testament examples in the opening of the body of his letter: “Rebellious people who in the past received divine justice (vv.5-10) and rebels who corrupt others (vv.11-13)” {Mackie}. In the first trio Jude delineates and recalls the story of Israel’s wilderness rebellion (Num. 14), rebellious angels (Gen. 6, 1 Enoch), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). These stories are about rebellion against divine design that lead to sexual immorality, precisely what the false teachers are guilty of (see vv.3-4).

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In Relation to the NT

Jude was one of Jesus’ half-brothers (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) who became a believer after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:14). In 1 Corinthians 9:5 we learn that Jesus’ brothers, including Jude, became leaders and missionaries in the early church. We know that Jude wanted to write something entirely different than what he does (vv.3-4), but he was led by the Spirit to write this letter primarily condemning false teachers and urging believers to stay faithful to Jesus. Jesus predicted (Matt. 7:15-19) and Peter (2 Pet. 2:1-3), John (1 Jn. 4:1-3), and Paul (2 Tim. 3:1-9) all echoed Jesus and experienced firsthand the rise of corrupt teachers and leadership within the church. Jude adds much to the conversation about false teachers infiltrating the church and not putting up with it (vv.5-19; see also 1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21; Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18). Jude’s call for perseverance is also strongly present in the rest of the New Testament (Jude 17-23; Rom. 12:12; Gal. 6:12; Col. 1:11-12; Rev. 3:10). Finally, the doxology (vv.24-25) is significant not just because it is long, but also because it is the last doxology of the New Testament, not only concluding this letter, but concluding the content of the epistles in the canon as a whole (Mathews).

Key Themes and Application

False Teachers

This is a theme that comes up often in the New testament (1 Jn. 2:18-3:10; 4:1-21; Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-21, ch.2, 3:14-18; Jude). Jesus predicted (Matt. 7:15-19) and Peter (2 Pet. 2:1-3), John (1 Jn. 4:1-3), and Paul (2 Tim. 3:1-9) all echoed Jesus and experienced firsthand the rise of corrupt teachers and leadership within the church. Jude adds much to the conversation about false teachers infiltrating the church and not putting up with it (v.5-19). Through powerful images and stories from the Old Testament, Jude teaches us that rebellion against divine design leads to sexual

immorality, precisely what the false teachers are guilty of (vv.3-10), and how God will judge those who lead others into their personal sin and rebellion (vv.11-13). Jude is using typology here to show that the behavior of these corrupt teachers is nothing new; it has an ancient pedigree. Rebellion against God's authority, sexual immorality, and rejecting God's messengers is common to every generation past, present, and future as well. These teachers create chaos wherever they go with their perversions of God's word and their disdain and lack of respect for his authority. Jude's point in all of this is that these teachers must be dealt with; they are cancerous to the church and the mission of the gospel.

Perseverance

Jude's call for perseverance is also strongly present in the rest of the New Testament (Jude 17-23; Rom. 12:12; Gal. 6:12; Col. 1:11-12; Rev. 3:10). They must, "contend for the faith" (vv. 3-4) because of the false teachers' preaching and their lifestyle. We do this through meditating and trust in the gospel, Spirit filled prayer, and obedience done out of love for God, because of his love first lavished upon us (vv. 17-23; 1 Jn. 4:19). God's grace the gift of his son, Jesus, demands a whole life response. Jude is applying, in the latter portion of his letter, what Jesus first told his disciples: if you really love me you will obey my teachings (Jn. 14:15). For Christians, how we live is the most reliable indicator of what we actually believe (Mackie).

Extra-biblical Texts

The fact that Jude uses ancient writings in this letter that are not recognized in the canon of Scripture, bothers a great number of people. It seems to me this lends to the lack of sermons and teachings in the church on the book of Jude. However, the tension maybe eased by simply learning to accept the fact that ancient Jewish culture was immersed in the Hebrew Bible, and many other texts that gained their inspiration from what the Scriptures said (Mackie). Not unlike Christian culture today. I don't believe that a book has to be in the Bible to be important or have an important message to God's people. Many of the books contemporaneously written alongside the bible, help us greatly in understanding the history and culture surrounding the canonical books. Jude used these examples from 1 Enoch and The Testament of Moses, because he knew his reader would get his point, and they would serve as powerful examples. Further, I enjoy many books and commentaries by authors such as C.S. Lewis, and D.A. Carson, and John Piper. As Dr. Mackie notes, "The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were valued as part of the biblical tradition" (BPV). It doesn't mean that they were designed as part of the original Hebrew Bible, but they were nonetheless part of the biblical tradition.

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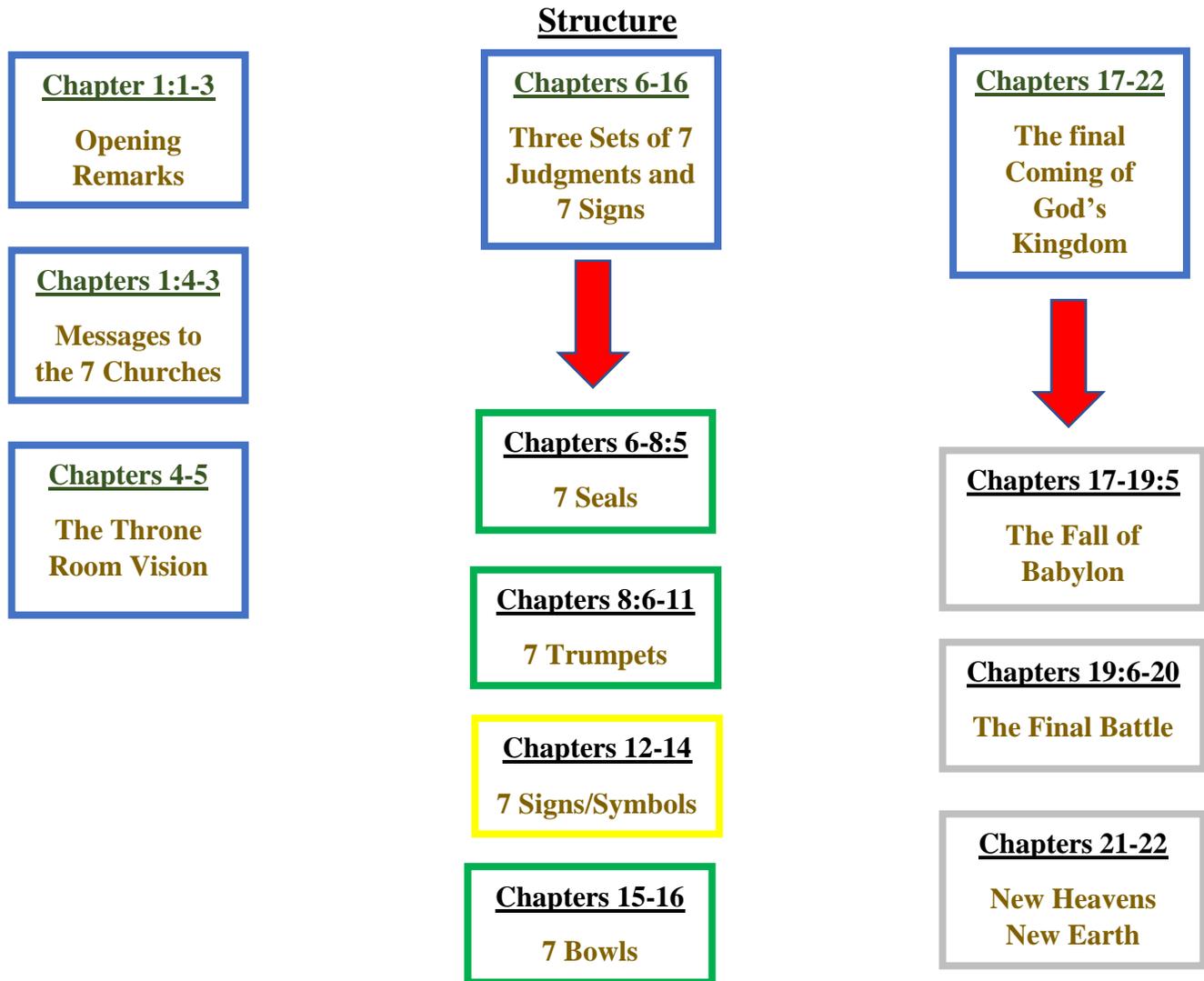
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The Book of Revelation



(The Bible Project/Me)

Main Idea: Revelation uncovers and unfolds the reality, through John's visions, that Jesus has conquered evil by his work on the cross and resurrection from the dead, and will one day consummate his already inaugurated kingdom, establishing the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Main Idea Explained

Though debated, the book of Revelation seems most likely to have been written by the apostle John, the same man who wrote the gospel of John and the letters 1-3 John. It is written to seven churches in Asia Minor (1:4-3; 22:21), from John's confinement on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (vv.1-3,9-11). It has multiple genres (apocalyptic, prophecy, poetry, and epistle), which all play a key role for accurately interpreting this complex book. The goal in apocalyptic literature is to give a God's eye perspective on difficult and evil times and encourage faithfulness. One doesn't read a cookbook like they do an owner's manual for their car, or a bedtime story like they do a tax return. We

must interpret each book of the Bible literarily, according to its own rules of interpretation, because God ordained what genres the biblical authors chose as well.

Opening: 1:1-3

In this introduction John has given us clear guidance on how he wants us to interpret this book (1:1-3). As Dr. Mackie notes, “Jewish apocalypses communicated through symbolic images and numbers drawing from the Old Testament” (BPV). It is not a secret message that if only we had a decoder ring we could know about the timing of the end of the world. Rather, John uses these Old Testament images expecting his readers to either know their meaning, or to go discover what they mean by looking them up. This is a letter addressed to real people undergoing persecution in the first century, and therefore our understanding must first be anchored in the historical context of John’s time, place, and audience (Mackie).

Messages to the 7 Churches: 1:4-ch.3

Chapter 1:4-3 contains the messages John is to give to the seven churches. John receives a vision of Jesus exalted as king over the world, and standing among seven burning lights (see Zech. 4), and he’s told it’s a symbol of the seven churches in Asia Minor. It seems that they are to be representative of all churches. This would be a circulating writing, and what is addressed and brought up with these churches is all-encompassing of what takes place in churches throughout all of history (Mathews). In this vision, Jesus addresses the problems that are facing each individual church. Some had grown indifferent and others were morally compromised (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea), but and others remained faithful to Jesus amid suffering persecution {Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13)}. In chapter 2:9-10 Jesus warns that the tribulation that was upon the churches is going to worsen, and like we just learned from Jesus’ remarks about the churches, they will have to choose between compromise and faithfulness. The temptation was to compromise out of either fear of persecution, or joining the masses and so be like the other nations (see, 1 Sam. 8:20; Jdg. 1-2). Jesus doesn’t leave them without hope as he promises a reward to those who persevere. Dr. Mackie notes that each reward is drawn from the final vision in the book about the New Creation (BPV). These messages to the seven churches set up the plot tension that will govern the narrative moving forward.

The Throne Room Vision: 4-5

Chapters four and five record John’s throne room vision with lots of images drawn from Isaiah 6 and 8, Ezekiel 1-3, and Daniel 7 and 12. In his vision he sees, surrounding God, all kinds of creatures and elders that represent all creation giving honor and allegiance to God. In God’s hand is the prophet Daniel’s sealed up scroll closed with seven seals. (see Dan. 12), symbolizing the message of the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 8:16; Ezek. 2-3; Dan 12) {Mackie}. However, there appears to be no one who can open the scroll, but John finally hears of someone who can, from an angel. It is, “the lion from the tribe of Judah” (Gen. 49:9), and “the root of David” (Isa. 11:1), this man can (Rev. 5:5). These titles given the “worthy one” are links to messianic warrior king texts describing the coming of the kingdom of God. That is what John *hears*, but what he turns and *sees* is not a massive lion, but a slain, yet living lamb ready to open the scroll. This symbol of Jesus as the slain lamb is vital for understanding this book properly. Dr. Mackie comments, “John is saying the Old Testament promise of God’s future victorious kingdom was inaugurated through the crucified messiah. Jesus overcame his enemies by dying for them. As the true Passover lamb so that they could be redeemed” (BPV). Because of this

resurrection, Jesus' death was not his defeat; it was his enthronement and the way he conquered sin. Death and Resurrection is the paradoxical way he is exalted over the nations and how Jesus ironically becomes Israel's king, in the event of the cross (see Mk.15-16). This profound vision concludes with the lamb alongside God being worshiped as the one true God. It is from this commanding position that the slain lamb begins to open the scroll, exercising his authority to move history toward its end. Which brings us to the three cycles of sevens and the seven signs (chs. 6-16). which depict God's justice exacted upon earth.

Three Sets of 7 Judgments and 7 Signs: 6-16

Interpretive Considerations

Some good scholars, godly men and women, think the three sets of seven divine judgments (chs.6-16) represent a literal linear sequence of events that either happened in the past, are happening right now, or are yet future. However, upon a careful reading, one will notice how John has interlaced the root system of the "sevens" together. The final seven bowls (chs.15-16) come out of the seventh trumpet (ch.11) and the seventh seal (ch.8) and the seven trumpets (chs.8-11) emerge from the seventh seal (ch.8) {Mackie}. Dr. Mackie explains this well,

They are like nesting dolls; each seventh contains the next seven. Also notice how each series of seven culminates with final judgement; they have matching conclusions. It is more likely that John is using each set of seven to depict the same period of time between Jesus' resurrection and future return from three different perspectives. (BPV)

Seven Seals: 6-8:5

This section opens with the slain lamb opening the first four seals, and John sees four horsemen (see Zech. 1), that symbolize times of war, conquest, famine, and death (Mathews). Things tragically common throughout every generation past, present, and future. The fifth seal portrays the cry of the slaughtered Christian martyrs in the throne room for God to vindicate them, but they are told to wait just a little while longer (6:11). The sixth seal is God's response to their cry, "The Day of the Lord" (DOTL) the day of vindication and final justice (see Joel 2; Isa. 2). Chapter 6:17 reads, "for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Chapter seven is John's answer to this question, as he interrupts the seven seals with a chapter about the slain lamb's army (Mackie).

John sees an angel marking out God's chosen people and he hears the number of them, 144,000 sealed from, "every tribe of the sons of Israel" 12,000 from each tribe (7:4). The number of this army is what John **heard** just like he **heard** the lion of Judah (but saw the slain lamb), when he turned and looked what he **saw** was the messianic army of God's kingdom made up of people from all nations (Jews and gentiles) fulfilling God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:4; 7:9-17) {Mackie}. Chapter seven thus answers the question posed at the end of the sixth seal. It is the multi-ethnic army of the slain lamb who can stand before God, because they've been redeemed by the lamb's blood, have persevered, and born witness to him (7:14). After this, the seventh and final seal is broken, but before the scroll is actually opened, the seven trumpets appear, and fire is taken from the incense altar with the cry of the martyrs and it's cast on to the earth bringing the DOTL to its completion (8:1-5) {Mackie}.

The Seven Trumpets: 8:6- ch.11

At this point John backs up and retells the story again from a different vantage point, this time using Exodus imagery. The first five trumpet blasts recapitulate the plagues sent upon Egypt (Ex.7-11), then the sixth trumpet releases the four horsemen that came from the first four seals (6:1-8). Astonishingly, despite all these plagues, the nations did not repent (9:20-21) just like hardened Pharaoh in the Exodus story. Dr. Mackie comments, “It seems to say that God’s judgment alone will not bring people to repentance” {BPV}. At this spot in the vision another intermission can be spotted (10:1-11:13), see ch.7). The angel brings the scroll that was unsealed by the lamb, and just like Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:3), John is told to eat the scroll and proclaim its content. After much anticipation, the scroll is opened, and we begin to see how God’s kingdom will be established on earth.

The scroll’s content is laid out in two symbolic visions (Mackie). First John sees God’s temple and the martyrs by the altar. He’s told to measure and set them apart (see Zech. 2 it’s an image of protection) from the outer courts which are excluded, and the people there get mangled and marred by the world. Some think this refers literally to the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in the past or will happen in the future (my Christian Scriptures professor in undergrad). It seems to me more likely that John is following Jesus and the apostles’ lead here who all used new temple imagery as a symbol for God’s people (1 Cor. 3:16; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:4-5) {Mathews}. If this is what John indeed intended, “this is an image about how Jesus’ followers might suffer persecution by the nations, but this external defeat cannot take away their victory in the lamb” (Mackie).

John’s second vision is of “Two Witnesses”, prophetic voices to the nations (11:4-14). Many think this refers literally to two prophets, physical human beings, who will appear in the future. However, John calls them lampstands (11:4) which is one of his crystal-clear symbols for the churches (1:10-12). It seems to me then that this vision is more likely about the prophetic task believers are given between the two comings of Christ, that is to proclaim the gospel message to the nations (Mackie). Then, one of Daniel’s beasts (Dan.7) enters the scene and it conquers the two witness and kills them (11:7-8), but they are resurrected and vindicated by God, resulting in the repentance of many among the nations (11:13).

God’s warning judgments (the seals and trumpets) did not stir up repentance among the nations, just like the Exodus plagues only hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Jesus however (the slain lamb), conquered his enemies (which includes us by the way, see Rom. 5), by loving them and dying for them. The church (the lamb’s multi-cultural army), now carries forth his mission revealed in the lamb’s scroll. Dr. Mackie adds,

God’s kingdom will be revealed when the nations see the church imitating the loving sacrifice of the lamb, not killing their enemies but dying for them. It is God’s mercy shown through Jesus’ followers that will bring the nations to repentance. This surprising claim is the message of the open scroll that John has placed at the exact center of the entire book. (BPV)

After this, the seventh angel blows the last trumpet, and God’s kingdom comes to confront the nations (11:19).

The Seven Signs (symbols): 12-14

John interrupts the three sets of seven judgments with this section detailing the seven signs he saw. This section reveals more about the open scroll. The first sign reveals the spiritual battles (ch. 12)

that lay behind the suffering of the churches, a battle raging since the Fall (Gen. 3:15). The serpent from the Garden of Eden is depicted here as a dragon who attacks a woman and her “seed” (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16); they represent the messiah and his people (Mackie). Then the lamb defeats the dragon through his death and resurrection and the dragon is cast to earth (12:7-17). The dragon’s task then turns to assaulting the rest of God’s people through persecution, but they are to conquer the dragon by resisting his allure and schemes even unto death. The real enemy is a spiritual one (Eph. 6:12), that is John’s point here, it’s not Caesar, or your neighbor next door, therefore we are to live obedient faithful lives marked by the great commission and the great commandment until Christ returns (Matt. 22:36-40 and 28:16-20).

John’s next series of signs (ch.13) retell the same conflict from the first ones, but this go around in the hopefully familiar symbolism of the prophet Daniel’s visions (see Dan. 7-12). John sees two beasts empowered by the dragon from the previous story. Dr. Mackie suggest that, “One of them represents national military power that conquers through violence, and the other beast symbolizes the economic propaganda machine that exalts this power as divine” (BPV). These beasts demand full allegiance and homage from the nations, which is symbolized by taking the mark of the beast on the forehead or hand, 666. Despite all the conjecture surrounding this infamous number, John is actually making a pretty straightforward Old Testament reference here. The writing on the forehead and hand comes from the Shema, a passage about what total allegiance to Yahweh looks like (Deut. 6:4-9). A prayer also to be written on the hands and forehead. The beasts and the nations in John’s vision are demanding their own mark of allegiance (666, v.13:18) and they are forcing people to choose a side. Just like Daniel’s visions (chs.7-12) tell us, here John illuminates once again that rulers and nations become ravenous beasts when they feed their own pride, exalt themselves and their power and resources over all else (Hooker, 16). They demand allegiance and trample all who get in their way. Babylon was the beast on the block in Daniel’s day, followed by Persia, then Greece, and Rome in John’s day. This is also true of any nation throughout all of history who act in like manner.

In chapter 14 we see the slain lamb once again with his army standing opposed to the dragon, the two beasts, and the nations. In verse six an angel flies in with, “an eternal gospel to proclaim”. His message is a call for all to repent and worship God and to evacuate “Babylon” (v.8) because their days are numbered. In the second part of chapter 14 John records his vision of final judgment and justice (vv.9-20). It is symbolized by two harvests, one good and one bad. The good harvest (a wheat harvest) representing Jesus coming to gather up his faithful people to himself and the bad harvest (wine grapes) which, “represents humanity’s intoxication with evil, and they are taken to the wine press and trampled” (Mackie). If we gain one thing from the “signs” or “symbols” let it be this: no one is neutral in the battle of life. As Dr. Mackie states, “John is placing a stark choice before these seven churches. Will they resist the lure of Babylon and follow the lamb, or will they follow the beast and suffer it’s defeat? “(BPV). Now that the choice is before them (and us), John returns to replay a final cycle of seven divine judgments symbolized as the pouring out of seven bowls.

The Seven Bowls: 15-16

We know from the scroll of the slain lamb and the sign visions that many repent, but we also know from the judgment passages that many do not. The first five bowls replay the Exodus plagues (see Exod. 7-11; and Rev. 8-11), with the same heart-breaking result as they had in the trumpet judgments. They only produced hard-hearted Pharaohs. The plagues lead up to the sixth bowl which pictures the dragon and the beast gathering their troops to face off with God’s people in a place called Armageddon

(16:12-16). Dr. Mackie notes that, “This refers to a plain in Northern Israel where many battles were fought by Israel against invading nations (see Jud. 5:14; 2 Kings 23:29)” (BPV). Some think this sixth bowl refers to an actual future battle, while others think it is a metaphor for God’s future judgement on sin and evil once and for all. Though arguments will continue to be made for both sides, what is clear is John’s use of symbolism from the book of Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 about Gog which was the prophet’s symbol in his day for the rebellious nations gathered before God to face his justice (Mackie). That is precisely what comes from the seventh bowl. Its pouring out is a celebration for the lamb’s army, and horror for all others, in this fourth and final depiction of the DOTL, where evil is defeated amongst the nations once and for all (16:17-21).

The message of the scroll has been revealed, so John now goes back to elaborate on three key themes from before, each one exploring the final coming of God’s kingdom from a different angle (Mackie).

The Final Coming of God’s Kingdom: 17-22

The Fall of Babylon: 17-19:10

An angel shows John a captivating woman who is drunk with the blood of the martyrs and the innocent people. She is riding the dragon from the sign visions, and she’s called Babylon the Prostitute (14:8;16:19; 17:5). What a nightmare! As was mentioned earlier, Babylon is a symbol for any rebellious nation. In this vision John is using images from a variety of Old Testament passages about the downfall of ancient Babylon, Tyre, and Edom, who were all rebellious nations (see Isa. 13,23,34,47; Jer. 50-51; Ezek.26-27) {Mackie}. Therefore,

John is simply showing how Rome is the newest version of the Old Testament archetype of humanity in rebellion against God. This isn’t something limited to the past or the future. It is a portrait of the human condition throughout history. Babylons will come and go leading up to the day Jesus come to replace Babylon with his kingdom. (Mackie)

The Final Battle: 19:11- ch.20

Here the DOTL is depicted as a final battle and it seems to me to be told twice (19:11-21 & 20:8-15), with the results being the vindication of the martyrs (20:1-7). We are taken back to bowl judgement number six where the nations are gathered against the lamb, except this time Jesus is riding a white horse. Interestingly and very telling of how this battle will shake out, he’s covered with blood before the battle starts, his own blood. The text tells us that his weapon used to confront and end evil for all time is the sword of his mouth (Rev. 19:15, see also Isa.11:4;49:2). I think what John is getting at here is that Armageddon is not going to look like the final battle scene of *Brave Heart*. God’s people will be passive, as their savior and warrior king judges the nations by the word of his mouth. The almighty holy creator of the universe will hold accountable those who refuse to repent of their sin.

After this final battle, John sees Jesus’ followers, particularly the martyrs, and they come back to life and reign with him for 1,000 years (20:1-7). Some take this as a literal sequence of events: Jesus’ return, 1,000 kingdoms, and then God’s final judgment, while others view it as symbolic of Jesus’ and the martyrs’ present victory over spiritual evil (Mackie). The two battles then depict Jesus’ return from two different vantage points. Regardless of how one connects the dots, both views get to the same point, and that point being: When Jesus returns as king he will deal with evil and he will vindicate those who have been faithful to him (Mackie). Back to the story line. After this 1,000 years

the dragon assembles the nations together to rebel against God's kingdom, but before the face of God seated on the great white throne, all are held accountable for the lives they have lived and to whom they gave their allegiance (20:8-15; Dan.7). Those who rejected God their whole lives are given what they want, to exist by themselves for eternity away from his relational presence. Babylon, the dragon, the prophet, and all who sought them are never again allowed to pollute and corrupt God's people.

New Heavens New Earth: 21-22

The book ends with the beauty of all things made new again, the consummation of all things, the new heavens and the new earth. An angel shows John a New Jerusalem, adorned like a bride prepared for her husband, and the very presence of God dwells with man making all things new (21:1-5; Isa. 65). It's beautiful, no more tears, no more mourning, no more pain. The picture is of our world healed, not scrapped and a completely new one made from nothing again, but rather restoration to glory surpassing even Eden (Gen. 2; Ezek. 47; Isa. 2 Zeph. 3). Surprisingly, there's no physical temple in the new creation, because it's not needed. The presence of the triune God saturates the new world with his presence, as a new humanity flourishes fulfilling the Edenic calling to rule as God's image bearers (Gen. 1:27-28) {Mackie}. And so ends this epic story of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Revelation in the Canon of Scripture

In Relation to the OT

There are too many references to count, as there are more Old Testament quotations in Revelation than any other New Testament book. The entire book is rooted deeply in the language, imagery, and theology of the Old Testament, particularly reflecting the apocalyptic genre in the same style as books such as Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel and Isaiah. However, there are also links to every genre and major division of the Hebrew Bible as well. John uses these Old Testament images expecting his readers to either know their meaning, or to go discover what they mean by looking them up. Since a survey such as this must be brief, a quick survey of a few examples will have to suffice.

As mentioned above, the primary genre itself is rooted in a rich and very distinct writing tradition, that of apocalyptic literature. John's use of sevens everywhere symbolizes fullness or completeness (Gen. 1; Lev.26:18-28). In chapters one through three John uses imagery from Zechariah to describe the churches (Zech. 4, the 7 lampstands). The forward focus of reward in this section that looks ahead to chapters 21 and 22 (New Heavens and New Earth), has connections to creation and Edenic paradise. The throne room vision in chapters four and five pulls imagery from Gen. 49:9; Isaiah 6, 8, and 11:1, Ezekiel 1 and 2, and Daniel 7 and 12, to describe this magnificent scene and the slain lamb who is worthy to open the scroll.

In the three sets of seven divine judgment and the seven signs, John floods the reader with spectacular imagery from the Prophets. In chapters six through eight, the four horsemen come from Zechariah one, and the concept of the Day of the Lord (DOTL) is rooted in Joel chapter two and Isaiah chapter two. The lamb's army is shown to be a fulfillment of Genesis 17:4 and God's promise to Abraham, and that the covenant applies to the "multitude of nations", not just to Israel. The seven trumpet judgments in chapters 8 through eleven replay the Exodus plagues (see Exod. 7-12), and the beast here can be found in Daniel chapter seven. In the seven signs (chs. 12-14) the cosmic battle is rooted in Genesis 3:15, and the earthly battle is based on Daniel 7-13 (Mackie). The mark of the beast, 666, finds its meaning in its counterpart, the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9). The seven bowl judgements (chs.

15-16) replay the exodus plagues again. The plagues lead up to the sixth bowl which pictures the dragon and the beast gathering their troops to face off with God's people in a place called Armageddon (16:12-16). Dr. Mackie notes that, "This refers to a plain in Northern Israel where many battles were fought by Israel against invading nations (see Jud. 5:14; 2 Kings 23:29)" (BPV). John's use of symbolism from the book of Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 about Gog is applied here which was the prophet's symbol in his day for the rebellious nations gathered before God to face his justice, same concept taking place here (Mackie).

In the fall of Babylon (chs. 17-19) John is using images from a variety of Old Testament passages about the downfall of ancient Babylon, Tyre, and Edom, who were all rebellious nations and became archetypes of any nation past, present, or future who chose to rebel against God (see Isa. 13,23,34,47; Jer. 50-51; Ezek.26-27) {Mackie}.

In the final battle (chs. 19-20), John uses images from Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2 to describe Jesus, and Daniel seven to describe the battle. John's concluding section (chs. 21-22) records John's vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth (Isa. 65:17), a new Garden of Eden (Gen. 2; Ezek. 47), a New Jerusalem (Isa. 2; Zeph. 3), and humanity ruling according to their original design (Gen. 1:27-28) {Mackie}.

In Relation to the NT

Though debated, the book of Revelation seems most likely to have been written by the apostle John, the same man who wrote the gospel of John and the letters 1-3 John. It is written to seven churches in Asia Minor (1:4-3; 22:21), from John's confinement on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (vv.1-3,9-11). It has multiple genres (apocalyptic, prophecy, poetry, and epistle), which all play a key role for accurately interpreting this complex book.

It no doubt has clear connection with the Gospel of John such as Jesus as "the lamb" (Rev. 5:6; Jn. 1:29-34), "living water" (Jn. 4:10-11,7:38; Rev. 7:17,22:1), and the "Word of God (Rev. 19:13; Jn.1). John's gospel is also fond of the number seven (seven titles, seven signs, and seven "I ams). Themes such as perseverance (Jude 17-23; Rom. 12:12; Gal. 6:12; Col. 1:11-12; Rev. 3:10), the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13- 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 2; 2 Pet. 1:16,19; 3:1-13), and faithfulness (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 Pet. 4:19; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10) are pervasive throughout the New Testament as well.

Key Themes and Application

The "Sevens"

John's gospel is fond of the number seven (seven titles, seven signs, and seven "I ams etc.), so it's no wonder why this literary masterpiece uses the number once again. In Johannine literature the number "7" is used to communicate the idea of divine completeness, perfection, or wholeness. In Revelation there are seven churches (1:11), seven angels (8:6), seven seals (chs.6-8), seven trumpets (chs.8-11), seven signs (chs. 12-14), and seven bowls (chs.15-16). Given John's symbolic use of the number seven, it seems that they are to be representative of all churches. This would be a circulating writing, and what is addressed and brought up with these churches is all-encompassing of what takes place in churches throughout all of history (Mathews). The three sets of seven divine judgments and seven signs seem to represent the fullness and completion of God's divine judgment on sin and evil and his vindication of those who are his.

Perseverance and Conquest

The theme of perseverance is strongly present in the rest of the New Testament (Jude 17-23; Rom. 12:12; Gal. 6:12; Col. 1:11-12; Rev. 3:10). Throughout the book of Revelation God's people are called to persevere, to endure trials and persecution, and place their hope in their future vindication (2:10; 12:1-2, 11; 14:12-13). Our ultimate hope is in the New Heavens and the New Earth (21:1-7), where suffering, tears, and sorrow will be no more. Revelation 12:11 says, "And they have conquered him (the dragon) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." In chapters six through eight God's people are called to conquer not by killing their enemies, but by suffering and bearing witness just like the lamb, Jesus, did (Mackie). Jesus conquered his enemies by loving and dying for them (Rom. 5) and the message of the lamb's scroll reveals the mission of his army, the church today, to be undertaken in like manner (ch. 11).

The Day of the Lord and Final Justice

This theme is crucial to the letter as a whole, as it's depicted over and over again throughout the letter (see chs. 6-16 and 17-20). The Old Testament prophets saw this day as the day God's promises would be fulfilled, when eschatological realities would be realized, when the Messiah would come, and God would establish his kingdom forever over all creation. Secondly, this day, however, would bring a lot of judgement, for the DOTL is also the day of reckoning for the unrighteous. The DOTL will address injustice and rebellion which the prophets use to refer to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do this for all creation, no longer in miniature (the book of Revelation). In the New Testament, this framework gets transformed in light of Jesus; the kingdom is "already, not yet". Meaning, we live in the inaugurated, but not yet consummated kingdom of God. Some aspects of the New Covenant are realities we live in today, but others are yet to come like a restored creation and people of God, final justice, and the full unshackled kingdom of God (Revelation explores this). We too are to embrace this reality teaching our Christ communities to not be afraid of this day, but embrace this truth and let it fuel our commitment and faithfulness to becoming more like Christ. His return should make our hearts excited, not ridden with fear, as we wait expectantly for his coming again. John uses this theme to motivate faithfulness and to show us that how we live our lives truly does matter to God. His grace is an invitation to live in his freedom, but freedom doesn't mean autonomy, but rather discipline, trust, faithfulness, and perseverance (Rom. 5:3-5).

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