

GOD WITH US

A Catholic Bible Study for Inmates

PART THREE

GOD WITH US

A Catholic Bible Study for Inmates

PART THREE The Gospels and Acts The Letters and Revelation

God Is With Me

When my day is lonely and depressing,
God is with me.

When my heart aches because I miss my
family, friends and loved ones,
God is with me.

When I overcome a hardship or problem,
God is with me.

When I receive that special letter or visit,
God is with me.

When my day is filled with hope and joy,
God is with me.

Contributed by an Inmate
of a Maximum Security Prison

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GOD WITH US
Bible Study Instructions
Part Three

Part Three of the Bible Study contains:

- 1) Part Three: A-The Gospels and Acts
- 2) Part Three: B-The Letters and Revelation

1) Read “Part Three: A-The Gospels and Acts”

Follow the directions for each book of the Bible

Answer the “Study Page” after each book of the Bible

Do the “Review Test” after studying “Part Three: A-The Gospels and Acts”

(All “Review Tests” are at the back of the Bible study book)

2) Read “Part Three: B-The Letters and Revelation”

Follow the directions for each book of the Bible

Answer the “Study Page” after each book of the Bible

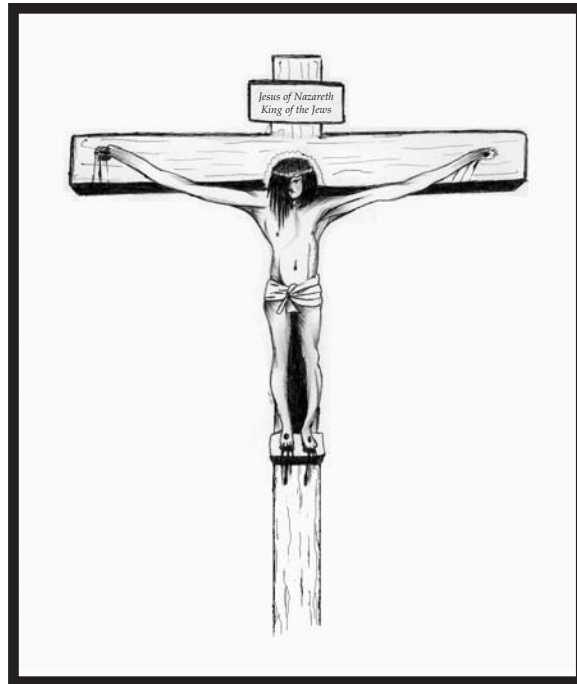
Do the “Review Test” after studying “Part Three: B-The Letters and Revelation”

End of Part Three:

- Tear out only the 2 pages called “Review Tests” for Part Three at the back of the Bible study after you have completed them
- Review and correct these pages with your study coordinator.
- Receive a certificate of completion for the section of the Bible study you have completed.

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*“And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw everyone to myself”
(John 12: 32).*

PART THREE

A - THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

The word *gospel* comes from an Old English word “*godspel*” which means “*good news.*” The good news is that Jesus, God’s only begotten Son, died and rose from the dead to free us from our sins. This is the message that gives hope and life to all believers: “*He has been raised from the dead, he is going before you*” (*Matthew 28:7*). This life-giving message was recorded in four different books named *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. Each gospel was written by a different author in his own style and from his own point of view. Although Jesus spoke Aramaic, the gospels were written in Greek, the most common language of that time.

It is important to realize that the church came first, then the gospels. This means that the gospels grew out of the *oral (spoken) tradition* of the church. During his life on earth, Jesus only preached. He did not leave any writings for his followers. After Jesus returned to his Father, the apostles went to all parts of the Roman empire to preach the message of Jesus. The stories and sayings of Jesus they told were remembered by the christian communities in various parts of the empire. In time, the authors of the gospels searched for as many stories about Jesus as they could find and then organized them into books, each presenting a unique portrait of Jesus.

From other early Christian authors we know that there was a collection of sayings of Jesus that existed before the gospels were written. Although this collection has been lost, the sayings themselves most likely were included in the gospels. We know that Jesus said some things that were not recorded in the gospels. For instance, Paul repeated a saying of Jesus: “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (*Acts 20:35*). This saying is not in the four gospels. Even in the gospels themselves, we read that Jesus said something but it is not recorded. For example, in the story of the raising of Lazarus, Martha told Mary that “*the teacher is here and is asking for you*” (*John 11:28*). No such words of Jesus were recorded in this passage. As the author of *John* said at the end of his gospel, “*There are also many other things that Jesus did*” (*John 21:25*).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke draw from the same source which bible experts call *Q*, from the German word *Quelle* (source). In general, *Matthew* and *Luke* follow the same outline found in *Mark*. But *Matthew* and *Luke* give details about the birth of Jesus, while *Mark* does not. Because these three gospels are so much alike they are called the *synoptic gospels*. *Synopsis* is a Greek word which means “*similar.*” The author of *Luke* also wrote *Acts* which gives the account of how the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, spread the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

On the other hand, *John’s* gospel was very different than the other three. The author wrote in his own style and included stories that were not recorded in the other gospels. These stories are mentioned in the study of his gospel that follows this introduction. On the other hand, *John* does not record the parables of Jesus.

There is a lot of discussion about when each of the gospels was written. However, the following dates are acceptable: *Mark* 65-70 A.D. (before the destruction of Jerusalem), *Luke* and *Acts* 80-85 A.D., *Matthew* 80-90 A.D., and *John* 95-100 A.D.

Each of the four evangelists has a special symbol that may stand for the ways their gospels begin. *Matthew’s* symbol is a *man* because his gospel starts with a record of the human family of Jesus. *Mark’s* symbol is a *lion*. It stands for the voice of John the baptist who roars like a lion in the wilderness. *Luke’s* symbol is an *ox* since his gospel begins with worship in the temple. *John’s* symbol is an *eagle* because of the way the words at the beginning of his gospel soar like an eagle. *Revelation 4: 6-8* and *Ezekiel 1:5-11* also describe these four unusual creatures.



MATTHEW

• History

The gospel of *Matthew* was not the first gospel to be written, but it is placed before the others because it serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The very first line of *Matthew* links Jesus with the Old Testament: "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (1:1). In other words, Jesus came from the line of David and belonged to the family of Abraham. Many Old Testament prophecies pointed to Jesus as the *messiah*. *Matthew* also showed Jesus as the new lawgiver, greater than Moses who gave God's people the law and the covenant at Mount Sinai. The author did this by arranging the gospel into five books, like the first five books of the bible called the *Torah*, or Law. Matthew noticed that many of the important moments in the ministry of Jesus took place on a mountain. In Chapters 5-7 Jesus gave his "sermon on the mount" where he taught a new law that included the beatitudes. In Chapter 17 Jesus revealed his glory on the mountain with Moses and Elijah beside him. Moses stood for the law and Elijah for the prophets of the Old Testament. Just as God spoke from the cloud on Mount Sinai, he spoke about Jesus: "*This is my beloved Son...listen to him*" (17:5). The gospel of *Matthew* showed that Jesus did not come to destroy the old Law. Instead, he used it like a stem to grow the flower of his new law of love: "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart...you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments*" (Matthew 22:37-40). In Chapter 27 Jesus was lifted up on Calvary and recognized as "*the Son of God*." As with all the gospels, *Matthew* ends with the joyful news: "*you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, just as he said*" (Matthew 28:5).

• Outline of Matthew

Prologue - Chapters 1 to 2 (Jesus is Born)

Book 1 - Chapters 3 to 7 (Jesus Proclaims the Kingdom of God)

Book 2 - Chapters 8 to 10 (Jesus Ministers in Galilee)

Book 3 - Chapters 11 to 13 (Jesus and His Enemies)

Book 4 - Chapters 14 to 18 (Jesus Teaches about the Kingdom and the Church)

Book 5 - Chapters 19 to 25 (Jesus Ministers in Judea and Jerusalem)

Epilogue - Chapters 26 to 28 (Jesus Dies and Rises)

• Passages to Read

The sermon on the mount (Chapter 5:1-20)

No more violence (Chapter 5:38-48)

The power to forgive (Chapter 9)

The final judgment (Chapter 25)

Jesus has been raised (Chapter 28)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?" (Matthew 9:5).

Teach us to forgive ourselves and others, that we may walk in your peace, Lord.

"Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Give us the wisdom and courage to live by your golden rule, God.

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" (Matthew 12: 48).

Whoever does the will of your heavenly Father belongs to your family, Lord.

Matthew Study Page

Question 1. *“And whoever gives only a cup of cold water...will surely not lose his reward”* (Matthew 10:42). God will not forget the smallest kindness. As followers of the gospel what small things can we do?

Question 2. *“He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus”* (Matthew 1:25). God asked Joseph to live without sexual relations. How did he find the strength to do this?

Question 3. *“I give praise to you, Father...for although you have hidden these things from the wise and learned you have revealed them to the childlike”* (Matthew 11:25). Can anyone with an open mind and heart like a child understand the gospel? What does this say about God?

Question 4. *“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father”* (Matthew 5:44-45). When we forgive grudges and hurts, how does it change us?

Question 5. *“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock”* (Matthew 7:24). What do we build our lives on?

What is your favorite passage in the Book of Matthew and why?

The Beatitudes - Matthew 5:2-12

The Teaching of the Master

In this chapter of *Matthew* Jesus stands out as the great spiritual master. He challenges his followers to live by a new spirit, “*surpassing the holiness*” (v.20) of those who just keep the law. He does this over and over again in Chapter 5 as he says: “*You have heard...But I say...*” (*Matthew* 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). In *Matthew* 5:2-12, there is a list of teachings given by Jesus called the *beatitudes*. Some people may think these words seem soft and gentle, but they are really very powerful. If we understand them they cut through our usual way of thinking. If we take them to heart and live by them they will turn our lives upside down. We will never be the same. However, these words of Jesus should not make us sad or afraid to follow him. No one said that being a Christian would be easy. Jesus warned his followers: “*If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first*” (*John* 15:18). All that Jesus wants is for us to be really happy. He says: “*I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete*” (*John* 15:11). If we live by the beatitudes we will be living as God the creator lives, as Jesus says at the end of this amazing chapter: “*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (*Matthew* 5:48).

The Beatitudes

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of God*” (v.3).

“*Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted*” (v.4).

“*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land*” (v.5).

“*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied*” (v.6).

“*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy*” (v.7).

“*Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God*” (v.8).

“*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God*” (v.9).

“*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of God*” (v.10).

“*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (v.11-12).

The Meaning of the Beatitudes

The English word *blest* does not say exactly what Jesus meant. The Hebrew (*asre*) and Greek (*makarios*) mean “*God’s joy is yours!*” It is unlike any joy on earth. It is a God-given joy that no one can take away. It is so deep and strong that no sorrow, loss, or pain can destroy it. It enables us to see everything in life as a gift. *God’s joy is yours* if you...

- 1) are as gentle with others as God is (v.3)
- 2) are heart-broken at the evil in the world and your sins (v.4)
- 3) humbly face your own weakness (v.5)
- 4) long for holiness more than any hunger or thirst (v.6)
- 5) see others with a merciful mind and heart (v.7)
- 5) serve God and others with no self-interest (v.8)
- 6) make peace with yourself and others (v.9)
- 7) suffer for living according to God’s will (v.10)
- 8) are mistreated for following Christ (v.11-12)

Living by the beatitudes does not mean we are better than others, or escape hardship and struggle. It means we live with joy because God is with us. As followers of Christ we are already live in his kingdom. It begins now and lasts into eternity. This takes courage and strength but God’s Spirit helps us. Otherwise, we could not live this way on our own. As Jesus said: “*for God all things are possible*” (*Matthew* 19:26).



MARK

• History

Mark is the shortest of the gospels and probably the first to be written, sometime during 65-70 A.D. The author is known as Mark, a companion of Peter the apostle, who traveled with Peter around the Roman empire after Jesus rose from the dead. During those journeys he wrote down what Peter preached and also added a few stories from other sources. Most likely, he was not the apostle Mark, and never met Jesus personally. Mark wrote his gospel while living in Rome after the death of Peter. This gospel was written with *gentiles* in mind, that is, people who were not Jews. Mark wants to get the message of Jesus across to people who did not understand Jewish customs. They also may not have read the Old Testament. For this reason, Mark explains Jewish customs (7:3-4, 14:12, 15:42), translates Hebrew words (3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 10:46, 14:36, 15:22, 34), and shows the gospel is meant for gentiles too (7:27, 10:12, 11:17, 13:10). Mark's gospel is like a mystery story with the answer at the end. In each chapter of his book, through the words and deeds of Jesus, he gradually reveals who Jesus is. Jesus explains three times that as the messiah he must suffer and die *"but after three days he will rise"* (Mark 10:34). However, even the disciples have a hard time understanding the truth. Only at the end of his life after the crucifixion is Jesus completely understood. He is God's suffering servant: *"For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). It is interesting that a Roman soldier watched how Jesus died and proclaimed: *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (Mark 15:39). *Mark* originally ended with the account of the empty tomb: *"He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him"* (Mark 16:6).

• Outline of Mark

Chapter 1:1-15 (The Prologue)
Chapters 1:16 to 8:21 (Jesus the Healer and Teacher)
Chapters 8:22 to 10:52 (Jesus the Suffering Messiah)
Chapters 11:1 to 13:37 (Jesus in Jerusalem)
Chapters 14:1 to 16:20 (Jesus Dies and Rises from the Dead)

• Passages to Read

Jesus cures a man possessed by a demon (Chapter 1:21-28)
Jesus calms the storm (Chapter 4:35-41)
Jesus reveals the cross and resurrection (Chapter 8:27-38)
Jesus teaches about serving (Chapter 9:33-37)
Peter denies Jesus (Chapter 14:66-72)
Jesus on the cross is the Son of God (Chapter 15:33-38)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).
We are saved by the good news of your forgiveness, Lord.

"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).
Give us the strength and courage to serve others like you, God.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many" (Mark 14:24).
By shedding your blood for us, you have set us free from guilt, Lord.

Mark Study Page

Question 1. *"The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him"* (Mark 1:26).
What things can possess us so that we are not free? Are we ready and willing to hand over to the power of Jesus all our problems?

Question 2. *"He asked them: 'Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?'"* (Mark 4:40).
What makes us afraid? Do we really believe that Jesus can calm our inner storms?

Question 3. *"Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him...He broke down and wept"* (Mark 14:72). Which word of Jesus touches our own heart if we truly let it?

Question 4. *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (Mark 15:39). The soldier realized that Jesus was both *man* and *God*. What does this mean for us?

What is your favorite passage in the Book of Mark and why?



LUKE

• History

The author of this gospel may have been Luke the physician (*Colossians* 4:14) who went with Paul on his journeys among the Gentiles (non-Jews).

He was educated, an excellent writer, but not an eye-witness to the ministry of Jesus. He wrote down what others who knew Jesus told him. However, he may have known Mary the mother of Jesus, because he alone gave more details about the birth and childhood of Jesus than any other gospel. Only *Luke* has the beautiful song of Mary. Luke wrote his gospel to show that the message of Jesus was meant for the whole world and *“that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem”* (*Luke* 24:47). This gospel has been called the *“gospel of mercy.”* It shows how God’s pardon and peace are meant for all people everywhere, but especially outcasts, the poor, and public sinners. The Gospel of *Luke* is about *“the tender mercy of our God”* (*Luke* 1:78). Only *Luke* included the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, and the repentant criminal on the cross. In these stories *Luke* taught that God goes after sinners, and is ready to show them mercy, even at the moment of death. Christians must be ready for the return of Jesus at any time, but *Luke* focused on the need to follow the risen Jesus day by day. The last chapter of *Luke* boldly states the good news for believers in every age: *“Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but has been raised”* (*Luke* 24:5).

• Outline of Luke

Chapter 1:1-4 (Why Luke Wrote the Gospel)

Chapters 1:5 to 2:52 (The Birth and Childhood of Jesus)

Chapters 3:1-4 to 4:13 (Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus)

Chapters 4:14 to 9:50 (Jesus Ministers in Galilee)

Chapters 9:51 to 19:27 (Jesus Heads for Jerusalem)

Chapters 19:28 to 21:38 (Jesus Ministers in Jerusalem)

Chapters 22:1 to 23:56 (Jesus Suffers and Dies)

Chapter 24:1-53 (Jesus Rises from the Dead)

• Passages to Read

God lifts up the lowly (Chapter 1:46-55)

Jesus pardons a sinful woman (Chapter 7:36-50)

Stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, and the lost son (Chapter 15)

Jesus visits a tax collector (Chapter 19:1-10)

The criminal who turned to Jesus (Chapter 23:39-43)

Jesus appears after his death (Chapter 24)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“We must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found” (*Luke* 15:32). In you we find ourselves and really start to live, Lord.

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost” (*Luke* 19:10).

You do not wait for us, loving God, you come looking for us.

“Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way?” (*Luke* 24:32).

Only you, Lord, can fill our hearts with lasting joy in this life.

Luke Study Page

Question 1. *"The Mighty One has done great things for me" (Luke 1:48).*
Are we able to become saints through our own ability or because of God's mercy?

Question 2. *"He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51).*
Jesus spent most of his life waiting to begin his ministry. What can we do with our time?

Question 3. *"Her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love" (Luke 7:47).*
Self-hatred can overwhelm us, but if God forgives us, shouldn't we forgive ourselves?

Question 4. *"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people" (Luke 15: 7).* If God has a special place in his heart for anyone, who is it?

Question 5. *" 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'...' Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise' " (Luke 23: 42-43).* How long does it take for us to receive God's mercy?
How does Christ's promise that we too will live with him forever in paradise change us?

What is your favorite passage in the Book of Luke and why?



JOHN

• History

John was the last of the gospels to be written. It may have been written by John the beloved disciple who is mentioned in it, or by someone who knew John and recorded his memories of Jesus and the gospel. It is dated toward the end of the first century (90-100 A.D.). *John* is very different than *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*. It is written in a very different style and does not follow the same outline of events as the other three gospels. It also has sayings and stories that are not in the other gospels. More than any other gospel, *John* has what are called the “*I am*” sayings of Jesus, which point to him as God. One example is: “*I am he, the one who is speaking with you*” (4:26). Others are: “*I am the bread of life*” (6:35), “*I am the way and the truth and the life*” (14:6). Only *John* has stories like the wedding at Cana where Jesus turns water into wine (2:1-11), the healing of the blind man (9:1-41), the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). The gospel of *John* could be called the gospel of signs and symbols, because the author uses so many of them to explain the gospel. *John* uses ideas like light and darkness, bread and hunger, water and thirst, truth and lies, life and death. *John* describes Jesus as true bread (*John* 6:28-35), living water (*John* 7:37-39), light of the world (*John* 8:12), and good shepherd (*John* 10:7-13). This gospel ends with the story of how the risen Jesus questioned and forgave Peter: “*Do you love me?*” (*John* 21:15-19). It is a question that the risen Jesus asks everyone who wishes to follow him. For *John* to love God is to live forever.

• Outline of John

Chapter 1:1-18 (Prologue - Light Shines in the Darkness as the Word Becomes Flesh)
Chapters 1:19 to 12:50 (The Book of Signs)
Chapters 13:1 to 20:31 (The Book of Glory)
Chapter 21:1-25 (Epilogue - Jesus Appears to Peter and the Disciples)

• Passages to Read

Water is turned into wine (Chapter 2:1-11)
Jesus gives life-giving water (Chapter 4:1-42)
Jesus is our bread of life (Chapter 6:22-71)
A blind man is healed (Chapter 9:1-41)
A dead man is raised (Chapter 11:1-44)
Peter is forgiven (Chapter 21:15-19)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him*” (*John* 1:18).
As each day passes, help us know you better, Lord.

“*I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another*” (*John* 13:34). We can love because you first loved us, God.

“*This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (*John* 13:35).
Help us make a difference in the lives of those around us, Lord

“*Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?*” (*John* 4:29).
You know all about us yet you love us, God.

John Study Page

Question 1. *“When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said: ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ” (John 9:35). Even if no one else respects us, how does Jesus treat us?*

Question 2. *“As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” (John 6:66). As Catholics, do we believe that the bread and wine really become the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist?*

Question 3. *“He cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot...Jesus said to them, ‘Untie him and let him go’ ” (John 11:43-44). When we feel tangled up in old mistakes and bad habits, is Jesus able to set us free?*

Question 4. *“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. (John 13:14-15). What are some ways that we can follow this example of Jesus?*

Why is the Gospel of John called a book of signs? What are some of them?



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

• History

Acts, or *Acts of the Apostles*, was written by the same person who wrote the gospel of *Luke*. Luke was a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor, and the companion of Paul the apostle. *Acts* is the story of how the church began and spread. Just as he promised, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples in the great event called Pentecost. From that day they boldly preached the good news about “*God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses*” (*Acts* 2:32). The hardships of the apostles actually helped them preach and spread the message of Christ. Even the death of Stephen by stoning helped spread the gospel because Paul, the future apostle, was a witness to it (*Acts* 7:58 and 22:20). As the early Christians said: “*the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.*” Paul changed from an enemy of the church to one of its greatest apostles. With Paul’s arrest and trip to Rome even more people heard about the gospel. *Acts* shows how the work of Jesus continued through his disciples. The Holy Spirit worked through the followers of Jesus as the ordinary way to spread the gospel. Luke used numbers to remind his readers that something was important. Paul’s conversion was told three times (*Acts* 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-23). The life of the early Christians was described three times (*Acts* 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 9:31). Peter’s conversion of the Roman centurion was repeated three times (*Acts* 10; 11:1-18; 15:7-11). The church held its first council in Jerusalem (*Acts* 15:19-21; 15:28-29; 21:25). Paul preached to the Jews first, then the gentiles (*Acts* 13:46-47; 18:5-6; 28:22-28), but always the same message: “*they took him down from the tree and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead*” (*Acts* 13:29-30). *Acts* ends with Paul as a prisoner in Rome.

• Outline of Acts

Chapters 1:1 to 2:13 (Preparing to Continue Christ’s Mission)
Chapters 2:14 to 8:3 (Mission to Jerusalem)
Chapters 8:4 to 89:43 (Mission to Judea and Samaria)
Chapters 10:1 to 15:35 (Mission to the Gentiles)
Chapters 15:36 to 28:31 (Mission to the Ends of the Earth)

• Passages to Read

The Spirit forms the new people of God (Chapters 1 and 2)
Trouble with the Jewish leaders (Chapter 5:12-42)
Saul accepts Christ and becomes Paul (Chapter 9:1-30)
Peter brings the gospel to Cornelius (Chapter 10:1-49)
Paul preaches the gospel to Jews and gentiles (Chapter 13:16-52)
Paul says good-by (Chapter 20:17-38)
Paul’s arrest and appeal (Chapter 25:1-120)
Paul arrives in Rome (Chapter 28:11-30)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses*” (*Acts* 1:8).
Wherever we are, whomever we meet, your Spirit empowers us to be witnesses, Lord.

“*During the night, the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, [and] let them out*” (*Acts* 5:19).
Even when we are confined, you can make us free, God.

“*I myself once thought that I had to do many things against the name of Jesus*” (*Acts* 26:9).
No matter what we did in the past, we can still be your apostles, Lord.

Acts Study Page

Question 1. *"Why are you standing there looking at the sky?"* (Acts 1:11). When Jesus returned to heaven, angels told the disciples to spread his gospel. How can we start doing the same?

Question 2. *"He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'"* (Acts 9:4). Has God ever brought you down so you could return to your senses? Why does Jesus accuse Paul of hurting *him* when he hurts *others*?

Question 3. *"He tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple"* (Acts 9:26). Like Paul, how do we feel when those we have hurt do not believe we have changed?

Question 4. *"To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name"* (Acts 10:43). In a few short words Peter explained the whole gospel. How do these words change our lives?

Question 5. *"We must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus himself who said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' "* (Acts 20:35). Why did Jesus say it is better to give than to receive? What happens when we do this?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Acts:

The Bible, the Church and the Pope

There are four *signs* that mark the Catholic church as the one Christ founded.

One: It is one because all its members are one in faith, share in the same seven sacraments, in the one sacrifice of the Mass, and are guided by one leader (2 *Peter* 1:1). This visible leader of the church is the pope who is the successor of Peter, the apostle that Jesus chose to be the rock of the church (*Matthew* 16:13-19). This teaching authority keeps the church from error by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. This unity was the final prayer of Christ himself: “*that they may all be one*” (*John* 17:21).

Holy: It is holy because Jesus who is its head is holy, the Spirit that Jesus sent strengthens us to be holy, and the church invites all human beings to live a holy life (*John* 6:69, *John* 16:7-8, and *Hebrews* 12:14). It also has been said that the church is holy because all of its members, although sinners, are forgiven: “*They shall be called the holy people*” (*Isaiah* 62:12). This is a holiness which all of us can have. That is why the bible refers to Christ’s followers as “saints” because they have been healed by God (saint comes from the Latin word *sanus* which means whole or healthy).

Catholic: It is catholic (which means universal) because it has the truth which it shares in every time and with every nation on earth (*Matthew* 28:19-20 and *1 Timothy* 3:15). It is the world-wide mission of the church to bring the gospel to all people (*Mark* 16:15). It is universal in its liturgy, the Mass, which people can attend anywhere in the world and feel at home.

Apostolic: It is apostolic because it is faithful to the teaching of the apostles and therefore stands on the apostles as its foundation (*Ephesians* 2:20). In this way the church remains faithful to the truth through Christ who leads it through Peter and the apostles. Their successors are the pope and the bishops who lead with him. When the pope speaks from the chair of Peter (*ex cathedra*) he teaches Christ’s followers on matters of faith and morals without error, that is, infallibly.

Peter the First Pope:

It is clear from the bible that Peter was given a special role in the church. When the names of the apostles are given, Peter is always placed first. More than all the other apostles, Peter is mentioned in the New Testament 195 times. After Peter, John’s name is mentioned only 29 times. Besides *Matthew* 16:13-19 quoted above, many other bible passages show that immediately after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter acted as the head of the apostles and the entire christian community. Non-Catholics find it hard to believe that Christ chose Peter as the first pope, but it is in the bible!

In *Mark* 8:29 and *Luke* 9:20, Peter is the first apostle to say to Jesus: “*You are the Messiah!*”

In *Mark* 16:7 the angel at the empty tomb mentions only Peter by name: “*Go and tell his disciples and Peter...*”

The transfiguration described in *Luke* 9:28-36 mentions “*Peter and his companions...*” Only Peter speaks to Christ, “*Master, it is good that we are here*” (v.33).

In *Luke* 24:33 the risen Christ appears to Peter first, then to the rest of the apostles.

In *John* 6:67-68, after many disciples left Jesus, Peter speaks for the others: “*Jesus then said to the Twelve, ‘Do you also want to leave?’ Simon Peter answered him... ‘We have come to believe...’*”

John 21:15-19 described how the risen Jesus tells Peter “*Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep*” calling him to care for his flock, the church.

Acts 1:13 “*When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James...*” As usual, Peter is mentioned first followed by the other apostles.

Acts 1:15 “*Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers...*” Peter is at the center speaking for all.

In *Acts* 2:14 after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church, Peter stands up to speak for the whole group: “*Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them...*” Like every Pope who has followed after him, Peter spoke as the head of the church with the help of the Holy Spirit.

PART THREE

B - THE LETTERS AND REVELATION

After the four Gospels and *Acts*, there are 21 letters in the New Testament. These letters are also called *epistles* (from the Greek word *epistolé*, a message or letter). These letters show us what the early christian community (church) was like and the problems that it had to deal with. The letters were written to answer questions, to settle differences, or solve problems. Many of these questions and problems are things that trouble christians in any age, so the letters continue to have great value even in our day. They contain many basic teachings of the Christian faith: Christ's death has freed us from our sins, faith in Christ brings us new life, the need for repentance and baptism in following Christ, the church as the body of Christ, the true body and blood of Christ shared in the breaking of the bread (Eucharist), the Spirit who guides the church and gives the gifts needed to help the church grow, the return of Christ at the end of time when he will overcome the enemy and gather his people from the living and the dead.

Fourteen of the letters are called *Pauline*, meaning they were written by Paul or written in his name. Paul's letters were written before the gospels, so they are the oldest christian writings. They start somewhere between 50 to 60 A.D. The letters to the churches are placed first, followed by those to individuals. In *Romans* and *Galatians* Paul dealt with the problems between Jewish and non-Jewish (gentile) Christians about how each group should live the christian life in different ways. *1* and *2 Corinthians* were written to people who lived in a very sinful city and had a hard time deciding what was right or how to remain strong and keep away from sin. It is important to point out that *1 Corinthians* 15:3-8 gives the earliest witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: "Last of all, ...he appeared to me" (v.8). The question of how to live if the "end was near" and Christ was returning was dealt with in *1* and *2 Thessalonians*. This became a problem for the early church because some Christians thought that Christ would return during their lifetime. As time went on, however, it became clear that Christ was not coming immediately, but would return at a time known only to God. Four of Paul's letters are called "captive" letters. They were written while he was a prisoner: *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*. Three are called the "pastoral" letters (*1* and *2 Timothy* and *Titus*) because they were written to individual leaders of the church rather than to entire groups. These leaders are given special advice on how to deal with the Christians in their spiritual care. *Hebrews* is placed last in the collection of Paul's letters. Bible experts are not sure that Paul wrote it because it has a very different style of writing. Nevertheless, it contains many of Paul's basic teachings.

Aside from Peter, Paul was one of the most important figures of the early church. As *Acts* records, he started out killing Christians because he thought they were a disgrace to God and a danger to true religion. After Jesus knocked him to the ground in a blinding light, he was baptized and became a follower of the "way" as the church was often called. Eventually he became the apostle to the gentiles who did not follow Jewish customs as the Jewish christians did. These customs involved temple worship and sacrifices, circumcision, ritual washings of their bodies and food, avoiding certain foods as unclean, and following the holy days of the Jewish calendar. At first, this caused a lot of confusion in the early church. This problem finally was solved at a special gathering of apostles and leaders called the Council of Jerusalem. After that, it was clear that gentile Christians did not have to follow Jewish customs, but Jewish christians were free to continue as they wished. Since then the church has held *councils*, like the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. or Vatican II in our day, whenever it needed to deal with important matters.

Some New Testament letters were written by the same person, so they are placed together in groups, like *1* and *2 Peter*; and *1*, *2*, and *3 John*. In these cases the longest letter is placed first. *James* and *Jude* may be short letters, but like the others they are full of spiritual insight and advice. *Revelation* is the last book of the New Testament and the Bible. It also may be the last to be written around 90-100 A.D. It was written to give courage to Christians who were suffering and facing death for their faith in Christ. It taught that the same Christ who suffered and rose victorious from the dead was leading them to spiritual victory in the midst of their own hardships.



ROMANS

• History

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in 57 A.D. while he was staying in Corinth. He wrote to the Christians living in Rome because he was planning to visit them. He knew many of them by name and mentioned them in Chapter 16. However, before he got there he was arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel and was put in prison.

When he finally arrived in Rome much later in 61 A.D. he still was a prisoner waiting for trial. He lived under house arrest *“with the soldier who was guarding him”* (Acts 28:16). Although Paul wrote his letter to the Christians, he also was thinking about the many Jews who lived in Rome. Only a handful accepted Christ as the Messiah. The rest rejected him. This disappointed Paul very much because they were his own race: *“I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham”* (Romans 11:1). Paul explained that God was still faithful to his covenant with the Jews, and he hoped that one day they would accept Christ. *Romans* is a very long letter, but the main point Paul wanted to make was that the gospel was *“the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”* (Romans 1:16). Paul also explained that human beings, whether Jews or Gentiles, were spiritually lost and unable to save themselves. Only God’s great love could save humanity from its wrongdoing and rebellion against God. God’s answer to human failure was to give his Son, Jesus Christ, as the savior of all: *“he who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all”* (Romans 8:32). Paul taught that Jesus is the outpouring of God’s love and the unfolding of his plan to save humanity. This plan had been *“kept secret for long ages”* but now revealed in Jesus (Romans 16:25).

• Outline of Romans

Chapter 1:1-15 (Opening Remarks)
Chapters 1:16 to 3:20 (Humanity in Need of Rescue)
Chapters 3:21 to 5:21 (Rescue by Grace, Blood, and Faith)
Chapters 6:1 to 8:39 (Saved by God’s Love)
Chapters 9:1 to 11:36 (God is Faithful to His Covenant)
Chapters 12:1 to 15:13 (Christians Must Practice What They Believe)
Chapters 15:14 to 16:27 (Closing Words)

• Passages to Read

How humanity is saved (Chapter 5:1-11)
The new life of baptism (Chapter 6:1-11)
Trust in God’s mercy (Chapter 8:28-39)
The Christian life of love (Chapter 12)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
All of us are weak and imperfect. Give us compassion for one another, Lord.

“God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
You have loved us first so we give our hearts to you, God.

“If God is for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).
Through the death of your Son we walk free. Thank you for our freedom, Lord.

Romans Study Page

Question 1. *“Just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all”* (Romans 5:18). Beginning with Adam, each of us has sinned, but the charges against us were dropped. Jesus was sentenced for us. How much are we loved, then?

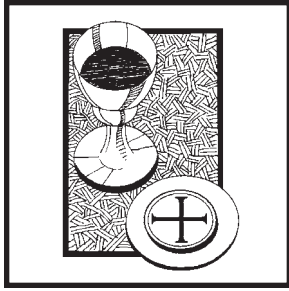
Question 2. *“He was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what [God] had promised he was also able to do”* (Romans 4:20-21). Abraham trusted God totally.

If we do not believe in God’s promise, who else is able to save us?

Question 3. *“I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate”* (Romans 7:15). Do Paul’s words describe what it is like to be a weak human being? What is the solution to this problem?

Question 4. *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9). Is Paul saying that faith is only a matter of what we say, or does it show itself in how we behave?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Romans:



1 CORINTHIANS

• History

Paul wrote *1 Corinthians* around 56 A.D. to answer a letter this new christian community had written to him. He knew the christians of Corinth well, because he had lived with them and taught them the gospel. Paul's letter gives an inside view of life in the early church.

These new christians had a lot of questions about their new faith, and needed guidance with problems that were beginning to divide them. After Paul left they began to form groups loyal to different teachers. Paul reminded them that he brought them the gospel and that unity was the true spirit of Christ. Some thought that as followers of Christ they should not get married. Paul praised marriage and those who did not marry for spiritual reasons. All christians belonged to the body of Christ and should live morally. Others were worried about buying meat in the market that had been used in pagan worship. Paul told them not to worry because idols were lifeless anyway. It was more important not to worship idols. Paul also taught them how to behave when they gathered to celebrate the Lord's supper. He scolded them for being disorderly, and reminded them that they shared the true body and blood of Christ. He also reminded them that together they were the body of Christ, and that the gifts each had were meant to build up this body. However, he told them that the greatest gift was love for one another. *1 Corinthians* 13 on love is one of Paul's most beautiful passages. In *Chapter 15* Paul wrote with great conviction about the victory over death that each of us has in the resurrection.

• Outline of 1 Corinthians

Chapter 1:1-9 (Greeting)

Chapters 1:10 to 6:20 (Teaching on Order in Church)

Chapters 7:1 to 11:1 (Teaching about Morality)

Chapters 11:2 to 14:40 (Teaching about Christian Worship)

Chapter 15:1-58 (Teaching about the Victory of the Resurrection)

Chapter 16 (Farewell)

• Passages to Read

The wisdom of the cross seems foolish to nonbelievers (Chapter 1:18-31)

Our bodies are temples of the Spirit (Chapter 6:12-20)

The Lord's Supper (Chapter 12:23-29)

The gifts of the one Spirit keep the body of christians together (Chapter 12)

True christian love (Chapter 13)

The power of the resurrection (Chapter 15)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). In the lesson of the cross we learn your healing power, Lord.

"Your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Thank you for helping us see everything with the eyes of faith, God.

"Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

No walls or bars separate those who belong to your body, Lord.

1 Corinthians Study Page

Question 1. *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). Since our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, how should we treat them?

Question 2. *“If I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). What kind of love is Paul talking about? When we face our final judgment, what will we be judged on?

Question 3. *“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”* (1 Corinthians 10:16). Why does the Catholic church believe that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Christ?

Question 4. *“If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy”* (1 Corinthians 12:26). Does this teaching on the body of Christ change the way you see others?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of 1 Corinthians:



2 CORINTHIANS

• History

2 *Corinthians* may in fact be a combination of several letters which were sent at different times. After Paul wrote his first letter to the Christians of Corinth he learned that they were still having serious problems. “*False teachers*” were challenging his authority as an apostle. In an effort to defend his ministry and win them to his side, Paul describes his life as an apostle. It has cost him his health and safety many times. Because he shared his feelings of anger, frustration, and love so openly, this letter is a clear view of his mind and heart: “*We have spoken frankly to you, Corinthians; our heart is open wide*” (2 *Corinthians* 6:11). It shows how human Paul was, and how deeply he loved Christ and the gospel. Although he was willing to suffer greatly for his ministry, he also was not afraid to take a stand and defend himself against his accusers. This letter also helps us realize that the early church was not perfect. The church had problems then, just as it has problems now. However, the same Spirit has been guiding the church like a ship through troubled waters. Paul’s example in the face of opposition gives us hope and courage as we face our own problems as members of the Christian community today. Paul’s final words are used today at the beginning of Mass: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you*” (2 *Corinthians* 13:13).

• Outline of 2 Corinthians

Chapter 1:1-11 (Greeting)
Chapters 1:12 to 7:16 (Paul’s Authority and Reputation)
Chapters 8:1 to 9:15 (Support for Jerusalem)
Chapters 10:1 to 13:10 (Paul Defends his Ministry)
Chapter 13:11-13 (Farewell)

• Passages to Read

The ministry of reconciliation (Chapter 5: 11-21)
Paul’s life as an apostle (Chapter 11:16 to 12:10)
Christ’s power and the test of a christian (Chapter 13:4-9).

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*When I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 *Corinthians* 12:10).

When we come to the end of our own strength, we find our strength in you, God.

“*For your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich*” (2 *Corinthians* 8:9).

Help us realize how valuable we are, that you have done this for us, Lord, and make us generous toward others.

“*Although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day*” (2 *Corinthians* 4:16).
As the days pass into months and years, help us grow in wisdom and love, God.

2 Corinthians Study Page

Question 1. *“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Are we stuck in our past, or do we really believe that God has forgiven us and can give us a new beginning if we give ourselves to him?

Question 2. *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”* (2 Corinthians 3:17). How can we be free even when we are confined?

Question 3. *“...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). After we have hurt or neglected others, how can we bring reconciliation to them?

Question 4. *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Are we serious about growing spiritually? Do we examine our behavior at the end of each day?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the 2 Corinthians:



GALATIANS

• History

Galatia was a part of the Roman empire (in central Turkey) that Paul had visited some years before he wrote this letter. While he was there he successfully preached the gospel and left behind a large Christian community. Later, Paul wrote *Galatians* because he found out that they were listening to misguided people. Some Jewish Christians were teaching them that whoever accepted the gospel must keep the old laws of Moses also. It is clear from the way he wrote, that Paul was very upset by this. He tried every way he could think of to help the Galatians realize the spiritual danger they were in. He even tried shocking them to their senses: “O stupid Galatians! who has bewitched you?” (*Galatians* 3:1). His motive was love for them and for Christ, and his only goal was to bring them back to a true understanding of the gospel. Step by step he carefully explained that God’s grace is a gift, and that following Christ means living in the freedom of the Spirit. Paul wanted the Galatians to know that just keeping religious rules and rituals (something he called *works*) could never make a person holy. God expected more than that. God wanted their hearts and their faith in Christ his only Son.

• Outline of Galatians

Chapter 1:1-5 (Greeting)

Chapters 1:11 to 2:21 (Paul Defends Himself and His Gospel)

Chapters 2 to 3 (Paul Explains the Gospel of Grace)

Chapters 5:1 to 6:10 (Grace Brings Freedom and Responsibility)

Chapter 6:11-18 (Closing Message)

• Passages to Read

Dying to the law and living for God (Chapter 2:15-21)

Faith makes us free (Chapter 3:23-29)

True freedom and the signs of our life in Christ (Chapter 5:13-26)

Correcting and teaching one another (Chapter 6:1-10)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (*Galatians* 5: 1).
Never again will anyone or anything keep us from the freedom that belongs to those you created and saved, Lord.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (*Galatians* 6: 2).
When we share the burden of others along the road of life, our own burden gets lighter, God.

“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up” (*Galatians* 6:9).
Give us the strength to keep on going good even when we feel like giving up, Lord.

Galatians Study Page

Question 1. *"You have come to know God, or rather to be known by God"*(Galatians 4:9). Since God is so much greater than us and is all around us, did we find God or did God find us?

Question 2. *"You were called for freedom...serve one another through love"* (Galatians 5:13). A flower is made to bloom, a bird to fly. As human beings created and redeemed by God what are we free to do?

Question 3. *"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22-23). There are a lot of people who say they are christian but how can we tell if someone is really following Christ?

Question 4. *"If you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another"* (Galatians 5:15). Are God's commands only so that we give him respect, or are they also for our own good?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Galatians:



EPHESIANS

• History

Ephesus was the third largest city in ancient Roman times, with a famous temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Her temple had hundreds of prostitutes as part of the pagan worship. The city was like a tourist center that attracted crowds of people to its stadium, theaters, and libraries. Paul spent almost 3 years in Ephesus preaching the gospel and starting a christian community there. Eventually, Paul's ministry was so successful that it became bad for the city's business. There was a riot among the business people because their sales of pagan souvenirs were down. As a result he was forced to leave the city. This is described in more detail in *Acts*, 18-20. *Ephesians* is the first of four *captivity* letters written by Paul (*Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*). They are called this because Paul wrote them while he was a prisoner. In each letter there are words like "I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ" (*Ephesians* 3:1). This letter points out the need for the christians of Ephesus to live in unity as followers of Christ. Once again, Paul was trying to correct the idea that some Jewish christians had that new converts should follow the ancient laws of Moses. While Paul stressed the spirit of freedom that christians enjoy, he also explained that freedom was not an excuse to do whatever they pleased. True freedom meant that they had the chance to do good to others. Their freedom *from sin* and the customs of Moses meant they were free *to serve* those in need. Christians are called to be free because they are loved by God, as Paul put it: "Live in love, as Christ loved us" (*Ephesians* 5:2).

• Outline of Ephesians

Chapter 1:1-14 (Greeting and Blessing)
Chapters 1:15 to 2:22 (Christians as Christ's Body)
Chapters 3:1 to 4:24 (Christians Live and Preach New Life)
Chapters 4:25 to 6:20 (How to Live as Christians)
Chapter 6:21-24 (Final Words)

• Passages to Read

God's plan of grace for all (Chapter 2:1-10)
Our unity as a body (Chapter 4:1-6)
Getting along as christians (Chapter 4:25-32)
The struggle against evil (Chapter 6:10-17)
Walking in the light (Chapter 5:1-21)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call" (*Ephesians* 1:18). As your children we are called to live with hope, not despair, Lord.

"By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God...so no one may boast" (*Ephesians* 2:8-9). Everything we have and do we owe to you, God.

"You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are...members of the household of God" (*Ephesians* 2:19). How can we thank you enough for making us part of your family, Lord!

Ephesians Study Page

Question 1. *“Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). What does it mean to live the truth in love like Christ?*

Question 2. *“Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity” (Ephesians 5:15-16). How will we spend our time? Will we resist God’s grace, or will we open ourselves to change and spiritually grow?*

Question 3. *“Pray at every opportunity in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18).*
Is there any time or place in our day or in our lives, that we cannot pray to God?

Question 4. *“To me, the very least of all his holy ones, this grace was given, to preach” (Ephesians 3:8).*
Is it in spite of, or because of, the mistakes we’ve made that we are called to spread the gospel?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Ephesians:



PHILIPPIANS

• History

Philippi was a large city in northern Greece (Macedonia) located along a major supply road between the eastern and western parts of the Roman empire. It was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Like many cities of the empire it had theaters, baths, temples and a forum—a place in the center of the city where people sold things and took care of business. In Paul's day, it was a favorite place for soldiers to retire. *Philippians* is the second of the *captivity* letters. In it Paul described how the gospel was being spread even while he was in prison (*Philippians* 1:12). Paul encourages Christians in any circumstance to believe that in spite of their failings and weaknesses, or even because of them the gospel will advance. Paul also warned Christians to remain strong in the face of what was coming (See *Philippians* 1:27-30). For the Philippians in their day it was persecution. For Christians today it means the promise to follow Christ will be tested while living among others who don't believe and whose values are often anti-Christian. Paul wanted them to remain faithful to the gospel he taught them and avoid false teachers. Furthermore, Paul did not want the Philippians to focus on their differences but on Christ who gives them joy and courage. He encouraged the Christians and their women leaders to work as partners not rivals. Like Paul they could face anything with the strength that Christ gave them (See *Philippians* 4:13).

• Outline of Philippians

Chapter 1:1-11 (Greeting and Thanks)

Chapters 1:12 to 2:18 (Following Christ Who Humbled Himself)

Chapters 2:19 to 4:9 (Encouraging Words for the Community)

Chapter 4:10-23 (Final Thanks and Farewell)

• Passages to Read

Every situation serves Christ (Chapter 1:12-26).

Standing firm for Christ (Chapter 1:27-30)

Learning how to be humble from Christ (Chapter 2:1-11)

Striving for spiritual maturity (Chapter 3:12-16)

True joy and peace (Chapter 4:4-9)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"...I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (*Philippians* 1:7). As your partners, help us defend and strengthen your gospel, Lord.

"...my situation has turned out rather to advance the gospel..." (*Philippians* 1:12). Help us understand that no matter who we are or where we are, we can promote your good news, God.

*"...he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross"* (*Philippians* 2:8).

Give us an obedient heart—one that really listens to you, Lord.

Philippians Study Page

Question 1. *“The brothers, having taken encouragement in the Lord from my imprisonment, dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly” (Philippians 1:14).* How can your time behind bars be spent giving encouragement to others and helping them to spread the gospel?

Question 2. *“You are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind struggling together for the faith of the gospel, not intimidated in any way by your opponents” (Philippians 1:27-28).* Where do we get the strength to stand firm against the influence of those who do not accept or understand the gospel?

Question 3. *“Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling” (Philippians 3:13-14).* Paul kept his “eyes on the prize.” What did Jesus mean in (Luke 9:62) about those who look “to what was left behind”?

Question 4. *“I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).* How will we handle it when others ignore us or make fun of us for walking with Jesus as our friend and master?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Philippians:



COLOSSIANS

• History

The city of Colossae, 100 miles east of Ephesus, had been a large trading center at one time. At the time of this letter it was a much poorer city. As can happen when times are hard, people begin to look for help and are a target for so-called easy answers. Epaphras, who brought the gospel to the people of this area, contacted Paul to ask for his support and advice about a problem that was threatening the spiritual lives of his community. In reply, Paul wrote *Colossians*, the third of the captivity letters, to combat the false ideas that were troubling these new Christians. Some confused teachers were telling them to stay away from certain kinds of foods and drink. They also told them to be fearful of the power of spirits, even angels, and that the stars and planets had power over their lives. If we compared this problem with our day, it might be like using Tarot cards, horoscopes, psychics or contacting the dead to decide how to live our lives. Paul encouraged the Colossians to stand firm in the gospel. He reminded them that they would not find salvation in other things. People were sadly confused if they focused on spirits or powers rather than Christ who was above any power in heaven and on earth. *Colossians* has been called one of the most Christ-centered books of the bible. It calls the reader to a deeper understanding of Christ as the head of creation and redemption. In *Ephesians* Paul focused on the *body* of Christ. In *Colossians* he concentrated on Christ as the *head*. Paul wanted Christ to be first in every part of their lives (*Colossians* 3:1-4). As he ended his letter Paul showed his human side. He hoped that they would not forget about him in prison. He said to them: “Remember my chains” (*Colossians* 4:18). This shows that everyone, even one of the greatest apostles, needs the spiritual support of other Christians. Scholars tell us that the number of Christians in Colossae may have been very small. If so, it reminds us that it is not how many people belong to our group but how deep our faith is!

• Outline of Colossians

Chapter 1:1-14 (Greeting and Thanksgiving for What God Has Done)

Chapter 1:15-29 (Christ Is the Head of the Body)

Chapters 2:1-23 (Human Solutions Cannot Compare to Christ)

Chapters 3:1 to 4:6 (Life in Christ Means Dying to Selfishness)

Chapter 4:7-18 (Paul’s Co-workers and Final Words)

• Passages to Read

Christ is before and above all (Chapter 1:15-23)

Living with Christ (Chapter 3:1-17).

Prayer and conduct (Chapter 3:18-4:6).

• Thoughts for Prayer

“Think of what is above” (*Colossians* 3:2). Help us see everything in the light of eternity, believing that there is something greater than this world, Lord.

“Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God” (*Colossians* 3:17). Everything in our lives can be an offering and a prayer to you, God.

“Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry” (*Colossians* 3:5). Living the gospel is serious business. We have a lot to face when we hand our lives over to you, Lord.

Colossians Study Page

Question 1. *“Persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (Colossians 1:23).* Who or what else can be the foundation of our lives?

Question 2. *“He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).* If someone asks us what redemption means, what four simple words can we use to explain it?

Question 3. *“See to it that no one captivates you with an empty, seductive philosophy...the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).* How many times have the promises or threats of others ended up not being what we needed for a better life?

Question 4. *“Now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another since you have taken off your old self...and have put on the new self” (Colossians 3:8-10).* Paul leaves no doubt about behavior that has no place in Christ’s way of life. Which ones do we need to work on the most?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Colossians:



1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

• History

After Paul set foot in Greece for the first time, in about 50 A.D., he preached the gospel in Philippi and then Thessalonica—the capital city of the province. It was located on the main supply road leading to Rome. This area had a large Jewish population, including many non-Jews who were fed up with pagan religion and also worshiped the God of Israel. Paul gained many converts to Christianity from among this mix of people. However, his success also made problems for Paul. Many Jews and gentiles were so upset with Paul for drawing people away from their worship services that they made it impossible for him to stay there. When Paul moved on to other cities in Greece, he placed the new Christian community under the direction of faithful leaders, Silvanus and Timothy. More details about this story can be found in *Acts* 15-18. About a year later in 51 A.D., Paul wrote to the Christian community he left behind. This makes *1 Thessalonians* the earliest writing of the New Testament, less than twenty years after the death of Jesus. It is not clear exactly when *2 Thessalonians* was written, possibly much later by a disciple of Paul. Both letters are studied together here because they are addressed to the same community. Also, both letters deal with a topic: *the final (or second) coming* of Christ. For many Christians of the early church, this became a concern because they expected Christ to return very soon, in their lifetime. Some members were being frightened by the predictions of others. Others even quit working, because they believed the end was so near. Paul wrote that no one knows when Christ will return: “*The day of the Lord will come like a thief at night*” (*1 Thessalonians* 5:2). In the meantime, Christians should remain calm, and continue to pray and do good works. A key passage in *2 Thessalonians* upholds the Catholic church’s teaching about scripture and tradition: “*stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter*” (*2 Thessalonians* 2:15). In other words, there are two ways that Christians learn about the faith. Some things were handed down to us by spoken word (teaching). Other we learn by written word (the Bible). This is why the Catholic church talks about its *teaching authority*, which stands with and supports *the bible*.

• Outline of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians:

Chapter 1:1-10 (Greeting and Thanksgiving)
Chapters 2 to 3 (Paul’s Work among Them)
Chapters 4 to 5:25 (Advice for Christian Living)
Chapter 5:26-28 (Final Greeting and Grace)

2 Thessalonians:

Chapter 1 (Greeting and Thanksgiving)
Chapter 2 (About the Coming of Christ)
Chapter 3 (Parting Advice)
Chapter 4 (Final Greeting and Grace)

• Passages to Read

Watch, pray, and love one another (*1 Thessalonians* 5:1-23)

With calm hearts continue to do good deeds (*2 Thessalonians* 2: 1-16)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one*” (*2 Thessalonians* 3:3).
As your children, evil has no power over us, God.

“*Encourage one another and build one another up*” (*1 Thessalonians* 5:11).

Whether you come sooner or later, let us always remember to care for those we live with, Lord.

“*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you*” (*1 Thessalonians* 5:16-18). Thank you for being with us every moment of every day, God.

1 & 2 Thessalonians Study Page

Question 1. *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7).*

What are some afflictions that make us ready to listen to God's message?

Question 2. *"As we were judged worthy by God to be entrusted with the gospel, that is how we speak, not as trying to please human beings, but rather God, who judges our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).* When others give us a hard time because we try to live by the gospel, what are some ways we can deal with them?

Question 3. *"From hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).* Who taught us the gospel?

Were they giving us their own message or was it God's? How do we know?

Question 4. *"May you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and will also accomplish it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).*

Are we ready for Christ when he comes? What can we do to get ready?

Please write down any other thoughts you have about the 1 and 2 Thessalonians:



1 & 2 TIMOTHY

• History

Three books (*1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy*, and *Titus*) are called the *pastoral letters* of Paul because they were written to Christian leaders or *pastors* rather than to the whole community. *Pastor* is Latin for shepherd. They were written at a time when the apostles like Paul were getting old or dying. New leaders were needed to take their place. These letters help us understand the needs of the early christian community and how important it was to have good spiritual leaders. These letters show that *imposition of hands* was used to ordain leaders, but that titles were different than they are today. The words *bishop* and *presbyter* were used for the same position, men and women were *deacons*. *Widows* as a special group lived a life dedicated to prayer, much like nuns today. These letters show that things were not perfect in the time of the apostles, just as they are not perfect now. Timothy's name turns up often in Paul's other letters (*2 Corinthians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, *1* and *2 Thessalonians*, and *Philemon*). His life as Paul's friend and missionary also is described in *Acts* 14:8-20 and 16:1-3). As an old man, Paul was concerned that Timothy give sound teaching to those in his care: "[hold] fast to the mystery of the faith" (*1 Timothy* 3:9). He told Timothy to be "nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching" (*1 Timothy* 4:6). Paul ends this first letter with a final warning: "Whoever teaches something different...does not not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching" (*1 Timothy* 6:3). He told Timothy to remember his example and to stay strong in his faith even in trying times. Then as now, some people have strayed from the faith: "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you" (*1 Timothy* 6:20). *2 Timothy* was written while Paul was on *death row* waiting to be executed. In this very personal letter Paul handed on his role as a leader and teacher of the gospel: "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith" (*2 Timothy* 4:7).

• Outline of 1 & 2 Timothy

1 Timothy

Chapter 1 (True and False Teaching)

Chapters 2-3 (Worship and Leadership)

Chapters 4-5 (Promoting Good Behavior)

Chapter 6 (Closing Advice)

2 Timothy

Chapter 1 (Greetings and Encouragement)

Chapter 2 (Patient and Loyal Service)

Chapter 3 (Faithful in Trying Times)

Chapter 4 (Final Words)

• Passages to Read

A sinner turned apostle (*1 Timothy* 1:12-17)

Qualities of true leaders (*1 Timothy* 3:1-13)

Advice to a young leader (*1 Timothy* 4:6-16)

False and true riches (*1 Timothy* 6:7-19)

Guard the gift of faith (*2 Timothy* 1:6-14)

Living and dying in faith (*2 Timothy* 2:1-13)

Remain faithful (*2 Timothy* 3:10-17)

Fulfill your calling (*2 Timothy* 4:1-8)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"Some people's sins are public...but other people are followed by their sins" (*1 Timothy* 5:24).

Whether they are secret or known, you see everyone's sins, God.

"All who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (*2 Timothy* 3:12).

No one said following your way was going to be easy, Lord.

"Train yourself for devotion, for, while physical training is of limited value, devotion... holds a promise of life for the present and for the future" (*1 Timothy* 4:7-8). Build up our strength of spirit, God.

1 & 2 Timothy Study Page

Question 1. *"I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life"* (1 Timothy 1:16).

How can even our sins and failures serve God's purposes?

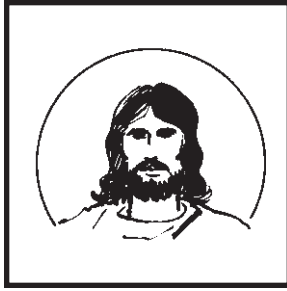
Question 2. *"I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained"* (2 Timothy 2:9). Are man-made walls thick enough to block out God's message of love for all persons?

Question 3. *"The time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:6-7). What will we be able to say about our love for God and others when it is time to face our own death?

Question 4. *"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control"* (2 Timothy 1:7). Why do some people think that Christian love is weakness?

What is true courage? What does it have to do with self-control?

Please write down any other thoughts you have about 1 & 2 Timothy:



TITUS

• History

Like *1 & 2 Timothy*, *Titus* is one of the *pastoral letters* that Paul wrote to the leaders or *pastors* of the christian community. It also was written before 67 A.D., the year Paul was executed in Rome. *Titus* is mentioned in *2 Corinthians* and *2 Timothy* as one of Paul's faithful companions. He traveled with Paul on many trips bringing the message of

Christ to people living in various parts of the empire. This letter was sent to Titus while he was staying on the island of Crete. He was sent there by Paul to appoint leaders of the Christian community "*in every town*" (*Titus* 1:5). Paul described to Titus what the chosen leaders must be like. He also told Titus how to deal with false teachers—a serious problem on Crete. After focusing on the leaders, Paul turned to the ways that Christians behave. He explained how they ought to treat one another as Christians, and how they should live honestly as members of society.

Paul knew what life on Crete was like. He quoted one of their own ancient poets named Epimenides: "*Cretans have always been liars...*" (*Titus* 1:12). Today we would say Paul called it like he saw it. However, Paul also was willing to criticize himself: "*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient...slaves to various desires and pleasures...*" (*Titus* 3:3). As he was in his other letters, Paul was very concerned about protecting sound doctrine and teaching the faith correctly. He wanted to protect the followers of Christ from those who did not understand the gospel. He mentioned this often throughout his letter, especially regarding bishops who were told to hold "*fast to the true message as taught*" (1:9). He told Titus: "*As for yourself, you must say what is consistent with sound doctrine*" (*Titus* 2:1). His final advice is stern: "*After a first and second warning, break off contact with a heretic*" (*Titus* 3:10). Paul did not want the Christian converts to be led by those who were spiritually blind themselves. We would say he used *tough love*.

• Outline of Titus

Chapter 1:1 (Greetings to Titus Who Shares Paul's Faith)

Chapter 1:5-2:15 (Guidance for Christian Leaders and People)

Chapter 3:1-11 (Special Advice for Titus)

Chapter 3:12-15 (Closing Greetings)

• Passages to Read

Read all of *Titus*.

Pay special attention to *Titus* 2:11-3:7 (Living in response to God's goodness).

• Thoughts for Prayer

"*We await our blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Christ Jesus*" (*Titus* 2:13). The great hope you give us keeps us alive, God.

"*...holding fast to the true message as taught*" (*Titus* 1:9).

Do not let us stray from the truth that the apostles taught and the church hands on to us, Lord.

"*They claim to know God, but by their deeds they deny him*" (*Titus* 1:16).

Not by words but by deeds, do we know who really belongs to you, God.

Titus Study Page

Question 1. *“Remind them to be under the control of magistrates and authorities, to be obedient, to be open to every good enterprise” (Titus 3:1).* Laws help people live together. Why does peace depend on justice (which means the proper respect that we owe one another)?

Question 2. *“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deluded, slaves to various desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful ourselves and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).* What would life be like without God’s word to guide us?

Question 3. *“Avoid foolish arguments...for they are useless and futile” (Titus 3:9).* How much time and energy is wasted, and how much harm is done, with arguments that spring from pride?

Question 4. *“They are to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, exercising all graciousness toward everyone” (Titus 3:2).*
How should guards and inmates treat one another? How can this be improved?

Please write down any other thoughts you have about Titus:

The Bible and the Sacraments of the Catholic Church

We enter the church and continue to live in it through 7 sacred actions. These are the *sacraments* that Christ gave to his followers. They are *signs* that bring us to Christ and his saving grace. The purpose of the sacraments is to help us 1) *grow together in holiness*, 2) *minister to others in need*, and 3) *worship God*. The bible is full of passages about them. Old Testament passages point to them, New Testament passages reveal how Christ used material things like water, bread and wine to heal, feed and strengthen those who believed in him.

1. Through **BAPTISM** we are born again into God's family (*John 3:5-7*). We are cleansed of sin (*1 Peter 3:24*) as we promise to follow Christ, not Satan (*James 4:7*).

Baptism in the Bible: Ezekiel 36:25, Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:9-11, John 4:14, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27-28, Ephesians 4:5.

2. Through **CONFIRMATION** we are given power by the Holy Spirit to witness to the gospel (*Luke 24:49*), and serve his church generously (*Acts 1:8*). This sacrament helps us pray, love God's word (*Colossians 3:16*), serve others and witness to Christ in the world (*Romans 5:5*).

Confirmation in the Bible: Isaiah 11:2, Isaiah 61:1, Ezekiel 36:26, Joel 3:1, Mark 1:10, Luke 4:18, John 7:38, Acts 8:17, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Ephesians 1:13.

3. Through the **EUCCHARIST** we receive the body and blood of Christ (*Matthew 26:26-28*). The bread and wine we offer are changed into Christ's body and blood in memory of him. This *real* presence of Christ in the Mass and in our church tabernacles unites us to him, each other and all God's people (*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*).

Eucharist in the Bible: Exodus 24:8, Deuteronomy 8:3, 1 Kings 19:8, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 24:35, John 6:51-55, Acts 2:40-41, Acts 10:40-41, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

4. Through **PENANCE** the sins we commit after Baptism are forgiven, as Jesus promised (*John 20:23*). This forgiveness depends on a contrite heart, a spirit of repentance, humble confession of our sins, and doing something to make up for what we did wrong (*2 Corinthians 1:5* and *5:18*).

Penance in the Bible: 2 Samuel 12:13, Ezekiel 18:30, Joel 2:12-13, Jonah 3:10, Psalm 51:5, Psalm 130:1, Matthew 9:5-6, Mark 1:15, Luke 7:47, Luke 15:21, Luke 24:47, 1 John 1:9.

5. Through the **ANOINTING OF THE SICK** Christ continues to minister to our souls and bodies (*Mark 6:7-13*). When the priest anoints those who are sick with oil (*James 5:14-16*) their sins are forgiven and their bodies are entrusted to God's care.

Anointing of the Sick in the Bible: Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 16:18, Luke 10:34, Luke 13:13, Acts 28:8-9, 1 Corinthians 12:9.

6. Through **HOLY ORDERS** some members of the church are set aside to continue Christ's ministry on earth (*Acts 6:3-4, Romans 15:15-16, Colossians 1:25*). As priests they serve the church as shepherds and teachers, continuing the ministry of the apostles (*Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, and 1 Timothy 4:13-15*).

Holy Orders in the Bible: Deuteronomy 5:22-27, Matthew 9:38, Matthew 20:27-28, Luke 10:2, John 20:22-23, John 21:17, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 2 Timothy 1:6, Romans 12:6, 2 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:18, 1 Peter 5:3-4.

7. Through **MARRIAGE** Christ blesses the union of husbands and wives (*Ephesians 5:22-32*). No one can force a man and woman to end this bond. Jesus taught: "*They are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate*" (*Matthew 19:6, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11*).

Marriage in the Bible: Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 10:6-8, John 2:1-11, Romans 8:35, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Corinthians 13:2, Ephesians 5:2, Colossians 3:14, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 4:8.



PHILEMON

• History

This fourth *captivity* letter is the shortest letter written by Paul—only 334 words in the original Greek version. It was written and sent at the same time as *Colossians*. Since Paul wrote it while he was in captivity, he fully understood what it meant to be locked up. He wrote it to ask Philemon, a wealthy christian who lived in Colossae, to forgive Onesimus, his runaway slave. Under Roman law this offense could mean serious punishment or even death if the slave was caught. Slavery was very common in the Roman empire. Even people who believed in God had slaves. After Onesimus ran away he went to see Paul and eventually became a Christian. Paul understood that his conversion to Christ changed things between the slave and his owner. Paul did not want to force Philemon into a decision so he appealed to his heart. He reminded him that Onesimus was now his brother in Christ and that Christ paid the debt for every person's sin. Paul wanted Philemon to realize that because they now were brothers it changed how the master and the slave looked at one another. Paul left Philemon with a great challenge: how to welcome the runaway in a society that had many slaves and servants.

It might surprise us that Paul did not oppose slavery openly in his letter. However, he knew that he could not change things overnight. Nevertheless, he dealt a quiet blow to the root of the tree of slavery by pointing out that a slave could become a brother. Paul began to change things, one person at a time. Because Paul's letters were passed around to other Christian communities, his words also touched the hearts of other slave owners. They began to think about their slaves as human beings and fellow Christians. This is what Paul hoped for when he asked Philemon to see Onesimus: *"no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord"* (Philemon 16).

• Outline of Philemon

Verses 1-3 (Opening Greeting)

Verses 4-7 (Paul Praises Philemon's Faith and Love)

Verses 8-22 (Paul Appeals for Mercy for Onesimus)

Verses 23-25 (Final Greetings)

• Passages to Read

Read all of *Philemon*.

• Thoughts for Prayer

"I rather urge you out of love" (Philemon 9).

Only the love you inspire is powerful enough to set things right, Lord.

"I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers" (Philemon 4).

Thank you for all those who lead us to life in you, God.

"Refresh my heart in Christ" (Philemon 20).

Remind us that our good deeds can powerfully encourage others, Lord.

Philemon Study Page

Question 1. *"If he has done you an injury or owes you anything, charge it to me"* (Philemon 18). Paul a model of how Jesus redeemed us. As we honestly examine our past and present, what debts has Christ payed for us? What do we owe him for this?

Question 2. *"Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back...as a man and in the Lord"* (Philemon 15-16). What would happen if inmates and guards saw each other as brothers in Christ?

Question 3. *"Welcome him as you would me"* (Philemon 17). Onesimus risked his freedom by trusting Paul and returning to Philemon. What do we risk when we find true freedom in Christ?

Question 4. *"For I have experienced much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the holy ones have been refreshed by you"* (Philemon 7). Do we believe in the power of one? Have we ever seen a bad situation change when one person started doing the right thing and inspired others?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Philomen:



HEBREWS

• History

This book is more like a sermon than a letter. The author was not Paul or one of the apostles because he explained that the gospel was taught “to us by those who heard him.” In other words, the author was not an eye witness but heard the gospel from the apostles. It is written in excellent Greek, perhaps sometime between 60 and 90 A.D. It is called

Hebrews (Jewish Christians) because it has so much in it about the way Jews worshiped in the temple. The readers had to be people who understood what the author was writing about. Perhaps they were converts from the priestly class who began to have second thoughts about their conversion. The main message of this letter is that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was more important than any sacrifice offered in the temple. In fact, Jesus ended the sacrifices of the Old Testament: “*But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice*” (Hebrews 9:26). The author wanted to explain that Jesus is greater than the angels, Moses, prophets, the ancient priesthood, temple sacrifices, the law, and the covenant. The author also wrote to encourage his fellow Christians who were facing punishment and even death because of their belief in Christ. Since Christ was better than all these things, turning away from him and returning to their old religion would be a step backward. In all their sufferings they should “[*keep their*] eyes fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). He knew what it was to suffer, and went ahead of them into heaven. Christ knew from experience what it meant to stand by God’s will, even shedding his own blood for humanity. Hebrews has meaning for Christians in every age because it teaches the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice. It gives a deeper understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass. In the Mass the death of Jesus on the cross is remembered and relived. Although it is offered throughout the world in many times and places, it is still only one sacrifice: “*For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated*” (Hebrews 10:14).

• Outline of Hebrews

Chapter 1:1-3 (Christ Reveals God)
Chapters 1:4 to 4:13 (Christ Is Greater than All)
Chapters 4:14 to 7:28 (Christ the Great Priest)
Chapters 8 and 9 (Christ’s Covenant)

Chapter 10 (Christ’s Sacrifice)
Chapters 11 to 12 (Faith in Christ)
Chapter 13 (Encouragement and Blessing)

• Passages to Read

Christ watches over us (Chapter 3:1-15)
Christ shares our suffering (Chapter 4:14-5:9)

Christ gives us confidence (Chapter 10:19-25)
Christ is our example (Chapter 12:1-14)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested*” (Hebrews 2:18). You know what it is to be human like us, Lord.

“*For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross*” (Hebrews 12:2). Never let us forget that our lasting home is with you, God.

“*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels*” (Hebrews 13:1-2). To meet anyone in need and help them, is to love you, Lord.

Hebrews Study Page

Question 1. *“Encourage yourselves daily while it is still ‘today,’ so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). How can we live out God’s word: “harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95:7)?*

Question 2. *“Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Hebrews 4:16). Why did one of the criminals next to Jesus on the cross turn to Jesus for mercy before he died? How does that give us hope?*

Question 3. *“Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3). How can the body of Christ remain one, even though its members are separated by walls and bars?*

Question 4. *“Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3). Does knowing that Jesus experienced disappointment and opposition give us strength to continue our own struggle to be good?*

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Hebrews:



JAMES

• History

The author of *James* was not an apostle. Paul called him “*the brother of the Lord*” in *Galatians* 1:19. He was not a blood brother, but relative of Jesus. In the Hebrew language a cousin is also called a brother. This is the same in many other languages even today. James was an important person in the early church. After Peter moved on, he became the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem. This letter also is more like a sermon than a letter. Although it is written in excellent Greek, it is addressed to “the twelve tribes.” This means the Christians throughout the empire who are the new people of God. It was written before 62 A.D., the year James was stoned to death by the Jews, according to the Jewish historian Josephus. James used many wise sayings and proverbs to inspire his fellow Christians. He warned them not to deceive themselves into thinking they were religious if they did not watch how they behaved. For him, true religion was something very practical. It meant caring for others in need: “*Be doers of the word and not hearers only*” (*James* 1:22). So that his readers would not miss this point, he made it even clearer: “*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows... and to keep oneself unstained by the world*” (*James* 1:27). In other words, Christians should show God’s love by caring for the weak and defenseless, unlike the pagan society which abandoned and neglected them. James is also important for another reason. It teaches Christians to pray for the sick and anoint them “*with oil in the name of the Lord*” (*James* 5:14). For the Catholic church this is the *sacrament of anointing of the sick*.

• Outline of James

Chapter 1:1-18 (Faith is Tested)

Chapters 1:19 to 5:6 (Faith Shows Itself in Deeds)

Chapter 5:7-20 (Faith Brings Conversion and Healing)

• Passages to Read

Read all of *James*, but give special attention to:

Good works are important (Chapters 2:14-3:12) and *The power of prayer* (Chapter 5:15-16)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him” (*James* 1:12).

Like spiritual athletes, may our love be faithful to the end, Lord.

“For one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, it is a sin” (*James* 4:17).

Give us the wisdom to know what is right, and the courage to do it, God.

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (*James* 4:8).

You are always ready to be our friend, Lord.

*“God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble”* (*James* 4:6).

When we are full of ourselves, there is no room for you, God.

James Study Page

Question 1. *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”* (James 2:14). If someone has nothing to wear or eat, and we say to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but do not help them, do we really believe in the gospel?

Question 2. *“Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”* (James 2:5). Although we are poor and despised in the eyes of the world, can we be rich in faith and love?

Question 3. *“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”* (James 1:2-3). Where will we find the strength of spirit to have joy in the midst of our trials?

Question 4. *“Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins”* (James 5:20). Although we ourselves are sinners, what can we do to help others who have lost their way?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of James:

Forgiveness

Our Sin and God's Mercy *"Rescue me from the mire" (Psalm 69: 15).*

When we were baptized our sins were forgiven. They were washed away with water and the Holy Spirit. However, as human beings we are weak. We are selfish and break our promises. This is part of our fallen human nature. Jesus described this dark side of humanity in *Matthew 15:18-20*: "*The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy. These are what defile a person.*" Yet God who made us and loves us as our Father, also helps us out of the mess we've made. In *Luke 15:11-32*, the story of the prodigal son, Jesus teaches us that God is our father and we are the selfish runaway. When we sin we actually are running away from God. However, God waits to welcome us home, put his arms around us, and forgive us. In *Luke 15:7* Jesus tells us that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents. Despite our sins God waits for us and forgives our sins when we turn to him and truly repent. This same story calls us not to be like the self-righteous older brother, because forgiveness flows from God's unending love which always gives the sinner hope.

Confessing Our Sins *"I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13).*

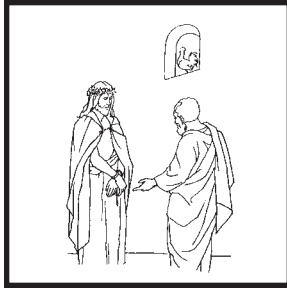
Although we have God's promise of forgiveness, the Catholic Church teaches us to confess our sins to a priest in order to receive forgiveness. Why must we confess to a human being? *1 John 1:9* says we must first admit our sins to be forgiven: "*If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.*" In *James 5:16* we read how the sick person is visited by members of the church, anointed and encouraged to confess his sins: "*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.*" In *2 Samuel 12:13* we read that David confessed his sin of adultery and murder to the prophet Nathan: "*Then David said to Nathan: 'I have sinned against the LORD.'*" *Nathan answered David: 'The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die.'*"

Examining Our Conscience *"...in my inmost being you teach me wisdom" (Psalm 51:8).*

Preparing for confession means carefully examining our conscience. To do this we recall the 10 commandments one by one and ask ourselves if we have disobeyed them in some way. The church teaches that there are venial and mortal sins. Venial sins are not so serious. For example, we may be impatient, bend the truth a little, treat someone rudely, or steal a pen. Other sins (listed in *Matthew 15:18-20* above) are called mortal because they destroy our lives and the lives of others. Through confession the church fulfills the words of Jesus in *John 20:22-23*: "*Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*" Since Christ spoke these words, countless Christians have found forgiveness and peace when the priest says in the name of God and God's people: "*I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*" And because God has forgiven us, we are called to forgive others.

Forgiving Others *"Forgive and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).*

We are called to share the grace we have received. As we follow Christ who died for our forgiveness, we try to live by his call to forgive others: "*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you*" (*Matthew 6:14*). Forgiving those who hurt us deeply can be hard work. It may take time, but even working at it brings God's peace on ourselves and others: "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion...bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do*" (*Colossians 3:12-14*). Only prayer will give us the wisdom and strength to do what may seem impossible: "*When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance*" (*Mark 11:25*). Forgiving will make us like our heavenly Father, and remove the hatred that poisons our own hearts.



1 & 2 PETER

• History

1 Peter was written by “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1) before he was executed in 67 A.D. in Rome. It was meant to give courage and hope to Christians who would “have to suffer through various trials” and be “tested by fire” (1 Peter 6-7). These words proved true

when Nero arrested a large group of Christians and ordered them to be covered with tar and burned alive. Nero said he was punishing them for setting fire to Rome, although he may have done it himself in order to rebuild the city. Nevertheless, Peter encouraged the followers of Christ to love one another and behave as good citizens. In this way they would be witnesses to the gospel and innocent of any crimes others would try to pin on them. Peter told them that in the end, they were in God’s hands while they “share in the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 4:13). This entire epistle may be an early example of preaching at a baptism.

2 Peter may not have been written by Peter but by someone else who gathered parts of Peter’s sermons together into one work. The author may have done this to warn Christians about false teachings and to discuss the final coming of Christ at the end of time. This was very much on people’s minds because they expected Christ to come soon. Some critics were saying “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4). In answer to both groups the author reminded them “that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Although “the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (2 Peter 3:10), it may be slow in coming because God is patient and wishes to give everyone a chance to repent.

• Outline of 1 & 2 Peter

1 Peter

Chapter 1 (The Gift of New Life and Hope)

Chapters 2-3 (God’s People in the World)

Chapters 3-4 (Stand Ready to be Judged)

2 Peter

Chapter 1 (Relying on God’s Promise)

Chapter 2 (Beware of False Teachers)

Chapter 3 (Wait for His Coming)

• Passages to Read

1 Peter

Faith saves us (Chapter 1:3-9)

We are God’s people (Chapter 2:1-10)

Suffering for a good cause (Chapter 3:13-17)

2 Peter

God’s word is reliable (Chapter:16-21)

God is patient with us (Chapter 3:8-13)

• Thoughts for Prayer

“Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him” (1 Peter 1:8). We love you and long for the day when we will see you face to face, God.

“Your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1: 21).

Unless we are anchored in you, we are tossed about on the waves of life, Lord.

“He is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). No matter how long it takes us, you never give up on us, God.

1 & 2 Peter Study Page

Question 1. *“Once you were ‘no people’
but now you are God’s people;
you ‘had not received mercy’
but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10).*

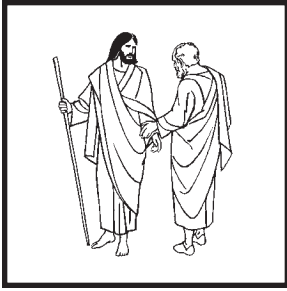
What are the false ways that we try to be ‘somebody’? How does God’s mercy make us ‘somebody’?

Question 2. *“Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 2:4).* Do we truly believe that we are precious in God’s eyes? Once we do, how does this give us a part in building up the community of Christ?

Question 3. *“Be free, yet without using freedom as a pretext for evil” (1 Peter 2:16).* What are the ways that we try to cover up the evil we do, saying we must be free to do as we please?

Question 4. *“They promise them freedom, though they themselves are slaves of corruption, for a person is a slave of whatever overcomes him” (2 Peter 2:19).* What things seem to promise us freedom or pleasure, but in the end make us slaves by overcoming us?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about 1 & 2 Peter:



1, 2 & 3 JOHN

• History

The three letters named after John are all dated around 100 A.D. By this time all the apostles were dead except John, the beloved disciple and an eye witness of Jesus. In the first letter he states he is proclaiming *“what we have seen and heard”* (1 John 1:3), and invites the readers to have fellowship with Christ. From 1 John to 3 John we read how this loving fellowship of the Christian community was tested. It had to face problems dealing with authority and false teachers. Teachers who still claimed they were Christians were spreading false ideas about who Jesus was. They could not accept that Jesus was really a human being: *“Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh”* (2 John 7). That is why it was so important for John to write about what he had *“touched with our hands”* (1 John 1:1). The author gave Christians of every time and place the most beautiful definition of God: *“God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him”* (1 John 4:16). However, this love does not remain up in the air, but must show itself in care for others: *“If God so loved us, we also must love one another”* (1 John 4:11). The letters of John focus on the *belief* and *behavior* of a christian life. Christian belief is based on the *truth* that Jesus Christ was both God and human. Christian behavior is based on practical *love* that is not all talk but shows itself to be real *“in deed and truth”* (1 John 3:18). For those who thought they could love God without loving others John was very clear: *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar”* (1 John 4:20).

• Outline of 1, 2 & 3 John

1 John	2 John	3 John
Chapters 1:1-2:27 (Why We Love)	Verses 1-6 (Walk in Love)	Verses 1-8 (Walk in Truth)
Chapters 2:28-5:21 (How We Love)	Verses 7-13 (Keep the Truth)	Verses 9-15 (Avoid Evil)

• Passages to Read

Read all of 1, 2 & 3 John.

• Thoughts for Prayer

“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an expiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

When we were lost, you risked your life to save us, Lord.

“If God so loved us, we also must love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Make us kind and forgiving, so that we become like you, God.

“...the truth that dwells in us and will be with us forever” (2 John 2).

The truth that you are good and forgiving never fades away, Lord.

“Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

You are waiting for us among our brothers and sisters, God.

1, 2 & 3 John Study Page

Question 1. *"Whoever hates his brother is in darkness; he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:11).*

What does it mean when someone is blind with hatred? What do they not see?

Question 2. *"Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8).*
When John says someone is without love does he mean they are not loved by others, or does he mean that they do not take the time to love others?

Question 3. *"Look to yourselves that you do not lose what we worked for" (2 John 8).*
If we judge others all the time do we risk messing things up for ourselves too?

Question 4. *"Do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does what is good is of God; whoever does what is evil has never seen God" (3 John 11).* When people say "I see what you mean" are they talking about the eyes of the body or the mind? Can living the gospel help us understand it better?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about 1, 2 & 3 John:

Resolving Conflict

Society teaches us to see those who are in a conflict as either "winners" or "losers." As followers of Christ, however, we are called to be reconcilers. This means making sure that both persons or groups in a conflict "win." In order for both to win, each must be treated with justice. *Justice* means what is fair for each one, and that each one is treated with dignity and respect.

Read: *Matthew 5:38-48*

This gospel passage calls us to a new kind of thinking that calls us to be like God who made us. We are not afraid to say to the other person or group *"I want to work things out with you."* We may even give up our place or something we have to others, not because we are weak but because we are strong is God's Spirit. It takes a lot of self-confidence and inner strength to put aside revenge and striking back. Because this is not easy to do, we turn to prayer and ask Christ to help us carry out his teaching. He will give us his strong Spirit to do things we could not do before. When Christ asks us to love your enemies He means that we must try to see them as human beings like ourselves, as having one Father.

Other Bible readings to explore regarding conflict resolution:

Fighting – *James 4:1*; Respect – *1 Peter 2:17, 3:16*; Patience – *Ecclesiastes 7:8, Proverbs 14:29, 15:18, 16:32*; Listening – *James 1:10*; Acceptance – *Romans 15:7*

Understanding Conflict:

Because we are human we cannot always avoid conflict, This is especially true when we live in crowded places or are together all the time. However, if we handle conflict in the right way it can us get along better in the end. But if conflict goes untreated it can tear people apart. Things will only get worse because it goes underground where it builds up pressure until emotions are ready to explode Some people avoid facing conflict, hoping it will just go away. A conflict can be two people arguing over who goes first in line, or who should get a chair. Or it can be more serious – when two people from different cultures or races threaten to harm each other.

The main reason conflict happens is because of poor communication. Very often we do not hear what the other is really saying, or needs. Sometimes what we think we see, is not really what is happening. We must take the time to ask questions and sort out what really is going on. Sometimes the truth is far from what we thought it was. Every conflict has a solution. A good solution gives everyone involved the power to bring about the solution.

Resolving Conflict:

There are helpful steps to dealing with conflict. Just as poor communication is the root of conflict, good communication is the key to the solution. It demands patience and courage.

- *use a mediator, someone both sides trust (someone who listens and will not take sides or judge),*
- *let each person say in their own words what the problem is,*
- *state the problem without putting blame on anyone - attack the problem not the person,*
- *listen carefully and be sure to understand what the other person or group is saying,*
- *allow enough time and be respectful of what is said,*
- *let each person suggest as many solutions as possible, without judging them*
- *choose one solution that respects the needs of each and that both can accept,*
- *if the problem seems to have no solution, say "let me prayer about it" and walk away,*
- *be willing to meet again and use the same steps, while asking for God's help.*



JUDE

• History

Jude introduced himself as “*the brother of James*” (Jude 1), the same James who was the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem, and who wrote the letter of *James* in the New Testament. If this was so, then he was not one of the twelve apostles but another Jude who was a relative of Jesus. Jude’s letter was written to a group of Christians who were bothered by people that Jude called “*godless*” (Jude 4). These misguided Christians perverted God’s forgiveness into lawlessness. They were trying to spread the idea that sexual misconduct was allowed because as Christians they were “*free*.” In behaving that way “*these dreamers nevertheless also defile the flesh [and] scorn the lordship*” of Jesus Christ (Jude 8) .

Jude encouraged his readers to remain loyal to the true faith: “*But you, beloved, remember the words spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jude 17). He reminded them that there would be people who caused divisions in the community because they behaved “*according to their own godless desires*” (Jude 18). The letter ends with a beautiful prayer to God “*the one who is able to keep you from stumbling*” (Jude 24). This prayer is called a *doxology*, from a Greek word that means *glory*.

• Outline of Jude

Verses 1-2 (Greeting)

Verses 3-4 (Reason for Writing)

Verses 5-16 (The Words and Deeds of the Godless)

Verses 17-23 (The Christian Response)

Verses 24-25 (A Prayer Glorifying God)

• Passages to Read

Read all of *Jude*, but pay special attention to verses 24-25:

Doxology (A prayer of praise).

• Thoughts for Prayer

“*There will be scoffers who will live according to their own godless desires*” (Jude 18).

Others may go their own way, but we will follow your will, God.

“*Build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the holy Spirit*” (Jude 20).

Only by prayer will our faith in you grow stronger, Lord.

“*From ages past, now, and for ages to come*” (Jude 25).

If we give you our time you will give us your eternity, God.

Jude Study Page

Question 1. *"To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance"* (Jude 1-2). What are the opposites of mercy, peace, and love? Why does God want these for us?

Question 2. *"Contend for the faith that was once for all handed down to the holy ones"* (Jude 3). How does our study and understanding of the faith give us strength to defend it?

Question 3. *"They live on the natural plane, devoid of the Spirit"* (Jude 19). If we live with no thought for God, what is the meaning of life?

Question 4. *"These people revile what they do not understand"* (Jude 10). Many people make fun of what they do not understand or fear. Should we answer them with our words, example, or both?

Please write down any other thoughts you may have about the Book of Jude:



REVELATION

• History

Revelation is the last book of the bible. It was written some time between 54 and 96 A.D., between the reign of Nero and Domitian. Both emperors arrested, punished and executed Christians as criminals because they would not worship the emperor as a god. Like *Daniel* in the Old Testament, the book of *Revelation* is written in the *apocalyptic* style. This is a special way of writing that was popular 200 years before Christ until 200 years after Christ. Apocalyptic writing often used numbers and symbols that served as a code for its readers. Certain numbers had special meaning, for example, 3 meant the *most*, 4 meant the *whole world* (similar to north, south, east, and west), 6 stood for things that were *imperfect*, 7 was used for *perfection* (like the 7 days of creation), 12 referred to *God's people* (Israel's 12 tribes, therefore 12 apostles), and 1,000 was used to describe a *large* group or a *long* time. For the Hebrews each letter of the alphabet had a number that went with it. The first letter was 1, the second was 2, and so on. That is how the emperor Nero was linked to 666, the number of the beast mentioned in *Revelation* 12:18. Other symbols had meaning for the time in which early Christians lived. In *Revelation* 12 the woman is the church and the beasts are the rulers of the empire. Rome, the capital of the empire, was called *Babylon*, a *harlot*, and also the *beast "with seven heads"* (*Revelation* 17:3) because Rome was built on seven hills. In *Revelation* 17:9-18 the author explained many of the symbols he used: "*Here is a clue for one who has wisdom*" (v.9). *Revelation* was written to give courage and hope to Christians who were undergoing great trials and suffering because of their loyalty to Christ and his gospel. There were lies circulating about them, and their religion was misunderstood. The emperors realized that this new religion was a threat to their special status as *gods*. In this time of spiritual warfare, the author reminded Christians that Christ was the true ruler of all (*Revelation* 1:5). In every age his followers join the earthly struggle against the power of evil. The message of the bible ends where it began in *Genesis*: God wants to be with his people. He is with them in the fight against evil, giving them the guidance and strength to see them through to a better life with him: "*Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race...God himself will always be with them*" (*Revelation* 21:3). The final message of this book is that God wins!

• Outline of Revelation

Chapter 1:1-20 (Prologue and First Vision)

Chapters 2 to 3 (Letters to the Seven Churches)

Chapters 4 to 22:5 (Remaining Visions)

Chapter 22:6-21 (Jesus Is Coming!)

• Passages to Read

Greeting and first vision (Chapter 1:1-20)

The scroll and the Lamb (Chapter 5: 1-10)

The woman and the dragon (Chapter 12)

Clues to hidden meaning (Chapter 17:9-18)

A new heaven and earth (Chapter 21:1-5)

Jesus the Lord is coming! (Chapter 22)

• Thoughts for Prayer

"*Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (*Revelation* 2:10).

Be at our side always that we may live with you forever, Lord.

"*You have limited strength, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name*" (*Revelation* 3:8).

You know how weak we are, so strengthen us with your word, God.

"*Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*" (*Revelation* 22:20). We are getting ready for your coming, Lord!

Revelation Study Page

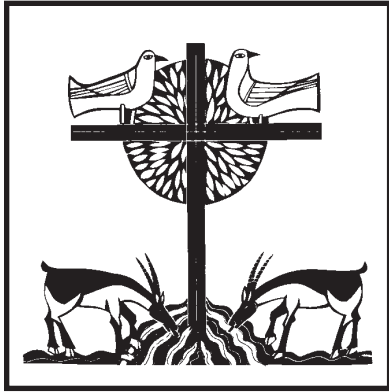
Question 1. *“Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead but now I am alive forever and ever”* (Revelation 1:17-18). When Jesus promised eternal life, did he mean our bodies will never die? Why does the church describe those who have died as *“born to eternal life”*?

Question 2. *“Behold, I make all things new”* (Revelation 21:5). Is God able and willing to wipe away all our past mistakes and make us totally new persons? What is our part in this?

Question 3. *“I am the searcher of hearts and minds and I will give each of you what your works deserve”* (Revelation 2:23). What is one truly unselfish deed for another worth in the eyes of God?

Question 4. *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning”* (Revelation 21:4). How strong and powerful is our hope of eternal life?

Please write down and describe some of the numbers or symbols used in the Book of Revelation:



PRAYERS OF THE BIBLE

“...from your delightful stream you give them to drink.
For with you is the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9-10).

When we turn to the prayers of the bible, we truly are praying in the Spirit, because the bible is the inspired Word of God. Not only are they beautiful prayers written a long time ago, but they are still full of meaning for people today. Another reason they are special is because they were known and used by Jesus and the apostles. Remember, Jesus and the apostles were Jews, so they turned to the writings of Old Testament to inspire them and help them pray. The

prayers of the New Testament are a great treasure because they were given to us by Jesus, Mary, and the apostles themselves. We have their own words to teach us how to pray.

Prayers of the Old Testament

Prayer of Moses (*Exodus 15:2-18*)

Prayers from Selected Psalms

Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143: The Seven Penitential Psalms

Psalm 22: The cry of Jesus on the cross

Psalm 23: God our shepherd

Psalm 25: God our help

Psalm 27: Trust in God

Psalm 34, 121: God our protector

Psalm 40: Doing God's will

Psalm 42, 63, 84: Longing for God

Psalm 62: Trust in God alone

Psalm 90 Time and eternity

Psalm 96: Praise for God's glory

Psalm 103: Praise for God's goodness

Psalm 130: A prayer for pardon

Psalm 139: God sees and knows us

Psalm 142: Prayer of a prisoner

Psalms 148, 150: Praising God

Prayer of Judith (*Judith 16:1-2 and 13-16*)

Prayer of gratitude (*Isaiah 12:1-6*)

Prayer of deliverance from evil (*Sirach 51:1-12*)

Prayers of the New Testament

Prayer of Mary (*Luke 1:45-55*)

Prayer of Zechariah (*Luke 1:68-79*)

Prayer of Simeon (*Luke 2:29-32*)

Lord's Prayer (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

Prayer of Jesus at the last supper (*John 17:1-26*)

Prayer of Jesus in agony (*Matthew 26:39,42*)

Prayer of Jesus on the cross (*Luke 23:46*)

Prayer of Consolation (*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*)

Prayer of God's blessing (*Ephesians 1:3-6*)

Prayer for others (*Ephesians 3:14-21*)

Prayer for fellow Christians (*Ephesians 6:23-24*)

Prayer of new birth (*1 Peter 1:3-5*)

Prayer of praise (*Jude 24-25*)

The Holy Land in the Old Testament



The Holy Land in the New Testament



REVIEW TEST - Part Three: A-The Gospels and Acts

After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. The word *gospel* means _____.
2. Each gospel was written by a different _____.
3. The gospels grew out of the _____ tradition of the church.
4. Jesus said some things that were not recorded in the gospels. True or False (Circle one)
5. Which two gospels give details about the birth of Jesus?

6. Which gospel was the last to be written? _____
7. *Acts* was written by the author of which gospel? _____
8. What helped the apostles preach and spread the gospel? _____
9. Paul changed from _____ to one of its greatest apostles.
10. *Acts* ends with Paul as a prisoner in Jerusalem. True or False (Circle one)
11. Why was *Matthew* placed first before the other gospels?

12. *Matthew* shows that Jesus came to destroy the old Law. (Circle one) True False
13. *Mark* is the shortest of the gospels. (Circle one) True False
14. How did *Mark* originally end? _____
15. Which is the only gospel to have the "*Song of Mary*"? _____
16. Only *Luke* included the stories of the *lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son, and repentant criminal on the cross*. (Circle one) True False
17. Which gospel, more than the others, has the "*I am*" sayings of Jesus? _____
18. The "*I am*" sayings point to Jesus as _____
19. *Acts* is the account of how the apostles spread the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven. (Circle one) True False
20. As described in *Acts*, the church held its first _____ in Jerusalem.

REVIEW TEST - Part Three: B-The Letters and Revelation

After completing all the test pages, review and correct them with the study coordinator.
Be sure to put your name and ID number on each test page.

1. There are 30 letters in the New Testament. True or False (Circle one)
2. The word *epistle* is from the Greek word *epistolé* which means _____.
3. Fourteen letters are called *Pauline*. What does this mean? _____

4. In *Romans* and *Galatians* Paul deals with problems between _____ and _____.
5. Four of Paul's letters are called _____ because they were written while he was a prisoner.
6. There also are four *pastoral* letters. True or False (Circle one)
7. Paul is called the *apostle to the gentiles*. True or False (Circle one)
8. After the Council of Jerusalem gentile christians did not have to _____.
9. The last book of the New Testament (and the Bible) is _____.
10. Why did the author write the book of *Revelation*? _____

11. Why did Paul write to Philemon, a wealthy Christian? _____
12. According to *Hebrews* the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was equal to any sacrifice offered in the temple. (Circle one) True False
13. *James* encouraged Christians to “*be doers of the _____ and not hearers only.*”
14. Which passage of *James* teaches the “*anointing of the sick*”? _____
15. The second coming of Christ is discussed in *1 & 2 Thessalonians* and *1 & 2 Peter*.
(Circle one) True False
16. What is the definition of God in *1 John*? _____
17. According to *1 John* “*If anyone says I love God but hates his brothers, he is _____.*”
18. Who is the author of *Jude*? _____
19. *Jude* ends with a prayer called a *doxology*, from a Greek word meaning _____.
20. Which chapter of *Revelation* explains many of the symbols used by the author? _____

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