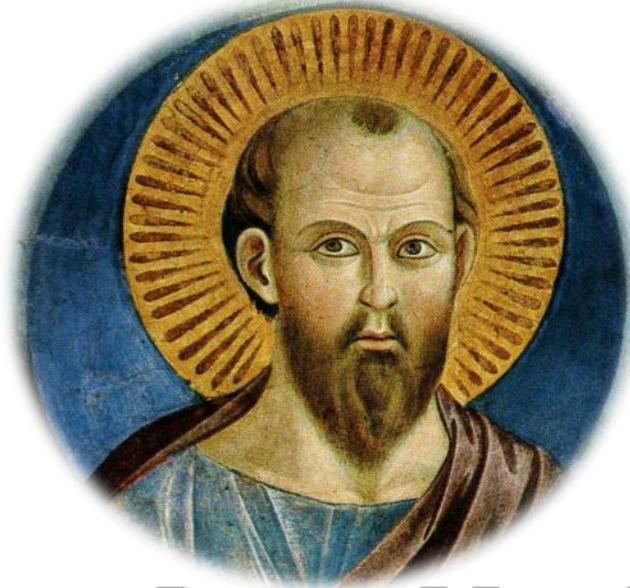


The Life & Letters



of the Apostle Paul



GULF SHORES

CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gulf Shores, AL

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Ray Reynolds & Colton Lamar

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE OUTLINES

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This study guide was created by Ray Reynolds and Colton Lamar for use in Bible classes at the Gulf Shores Church of Christ (Gulf Shores, AL). The material presented in this series has been gleaned from Dr. Steven Guy, Dr. Coy Roper, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, Jerry Davidson, Mark Copeland, Gleason L. Archer, Irving L. Jenson, Everett Ferguson, Dennis Smith, F. LaGard Smith, and various other sources. Please use discretion and do your own study to determine proper dates and order of the events discussed in this study. These Bible studies were prepared in a pre-determined chronological order based on the research and assumptions of the authors of this workbook.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #1: The Background of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:54-8:3)

Introduction: Paul is one of the most prolific characters in the Bible. He wrote thirteen books in the New Testament and we hear his name and parts of his story so often in our sermons and bible lessons. This Bible class is the story of Paul's life and letters in chronological order based on historical research. We will start by introducing the Apostle. In Paul's later letters we find some information about his life before he is introduced to us in Acts. Saul is born in Tarsus, and is a Roman citizen. He was born a Jew and was trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel, one of the most knowledgeable Jews of his time. He was most likely taught Jewish law from a very young age. There is a great possibility that he was in the Sanhedrin. We are first introduced to him at the stoning of Stephen.

Discussion:

- What do you know about Paul's background?
- What do you know about Paul's character?
- What do you think Saul was doing at Stephen's stoning?
- Why do you think Saul approved of arresting and killing Christians?
- Why were the Jews so adamant about persecuting Christians?
- How would you feel about Saul if you were a disciple of Christ in this day?

Conclusion: In this story of Stephen's death we hear, for the first time, a very important name. Saul is a Pharisee on a mission to shut down any followers of Jesus Christ. He is arresting Christian men and woman. He had no mercy on anyone who had the nerve to speak Jesus' name. There is so much more we must learn about Saul of Tarsus.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

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Lesson #2: The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19)

Introduction: Saul is still on his mission to persecute Christians. This “havoc” upon the church is just in the early stages. Saul takes to Damascus to find more men and women to imprison. On the route to his destination he is blinded by the Holy Spirit and given instructions. Because of this event, his life as an apostle is set in motion. From this point forward, everything changes.

Discussion:

- How did the Saul respond to the bright light?
- How did those traveling with Saul respond to the light and the voice?
- Why do you think the Lord wanted Saul?
- Why did the Lord blind Saul? How long was he blind?
- How is the miracle of Saul’s sight being returned to him described?
- Who is chosen to teach and convert Saul? Why was he chosen?
- How would you feel if you were called by God to teach Saul?
- What do you think the initial response of people was when they heard Saul converted?

Conclusion: Saul has been converted and is eager to share the Message with anyone who will listen. Even going to those who he knows will not listen. It was clear, no matter what the reason Saul was chosen, that he was called to do a great work. There is so much more we must learn about Saul of Tarsus.

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Lesson #3: The Ministry of Saul and Barnabas (Acts 9:23-30, 11:22-30, 12:24-25)

Introduction: Saul is already stirring up trouble for the Jews in Damascus, so much so that they plan to kill him, so his fellow disciples in the city help him escape. He then travels to Arabia, then returns to Damascus, and spends three years before going to Jerusalem (**Galatians 1:17-18**). In **Acts 10** Peter has a vision and the followers realize they are to reach out to gentiles and not only to Jews. In **Acts 11** Barnabas is sent to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem, to check on the gentile outreach. He goes, sees a good work and a growing ministry, then he departs to Tarsus to find Saul. He brings Saul to Antioch where they preach and teach before being given an important message from a prophet.

Discussion:

- How did Saul react after his conversion? What does he do immediately?
- Why do you think the Jews fixated on killing Saul so quickly?
- Why do you think his fellow disciples were willing to help him escape the Jews?
- What do you think Saul was doing when he went back home?
- Why did Barnabas want Saul's help at Antioch?
- Do you think the name "Christian" was used in a good light or a bad one? Explain.

Conclusion: It doesn't take long after being with the disciples in Jerusalem that Saul is wanted dead again, and once again his brothers send him off, but this time to his home town of Tarsus. Barnabas and Saul are not back in Antioch long before they are sent off on their first big missionary journey. This mission effort would change the world. Their team does a tremendous amount of good. There is so much more we must learn about Saul of Tarsus.

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Lesson #4: The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-15:35)

Introduction: Saul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey, taking John Mark with them. They sailed to Cyprus. They began to teach and do works through the whole island before sailing on to Antioch in Pisidia where trouble finds them again. Throughout all their trials it is interesting to see how faithful they are to God and how dedicated they are to the cause of mission work.

Discussion:

- Where they decided to mission work first? Why?
- How would you feel if Saul of Tarsus visited your congregation?
- What would be the reaction of Christians when Saul visited a region?
- What would be the reaction of Jews when Saul visited a region?
- Why do you think Saul starts going by Paul here?
- If a lot of the Jews followed Paul and Barnabas after the first synagogue day in Antioch in Pisidia, why did they plot against them the next Sabbath Day?
- Why do you think Paul chose to visit the synagogues? Isn't that dangerous?
- What can we learn about Paul's courage and tenacity from these stories?

Conclusion: Paul and Barnabas are preaching in the synagogues and doing works throughout their travels. They are reaching out to all Jews and Gentiles. The subject of the conversion of Gentiles is about to become the subject of Paul's first letter. There is so much more we must learn about Saul of Tarsus.

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Lesson #5: The Letter to the Galatians

Author:

Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ (**Galatians 1:1-3**), formerly known as Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. This letter is often lumped with Romans, I Corinthians, and II Corinthians as one of the major letters of the apostle. There are some striking similarities between it and the book of Romans.

Date:

This particular book is difficult to date. The reason for this dilemma can be summarized by saying that there are two schools of thought. Some scholars believe Paul wrote the book to the churches he and Barnabas started during the first missionary journey in the Southern parts of Galatia and others believe it was written much later during his third missionary journey and is written to a general audience.

The term Galatia in the New Testament designates both a territory in north-central Turkey and a Roman province in the south. In 25 BC this Celtic territory was converted into a Roman province called Galatia. This province included parts of Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (all referenced in the NT). Therefore, the term Galatia can geographically describe the territory inhabited by the Celtic tribes from Gaul, or politically describe the entire Roman province. This adds to the dating dilemma.

Around 200 AD the Roman province was reduced to include only the ethnic Galatians (Celtics) and the double use of the term disappeared. Therefore, the traditional view (now called the “North-Galatian theory”) became that Paul, on the second missionary journey, established churches in northern Galatia (**Acts 16:6**) and wrote the letter to the Galatians from Ephesus on the third missionary journey about AD 56.

By the 19th century there were critics of this "traditional" view. Sir Williams Ramsey popularized a new “South-Galatian theory.” Ironically, the tables turned and this view is almost universally accepted today. This theory maintains that while Luke uses ethnic-geographic designations (**Acts 16:6, 18:23**), Paul’s general practice was to use political designations (**Romans 16, Galatians 1:1, I Corinthians 16:1**).

The letter to the Galatians was probably addressed to Christians in southern Galatia, or churches established on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13-14**). This means he probably wrote it around 49-50 AD from Antioch in Syria. The arguments for this date also include the confrontation of Paul and Peter described in **Galatians 2** and the events of the Jerusalem counsel in **Acts 15** that took place around this time.

Theme:

The theme of the book seems to be the doctrine of justification by faith. This was one of the topics close to Paul's heart (see Romans). Some people have referred to Galatians as "little Romans." Many of Paul's themes and thoughts overlap in an abbreviated form.

Audience:

The intended audience is the churches of Galatia. The brethren in this region are mentioned by Paul in **I Corinthians 16:1**. There is little doubt that Paul was influential in the establishment of many of these congregations (**Galatians 1:2, 8-9, 4:11-14, 19**). They were converted out of paganism (**Galatians 2:3-4**).

It is interesting to note that Galatians is the only letter that Paul addressed to a group of congregations. Each of these congregations were affected by the same disturbance (**Galatians 1:6, 9, 5:7-9**) which was prejudice. Basically Jews verses Gentiles. Jewish teachers were trying to convince Gentile converts that they had to become Jews before they could become Christians (**Galatians 1-4**). This would have been a difficult topic to address, but due to Paul's great relationship with these congregations he is able to skillfully describe arguments for universal membership into the body of Christ. The book of Acts tells us about some of these congregations.

One of the most important congregations in Galatia was the church in Antioch of Pisidia. If you follow their journeys (**Acts 16-18**), Paul and Barnabas reach the mainland from Cyprus. They first land at Perga on the coast and then travel straight north about 100 miles to the city. The synagogue in Antioch was made up of many proselytes (**Acts 13-14**). They were very faithful.

When the missionaries were forced out in **Acts 13**, they went to Iconium. This is 60 miles southeast of Antioch and bigger than Lystra or Derbe. Paul and Barnabas got a similar reception as they did in Antioch of Pisidia. Eventually a church is established before they are nearly stoned to death and have to leave quickly.

The missionaries went on to Lystra (Lycaonia). This was the boyhood home of an important convert named Timothy (**Acts 16:1-2**). Roman and Jewish colonies established it around the third century BC. The people were hospitable. A lame man is healed here and there are a handful of Paul's sermons recorded from here (**Acts 14, Acts 17**). Paul encounters people, like those described in **Galatians 1**, who confuse the men with gods. Paul is stoned, but a group of Christians continue to meet after he leaves (**Acts 14:19-20**).

Derbe is probably the last city Paul and Barnabas visited before retracing their steps home. Luke doesn't tell us of any opposition in this city on the first trip. Timothy is watching and learning from them and will be useful on the next trip. They may have established a church in Perga and in other Galatian cities as well.

Key Verses:

Galatians 1:6-9, 2:16, 2:20, 3:7, 3:13-14, 3:26-29, 4:6-7, 5:4, 5:22-23, 6:1-2, 6:7-9

Outline:

- I. *The Gospel & Grace (chapter 1)*
- II. *The Gospel & Authority (chapter 2)*
- III. *The Gospel & Faith (chapter 3)*
- IV. *The Gospel & Blessings (chapter 4)*
- V. *The Gospel & Freedom (chapter 5)*
- VI. *The Gospel & Daily Living (chapter 6)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- What does this letter show us about how Paul handles issues?
- Why does Paul say he is afraid he may have labored in vein?

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Lesson #6: The Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:11)

Introduction: Paul visits the council in Jerusalem during the debate of circumcision. After he arrives back at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decide to go to all the churches they've established and/or visited. They hope to check on their growth. One small problem is that Barnabas wants to take his relative, John Mark (nephew or cousin), along on the journey again. The last time this happened John Mark got homesick. This causes a significant conflict to start their journey.

Discussion:

- What can we learn about the success of the first missionary journey?
- Why did Paul feel so strongly about circumcision being unnecessary?
- Why did Paul feel so strongly about John Mark staying home?
- What was the result of this conflict between Paul and Barnabas?
- Where do Barnabas and John Mark go? Where do Paul and Silas go?
- Why did Paul want the soldiers to escort them out of the city?
- What are some of Paul's biggest successes to this point?
- What could be considered some of his greatest failures?

Conclusion: After being arrested and set free in Philippi, converting some in Thessalonica, and saving many and growing the church in Corinth, Paul decides to stay there for a year and a half. During this time, he writes his next letter. There is so much more we must learn about the apostle Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #7: The First Letter to the Thessalonians

Author:

Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ (**I Thessalonians 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. He uses Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy to aid him with the writing. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul and quoted it often.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 49-51 AD in the city of Corinth. There is little doubt that this letter was one of the earliest letters that Paul wrote, and it may be the first, depending on the date of Galatians. It was written during the second missionary journey when he was accompanied by Silas (**Acts 15:22**) and just a few months after they had established the congregation in Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1-9**).

The book of Acts reveals that the missionaries reasoned with those in the synagogue for three Sabbaths before having success. They probably only stayed in Thessalonica for a few months and then went on to Berea (**Acts 17:10**), Athens (**Acts 17:15**), and eventually Corinth (**Acts 18:1**). While in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to visit the brethren in Thessalonica and then met up with him in Corinth where he got the report and then wrote this letter.

Theme:

This letter is about preparing for the second coming of Jesus. Since Paul's stay in Thessalonica was brief, he didn't have time to describe all the aspects of living a holy life and how to anticipate for the Lord's coming. The church was still struggling with immorality and weak faith.

The latter part of this letter has been the subject of much study and debate. Paul, while attempting to encourage the brethren (**I Thessalonians 4:18**), apparently opened up a "can of worms" regarding the end times. He would have to clarify more in a second letter.

In this first letter to the Thessalonians Paul tells of the resurrection of the righteous dead and the “changing” of those alive when Christ comes again (**I Thessalonians 4:13ff**). Paul does not address when this would take place, except to give the impression it would happen suddenly. He taught that Christ would come as a “thief in the night” (**I Thessalonians 5:2**) but no one knew when this would happen (**Matthew 24:36, 25:13**).

Audience:

The church of Thessalonica was the intended audience. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Its inhabitants were Roman citizens who were ruled by officials known as “politarchs” (**Acts 17:6-8**). Remember that Paul was called to do missions here. Aristarchus and Secundus (of Thessalonica) were believers that labored with him (**Acts 20:4, 27:2**).

Key Verses:

I Thessalonians 1:2, 1:5, 2:6-7, 2:12, 3:9-10, 3:13, 4:3, 4:11, 4:13-18, 5:2-6, 5:9, 5:17-19, 5:23

Outline:

- I. Commendation for Faithfulness (1:1-10)*
- II. Counseling for Persecution (2:1-20)*
- III. Concern for the Future (3:1-4:12)*
- IV. Caution About the 2nd Coming (4:13-5:11)*
- V. Concluding Exhortations (5:12-28)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- Do you think a trip to Thessalonica would have been a better way to clear up the misunderstanding about the end times? Explain.
- What are your thoughts about Paul’s description of the second coming?

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Lesson #8: The Second Letter to the Thessalonians

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**II Thessalonians 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. He uses Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy to aid him with the writing, like he did in the first letter. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul and quoted it often.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 50-52 AD in the city of Corinth. It was written as a follow-up letter to clarify some things mentioned in the first letter and to help ease the suffering of the saints. It was written during the second missionary journey when he was accompanied by Silas and Timothy in Corinth (**Acts 18**).

Theme:

This letter is about the judgment of God. He jumps right into the subject in the first chapter. Then he addresses some correspondence between himself and the Thessalonians that we do not have on record (**II Thessalonians 2:1**). Paul must have been very concerned with the brethren as he describes the imminent apostasy or “falling away” (**II Thessalonians 2:7, I Timothy 4:1**) that restrained the work and negated his own preaching and teaching.

Paul points out that the real enemy of the faith is the lawless one, and he would be revealed in their suffering (**II Thessalonians 2:8-10**). This activity of the “lawless one” could be the protagonists in the Jewish war against the Romans when the Temple was destroyed (70 AD). It could also be referring to the Roman emperors in general or specifically Nero (54–64 AD) and Domitian (96 AD). He also reveals that miraculous activity from the “man of sin” proves that even Satan and his angels can do amazing things. In fact, the Old Testament and the New Testament affirm that it is not just God’s people who can work miracles or participate in the supernatural.

Audience:

The church of Thessalonica was the intended audience. Paul intended for them to prepare for the “day of the Lord” (**II Thessalonians 2:2**) which is an Old Testament expression first described in **Amos 5:18-20**. It is a day of darkness and calamity. He encourages the church to be prepared for a day like this when Jesus would return (**II Thessalonians 2:8**).

It should be noted that there have been many “days of the Lord” in history. One need not apply this expression exclusively to the second coming of Christ (**Joel 2 & Acts 2**). This great tribulation may have taken place in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (70 AD), rather than the end of the world (**Matthew 24:15-35**). Clearly, Paul anticipated that these people would see a fulfillment of this prophesy in their lifetime.

Key Verses:

II Thessalonians 1:3, 1:6, 1:11, 2:1-3, 2:7-8, 2:13, 3:1, 3:6, 3:10-11, 3:14-15

Outline:

- I. God Will Bring Judgment (1:1-12)*
- II. God Will Send Christ (2:1-12)*
- III. God Will Reward the Faithful (2:13-17)*
- IV. God Will Remain Faithful (3:1-5)*
- V. God Will Discipline His People (3:6-15)*
- VI. Concluding Remarks (3:16-18)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- Why do you think Paul felt the need to write this second letter?
- Why did Paul point out his own handwriting?

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Lesson #9: The Second Missionary Journey cont. (Acts 18:12-22)

Introduction: We find Paul being dragged to Gallio in southern Greece and being released before leaving Corinth. He continues his travels accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila on his way to Ephesus. He would leave them in Ephesus and sail on to Caesarea. Finally, he will go to Jerusalem and Antioch. His stay will be short lived as he will be on the road again in no time. Remember that Antioch was considered his home base.

Discussion:

- What was the original purpose of the second missionary journey? Is it accomplished?
- Why did the Jews beat Sosthenes?
- What do we know about Priscilla and Aquila? Why did they travel with Paul?
- What kind of vow do you think Paul had taken? Why did he do it?
- What else can we learn about this vow (**Number 6:5-6, Acts 21:23-26**)?
- Who else in the Bible participated in this kind of a vow? Why?
- Why do you think Paul decided to return to Antioch?
- What do you think happened to Silas?

Conclusion: Paul has returned home from his second missionary journey. He is getting prepared for his third missionary journey and wants to spend three years doing the Lord's work in Ephesus. He is also going to get news of the church in Corinth. There is so much more we must learn about Paul.

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Lesson #10: The Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-19:22)

Introduction: Paul has returned to his supporting congregation in Antioch. He has decided to re-visit places in Galatia and Phrygia which he had evangelized on his first missionary journey. He also wants to revisit Macedonia and Greece. Most of the focus of this journey will be in Ephesus (and Western Asia minor) where he will encounter paganism and idolatry like never before in his travels. He will also encounter some very interesting characters like Apollos. We can clearly see at this point that it is of benefit to him to have a great supporting staff around him. Priscilla and Aquila will handle some of the one on one studies.

Discussion:

- What do we know about Apollos?
- Why are Aquila and Priscilla taking a lead in evangelism?
- How does Apollos respond to the teaching of Aquila and Priscilla?
- What do we know about the Ephesian Pentecost?
- Why did Paul command them to be re-baptized?
- What does this tell us about the baptism of John and the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit? Did Paul have the right to command them to be rebaptized? Explain.
- What do we know about the miracles of God by the hands of Paul?

Conclusion: The teaching and the miracles that take place in this section are meant to glorify Christ. We also see Paul's ministry in Ephesus and what is considered to be the "Ephesians Pentecost." To this point in Acts we have seen the conversion of Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and pagans. There is no limit to what God can do or to where His grace will reach. Anyone can receive salvation! There is so much more we must learn about Paul.

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Lesson #11: The First Letter to the Corinthians

Author:

Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ (**I Corinthians 1:1, 16:21**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. There are few who doubt this as fact. He had a great relationship with this church.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it in the spring of 57 AD in the city of Ephesus (**I Corinthians 16:8**) during his third missionary journey (**Acts 19:1-41**). This was shortly before the Jewish feast of Pentecost (**I Corinthians 16:8**). It could have been written as early as 55 AD, but definitely during his three years in Ephesus, and coincided with his tenure at the school of Tyrannus (**Acts 19:9-10**).

Theme:

The entire book is about maturity and dealing with church issues. The problems at Corinth had reached Paul and the brethren in Ephesus. This message came from two sources: 1) the household of Chloe (**I Corinthians 1:11**), and 2) a personal letter (**I Corinthians 7:1**), which was delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**I Corinthians 16:17**).

Paul recommends Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus to the leadership of the church (possibly the eldership) to help the church seek balance. It is doubtful that they had elders, so Paul may be suggesting these three men to the congregation for ordination and sends his blessings (**I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9**). Clearly the Corinthians needed leadership to overcome the struggles they were facing as a church.

Audience:

The intended audience is the church in Corinth. Corinth was situated on the Isthmus of Greece (called Achaia in the Bible) between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea (above the Mediterranean Sea). It was around 50 miles east of Athens. It was a newer city, with a population of less than half a million people from all kinds of cultures, mostly pagan.

The temple of Venus (Aphrodite), was located in Corinth and it hosted 1000 priestesses dedicated to prostitution in the name of religion. The church was established during Paul's second journey (**Acts 18:1-18**) and struggled contending with this issue. Paul felt compelled to address the problem of idolatry and other issues before coming in person.

Key Verses:

I Corinthians 1:10, 3:16-17, 6:12-20, 9:24-27, 10:13, 10:23, 12-13, 15:58, 16:1-4

Outline:

- I. *Problems Regarding Unity (chapter 1)*
- II. *Problems Regarding Sensitivity (chapter 2)*
- III. *Problems Regarding Immaturity (chapter 3)*
- IV. *Problems Regarding Humility (chapter 4)*
- V. *Problems Regarding Purity (chapter 5)*
- VI. *Problems Regarding Immorality (chapter 6)*
- VII. *Problems Regarding Sexuality (chapter 7)*
- VIII. *Problems Regarding Liberty (chapter 8)*
- IX. *Problems Regarding Idolatry (chapter 9)*
- X. *Problems Regarding Conformity (chapter 10)*
- XI. *Problems Regarding Loyalty (chapter 11)*
- XII. *Problems Regarding Spirituality (chapter 12)*
- XIII. *Problems Regarding Charity (chapter 13)*
- XIV. *Problems Regarding Stability (chapter 14)*
- XV. *Problems Regarding Authenticity (chapter 15)*
- XVI. *Problems Regarding Sincerity (chapter 16)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- What do we know about the leadership of the church in Corinth?
- How do you feel about Paul giving his own opinions to this church?

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Lesson #12: The Third Missionary Journey cont. (Acts 19:23-20:1)

Introduction: Paul may have paused for a short time to write some letters, but his zeal for mission work has not concluded. Paul has handled the problems he heard about from the household of Chloe. He has addressed the problems in Corinth. Now it is time to get back on the road. At this point the church is being called “The Way” by some of its critics, and maybe even some of the followers. Paul has a conflict with Demetrius, the silversmith, who thinks that Paul’s evangelistic efforts are hurting the local economy. This not only causes a commotion, it leads to serious Christian persecution.

Discussion:

- Who has spent time ministering to Paul during this period? Why?
- Why is Demetrius so upset about Paul’s work in this region?
- Why is idolatry so popular in Ephesus? Explain.
- Who are these officials in Asia? What is their role?
- How do you think this event will impact Paul’s missionary journey?
- Who will stand in defense with Paul? How do you think this will end?
- Where did Paul go after the uproar settled down?
- What do we know about the temple of Diana?

Conclusion: Things began to change after this event in Ephesus. Heavy persecution from Jews, Gentiles, and pagans were starting to have an effect on the church. Paul’s ministry is being threatened, but he will not give up! He keeps moving forward. There is so much more we must learn about Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #13: The Second Letter to the Corinthians

Author:

Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ (**II Corinthians 1:1, 10:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. Timothy also aided in its writing. This is a continued correspondence with these brethren.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it shortly after the first letter, possibly within six months to a year from the first (**I Corinthians 16:1, II Corinthians 8:10, 9:2**). It is assumed to have been written in the fall of 57 AD in Ephesus (or the region of Macedonia) during his third missionary journey (**Acts 19:1-41**). It could have been written as early as 56 AD.

Theme:

The entire book is about hope and encouragement to the congregation, with the exception of chapters 10-13 that seem to be out of place. When the problems at Corinth reached Paul because of the household of Chloe (**I Corinthians 1:11**), and a personal letter delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**I Corinthians 7:1, 16:17**), Paul makes necessary recommendations, including three men who could serve in the leadership, and had those three men personally carry his first letter.

The church apparently needed continuous attention (four letters), so Paul sent Timothy to them (**I Corinthians 4:17, 16:10-11**), then he made a "sorrowful" visit (**II Corinthians 1:23-2:1**), which didn't end well. Therefore, he sent a letter through Titus (**II Corinthians 2:3**), which some scholars believe can be found attached at the end (**II Corinthians 10-13**), called the "sorrowful letter."

Audience:

The intended audience is the church in Corinth (See notes on I Corinthians and the Church in Corinth - Churches of Christ in the New Testament series). This was a congregation that was struggling with Paul's advice in previous letters and visits. There is no doubt that they had many conflicts in this congregation.

Several brethren complained about the authenticity of Paul (**II Corinthians 1:15-17**), his speech (**II Corinthians 10:10, 10:16**), his financial situation (**II Corinthians 11:7-9, 12:14**), his purpose for calling for their repentance (**II Corinthians 12:20-21**), and even his apostleship (**II Corinthians 10-13**). In the latter part of this letter he will have to defend himself. Some scholars consider the latter part of II Corinthians to be a completely separate letter (“sorrowful letter”) and that two letters may have been rolled together for safekeeping.

Key Verses:

II Corinthians 1:3-4, 4:1, 4:7, 4:16-18, 5:20-21, 6:2, 6:14, 8-9, 12:7-13, 13:1-4

Outline:

- I. *Hope Through Consolation (chapter 1)*
- II. *Hope Through Instruction (chapter 2)*
- III. *Hope Through Commendation (chapter 3)*
- IV. *Hope Through Manifestation (chapter 4)*
- V. *Hope Through Reconciliation (chapter 5)*
- VI. *Hope Through Separation (chapter 6)*
- VII. *Hope Through Satisfaction (chapter 7)*
- VIII. *Hope Through Devotion (chapter 8)*
- IX. *Hope Through Demonstration (chapter 9)*
- X. *Hope Through Transformation (chapter 10)*
- XI. *Hope Through Declaration (chapter 11)*
- XII. *Hope Through Affection (chapter 12)*
- XIII. *Hope Through Examination (chapter 13)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- What does this book tell us about Paul’s attitude towards the people of this church?
- Why did they have so many problems in Corinth? Why weren’t they handled?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #14: The Third Missionary Journey cont. (Acts 20:2-3)

Introduction: It is believed that not long after leaving Ephesus Paul writes the book of Romans (next lesson). However, Paul chooses to sail across Macedonia and on to Greece. The Scriptures teach us that he stayed there for three months. He was unable to stay very long because of continued persecution by the Jews. The Jews were plotting against him and this forced Paul to change his plans. He wanted to sail to Syria, but decided to go back through Macedonia. The Scriptures are also clear that some of the brethren decided to go on this trip with him. We will cover that part of the story in a future lesson.

Discussion:

- What were some of the highs and lows of Paul's first missionary journey?
- What were some of the highs and lows of Paul's second missionary journey?
- What were some of the highs and lows of Paul's third missionary journey at this point?
- Would you have continued traveling the world after facing these trials? Or would you have decided to return home? Explain.
- Would you have been discouraged by the constant persecution? Explain.
- Paul is under continued attacks, but does not stop working for the kingdom. What does that tell us about his zeal and confidence?
- We are halfway through our study on the Life and Letters of Paul. What have you enjoyed so far about this Bible class series?

Conclusion: Paul is ready to get back out on the road. He still feels compelled to take the gospel as far as Rome. He knows that there are many brethren that need to be encouraged and souls that need to be won. There is so much more we must learn about Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #15: The Letter to the Romans

Author:

The apostle Paul is the undisputed author of the letter. Many critics of the Bible can even agree to this fact. Paul did use Tertius as a secretary to pen the letter (**Romans 16:22**) and probably used Phoebe to take the letter to the Romans (**Romans 16:1**).

This book appears first in a long succession of letters in the New Testament. There are 13 epistles (letters) ascribed to the apostle Paul. There are only six of those letters where his authorship is questioned, but only by the most liberal scholars.

Date:

This book was probably written from Corinth in the mid to late 50's AD when Paul was on his third missionary journey (**Acts 20:2-3**). He spent only three months there toward the end of his journey on the way to Jerusalem. Some have assigned the year 55 AD to the book, but that is only by speculation. Others suggest 56 or 57 AD.

We can confirm he was in Achaia/Corinth region when it was written because of four things: (1) Phoebe was from Cenchrea, Corinth's eastern seaport (**Romans 16:1**), (2) Timothy and Sosipator/Sopater, companions of the third missionary journey, were with him (**Romans 16:21, Acts 16:1-5, Acts 20:4**), (3) Gaius was a member of the Corinthian church, and he was baptized by the apostle Paul (**Romans 16:23, I Corinthians 1:14, Acts 18:7**), and (4) Erastus, the treasurer of Corinth, is mentioned (**Romans 16:23, II Timothy 4:20**).

What we do know is that it would have been written when Paul was collecting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem (**Romans 15:18-22**). It is clear that he had already collected money from the churches in Macedonia and Corinth (**Romans 15:26-27**). He was on his way to Spain before coming to collect their offering (**Romans 15:28-29**). It is safe to assume that Romans was written after I & II Corinthians because their money had already been collected (**I Corinthians 16, II Corinthians 8-9**).

Theme:

The theme of the letter is that we are justified by faith (**Romans 3:21–8:39**). In the Greek, the word justification means “to set right.” Paul declares that the sinner can be saved. The sinner has to obey the Lord (**Romans 1:5, 16:26**), but cannot be justified by their works alone to save. The foundation of justification is built on Christ’s merit and not man’s merit.

The Roman letter is more formal and less personal than any other letter of Paul. It is possible that this was done because of his intent for it to be universal. It is not a thesis or a treatise (**Romans 16:22**). Paul wrote the letter because he was “the apostle of the Gentiles” (**Romans 11:13, 15:16**). Rome was the capital of the Gentile world. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was free to travel throughout the Empire. He used his Jewish heritage and Roman citizenship to reach the masses. He established Gentile churches in strategic centers around the world. He worked in major cities. These events helped to spread the gospel to every creature on the earth.

Audience:

The letter is written to Roman Christians who Paul intended to visit. We do not know who established the church in Rome but we do know that there were around 50,000 Jews in Rome during Paul's day. Total population was around 4 million. Archeological evidence suggests that there were at least 13 synagogues (based on ruins that have been discovered).

We are not sure who took the gospel to Rome first. Paul gives a hint in **Romans 15:20**, when he says it was built on the foundation of others. Many scholars believe that the Jews heard of the Christian movement. They may have studied the prophecies and discovered the truth for themselves. Another theory is that **Acts 2:10** says there were "visitors from Rome" at Pentecost. These visitors may have become followers and went back to establish the church.

The Christians suffered persecution in Rome soon after the church was established. In fact, Claudius had all Jews, and Christians (including Pricilla, Aquila) forced out of the city in 49 AD because they enraged him (**Acts 18-19**). One writer in that day (Suetonius) said, "He expelled the Jews from Rome because on the instigation of Chrestus they were continually causing disturbances." Further research shows that Chrestus also meant Christus or Christians. This means the gospel was preached among the Jews as early as 49 AD or before.

Acts 18 seems to imply that the work was already established when Paul arrived in Rome himself, as we assume Pricilla and Aquila were already in the church. These two are mentioned in **Romans 16** along with several others. After Claudius' death the Jews returned to Rome, along with some Christians. Paul probably wrote Romans at that time as he saw the door beginning to open again and he hoped to take advantage of the opportunity.

Romans 1:8 reveals that the community of believers was well-known among the brotherhood. Some of the Christians in Rome knew Paul before he arrived there (maybe from other missions). Some of Paul's own relatives were a part of the church family at Rome (**Romans 16:7, 11**). The church in Rome met in various locations. One congregation met in the home of Aquila and Pricilla (**Romans 16:5**). According to **I Corinthians 16:19**, **Colossians 4:15**, **Philemon 2**, and **Acts 18:7** there were others. They may have met collectively, but they specifically met in house churches.

Key Verses:

Romans 1:7, 1:16, 3:9-11, 3:21-24, 4:3, 5:1, 5:8, 6:23, 8:1, 8:9, 8:28, 8:31, 8:37-39, 10:9-10, 10:14, 12:1-2, 12:19, 13:1, 16:16-17

Outline:

- I. *Introduction (1:1-17)*
- II. *Condemnation (1:18-3:20)*
- III. *Reconciliation (3:21-5:11)*
- IV. *Sanctification (5:12-8:39)*
- V. *Vindication (9:1-11:36)*
- VI. *Application (12:1-15:13)*
- VII. *Conclusion (15:14-16:27)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- Who are the people Paul wants to praise in the last chapter of this book? Why?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #16: The Third Missionary Journey cont. (Acts 20:4-21:16)

Introduction: The persecution of the Jews has forced Paul to change his traveling plans. He has decided to allow Sopater (of Berea), Aristarchus (of Thessalonica), Secundus (of Thessalonica), Gaius (of Derbe), Timothy (of Asia), Tychicus (of Asia), and Trophimus (of Asia) to accompany him. These men were specifically chosen by the Gentile churches to deliver a financial gift to Jerusalem (**I Corinthians 16:3-4**). Little is known about most of these men, but other books tell us about more prominent characters like Timothy. All of these men were valuable in the kingdom work. Paul minister in Troas, Miletus, and other more hostile territories along the way.

Discussion:

- What do we know about the companions of Paul?
- When did the disciples meet? On what day? At what time?
- What happened to the man named Eutychus? Why?
- What do we know about the work from Troas to Miletus?
- Why did Paul decide to meet with the Ephesian elders?
- What was Paul's message to the Ephesian elders?
- What do we know about Philip's daughters, Agabus, and others introduced to us here?
- How do we know that Dr. Luke was still with him at this point?

Conclusion: It is clear the difficult days are ahead. Paul is relentless and unwavering. He is ready to face persecution and death. What an amazing man of God! There is so much more we must learn about Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #17: The Arrest & Trials of the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:17-26:32)

Introduction: The warning from Agabus must have had an impact on the companions of Paul. Obviously, Paul is wanting to continue his travels and refuses to give up on his vision to preach the gospel to Gentiles. Paul also realizes that this compulsion may lead to his own imprisonment and even death. Dr. Luke, and a few companions, decide to travel to Jerusalem. They meet with the elders, and with James, and are accepted immediately. Paul is able to give a full report about his work among the Gentiles. Things appear to be good at first, but soon things will change.

Discussion:

- What is the purpose of the meeting with James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem? How did they react?
- Why does Paul decide to go to the Temple? Who does he take with him? Why?
- What is the accusation that leads to Paul's arrest?
- What previous reports led the Jews to bring up charges? Why?
- What can we learn from Paul's defense in chapter 22? What about chapter 24? What about chapter 25? What about chapter 26? How are each of these similar/different?
- What are some of the benefits of having Roman citizenship?
- How did Paul successfully divide the Sanhedrin?

Conclusion: There is no doubt that Paul is a very divisive character. Jews and Christians were unable to truly appreciate his passion. Paul is also willing to share his conversion story with any audience. We need more Christians like the apostle Paul. There is so much more we must learn about the apostle Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #18: The Voyage to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:31)

Introduction: The apostle Paul has been imprisoned for quite some time. He has been accused of sedition, stirring up a riot, endangering the economy and agitating the people. His audience with dignitaries and rulers has allowed him to preach the gospel in places where it had not previously been shared. He has been effective in his evangelism all around the world. However, he is ready to go to Rome and appear before Caesar. It is clear from **Acts 9** that this was where Paul was headed. He has accepted this fate.

Discussion:

- What can we learn about the long voyage to Rome?
- Why did the ship become wrecked at sea?
- How does Paul handle the shipwreck? What do we know about his authority?
- How many people were killed during the shipwreck? Explain.
- What do we know about the ministry of Paul on Malta?
- How long did it take them to reach Rome? Why?
- What did they do with Paul when he arrived in Rome?
- How does the book of Acts end? Why? What is happening?

Conclusion: The book of Acts has an abrupt ending, but we know that Paul was making the best of the situation. It is clear that Paul was renting his own house and had regular meetings in it. Many scholars believe Paul was released shortly after these events but was soon arrested again and suffered martyrdom. We will consider this in a future lesson. There is so much more we must learn about the apostle Paul.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #19: The Letter to the Ephesians

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Ephesians 1:1, 3:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul. However, there are critics of his authorship because they see too many similarities between it and Colossians, but we should also consider the similarities between Romans and Galatians. It wasn't unlike Paul to use similar phrases. In fact, both Ephesians and Colossians share similar outlines, outlook, and theme. Also, both letters were delivered by Tychicus (**Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-8**).

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, 6:20**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles. It is likely that Paul could have written it after he wrote the letter to Colossae (see Colossians notes). We are considering it here because of chronology.

Theme:

This letter is about Christian unity and reconciliation in Christ. For this reason, some consider Ephesians to be one of Paul's most moving letters. No book in the Bible exalts Christ and the church more than the book of Ephesians (**Ephesians 3:21**). This is important because religiously speaking the city was more diverse in religion than any other city in the Empire (emperor worship, Greek and Roman temples, etc.). The Jews that lived in Ephesus maintained a large synagogue, but were heavily influenced by pagans. In his letter, Paul calls them "Jewish exorcists."

Paul may have helped in the establishment of the church in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:20-21**). He spent three months there (**Acts 19:8-9**), but Aquila and Priscilla stayed a while longer and converted Apollos (**Acts 18:24-26**), a young man from Alexandria (Egypt). Paul returned to Ephesus (**Acts 19:1-7**) to find 12 other God-fearers like Apollos. He teaches them and they are baptized soon afterward.

Paul decided to stay an additional three months in Ephesus to teach in the synagogue (**Acts 19:8-9**). There is little doubt that Paul's work brought hardship upon himself and the church in that community. Eventually he was not welcome in the synagogue. He performed many miracles and conducted himself admirably, but the people in this area were critical of those of "the Way" and persecuted the entire community of believers. It was a very difficult time for the church.

Paul probably rented a lecture hall named after Tyrannus (Tyrant - students gave the nickname) or was a part of the university lifestyle while in Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**). Early writings tell us he lectured daily from 11 AM to 4 PM (for two years). It was also at this time that Paul supervised many other missionaries, works, and ministries from this location. He worked with Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphras. He was overseeing the work in Laodicea and Colosse. **Acts 19:10** says, "All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Jews/Greeks). He hopes his letter will keep the church together and united.

Audience:

The title and the first verse show us that the intended audience is the church in Ephesus. However, this has been the source of some debate as it may have been intended for a universal audience. There is a close connection between Ephesians and Colossians as we have already noted. Any good reference Bible will show the close relationship between these two books.

It is interesting to note that the words "in Ephesus" (**Ephesians 1:1**) are missing in our three oldest existing copies of this letter (Chester Beatty papyrus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus). This accounts for the different ways the first verse is translated (KJV and RSV). This omission allows scholars to speculate on "to whom" the letter was written. The title, "to the Ephesians" may not have been part of the original letter, as is true of many of the titles of New Testament books, but it is clear who was intended to read the book.

The audience, whether general or specific, need to know God's seven-fold plan for unity that is found in this book (**Ephesians 4:1-7**). Ephesus may have been a very successful and thriving congregation, with many significant leaders (Paul, John, Timothy, etc.) but it is not enough for them to be without criticism. There is no "perfect" church.

No doubt Paul faced some adversity during the latter years of his ministry in Ephesus which led them to respect him even more. One significant event was when he became embroiled in a dispute with artisans, whose livelihood depended on selling the statuettes of Artemis in the Temple of Artemis (**Acts 19:23-41**). This story would have been one of the famous tales of the apostle Paul. During his time in this city he also wrote I Corinthians (see I Corinthians notes) which helped to keep the church on the spiritual map.

There may be no other church with so much emphasis in the New Testament, with maybe the exception of Antioch and Jerusalem. John's ministry in Ephesus was also successful. In fact, it was associated with John more than Paul (see John, I-III John, and Revelation notes). Timothy also served the congregation as a minister and a bishop/elder (traditionally Onesimus too). Church history tells us that Timothy served as a shepherd in Ephesus for about 15 years along with John (see Philemon, I & II Timothy notes).

There are also several women who had successful ministries in the city of Ephesus. Priscilla and her husband Aquila are well-known for their work in this city. Jesus' mother Mary lived here and worshipped with this congregation. History also tells us that Mary Magdalene was a teacher here in Ephesus.

Key Verses:

Ephesians 1:3, 2:19-22, 3:5, 3:20-21, 4:1-6, 4:11-16, 4:30, 5:15, 5:22-23, 6:10-20

Outline:

- I. Our Will in Christ (chapter 1)*
- II. Our Wealth in Christ (chapter 2)*
- III. Our Work in Christ (chapter 3)*
- IV. Our Walk in Christ (chapter 4)*
- V. Our Ways in Christ (chapter 5)*
- VI. Our Warfare in Christ (chapter 6)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #20: The Letter to the Philippians

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Philippians 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul, but there are questions about the date and place of writing. This letter is considered to be one of the most loving, warm, and personal of all that Paul wrote.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Philippians 1:12-20**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon). He also wrote another letter to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:16**), unfortunately, Paul's letter to the Laodiceans has been lost (**I Corinthians 5:9**). We can see from the other prison epistles the spirit that must have been reflected in that lost epistle.

There are a few who doubt whether or not Paul wrote it from a Roman prison cell, however, there are clues to this fact. For instance, in **Philippians 1:13** Paul mentions the palace guard and in **Philippians 4:22** he references Caesar's household. It also seems from his writing that wherever he was staying it was a long ordeal. Those who do question the location of the writing try to point to his time in Ephesus (**Acts 19-20**) or his imprisonment in Caesarea (**Acts 24-26**) as possible locations. However, we have no reference to an imprisonment in Ephesus and the imprisonment in Caesarea was further from Philippi than Rome.

Theme:

This letter is about living a joyful Christian life. Paul is attempting to encourage his readers but also challenge their way of thinking. If we could choose to be a member of one of the New Testament congregations, we would probably choose Philippi. If we could choose to receive a letter, this would probably be it. This group seemed to embody the spirit of Christ. The church seems to have a spirit of love and generosity (**II Corinthians 8:1-5**) as it would have been a part of all the Macedonian churches described there.

Paul wanted the congregation in Philippi to know that he was experiencing trials but he got through them because of his faith and strength in Christ. Therefore, he has only praise for them and reflects a positive state of mind despite his imprisonment. The terms “joy” and “rejoice” appear sixteen times in this letter.

In order to reveal the need for the church to have joy, Paul evaluates his own life and circumstances (**Philippians 3:12-16**). He tells his secret of his own contentment in Christ (**Philippians 4:10-13**). Paul was not perfect, and his life was not free of problems, but he found a way to rely on God (**Philippians 2:1-11**).

Audience:

The church of Philippi was the intended audience. The origins of the church are recorded in **Acts 16**. The church began because of the work of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke because of the Macedonian call. Remember that Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man saying, “Come over and help us” (**Acts 16:9**).

The missionary team had success early on with a ladies’ prayer group that met outside the city (Lydia). It should be noted that it was Paul’s usual custom to go to the synagogue first, so why did he stray from that pattern (**Acts 13:14, 17:1-2**)? We really don’t know, but it is assumed that there was not a synagogue in Philippi, and that the Jews in the city were already restricted from group assembly, and meeting on their own. It was also tradition that you needed ten men to start a formal synagogue so there may not have been enough men to form one yet.

The Jews were not embraced in Macedonia. The people in that region saw Yahweh as a foreign God. Some prominent Roman cities restricted worship to outside the city gates. There is a very interesting statement in **Acts 16:20-21** that hints to this fact. The mission team was accused of being Jews, or at least followers of a branch of Judaism, so they were advocating an illegal practice (and stirring up the locals over the slave girl).

By the end of their ministry in Philippi three households became the nucleus of a new congregation. There was the aristocratic family of Lydia (**Acts 16:11-15**), the middle-class family of the jailor (**Acts 16:25-34**), and the lower class slave girl (**Acts 16:16-18**). Within ten years this nucleus had become a full-fledged congregation with “bishops and deacons” (**Philippians 1:1**).

On his first visit to Philippi we see Paul casting out demons, and performing miracles, but ten years later he simply trusts in God for the recovery of the sick (**Philippians 2:25-27**). This should tell us something about the purpose and duration of miracles in the first Christian century and the maturity of the churches of Christ. He also commended two preachers/church leaders including Timothy who was a regular visitor, and Epaphroditus (the minister in Philippi).

Key Verses:

Philippians 1:6, 1:21, 1:29, 2:3, 2:5-11, 3:9-10, 3:13-14, 3:20, 4:4, 4:6-8, 4:13, 4:19

Outline:

- I. *The Single Mind (chapter 1)*
- II. *The Submissive Mind (chapter 2)*
- III. *The Spiritual Mind (chapter 3)*
- IV. *The Secure Mind (chapter 4)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- How have things changed since Paul's visit in Philippi?
- Who are some of the faithful workers in Philippi? What do we know about them?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #21: The Letter to the Colossians

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Colossians 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. He uses Timothy to aid him with the writing (**Colossians 1:1**). The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul. However, there are critics of his authorship because of the likeness to Ephesians, but we should consider the similarities between Romans and Galatians. It wasn't unlike Paul to do this. In fact, both Ephesians and Colossians share similar outlines, outlook, and theme. Both letters were delivered by Tychicus along with the book of Philemon (**Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-8**). Paul also puts some emphasis on Onesimus in this book (**Colossians 4:9**).

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Colossians 4:4, 18**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles. Paul wrote it around the same time that he wrote Philemon (see Philemon notes) but prior to Ephesians (see Ephesians notes). He also wrote another letter to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:16**). In fact, Paul asks this congregation to read the letter to Laodicea publicly. This gives the most accurate picture of how the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were collected. Unfortunately, Paul's letter to the Laodiceans has been lost (**I Corinthians 5:9**).

Theme:

This letter is about the supremacy of Christ. The people in Colossae were very affluent and familiar with popular culture. Colossae was an ancient city of about 500 years when Paul wrote this letter. It was known for a peculiar purple wool (colossinus). The city stood on a trade route from Ephesus to the Euphrates. However, the trade route changed and the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis became the greater cities. Colossae was the last prominent city to get Paul's attention through letters.

Paul was worried about some erroneous doctrines that were beginning. The exact origin of this false teaching is unknown. Some say it was Essenism or Gnosticism. It may have been a contemporary Judaism with a syncretism of local Phrygian ideas. Nevertheless, Paul met these errors by presenting the all-sufficient Christ. He reveals that Jesus was not superhuman, but God in the flesh. He created all things. He provides the hope of salvation (the gospel) and the means of salvation (His blood).

In Colossians, Paul wants to present Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God, in whom are the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, and divine perfection (**Colossians 1:15-23**). On the cross, Jesus Christ revealed His importance and freedom from corruption, and newness of life is found in His death and resurrection (**Colossians 2:8-15**). Paul does not critique, condemn, or judge the Colossian heresy, but delivers a positive case for Christian truth.

Audience:

The church of Colossae was the intended audience. This congregation was probably established on Paul's third missionary journey during his ministry in Ephesus. However, it is possible that the congregation was not started by Paul. We have no record of Paul ever traveling to this city (**Colossians 1:9, 2:1**), but Epaphras had a wonderful relationship with this congregation (**Colossians 1:5-7**). The church may have been established by Timothy (**Colossians 1:1**), Epaphras (**Colossians 1:7, 4:12-13**), or even those who returned from Pentecost (**Acts 2:10**). Luke records that Phrygians were present that day.

The church was led by a Gentile preacher named Archippus (**Colossians 4:17**). The fact that the evangelist was a Gentile must have affected its outreach. The congregation would have struggled with the Jew vs. Gentile scenario as a church. This would be something the Gnostics and Judaizing teachers would have exploited. However, Paul encourages fellowship with the church at Laodicea. They needed to fellowship with other strong congregations to give them strength. Also this Colossian heresy could have influenced other churches nearby, so communication is a key.

The letter from Paul is very intriguing and challenging to all who read it. The letter deals with a lot of heretical teaching that influenced the church there, but we are blessed to take away something positive when we read it. Even the casual reader can see that the Colossian heresy was threatening the work of the church and Paul is writing to keep the church on the same page.

Paul's work in the school of Tyrannus, while in Ephesus, would have given him the opportunity to share these thoughts with many others (**Acts 19:10**). Early writings tell us he lectured daily from 11 AM to 4 PM (for two years). Paul supervised missionaries, works, and ministries like the one in Colosse, Ephesus, and Laodicea. He mentored people like Timothy, Apollos, and Epaphras who would also carry this message of hope to their home congregations and to the world.

Other significant members of this church included Philemon and Onesimus (**Philemon 1, Colossians 4:9**). Because the congregation was affluent, and well connected to others within the Christian fellowship, it may have stood for quite some time after the first century. Recently archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of an ancient church there.

Key Verses:

Colossians 1:9-14, 1:18, 2:8, 2:13-15, 2:18-19, 3:1-7, 3:12-17, 3:20, 4:2-6, 4:16-17

Outline:

- I. The Supreme Christ (1:1-29)*
- II. The Supreme Gospel (2:1-23)*
- III. The Supreme Life (3:1-4:1)*
- IV. The Supreme Fellowship (4:2-18)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- Who are some of the influential brethren here? What do we know about them?
- Why is it important for us to remember the supremacy of Christ?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #22: The Letter to Philemon

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Philemon 1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church unanimously accepted it as from Paul. This letter is unlike the other prison epistles in that it is addressed to a person and not to a congregation. However, it was circulated and read along with other letters. Paul was also aided by Timothy in this letter.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 60-62 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison (**Philemon 1, 9-13, 23**). This is why it is lumped with the other prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians). He also wrote another letter to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:16**) but unfortunately it has been lost. Philemon can be compared to the book of Colossians because many of the same people in this little letter are also mentioned in that book (i.e. Timothy, Aristarchus, Archippus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, Onesimus, and Demas). There is little doubt that Philemon and Colossians were written at the same time.

Theme:

This letter is about brotherly love and forgiveness. The recipient is a member of the church and a master of slaves. It should be noted that this was not uncommon, but when an opportunity to show grace to a former slave presents itself Paul takes the opportunity to teach. Paul's letter gives us inspired insight into the slavery system and the growing conflicts and prejudices facing the New Testament church.

Audience:

The letter is personally addressed to Philemon, Apphia (wife), Archippus (son), and the church in their house. The letter concerns Onesimus, a slave who stole from his master (**Philemon 19**) and escaped to Rome, where he came into contact with Paul. We have no way of knowing how or why Onesimus visited Paul in prison. However, Paul converts him and sends him back to his master.

Evidently the actions taken before you become a Christian still count. Repentance includes recompense for past sins, so long as one is able. We know that God can (and will) forgive all sin but true repentance is changing direction. This includes making things right that were previously wrong. Neither Onesimus or Philemon were innocent in the problems Paul addressed (or didn't address).

It is interesting to note that this letter does not denounce Philemon's right to hold slaves, but does command that forgiveness be given to Onesimus. Upon his return, he is no longer a slave but a beloved brother (**Philemon 16**). This would have been a hot topic in this day because in the Roman Empire there were about 60 million slaves. Hefty rewards were given for their return. During our own Civil War in America the letter to Philemon was heralded.

Key Verses:

Philemon 4, 7, 11, 15-17, 20, 21

Outline:

- I. *Paul's Prayer (1-9)*
- II. *Paul's Plea (10-16)*
- III. *Paul's Pledge (17-25)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- Why do you think Paul focused on the relationship of Onesimus and Philemon, but did not outright condemn the practice of slavery?
- What does this book teach us about Christian love?
- What does this book teach us about forgiveness?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #23: The First Letter to the Timothy

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**I Timothy 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church accepted it as from Paul, but recent scholars will try to debate this fact. There is strong internal and external evidence that it was written by him.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 62-65 AD from Macedonia. As the book of Acts concludes it is evident that Paul is headed for prison (62 AD?). The first letter to Timothy would have been written soon after those events. In fact, churches were planted all over Macedonia after the second missionary journey and in Ephesus on the third journey.

Paul had apparently left Timothy in this region to serve the congregations (**I Timothy 1:3**), possibly in fear that he would not return from a Roman imprisonment (**Acts 26-28**). After his release, probably in the spring of 63 AD, Paul went east (**Romans 15:22**) and also planned to visit Timothy and Titus (**I Timothy 3:14, 4:13, Titus 3:12**). Since very little of this book deals with a heavy persecution upon the church, I Timothy and Titus were evidently written before Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians (July, 64 AD).

Theme:

This letter is lumped with the “Pastoral Epistles” because of the content and nature of it. It was clearly meant for the preacher, not the congregation. However, there is nothing wrong with the entire congregation learning of its contents (see Philemon). Timothy was a younger colleague, but Paul gives the minister authority to appoint elders, rebuke the false teachers, and nurture the flock. He gives guidance and direction for the spiritual life of a church leader.

Audience:

The letter is personally addressed to young Timothy (**I Timothy 4:12**), whom he regarded as his “true son in the faith” (**I Timothy 1:2**), the minister of the congregation in Ephesus (**I Timothy 1:3**). It should be noted that Paul met Timothy in Lystra. Timothy’s parents were in a mixed marriage. His father was Greek and his mother, Eunice (**Acts 16:1, II Timothy 1:5**) was a Jew. His grandmother Lois was also a very influential person in Timothy’s life (**II Timothy 1:5**).

Paul had a strong influence on this young man and was able to persuade him to do many amazing things. Since racial descent was determined by the mother in this culture, and because it was feared by the churches that his ministry might prove difficult, Paul had Timothy circumcised not long after his conversion and after some serious debate (**Acts 16:3**). It should also be noted that none of Paul’s companions are mentioned as often as Timothy.

Key Verses:

I Timothy 1:5-7, 1:17, 2:1-7, 3:1-13, 3:16, 4:1-5, 4:12, 5:3-16, 5:19-20, 6:6, 6:12, 6:17-19

Outline:

- I. *The Teaching of a Church Leader (1:1-20)*
- II. *The Prayer Life of a Church Leader (2:1-15)*
- III. *The Qualifications of a Church Leader (3:1-16)*
- IV. *The Life of a Church Leader (4:1-16)*
- V. *The Work of a Church Leader (5:1-25)*
- VI. *The Perseverance of a Church Leader (6:1-21)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- How can we know that Paul and Timothy had a great relationship?
- What does this book teach us about mentoring?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #24: The Letter to Titus

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Titus 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. Traditionally we do not know much about the background and intent of the letter, but we know how it was received. The early church accepted it as from the authority of Paul, although modern day scholars like to debate other possible authors and intended purposes.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 62-65 AD from Macedonia at the same time and location that he wrote the first letter to Timothy. As the book of Acts concludes it is evident that Paul is headed for prison, but wanted to encourage the younger preachers. Therefore, he wrote the first letter to Timothy and this one to Titus just in case he did not return from a Roman imprisonment (**Acts 26-28, Titus 3:13**). He sees the end coming for him.

After his release, probably in the spring of 63 AD, Paul went east (**Romans 15:22**) and also planned to visit Timothy and Titus (**I Timothy 3:14, 4:13, Titus 3:12**). Since very little of this book deals with a heavy persecution upon the church, I Timothy and Titus were evidently written before Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians (July, 64 AD) when the church was still in its infancy and the most significant problems they faced were within the fellowship, not without.

Theme:

This letter is associated with the “Pastoral Epistles” because of the content. Paul encourages Titus to keep working steadfastly. It was clearly meant for the preacher, not the congregation, but as with the letters to Timothy and Philemon one can see that the whole church could benefit from its content. There is no doubt that they needed encouragement to get organized.

While Timothy is clearly identified as a younger colleague, Paul speaks to Titus with a different tone and with a shorter message, which gives the assumption that he was older and more mature. Like Timothy, Titus is given authority to appoint elders, rebuke the false teachers, and nurture the flock, but more emphasis is placed on daily living. Paul addresses church unity, morality, and Christian obligations in the community.

Audience:

The letter is personally addressed to Titus whom Paul considered to be a “true son in our common faith” (**Titus 1:4**). Paul had apparently left Titus on the island of Crete to serve the congregations (**Titus 1:5**) and set things in order.

We are given insight into the mindset of those in this congregation and community from Paul’s own words: deceptive, ignorant, liars, evil, lazy gluttons. They were struggling with leadership, legalistic false teaching, idolatry, and immorality.

Key Verses:

Titus 1:2, 1:5-9, 1:15, 2:1-8, 2:11-14, 2:15, 3:1, 3:3-7, 3:9-11, 3:14

Outline:

- I. Instruction For Church Organization (1)*
- II. Instruction For Christian Obligation (2)*
- III. Instruction For Correct Operation (3)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- How do you think Titus responded to this letter?
- What does this letter teach us about church organization?

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #25: The Second Letter to Timothy

Author:

Paul, the apostle (**II Timothy 1:1**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. The early church accepted it as from Paul, but recent scholars will try to debate this fact. There is strong internal and external evidence that it was written by him.

Date:

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote it around 64-65 AD in the city of Rome, while in a Roman prison and preparing for his death (**II Timothy 1:8, 16-17**). As mentioned in the notes from I Timothy, the book of Acts has Paul headed for a Roman prison around 60-62 AD. Luke's detailed account of the trip is found in the latter chapters (**Acts 26-28**). Acts leaves the question of Paul's release unanswered, but there is ample evidence that he was released after the two years (**Acts 28:30, I Timothy, Titus**).

Upon his release, probably in the spring of 63 AD, Paul went east (**Romans 15:22**) and also planned to visit Timothy and Titus (**I Timothy 3:14, 4:13, Titus 3:12**). However, when Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians (July, 64 AD) and began a harsh persecution, Paul may have had to alter his plans. During this persecution, Paul was imprisoned a second time in Rome and died around 67-68 A.D. (**II Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**). Tradition says he was beheaded. He may have even died the same day as the apostle Peter.

Theme:

Along with the first letter to Timothy and Titus, this book is lumped with the "Pastoral Epistles." It was clearly meant to be a final word of encouragement to the young preacher, protégé, and friend of the apostle. Much like the first letter, Paul identifies things every young preacher should know, believe, and teach. He addresses certain challenges but shows how the eternal benefits far outweigh the present circumstances. It is the opinion of many that the last chapter of this book is the most personal and touching of anything Paul ever wrote. It is his farewell message.

Audience:

The letter is personally addressed to young Timothy, whom he regarded as his “beloved son” (**II Timothy 1:2, 2:1**). He was still ministering in Ephesus (**II Timothy 4:19**). Remember that Paul met Timothy in Lystra, personally knew his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois who apparently taught him the Holy Scriptures from his youth (**Acts 16:1, II Timothy 1:5, 3:15**), and he mentions Timothy more frequently than any other companion.

Paul had already faced his first preliminary hearing and was ready for a formal trial. He was abandoned by all of his companions except Luke (**II Timothy 4:10-11**). One witness, Alexander, is mentioned to have testified against him (**II Timothy 4:14**). Paul expected imminent death, therefore, Timothy is seen as the last hope (along with Mark) for some of Paul’s final requests (**II Timothy 4:6-9, 11, 13, 21**).

Key Verses:

II Timothy 1:7, 1:12, 13-14, 2:2, 2:10-13, 2:15, 2:22-26, 3:1-5, 3:12, 3:16-17, 4:2, 4:6-8, 4:17

Outline:

- I. *The Ministry of a Church Leader (1:1-18)*
- II. *The Strength of a Church Leader (2:1-26)*
- III. *The Challenges of a Church Leader (3:1-17)*
- IV. *The Testimony of a Church Leader (4:1-22)*

Discussion:

- What are some important things we can learn from this book?
- What are some of your favorite passages from this book?
- How would you have felt if Paul sent you this letter?
- Why does Paul seem so victorious? How does he have this kind of courage?
- Do you think Paul’s passion for Christ rubbed off on others? Explain.

The Life & Letters of the Apostle Paul

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Lesson #26: The Death of the Apostle Paul (68 AD?)

Introduction: Here is what we know about the apostle Paul: he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (**Acts 22:3**), he was from the tribe of Benjamin (**Philippians 3:5**), he worked as a tent maker (**Acts 18:3**), he studied under Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**), he was a pharisaical Hebrew (**Philippians 3:5**), he persecuted many Christians (**Acts 8-9, Philippians 3:6**), he was saved after being blinded on the Damascus Road and taught by Ananias (**Acts 9**), he received miraculous gifts after his conversion (**Acts 9**), he was called into missions (**Acts 13**), he carried the gospel to the Gentiles (**Galatians 2:7-10**), he spoke up for the church in Antioch during the Jerusalem Council (**Acts 15**), he opposed Peter's hypocrisy (**Galatians 2:7-10**), he disputed with Barnabas about John Mark (**Acts 15**), he led three missionary journeys and founded many congregations (**Acts 13-20**), and he wrote many letters to churches. Various scholarly sources tell us that Paul was beheaded in Rome.

Discussion:

- What are some important things you have learned about the apostle Paul in this series?
- What do you appreciate the most about the apostle Paul?
- Which of Paul's letters have touched you the most? Why?
- How do you think the church was impacted by Paul's ministry?
- How do you think the church took the news of Paul's death? Explain.
- Why is it important to keep our passion and zeal until death?

Conclusion: Paul was a tremendous example for the church! Scholars tell us that he converted people even up until his death, including soldiers and family members of Caesar. There is so much we need to appreciate from Paul's story. We need emulate his character and study his letters. He was a terrific minister, missionary, mentor and man of God!