

# SHORT SKETCHES OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

by Unknown

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*A collection of articles and writings from Short Sketches of the Books of the Bible, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.*

112 Chapters

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## Short Sketches of the Books of the Bible

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## Preface

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The following notes appeared monthly in “The Christian Shepherd” from October 2001, through March 2004. In that a single volume is simpler to handle and is more readily accessible, this bound compilation has now been produced. In some instances the notes contained herein are longer than those originally published, space being less of a premium.

There has been no attempt or desire to introduce anything new in these outlines—no fresh interpretations, no novel thoughts. This is said without apology. Everything contained herein is available elsewhere.

It would be an answer to prayer if these notes should simply be a help to one young in the faith, perhaps opening up the Holy Scriptures to them in some small measure. Unless we daily feed on the Word of God, we cannot expect to be sustained in the path of faith or to grow spiritually. Although the text of many verses has been included, the reader is encouraged to open their Scriptures and consider for themselves both the verse and its context.

The reader is also urged to read the 19th and 20th century writers from which so many of these notes were gleaned.

Nicolas Simon

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## The Holy Scriptures

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It is needful in these dark days to have the Holy Scriptures constantly before us. “Lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut. 11:18).

While the world is tossed to and fro, ever learning yet never coming to a knowledge of the truth, we have a sure resource in the Bible. May we heed the exhortation given by the Apostle Paul to Timothy: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

At one time, the immense cost of producing books limited access to the Bible for most. Today, we are deluged with the printed word, most of which occupies our minds and time with pursuits other than the Holy Scriptures.

The enemy also seeks to undermine the authenticity of the Scriptures. If failing in that, he seeks to revise and paraphrase its words to suit men’s minds that are at enmity with God. How careful we must be in handling the Word of God. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

In this humanistic age, freedom of thought encourages each to come to a personal interpretation of Scripture, but the Bible says: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). We are to “have an outline of sound words, which [words] thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which [are] in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13 JND) and to be “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

The word of God cannot be studied in a rationalistic way, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). Though a babe in Christ has, by the Spirit, an understanding of the Holy Scriptures, none can plumb its infinite depths.

## Major Divisions

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The Scriptures are divided into two—the Old and New Testaments. There is a gap of some 400 years between the last book of the Old Testament and the birth of Christ, which marks the beginning of the new.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, excepting Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26, Jer. 10:11, and Dan. 2:4-7:28, which were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek.

The arrangement and titles for the books of the Old Testament follow that of the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from 280 B.C.). First, the five books of Moses, second, the historical books (Joshua through Esther), third, the poetical books (Job through the Song of Songs), and fourth, the prophetic books (Isaiah through Malachi). Within each group, the books are generally chronological—though the minor prophets (so-called) are grouped together after Daniel.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the books of the Old Testament are divided into three groups. It is perhaps this arrangement that the Lord Jesus refers to when He says: “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). The groupings are firstly the Law (Torah)—the five books of Moses; secondly the Prophets—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets; and thirdly the Writings—the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Christ and that which concerns Himself form the grand theme of all Scripture. Another has written, “He is the center of all revelation and the burden of all Scripture”. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

## Genesis

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Genesis, the first book of the law of Moses, is the book of beginnings. The title “Genesis” is Greek for “the source or fount”, and is taken from the Septuagint. In Hebrew, the title comes from the first word of the text “In the beginning”. The time covered by this book, excluding the period left unspecified in the first two verses, is some 2,316 years. This exceeds the total time period covered by the remaining portion of scripture—both Old and New Testaments.

The book may be divided into five distinct periods: 1. In the beginning (ch. 1:1, 2). 2. From the Adamic creation to the fall (ch. 1:3-3). 3. From the fall to the flood (ch. 4-7). 4. From the flood to the call of Abraham (ch. 8–11). 5. The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph (ch. 12-50).

Genesis 1:2 tells us that the Earth was “without form [waste], and void”, and yet in Isaiah 45:18 we find that: “God created it not in vain [waste]”—exactly the same word in the original as that found in Genesis 1:2 (the only other use of this word is to be found in Jeremiah 4:23). The time that transpired from the creation of the heavens and the earth until we find it waste and void is not specified, and neither are we told what transpired during that time—though we do know that the angels of God shouted for joy when the corner stone was laid (Job 38:6-7).

Within the pages of this book we find all the great principles of God’s relationship with man (without bringing in redemption, which makes a people for God and a dwelling-place for God in man). Here lie the great foundations for the remainder of Scripture. It is no wonder that Satan would attempt to undermine the contents of this book, throwing doubts upon its authenticity.

A general outline may be given: creation (ch. 1-2); Satan (ch. 3); the fall (ch. 3); the promise to the serpent concerning the Seed of God (vs. 3:15); sacrifice introduced (vs. 3:21 & ch. 4); our heavenly hope prefigured in Enoch (5:21-24), while the Jewish remnant is seen in Noah (ch. 6-8); the judgment of the world (ch. 6-8); government introduced as a check upon evil (ch. 9); the nations of the world with their independence epitomized in Nimrod (ch. 10-11); the call and life of Abraham, a life of faith (ch. 12-25); the son of promise, Isaac, a picture of Christ (ch. 21-28), with resurrection prefigured in Isaac (ch. 22); a heavenly people pictured in Isaac, “I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven” (vs. 26:4); the church, the bride, represented in Rebecca (ch. 24); God’s earthly people are seen in Jacob, “thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth” (ch. 28); Christ is pictured in Joseph, and the restoration of Israel is foreshadowed in His dealings with his brethren (ch. 37-45); Israel (Jacob) and his family go down into Egypt and dwell in the land of Goshen (ch. 46-50); prophecies concerning Israel (ch. 48-49); the burial of Jacob, and the death of Joseph (ch. 50).

If we consider the ages of the patriarchs, we find some interesting points for our consideration. Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5:5). During his lifetime he would have had opportunity to commune with Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech. Noah, the son of Lamech and a contemporary of Methuselah lived for 950 years, 350 years of that after the flood (Gen. 9:28-29). During this period, he may have talked with Nahor and Terah, Abraham’s grandfather and father. The life of Shem,

Noah's son, overlapped the lives of Abraham and Isaac.

It was by eyewitness account that the knowledge of God, of His Creation, the fall, His remedy, and His judgment, were passed down. How solemn then when we read in the book of Romans: "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened ... Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:21, 32).

## Exodus

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The book of Genesis closes with the children of Israel and their households in the land of Egypt, 70 persons in all (Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22—Acts 7:14 quotes from the Septuagint). Though Joseph died in Egypt, this was not the land that had been promised to Jacob and his seed, and it is by faith that he leaves instruction concerning his body—“God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (Gen. 50:25; Heb. 11:22). Joseph looked beyond this scene to another.

Joseph’s words are fulfilled in Exodus when the children of Israel are brought up out of the land of Egypt through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. (Numbers covers the remaining thirty-eight years of their forty years’ wandering in the wilderness, bringing them to the Jordan, while Deuteronomy records the last words of Moses before they entered the land of Canaan.) Although Moses saw the promised land from the top of Mount Pisgah, he never entered it.

While this gives us a broad outline of the historic events of these books, we would lose very much if that were all we saw. The Old Testament is full of vitally important moral instruction for believers today. These Scriptures were “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), examples or types for us (1 Cor. 10:6), “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

In Exodus we have redemption and, as a result, relationship to Jehovah, the Redeemer. In Genesis we read of Elohim, the Creator, the One with whom man has to do (Gen. 1:1). God introduces himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, God Almighty (Gen. 17:1). In Exodus however, we have, “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14). This is Jehovah, the Eternal One—a name that speaks of relationship—and it was by this name that Israel was to know God. “I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm, and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people, and will be your God; and ye shall know that I, Jehovah your God, am he who bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Ex. 6:6-7 JND).

Exodus may be divided as follows: 1. Israel in Egypt (ch. 1-6). 2. The ten plagues of Egypt (ch. 7-12). 3. The exodus—from the Passover to the Red Sea (ch. 12-14). 4. The song of redemption (ch. 15). 5. The Red Sea to Mt. Sinai (ch. 16-19). 6. The law and the pattern for the Tabernacle (ch. 20-40).

In the Passover we see the blood of the Lamb meeting the claims of God as a judge. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Ex. 12:13). The Lamb is a type of Christ (1 Cor. 5:7), and the blood the foundation of every spiritual blessing.

The Red Sea is a picture to us of Christ’s death and resurrection. It typifies the deliverance of the believer from the power of Satan and the world. In salvation we are not merely safe from wrath to come, but have complete victory over the power of sin (Rom. 6:17-18). The Israelites saw the bodies of the Egyptians upon the seashore (Ex. 14:30).

Though freed from that tyrant sin, there is conflict still—“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17)—and we find Joshua fighting Amalek (Ex. 17:10). However, in Moses we have pictured the One who ever lives to make intercession for us (Ex. 17:10-12; Heb. 7:25).

## The Tabernacle

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As soon as we have a people redeemed in the Old Testament, we have the thought of God dwelling in the midst of His people. God could not dwell with them in Egypt, a land of idolatry; he must separate them from such a scene for Himself.

The tabernacle (or tent of meeting) was constructed according to the pattern given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It consisted first of a court, and, within the court, the tabernacle itself. The tabernacle was divided into two parts: the Holy place and, separated by a veil, the Holy of Holies, where was the Ark of the Covenant. It was from within the Holy of Holies that Jehovah was looked upon as dwelling in the midst of His redeemed people. “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). As the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness, the tabernacle formed the center of their encampments (Numbers 2).

Such a building must be built according to God’s specifications: “According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it” (Ex. 25:9). No detail was insignificant and nothing was left to the ingenuity of Moses. We find in the New Testament that the things made were “patterns of things in the heavens” (Heb. 9:23). The tabernacle, its furnishings, and the many instruments were figures of the true. In them we see Christ shadowed—His person and His work.

## Leviticus

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In Leviticus we have instruction as to how the children of Israel were to approach unto God. It was to be in the directed way, in a suited state, and through one of God's appointed priests.

In considering this book, it is good to remember the contrasts drawn in the book of Hebrews: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (Heb. 10:1). In Leviticus we have beautiful pictures of the sacrificial and priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapters 1-6, we have the five offerings: the burnt offering, the meat offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. Beginning at verse 8 of chapter 6, through to the end of chapter 7, we find the laws governing their observance—here the peace offering comes last.

The peace offering was not atoning. Rather, it was the outcome of one having been blessed—the response of the heart in worship. Part was accepted of God, part was food for the priest and his sons, while the offerer also partook of the sacrifice. It was enjoyed together in joint communion.

In chapters 8 through 10 we have the priesthood of Aaron and his sons. Chapters 11 through 15 show us man by nature and practice. In these chapters, we find the law of the leper. Leprosy is sin producing an unclean condition through its insidious working

In chapter 16 we have the Day of Atonement. The two goats present the double aspect of the atoning work of Christ. In the first goat we see God's holy and righteous character vindicated, enabling Him to be propitious (merciful) to the whole world. The scapegoat, on the other hand, speaks of Christ bearing our sins—"who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The one speaks of propitiation (Rom. 3:25), the other of substitution.

In chapter 23 we have the seven feasts of Jehovah. In these feasts we see pictured God's dealings with man, and in particular Israel, from the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to His millennial kingdom.

"Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). In the first fruits of harvest we have the resurrection—on the day after the Sabbath. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). In the feast of weeks (Pentecost) we see foreshadowed the descent of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the Church (Acts 2). Between this feast and the last three there is a break (verse 22) in which the stranger comes into blessing. In the Feast of Trumpets we have the awakening of Israel, their restoration in the Day of Atonement, and finally their millennial blessing with the feast of booths.

The last three chapters give us "the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai" (Lev. 27:34, compare 1:1). Befitting Sinai, they present the claims of God in government.

## Numbers

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The Hebrew title of this book, “In the Desert,” appropriately summarizes its historic content. The book takes us from Mt. Sinai to the plains of Moab by the river Jordan. Service and walk characterize Numbers. It is important to note that worship (Leviticus) follows redemption (Exodus) and must have its due place before service.

The following divisions may be observed: arrangements for the departure from Sinai (ch. 1-9); the journey from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea on the borders of Canaan (ch. 10-12); the 12 spies search out the land (ch. 13); apostasy—“Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (ch. 14); God’s purposes for his people—Canaan, not the wilderness is to be their hope (ch. 15); in 38 years of wandering God’s purposes remain unchanged (ch. 16-19); second arrival at Kadesh-barnea, and their journey from thence to the plains of Moab (ch. 20-36). Chapter 33 gives us a summary of their encampments, with their first stay at Kadesh-barnea conspicuous by its absence.

Through unbelief, all those twenty years old and upward among the nation of Israel perished in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:29-30). These two faithful men, numbered among the twelve spies, alone stood for Jehovah and His truth.

Though in the wilderness, the promised land was always to be before the children of Israel. A ribbon of blue was to fringe the borders of their garments (Num. 15:38), as it should ours figuratively, reminding us that we are a heavenly people. God would not have us in Egypt—the world. He would not have us in the wilderness either—the world as it appears to the eye of faith.

The children of Israel entered the Red Sea, and came out of the Jordan (Ex. 14:22; Josh. 4:16-18). Nothing is spoken of them exiting the Red Sea, or of entering the Jordan. Their desert wanderings were not the path of faith.

It is sad to see at the journeys end, that some still did not wish to enter the land: “Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, [and] bring us not over Jordan” (Num. 32:5). In contrast, it is beautiful to see the desire of the hearts of the daughters of Zelophehad (ch. 27). They did not despise the pleasant land, to the contrary, they claimed their father’s portion, and God honored their faith.

## Deuteronomy

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The Greek title that we have retained from the Septuagint means “the second law” or the “law repeated”. However, this does not adequately describe the contents of this book. It would be a serious mistake to consider Deuteronomy a mere repetition of what has gone before. The Hebrew title derives from the first verse and means “words”. “These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab” (Deut. 1:1).

Unlike Exodus or Numbers, which have a large historic content, Deuteronomy is almost entirely the words of Moses, which he rehearsed in the ears of the people before they entered the promised land. Whereas Leviticus is addressed to the priests, Deuteronomy is addressed to the people.

It was eleven days’ journey from Horeb, by the way of mount Seir, to Kadesh-barnea (Deut. 1:2), but now some forty years later, a new generation (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) is about to enter the land. Moses begins in the first three chapters rehearsing a brief summary of God’s ways with them. What lessons He had taught them in the wilderness, not only of their own weakness, but also of the infinite holiness, patience, grace and love of Jehovah!

Chapter 5 begins: “And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them”. These words continue through to the end of chapter 28. Chapter 29 begins with the summary: “These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb” (Deut. 29:1). Again we find the children of Israel saying “we will hear it, and do it” (Deut. 5:27), which brings forth the response from the One who knew their hearts, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deut. 5:29)

The instruction they received supposes that they are in the land, a land that Moses was not to enter himself, though he would see it with his eyes (ch. 34). They were to love the Lord their God and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments continually (Deut. 11:1). Rebellion would result in judgment. Once in the land, they were to worship in the place of the Lord’s choosing—“Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD” (Deut. 12:11).

Sadly, Deuteronomy also presupposes their failure. The book looks beyond their entry into the land; it looks prophetically to the day when, having failed, they would be driven out of the land and scattered amongst the nations, from whence the Lord would gather them again (ch. 30). The song of Moses in chapter 32 anticipates their apostasy, their restoration, and God’s judgment upon the

nations.

It is interesting to note that Deuteronomy is the most frequently quoted book of the Pentateuch in the New Testament. Though the children of Israel did indeed fail, we see in beautiful contrast the One who always did the will of the Father. The three quotations used by our Saviour in answering the tempter are taken from this book (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

## Joshua

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The book of Joshua begins where Deuteronomy ends. Moses having died on mount Pisgah, it is now Joshua who, by divine appointment (Num. 27:18-23, Deut. 1:38, 3:28), leads the children of Israel into the promised land—“unto the land which I do give to them” (Josh. 1:2). It was not for the lawgiver Moses to bring them into the land of Canaan. They would not claim the land on the ground of their righteousness, but according to the promises made to their fathers (Josh. 1:6). For the children of Israel, it was simply a question of their entering into that which God had given them for a possession. “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you” (Josh. 1:3).

Come out of Egypt, Joshua pictures to us Christ as the leader or captain of His saints. In Hebrew, Joshua means “Jehovah is Salvation” and is translated in the Greek as Jesus (Acts 7:45). The expression, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life” (Josh. 1:5) is to Joshua. As with the children of Israel, we have One in whose strength we stand—“be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10).

The book may be divided historically thus: preparation for entry into the land of Canaan (ch. 1-2); the crossing of the river Jordan (ch. 3-4); circumcision at Gilgal (ch. 5); Jericho destroyed and cursed (ch. 6); the failures and victories of the people (ch. 7-12); division of the land (ch. 13-22); Joshua’s dying charge (ch. 23-24).

While the passage through the Red Sea typifies Christ’s death for the believer, the passage through the Jordan typifies the believer’s death with Christ and being raised with Him. Jordan is not what we have been delivered from, but what we have been brought into. It is resurrection in type, and its application is found in the book of Colossians. “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances. ... If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 2:20, 3:1).

The wilderness is the character that the world takes when we have been redeemed. It is where the flesh is sifted. Circumcision was not carried out in the wilderness. In contrast, death, and our entrance into heavenly places, judges the whole nature in which we live in this world. Circumcision is the application of the Spirit’s power to the mortification of the flesh. Our Gilgal is found in Colossians 3:5, “Mortify therefore”. It does not say, “die to sin”. “Mortify” is active power; it rests on the power of that which is already true to faith: “Ye are dead” (Col. 3:3), “mortify therefore” (Col. 3:5).

Before conflict begins, they eat of the old corn of the land (Josh. 5:11)—a picture to us of a heavenly Christ, upon whom those who have spiritually passed through Jordan feed. The manna—a humbled Christ for our wilderness circumstances—ceased on the next day, and from that day forward they ate of the fruit of the land (Josh. 5:12; John 6:31-33).

## Judges

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Joshua is a book of victorious power; Judges a book of failure and weakness. Gilgal—circumcision (death to the flesh)—is exchanged for Bochim, a place of weeping, but the angel of the Lord is there (Judg. 2:1-5).

The children of Israel had been told, “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you” (Josh. 1:3). Nevertheless, the energy of faith quickly gave way to complacency and unbelief. Having failed to secure for themselves the land that God had given them, they made leagues with its inhabitants in direct disobedience to God (Deut. 7:2). These inhabitants, allowed of God to remain that He might prove them, quickly became a snare (Judges 2:3, 21-22). Before we reach the end of the book of Joshua, we find idols amongst the people (Josh. 24:23). Falling under the judgment of God, He delivers them into the hands of their enemies.

Upon the death of Joshua, we have no successor. Instead, we find God in mercy raising up judges with authority over a limited portion of the country. These were times of revival; there was repentance, and they were delivered. Upon the death of each judge, the children of Israel returned to their evil ways—corrupting themselves worse than their fathers (Judg. 2:13-19). It was a time in which every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judg. 21:25). It is helpful to note that chapters 17-21 are not chronological, but rather, follow a moral order.

Thirteen judges are mentioned. Their names, and the rest periods that resulted from the deliverance wrought on their behalf, are: Othniel, 40 years (ch. 3:8-11), Ehud, 80 years (ch. 3:12-30), Shamgar (ch. 3:31), Deborah and Barak, 40 years (ch. 4 and 5), Gideon, 40 years (ch. 6-8), Abimelech, 3 years (ch. 9), Tola, 23 years (ch. 10:1-2), Jair, 22 years (ch. 10:3-5), Jephthah, 6 years (ch. 11 - 12:7), Ibzan, 7 years (ch. 12:8-10), Elon, 10 years (ch. 12:11-12), Abdon, 8 years (ch. 12:13-15), and Samson, 20 years (ch. 13-16).

The book of Judges reminds us of the sad history of the church. The Apostle Paul’s parting words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20) answer to those of Joshua at the close of that book. When Satan failed to destroy the church through persecution, he sought to corrupt it by bringing it into a union with the world. Each period of revival has been followed by greater decline. “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11).

## Ruth

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The opening verse of the book of Ruth gives us the time and setting of this brief narrative, both historically and morally. “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land” (Ruth 1:1). Ruin and failure characterized the book of Judges; grace and life are characteristic of Ruth. We also see faith; a faith that lays hold of that grace and appropriates it.

The meaning of the names used throughout the book, of both individuals and places, is very instructive. The book takes up the family of Elimelech (“my God is King”), who with his wife Naomi (“my pleasantness”) and two sons, Mahlon (“sickness”) and Chilion (“consumption”), live in Bethlehem (“house of bread”). Leaving the chosen land because of the famine, the family seeks refuge in the country of Moab. Contrary to God’s instruction, the two sons marry daughters of the land (Deut. 23:3).

Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion all die in that strange country, leaving three widows, Naomi, and her Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Ruth, cleaving not only to Naomi, but also to her God and His people, returns with her to Bethlehem. How the words of Ruth, a Gentile stranger, contrast with those of Naomi (Ruth 1:15-17). Acknowledging the hand of God in her life, Naomi requests that she be called Mara (bitterness), “for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20).

Having returned to Bethlehem (“house of bread”), we find a wonderful story of grace and redemption. Boaz (“strength”) pays the price of redemption, and Ruth becomes his wife. Grace alone could accomplish this task, for Ruth the Moabite was a stranger to the covenants of promise. This beautiful book, which began with famine, death, and bitterness, now ends with life.

Ruth’s child Obed is seen as Naomi’s son (Ruth 4:17). Obed is the father of Jesse, and the grandfather of King David. Ruth, along with Tamar, Rahab (the mother of Boaz), and Bathsheba, are the only women mentioned in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 1). Who can fathom the grace of God?

Prophetically, Ruth represents the future Jewish remnant. Portrayed as a Gentile destitute of right or title, she identifies herself with the desolate condition of the afflicted people (Mara). Boaz, a figure of Christ, undertakes the cause of Ruth, marries her, redeems the inheritance (the land of Palestine), and raises up the lost memorial of Israel.

## First and Second Samuel

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First Samuel is a continuation of the historic account of Judges, with the book of Ruth forming an important link between the two. In Ruth, we have introduced the royal lineage descending from the tribe of Judah according to Jacob's prophecy (Gen. 49:10). The books of Samuel take us to the establishment of the kingdom in David. These two books originally formed a single volume; the Greek translators introduced a division at the death of Saul.

Before David, we have a transitional period. In Eli and his sons, the priesthood fails (1 Sam. 2:12-36). The priesthood had been the immediate link between the people and God. With the sacrifice, the basis of approach unto God, trampled upon (1 Sam. 2:29) and the ark taken by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4), there is a total breach. God must come in, in His own sovereign way, and the prophet is introduced (1 Sam. 3:19-21). Samuel is the first in a long list of prophets continuing until John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, even as Samuel introduces David.

While the people's cry of "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5) was a rejection of Jehovah and His reign, God turned their sin into an occasion for bringing out His purpose in royalty to be accomplished in Christ. Saul, their first king, was the people's choice (1 Sam. 12:13). However, God's kingdom cannot be established on the ground of the flesh, and man and his choice are unable to stand before the enemy. While Saul reigns, David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), is rejected. Gathered to him in his rejection, we find those that the world despised but whom God honored—"the excellent of this earth" (1 Sam. 22:1-2; Ps. 16:3; Heb. 11:38). Sadly, the ties of nature prove too strong for Jonathan, Saul's son, a valiant man of faith, and he falls with Saul (1 Sam. 31:2). In all, Saul reigned for 40 years. In type, he prefigures the willful king, the antichrist (Dan. 11:36).

In the second book of Samuel, we have David's kingdom established in power, first in Hebron over Judah for seven and a half years (2 Sam. 1-4), and then over all Israel (2 Sam. 5). In all, David reigned 40 years (1 Ki. 2:11). "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Sam. 3:1). Not man's choice or his doings, this is the sovereign election of God. "Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved" (Ps. 78:67-68). David's life and reign presents in type Christ, and the establishment of His kingdom.

In the books of Samuel, we have man in responsibility, and as always, he fails. At ease in Jerusalem, David falls into sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11). To cover his sin, he caused the death of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and numbered amongst his mighty men (2 Sam. 23:39). David's confession is beautifully recorded in Psalm 51, but God's government must take its course and David bows to this. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7), is an abiding principle. Sin, death, and rebellion follow in David's house. How sad to read his last words, "Although my house be not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:5).

Second Samuel closes with judgment upon Israel from Dan even to Beersheba (2 Sam. 24:15). Jehovah, acting in mercy, stays the hand of the angel from destroying Jerusalem, while David intercedes for the people, owning the sin as his own—"Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house" (2 Sam. 24:17). Sacrifice must be offered, and there on Moriah (where Abraham offered up Isaac) atonement is made.

As we observe current world events, we have peace knowing that the future of Zion rests with God, not man. The books of Samuel present a vivid, prophetic picture of God's dealings with Israel and of their restoration in a coming day.

## First and Second Kings

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The two books of Kings, like those of Samuel, originally formed a single volume. Beginning with Solomon's reign of righteousness, peace, and glory, they end with Israel in captivity and all in ruin. In the Kings, as with the books of Samuel, we have man in responsibility. Sadly, we find that Solomon himself—blessed by Jehovah more than any other in wisdom, glory, and riches—sows the seeds for the ruin. “King Solomon loved many strange women, ... it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:1, 4). It is not until Josiah, one of the very last kings of Judah, that the high places built by Solomon are destroyed (2 Kings 23:13).

Jehovah pleaded with His people, patiently dealing with them in mercy. Though there are periods of revival and examples of individual faith, the calls are unheeded. “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

Upon the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two. Ten tribes were given into the hand of Jeroboam, a ruler over the house of Joseph (1 Kings 11:28), while Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was left with just two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Henceforth there are two kingdoms (to be united again in a future day under Christ the King). The ten northern tribes are collectively called Israel, or sometimes Ephraim (particularly by the prophets), while Judah and Benjamin are known simply as Judah—Benjamin's numbers being few. The priests and Levites joined with Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-14). Omri, the father of Ahab—kings of Israel—established his capital in Samaria, forever connecting that name with the northern kingdom (1 Kings 16:24).

Fearing lest the people should return to Jerusalem to sacrifice, Jeroboam established a false religion (1 Kings 12:25-33). Making two golden calves, he placed one in the southern town of Bethel and the other in Dan in the north, declaring, “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). Complete with priests (of the lowest of the people), holy days, and sacrifices—all devised of his own heart—this counterfeit religion displaced the true. Israel never turned from this position, walking in the sins of Jeroboam, and never departing from them (2 Kings 17:22).

From the twelfth chapter of First Kings to the first chapter of Second Kings we have the ministry of the prophet Elijah, and, from the second chapter to the thirteenth chapter we have that of Elisha. Miracles were performed (especially reserved for Israel) that had not been seen since the day of Moses. Israel's apostasy culminates with their being taken captive by the Assyrians (the king of the North, the rod of God's anger) in chapter 17 of Second Kings. The Assyrians replaced the displaced people with men from other lands; these became known as the Samaritans.

Up to this point, the book of Kings has been chiefly occupied with the history of Israel. Now, with the 10 tribes in captivity, the closing days of Judah's history is taken up. Though there were kings of Judah that "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord", as a nation they failed to heed the warning of Israel's captivity and forsook the Lord, falling into the same sin of idolatry (Jer. 3:8). The prophets Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, all lived and prophesied during this period. Solomon's temple is gradually stripped of its glory. In the days of Ezekiel we find its inner walls covered with images portraying creeping things, abominable beasts, and the idols of Israel (Eze. 8:10).

The book of Second Kings concludes with the captivity of Judah under the Chaldeans. God's sentence, of which they were forewarned by Hosea the prophet, is fulfilled, "Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hos. 1:9). Though men may scoff, there is a day appointed "in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31).

## First and Second Chronicles

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To the natural mind, Chronicles may appear to be a rather incomplete adjunct to the book of Kings. However, nothing could be further from the truth. We find in this book—for originally the two books formed a single volume—that we have moved from an historic account of the decline and captivity of Israel and Judah to a new division, a different time, and a new subject.

Though grouped with Kings in the Old Testament arrangement with which we are familiar, this book falls within that part of Scripture called the “Writings”. Written after the captivity (1 Chron. 6:15; 3:17-24), with a remnant of Judah having returned to the land of Israel (see Ezra and Nehemiah), all was in ruin about them. Fragmentary in character, it reflects the condition of that day. What had become of the promises of God, and in particular that which concerned the house of David?

Whereas man in responsibility is the subject of Samuel and Kings, here in this beautiful book we have God’s sovereignty acting in grace to fulfill His promises and accomplish His purposes—not one word of which can fail, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:29). It is Israel’s history as God delighted to see it.

## Genealogies

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The first nine chapters of First Chronicles consist of genealogies—particularly important to a Jew returning from captivity (Ezra 2:59, 62)—yet within them there are many gems to be found and meditated upon (e.g. Jabez in 1 Chron. 4:9, 10). Extending back to Adam, we have that line blessed by grace according to God’s sovereignty.

In reading these genealogies, it is helpful to see that the natural appears first and then that which is spiritual—owned of God in grace (1 Cor. 15:46). Hence, we have Japheth, Ham, and lastly Shem (1 Chron. 1:5, 8, 17); the sons of Isaac, with Esau first, and then Israel (1 Chron. 1:34).

In the third chapter, we arrive at the grand object of the book, the genealogy of David. Beginning with the fourth chapter we move from the subject of the king, to the nation—Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, Levi, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher. Benjamin is again brought before us in chapter 9, now as the line of Saul the king. “So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies; and, behold, they were written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, who were carried away to Babylon for their transgression” (1 Chron. 9:1).

## The Seed of David

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A remarkable indication of the character of the book is to be seen in chapter 10 of First Chronicles. In just 14 verses the reign of Saul is introduced and summarily dismissed. Immediately we have the kingdom established according to God's counsels in chapter 11: "Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord by Samuel" (1 Chron. 11:3).

We do not read of David's sin with Bathsheba or Absalom's rebellion. We hear nothing of Adonijah, instead First Chronicles ends with the peaceful transfer of the throne to Solomon, "whom alone God hath chosen" (1 Chron. 29:1). Solomon's failures are not recorded; there is no mention of his many wives.

In Chronicles, we see God's counsels of grace accomplished in David and Solomon as types of Christ, but only in type. From chapter 10 of Second Chronicles to the end of that book, we have the sad history of Judah; from Rehoboam until the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the king of Babylon and their captivity in that land. Yet we see God in grace preserving the royal line of David, and to what end? "He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:22-23).

In Chronicles, as in Samuel, David's sin in numbering the people is mentioned. However, in Chronicles it is not, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord" (2 Sam. 24:14); rather, "let me fall now into the hand of the Lord" (1 Chron. 21:13).

We do not read in Chronicles of David buying the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam. 24:24); rather, David gives to Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight (1 Chron. 21:25). One is for the threshing floor and the other for the place—it is not just the treasure now, but the whole field (see Matt. 13:44). It is not measured in silver—the price of redemption—as we find in the book of Samuel (consistent with the character of that book). Rather, here it is measured in gold, the inestimable value of Christ's work at Calvary as seen in the eyes of God.

## Ezra and Nehemiah

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Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are the last historical books of the Old Testament. All three are post-captivity. Ezra and Nehemiah consider the remnant of Jews that returned to Judah, while Esther takes place in the land of their exile. This was the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). God’s sentence of Lo-Ammi (“not my people”, Hosea 1:9) is written upon Israel. The land is under the dominion of the Persians, and all dates are relative to their monarchs. Yet God has not forgotten Israel (Jer. 31:20). He is still to be seen working behind the scenes, using the Gentile rulers as He chooses, and in His time, to execute His will.

The book of Ezra describes the construction of the temple, while in Nehemiah we have the restoration of the city of Jerusalem and its walls. Ezra, the priest and a ready scribe, was concerned with the ecclesiastical state of things, while Nehemiah, the king’s cupbearer and governor of Judah, was occupied with the civil.

In these books we see faith displayed in the day of ruin, a conduct that is not pretentious but acknowledges the condition of things. The very act of establishing the altar again in the midst of the temple ruin only served to highlight the state of things (Ezra 3:2).

The book of Ezra begins in the time of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1) and continues through the reigns of Ahasuerus (Cambyses; Ezra 4:6), Artaxerxes (Smerdis; Ezra 4:7), and Darius (Darius Hystaspis; Ezra 4:24), during the 2nd year of whose reign, Haggai and Zechariah prophesy (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). The events of Esther follow and take place during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), while the latter part of Ezra and the entire book of Nehemiah occur during the reign of his son, Artaxerxes (Artaxerxes Longimanus; Ezra 7; Neh. 2:1).

## Ezra

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The return to Jerusalem of the Jews from captivity was not a random event at the whim of the king, but rather one whose precise time had been prophesied by Jeremiah: “For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jer. 29:10). Further, the very sovereign under whose hand this would take place, Cyrus, was named long before (Isa. 44:28). Those that took advantage of the offer were principally of Judah and Benjamin with a few Levites—a small remnant of the Chaldean captivity. These are the Jews, a term employed frequently in these books. Jehovah permits their return, setting the scene for the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament. The return is under the leadership of Zerubbabel, of the royal line of David, but everything is subject to the king of Persia.

Before the foundations of the temple were laid, and before the walls of the city were restored, the altar was raised up, for therein was their refuge. The foundation of the temple followed (Ezra 3), but the enemy is always ready to hinder. Seeking first to join with them, then in open opposition, he sought to bring the work to a halt (Ezra 4). Discouragement set in and the work ceased, long before the edict from Artaxerxes (4:17-24). The condition of the people had to be addressed before God could move the King, and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to this end (Ezra 5:1). As a result, the temple was completed—though without the ark it was an empty house.

Some years later, a second smaller group returned to the land under the leadership of Ezra (Ezra 7-8). Ezra was astonished to find that the people and the priests had intermarried with the inhabitants of the land contrary to the word of the law (Ezra 9-10). The prayer that flowed from Ezra’s heart is beautiful; justifying God, he identified himself with the sins of the people. Confession is the fruit of Ezra’s appeals, and the children of captivity separated themselves from the people of the land, and from their strange wives (Ezra 10:11, 12).

## Nehemiah

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The book of Nehemiah commences in the 20th year of Artaxerxes—a very important date, for it begins the 70 weeks of Daniel (Dan. 9:25). In that year the command to build and restore Jerusalem was given to Nehemiah (Neh. 1-2). Again, the enemy tried to hinder the work, for these were troublous times. There were enemies not only without, but also within. With a weapon in one hand, they built with the other (Neh. 4:17) until the work was complete, for it was wrought by God (Neh. 3-6).

For twelve years Nehemiah governed (Neh. 5:14), during which time he was diligent in addressing the grievances of the people. Usury was condemned, and mortgaged lands and property were restored (Neh. 5). In the ninth chapter they bind themselves by a covenant, only to prove again that there is no power within man to keep that which he promises. At the end of the twelve years, after a brief visit to Artaxerxes (Neh. 13:6), Nehemiah returns to find the enemy dwelling within the courts of the house of God, the Levites neglected, the Sabbath violated, and the people again united with the strangers of the land (Neh. 13:7-28). Such is the continual failure of the first Adam—fully proven at Calvary.

## Esther

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The events described in the book of Esther occurred during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), the father of the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7. The mass of Jews had remained in their land of captivity, even though the proclamation of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1) had gone out more than a half a century earlier. The small remnant that had returned to a ruined Jerusalem had energy of faith that was not seen amongst those that remained. The name of God is not once mentioned in this book, but God's ways are sure. Though hidden, He will deliver His people—even when He can no longer publicly own them as such. As the scenes of this beautiful book of God's providential care unfold, we find them arranged precisely as He chooses to arrange them.

As a result of queen Vashti's refusal to show her beauty (Es. 1:11-12), she is set aside and her royal estate is given unto another better than she (Es. 1:19)—Esther, or Hadassah in Hebrew—the cousin of Mordecai, a captive of the tribe of Benjamin. Esther was an orphaned Jewess, very beautiful, and was as a daughter to Mordecai (Es. 2:7).

While Esther is brought into the very heart of the palace as queen, Mordecai holds a despised position in the king's gate—their relationship unknown (Es. 2:19, 20). Refusing to bow down to Haman the Agagite (an Amalekite; 1 Sam. 15:8), Mordecai incurs the hatred of this powerful man (Es. 3:1-5). In one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all the Jews of the kingdom were to be exterminated—Esther included—and though not mentioned specifically, the remnant in the province of Judea (Es. 3:13). For Haman, everything seemed to be coming together; however, the Observer of men arranges a wakeful night for the king. Perhaps hoping to hear of his own grandeur, he instead hears from the state records how Mordecai had saved his life (Es. 6:1-3). Mordecai must be exalted, the adversary of the Jews must be exposed, and their enemies destroyed (Es. 6, 7). The book closes with Mordecai promoted to the second place in the kingdom (Es. 10:3).

While Esther's obedience to her cousin, her willingness to forfeit her life for her people, and Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman were acts of true faith, we must remember that providence cannot be taken as a guide for the exercise of faith. Faith does not look at circumstances but to God Himself, and is guided by His Word. Though providence saw to Moses in the bulrushes, it was by faith that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:24).

There are many practical lessons to be found in Esther, but the primary subject of this book is God's earthly people. The Gentile wife (Christendom in her Christian responsibility) has failed to show her beauty (Rom. 11:21-24), and a Jewish wife will supersede her. The Gentile opposer of the Jews must be judged, and the despised Mordecai—a picture of Christ—must be exalted as the Head over all things.

## Job

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In our Old Testament arrangement, the book of Job marks the beginning of the poetic books. Chronologically it would appear to fall during the latter portion of Genesis—after the flood and before the law. Job, an actual person as scripture testifies (Eze. 14:14; Jas. 5:11), lived in the land of Uz, generally understood to be in Arabia. He was one who, by God’s own testimony, was perfect and upright, “one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). The entire account is about Job’s extraordinary trial.

This book has been widely misunderstood, and many fall into the same error as Job’s friends—that Job brought his suffering upon himself because of his sins. God was not punishing Job for his self-righteousness; this was not the secret sin his companions so vehemently sought. (That he was self-righteous is without question, however, it was a symptom not the root.) Man by nature views his prosperity as God’s approval, and affliction as His disapproval. This view of God has terrible implications. Clearly there are instances where the wicked prosper (Job 21) and, as in this case, where the righteous suffer.

There was a needs-be in Job’s life. However, the question was not, “What is this that thou hast done?” (Gen. 3:13), but rather, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). The book considers man’s state in nature quite apart from any question of sins committed. Man would seek to justify himself before God—and surely such a man as Job had plenty to rest upon—but he does not know that he is entirely at enmity with God.

Aside from the first two chapters in which we learn the origin of Job’s trial, the remaining chapters are a dialogue between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (Job 3-31), Elihu (Job 32-37), and finally the Lord Himself (Job 38-42).

God allows Satan to buffet Job, but a bound is set and his life is preserved. Satan reasoned that without a reward Job would curse God (Job 1:9-11). Satan, and the natural man like him, has no appreciation of faith. Satan seduced Eve with the promise of a reward, and assumes God works likewise (Job 1:10). Satan exits the scene having failed, and Job’s sorest trial begins with his so-called friends.

Eliphaz speaks from experience (Job 4:8, 15:10). God cannot be found by experience, and this is reflected in his comments (Job 22:3). We only know God by the revelation that He makes of Himself.

Bildad speaks from the conscience (Job 8:6), but conscience condemns man without remedy. Like his friends, Bildad views the government of God as the full measure and display of His righteousness, a doctrine that proves our utter ignorance of God.

Zophar is a legalist—do and you will live (Job 11:13-15)—but man has no power to please God through good deeds.

We cannot dismiss all that the friends say, for there was truth there, though misdirected; it all pointed Job to himself and not to God.

“How should man be just with God?” (Job 9:2). Job knew that if he justified himself, his mouth would condemn him (Job 9:20). He wished for a daysman (umpire) between himself and God (Job 9:33), one that might plead for him (Job 16:21). With his thoughts inward, knowing that his friends falsely accused him, Job justifies himself at the expense of God (Job 29:14, 40:8).

In Elihu, we have in type the mediator, of whom Christ is the fulfillment. Elihu points Job’s thoughts away from himself and towards God. God speaks to man in a vision (Job 33:15), in sickness (Job 33:19), and sometimes by a messenger (Job 33:23). In his trial Job failed to see that God was for Him. Elihu’s heart yearned for Job (Job 32:19). In our trials do we justify God? Do we recognize His loving hand in it? Do we know that we have an advocate that yearns for us? Or do our hands hang down and in our self-occupation see nothing but God as Judge? “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6).

Job’s heart thus prepared, he hears the Lord answer him out of the whirlwind (Job 38:1). With his eye now fixed on God and His glorious power as revealed in creation, Job can only say “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). Therein is Job’s deliverance in the measure that he could know it—God is the justifier, He has found a ransom (Job 33:24).

We can now say what Job could not know at that time, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24-26).

## The Book of Psalms

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The Book of Psalms is a collection of meditations, prayers, and praises. While the book has a distinctly prophetic character, it is not a formal declaration of future events. Neither is it history or doctrine, though it contains both. They are the expressions of the hearts of those in the midst of deep sorrow or exercise under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

David wrote many of the Psalms (Luke 20:42). Some can be related to specific circumstances in his life. Nevertheless these are not simply the cries of David, nor mere human sentiment. Rather, they are the language of the Spirit of Christ in the psalmist (1 Peter 1:11). Some, such as Psalm 22, can be identified with a particular time and place in the history of the Lord Jesus. In others, we find Christ in association with the godly remnant in Judah and Israel: afflicted in the land, out of the land, the place He took among them when on earth, and in the full blessing of millennial days. No other book expresses the thoughts and feelings of the Lord's heart in such a manner.

While there is much for the Christian, the Psalms should not merely be read for comfort, but for communion with the mind and ways of God. The Psalms are occupied with Judah and Israel. They are the experiences of a people under law. The blessings and position that we as Christians—members of the body of Christ—enjoy were not known.

## Divisions of Psalms

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The Book of Psalms is not divided into chapters; rather, each psalm is known by its position—for example, the second psalm (Acts 13:33). The headings that are found above many of the psalms appear in the Septuagint and other manuscripts, and are of a very ancient date. In the Hebrew, the psalms are divided into five books, each with a distinct character: Psalms 1-41 form the first book, 42-72 the second, 73-89 the third, 90-106 the fourth, and 107-150 the fifth. The closing of each book is distinctly marked, as may be observed by reading the last few verses of each. Their order is moral, never chronological.

## Prophecy and the Psalms

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An understanding of the prophetic future of Judah and Israel is helpful in understanding the Psalms. At the close of the historic books, both Judah and Israel are in captivity. Judah's post captivity history has differed from that of Israel, whose identity as a people has been lost. As we are witnessing even today, Judah will be restored to her land in unbelief (Isa. 18), and will ultimately rebuild her temple (Isa. 66:1-6; 2 Thess. 2:4; Psa. 74). With the church having been taken out of this scene at the rapture, a period of tremendous trial will come upon the whole habitable world (Rev. 3:10). Lasting for seven years (Dan. 9:24-27), the first three and half years are known as the beginning of sorrows (Matt. 24:8; first book of the Psalms), while the last three and half years are a period of great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-24; second book of the Psalms).

The 75-day period following the great tribulation is called the Indignation (Isa. 10:24-25, 26:20, 34:1-2; Dan. 11:36). During this time, many nations will attempt to crush Israel, challenging even the Lord himself. A remnant of Judah will be preserved (Zech 13:9). The experiences of this remnant under the chastening hand and governmental discipline of God, suffering for and confessing the national guilt of a broken law, and the still more awful burden of crucifying their Messiah, are very fully detailed in the Psalms. The Lord will gather the ten tribes back into the land (Mt 24:31; Deut. 30:1-10; fourth Book of the Psalms), causing them to pass under the rod, purging out the rebels at the border (Eze. 20:35-37).

With the close of the indignation, the Lord's kingdom will have been established and He will reign over the earth in righteousness for a period of 1000 years—the Millennium (Psa. 72; Isa. 35; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 20:1-6). Those that remain of the Gentile nations will go up year by year to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts (Zech. 14:16).

## Overview of the Five Books of Psalms

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In the first Book of the Psalms, we have Christ in association with a suffering but faithful remnant in Judea. Jehovah is the most frequent title used in this portion, being His title of covenant relationship with Israel. “To the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent thou hast said, in them is all my delight” (Psa. 16:3 JND). The first two Psalms are introductory to the whole collection; they introduce the godly remnant and the Messiah—the Lord’s anointed (Psa. 2:2).

In the second book, the remnant is viewed as driven from the land but cheered and sustained by the presence and promises of their Messiah. God does not publicly own this remnant and so “God” (Elohim), the creation title, is used in preference to “Jehovah”. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psa. 46:1).

The whole nation in the last days is spoken of in the third book. Their history and God’s dealings with them are referred to (for example, Psa. 78). The subject is taken up in a general fashion; it is not Christ in association with the remnant. We see equally references to “God” and “Jehovah”.

In the fourth book, we have the coming of the Messiah, the relationship between Israel and God having being restored. Jerusalem is the setting. Here we have the blessing associated with His reign and personal presence. These are joyous Psalms. Jehovah is again the preferred title. “O sing unto the LORD a new song; for He hath done marvelous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory” (Psa. 98:1).

The psalms that make up the fifth book are moral rather than prophetic, dealing with Israel’s return to Jehovah and His ways with his people (for example, the fifteen Songs of Degrees; Psa. 120-134). They end in praise.

## The Church and Prophecy

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It is perhaps necessary at this point to briefly discuss the position of the church with respect to prophecy. The church was not, and is not, the subject of prophecy. Prophecy is occupied with God's dealing in government on the earth, at the center of which is Israel. It is important for believers to understand this, else much in the Bible will cause confusion. The church is an entity quite distinct from Israel: "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32).

In Matthew, the church is a future thing. Peter was a stone ("Peter" in Greek is petros, a "stone"), but it is the truth of Peter's confession, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16), that forms the foundation—the rock—upon which Christ would build His assembly. He is the builder, and the building is His. It is perfect; the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Matt. 16:15-18).

Scripture also presents a view of the church in relation to human responsibility. Paul as a wise master-builder laid the foundation—Jesus Christ—upon which others build; not only gold, silver, and precious stones, but also wood, hay, and stubble (1 Cor. 3:10-12).

The decay that has come in is spoken of in 2 Peter, the Epistles of John, and Jude. In the addresses to the seven churches in Revelation, we have a view of Christendom in its various phases of decline. It is not the church itself that is the subject, but the moral ruin of professing Christendom in this earthly scene. While the bride, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27), will be called away at the rapture, the apostate empty profession that remains (the great harlot; Rev. 17:1 JND), will be spewed out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16). The Lord will then again take up Israel—the natural branches (Israel) being grafted into their own olive tree (Rom. 11:24).

## The Writings of Solomon

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Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon are the writings of King Solomon, the wisest of men. Not only did he receive wisdom and understanding from God—heavenly wisdom for an earthly pathway—Proverbs (1 Kings 4:29-34), but Solomon also received riches and honor (1 Kings 3:13).

In Ecclesiastes we have Solomon at the end of his earthly pathway, reflecting on his experiences. Having tasted every pleasure that this world has to offer—nobody can do more than the King can (Eccl. 2:12)—he declares “vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). There is no object under the sun that can fill the longing heart of man.

In contrast, the Song of Solomon presents Christ as the object of the heart. Here we have expressed the yearnings of one who desires an established relationship with the object of her love. It concludes with the triumph of love—“who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” (Song of Sol. 8:5).

It is clear that all three books—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon—have a prophetic character. In them, we have, respectively, Israel in covenant relationship, the covenant relationship broken, and, finally, restoration.

## Proverbs

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Proverbs treats of this world and God's government: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). This is as true today as it was in Solomon's day. The book may be divided into four parts, with chapters one through nine forming the first division. Introduced as the proverbs of Solomon, the first six verses of chapter one form a preface, while the seventh verse gives us our starting point: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". In these chapters we see wisdom contrasted with the alluring charms of the "strange woman"—two paths, one unto life, and the other unto death. "Whoso findeth me [wisdom] findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD" (Prov. 8:35). "For her [the strange woman's] house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life" (Prov. 2:18-19). Wisdom is seen, not as the faculty of man, but as something to be diligently sought after. Frequently personified, we see this very distinctly brought out in the eighth chapter, with Christ introduced in verse 22 as the wisdom of God.

Chapters 10 through 24 are "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov. 10:1). For the one that listens, they provide a path to follow. These are the proverbs according to the principles of the first nine chapters—"The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein" (Prov. 22:14).

Chapters 25 through 29 form a supplement to what has gone before. "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out" (Prov. 25:1). In chapter 30 we have "the words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal" (Prov. 30:1). The final chapter, chapter 31, concludes with the words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him (Prov. 31:1). The first nine verses consist of advice from a mother to her son the king, while the remaining verses present the "virtuous woman"—"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). Of Agur we know nothing beyond our chapter. Some have speculated that Agur is another name for Solomon, but "the son of Jakeh" would suggest otherwise. It has likewise been suggested that king Lemuel is Solomon, and though we cannot say with any certainty, it remains a possibility.

## Ecclesiastes

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In understanding Ecclesiastes, it is important to see that the extent of the individual's experience is under the sun, a phrase repeated twenty-nine times. There is recognition of God, but no revelation from Him. Whereas the name Jehovah—the name of covenant relationship—is characteristic of Proverbs, it is not once used in Ecclesiastes.

Its conclusions are truthful, yet often far from the truth; they are the extent of man's knowledge (see Eccl. 3:19 for example). As another has said, this book is the "sigh of sighs". Many are seeking the illusive goal of happiness in this materialistic world, only to discover that what little they find lasts a fleeting moment and cannot satisfy. Further, man finds that he is nothing but a decaying mortal; death is his inevitable end (Eccl. 12:1-7). All is "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 1:14).

The book concludes where Proverbs begins: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13, 14). Knowing that all our works will be brought into judgment, it is well to walk in the fear of God, this is a first principle. Man however, knowing the judgments of God, has chosen to walk without regard for God (Rom. 1:32).

Job in his deep trial sought an answer to the question of human suffering. The Preacher through indulgence sought to know the answer to human happiness. Without divine revelation, man cannot deduce the answer to either. There is but One, whose glory is above the brightness of the sun, even Jesus, who alone can fill the heart and satisfy the deepest longings of the soul.

## Song of Solomon

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Of Solomon's 1005 songs (I Kings 4:32), only one is to be found in the canon of Scripture. It is the Song of Songs, as the book so titles itself (Song of Sol. 1:1). The song is a dialogue between the spouse and the King, though the daughters of Jerusalem may also be heard. The King without question is Christ, the One who will reign in Zion. The spouse is not the church, but the Jewish remnant, while the daughters of Jerusalem are the faithful of Israel. "And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi [my Husband]; and shalt call me no more Baali [my Lord i.e. Master]... And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:16, 19).

The song is progressive. It records the drawing out, and anticipation of the love between the spouse and the King. In contrast, there is present realization of relationship for the Christian. However, if the book is rightly applied, we can see principles in common with God's dealing with each one of us. Christ loves His assembly, He loves His earthly people, He loves the soul that He draws to Himself, so that there is a moral application to ourselves which is very precious.

A helpful aid in understanding this book is to mark the verses according to their speaker—the Concise Bible Dictionary contains such a summary. In many instances these divisions are discerned by changes in the original Hebrew, a language inflected by gender.

The song may be divided into six sections: The Assurance of Love (ch. 1:2-2:7), The Awakening of Love (ch. 2:8-3:5), The Communion of Love (ch. 3:6-5:1), The Restoration of Love (ch. 5:2-6:12), The Witness of Love (ch. 6:13-8:4), and The Triumph of Love (ch. 8:5-8:14).

It is beautiful to see the progress in the thoughts of the spouse. At first, governed by her own affections she exclaims: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Sol. 2:16). However the Lord wants us to know more of Himself, and His work in our lives is ongoing. The next time the thought is expressed, the King's affections precede her own: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song of Sol. 6:3). Finally, with her heart full of her Beloved's love toward her, there is no expression of her own affection at all, it is all Christ: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (Song of Sol. 7:10).

## The Major Prophets

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The book of Isaiah marks the beginning of the so-called major prophets, a division that also takes in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The minor prophets (minor merely because they are shorter) follow, from Hosea to Malachi. With the failure of the priesthood (1 Sam. 1-4), the prophet, by God's sovereign appointment, became the means whereby He could address Himself to the conscience of His people. The priest was the people's representative before Jehovah; the prophet was Jehovah's mouthpiece to the people.

Prophecy presents the mind of God, not just with respect to future events, but also as to present state. It is for this reason that the books of Joshua through Kings are to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures within the portion known as "The Prophets" (Luke 24:44).

Prophecy is two-sided. On the one hand, it reveals the sinful state of the people and God's judgment—His strange work (Isa. 28:21). On the other hand, it reveals His heart in love, in particular the promise of the coming of the Messiah. One cannot be without the other.

## Isaiah

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The opening verse of Isaiah gives us the name of the prophet, the subject of his vision, and the time when it was received. Isaiah was a prophet of Judah during the final years of Israel's history (the ten tribes), when the Assyrian threatened and finally took that nation captive and besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 15-20).

Chapters 36-39 are a historic account of this period, and, as is frequently the case, present conditions are used as an illustration of God's future dealings. Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrian, and Hezekiah's recovery from sickness, are a type and sign to Israel of their deliverance and restoration.

The first prophetic section, chapters 1-35, gives the external history of Israel with respect to the surrounding nations. The final section, chapters 40-66, presents Israel's internal history. Kings and peoples are no longer prominent; rather, this is God's controversy with His people. While Isaiah addresses many nations, the prophecies are centered on Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 1:1). The prophecies of Isaiah are the most comprehensive and His statements concerning Christ the most full.

Within this broad outline, there are further divisions. In chapters 1-12 we have Judah's sinful condition. Two subjects of supreme importance are introduced: Christ, Immanuel (Isa. 7:14), and the Assyrian (king of the North), the rod of mine anger (Isa. 10:5). The section ends in a song of triumph.

In chapters 13-27 judgment is pronounced on Israel's enemies. Beginning with the surrounding nations it goes on to address "the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" (Isa. 24:21), death is swallowed up in victory (Isa. 25:8), His indignation is poured out on inhabitants of the earth (Isa. 26:20), and the dragon that is in the sea is slain (Isa. 27:1). The portion concludes with worship (Isa. 27:13).

In chapters 28-35 Israel and Jerusalem are again the focus; five woes are declared on Israel (Isa. 28:1, 29:1, 29:15, 30:1, 31:1), followed by Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrian (Isa. 31:8), God's intervention and its blessed result (ch. 32), the destruction of Gog (ch. 33), judgment of Edom, Idumea (ch. 34), and the joy of the kingdom (ch. 35).

Chapters 40-48 give us God's controversy with Israel because of their idolatry. Cyrus is a type of the Deliverer; he was the executor of judgment upon idolatrous Babylon (ch. 45).

Then in chapters 49-57 we have God's controversy with Israel because of their rejection of the Messiah.

Finally, in chapters 58-66 we have the deliverance and blessing of the remnant.

## Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel

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Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all prophesied during the final turbulent years of the Kingdom of Judah. While Jeremiah remained amongst the poor of the land dwelling at Jerusalem (Jer. 40:6), Ezekiel is found dwelling amongst the captives (Ezek. 1:1), and Daniel is in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar. How beautiful it is to see each in their appointed place, faithfully proclaiming the message given them of Jehovah. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests (Jer. 1:1; Ezek. 1:3), while Daniel was of royal descent (Dan. 1:3).

## Chronology

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The entire period from king Josiah to the destruction of Jerusalem is a little over 50 years. Five kings reigned during this period. Josiah was slain by Pharaoh-nechoh and the people made his son king, Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum) (2 Kings 23:29-30). Jehoahaz was taken captive by Pharaoh-nechoh who made Jehoiakim (Eliakim), another son of Josiah, king in his stead (2 Kings 23:33, 34). Jehoiakim ended his reign as a vassal of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). Daniel was a captive during this time (Dan. 1:1).

Jehoiachin (Jechoniah, Coniah), a grandson of Josiah and the son of Jehoiakim, became the fourth king. Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon along with the able-bodied men of the land (2 Kings 24:15, 16). Ezekiel was included amongst their number (Ezek. 1:2). Zedekiah (Mattaniah), a third son of Josiah, and the last king of Judah, was made king by Nebuchadnezzar and taken captive by him (2 Kings 24:17, 25:7).

Zedekiah's reign was replaced with the governorship of Gedaliah, whom Ishmael (of royal descent) murdered (2 Kings 25:25). Only Josiah and Jechoniah are mentioned in the genealogy of Matthew.

It was a time of profound change during which God was setting aside Israel and placing His government in the hands of a Gentile nation. Recognizing this is key to understanding these books.

## Jeremiah

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Outwardly things appeared to be very good in the days of Josiah. However, the rapid decline after his death exposed the inward corruption. While king Josiah zealously followed the Lord, the hearts of the people were unchanged and the recovery to Jehovah was feigned (Jer. 3:6-11).

Jeremiah had the task of prophesying to a nation that refused to hear—to a people that would soon be subdued by a foreign power as ordered by the government of God, against whom they were not to rebel. False prophets, whose words pleased the people, constantly opposed him.

Jeremiah enters into all this personally. His love for the people and his jealousy for a holy God produced a tremendous conflict in his soul, not to mention the physical suffering that he also endured. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet (Jer. 9:1). He stands in the breach, pleading for the people, though he saw that it was all in vain (Jer. 14:17-22). Jeremiah's life is woven into the fabric of his prophecies.

The book consists of a number of distinct prophecies. Because they are not ordered chronologically, a moral order must be understood. In the first twenty-four chapters, Jeremiah pleads with the people, appealing to their heart and conscience. These prophecies take us to the siege of Nebuchadrezzar (ch. 21-24), but not beyond.

In chapter 25, we have a general summary of God's judgments by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar (Jer. 25:8-11), the punishment of the king of Babylon after 70 years (Jer. 25:12), and the judgment of the nations (Jer. 25:31).

The remaining prophecies have much more to do with historic events. Their captivity would be for 70 years (Jer. 29:10). In chapters 30-33, we are taken prophetically to a future time, to the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). It looks forward to a coming day when God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31), restore the land to them again, and "cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land" (Jer. 33:15).

In chapter 39, Jerusalem is taken, but Jeremiah chooses to remain among the poor of the land (Jer. 39:10, 40:1-6). In chapters 40-44 we have the final history of the remnant in the land under Gedaliah, his murder by Ishmael, and their escape into Egypt contrary to the word of Lord by Jeremiah (Jer. 42:7-22). Chapters 46-51 give the judgment of the nations, beginning with Egypt and ending with Babylon.

## Lamentations

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The book of Lamentations contains the lament of Jeremiah over Jerusalem—once great among the nations—now solitary and desolate (Lam. 1:1). The Lord had done righteously, but understanding God’s government against that city only deepened Jeremiah’s sorrow (Lam. 1:18).

Jeremiah confessed the sin of the city as his own, and he felt what it was to be rejected by the very ones for whom he wept. “See, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam. 1:11-12). In his sorrow, we see expressed something of the sorrow so fully felt by the rejected Christ.

The setting aside of the temple and the altar—things necessary for the Israelite to approach God—brought great distress to Jeremiah (Lam. 2:6, 7).

In the first two chapters, Jerusalem is spoken of as the object of God’s wrath. In the third chapter, Jeremiah speaks as the one bearing the affliction, a position typical of Christ. “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath” (Lam. 3:1).

Chapters one, two and four each have twenty-two verses, and each verse commences with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Similarly, chapter 3 has twenty-two stanzas of three verses each. The fifth chapter, while having twenty-two verses, is not constrained by this arrangement, for it is a prayer. With confession made, Jeremiah can bring that which has afflicted the people before a compassionate (Lam. 3:22-36) and unchanging God (Lam. 5:19).

## Ezekiel

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Ezekiel's prophecy takes in all Israel. "And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day" (Ezek. 2:3). The book does not concern itself with the times of the Gentiles—a period fully detailed in the book of Daniel. Rather this interval is skipped over and Ezekiel's prophecy resumes with the millennium, when Jerusalem will again be the center of God's government. Ezekiel's prophecies are full of symbols and imagery.

The book may be divided into four parts. Chapters 1-24—the rebellious house of Israel (Ezek. 3:9). These chapters are arranged chronologically and tell of the impending invasion of the Chaldeans and the destruction of Jerusalem (ch. 24).

Chapters 25-32—the judgment of the seven Gentile nations—Ammon (ch. 25:1), Moab (ch. 25:8), Edom (ch. 25:12), Philistia (ch. 25:15), Tyre (ch. 26-28:19), Zidon (ch. 28:20), and Egypt (ch. 29-32).

Chapters 33-39—the return of the remnant, which of necessity includes judgment on Israel and those that oppose that restoration.

Chapters 40-48—the future millennial temple.

In the first division, Ezekiel chronicles the departure of the glory of Jehovah from the temple (Ezek. 1:28). Firstly, we see that glory go up from the cherub and stand over the threshold of the house (Ezek. 10:4). From the threshold it moves to the east gate of the Lord's house (Ezek. 10:18-19), and finally, up from the midst of the city to the mountain on the east side of the city (Ezek. 11:23).

The glory of Jehovah returns to the millennial temple in the fourth division—"And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house" (Ezek. 43:4-5).

## Daniel

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Of all the Old Testament prophets, Daniel is probably the one with whom we are most familiar. There are numerous practical lessons to be learned from the life of this young man who purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the portion of the king's meat (Dan. 1:8). His faithfulness is recorded by Ezekiel (Ezek. 14:14), and as a faithful one amidst a Gentile nation, he is a picture to us of the Jewish remnant in a coming day.

As a prophet in the court of Gentile kings, he is occupied with the "Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). From verse 4 of chapter 2 through to the close of chapter 7, the book is written in Aramaic (Syriac, Dan. 2:4). The Gentile conquerors had in their language the mind of God regarding the authority that they had received from Him.

The book may be divided into two parts. The first six chapters give us the history of the monarchs from Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Cyrus the Persian (Dan. 6:28) and Daniel's interaction with them. Here are to be found general principles concerning the times of the Gentiles. The details of this period are covered in the remaining six chapters in Daniel's visions.

There are four Gentile nations beginning with the Babylonian empire (under Nebuchadnezzar). That kingdom would be succeeded by the Persian (under Cyrus), which in turn would be overtaken by the Grecian (Alexander the Great). A final empire, the Roman Empire, would conquer the Greeks.

Daniel lived to see the grandeur of the Babylonian empire and its fall to the Medes and Persians, but not beyond; yet the detail in which he describes future events is extraordinary—sufficient to confound historians. Though the Roman Empire declined and collapsed, no superseding kingdom rose in its place. In a coming day the Roman Empire will reappear in its final form as a ten-nation confederacy—a beast dreadful and terrible (Dan. 7:7).

In this book, we also find that seventy weeks (or periods of seven) are determined upon Daniel's people (the Jews) and upon the holy city Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24). From the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (Neh. 2) until Messiah the Prince, would be sixty-nine weeks (seven plus sixty-two; Dan. 9:25-26). When each week is taken as seven years, we find that the sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years, have been fulfilled precisely.

Further, a prince will come (of the people that would destroy Jerusalem—the Romans) and will confirm a covenant with the many for one week. This is the final and seventieth week (Dan. 9:26-27).

The seventy weeks close with the bringing in of everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24). Clearly this is still future. The final terrifying week, a seven-year period, divided into two three-and-a-half year periods, is future (Dan. 9:27, 7:25). This present day of grace in which we live, from Christ to the Rapture, is omitted in this timeline, for the "seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Dan. 9:24).

## The Minor Prophets

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The last twelve books of the Old Testament are commonly designated The Minor Prophets. Though shorter, they are nonetheless full of vital details not found elsewhere in Scripture. Their subject is clearly prophetic; however, they each contain much for practical meditation. In them we read of God's ways with His earthly people, His tender love, holiness, patience, judgment, compassion, mercy, and grace.

### Chronology

Hosea and Amos prophesied during the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel (Hos. 1; Amos 1). Hosea continued on during the reign of the next three kings of Judah—Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—making him a contemporary of Micah, who also prophesied during this period (Mic. 1:1), as did Isaiah (Isa. 1:1).

The ever-threatening Assyrian in the North overshadowed the day in which they prophesied. This was just prior to the captivity of Israel (the ten tribes; 2 Kings 17), and 150 years or so before the captivity of Judah. A date cannot be given to Joel, though clearly it predates Judah's captivity.

Although Habakkuk cannot be placed precisely in time, it is the invasion of the Chaldean, not now the Assyrian, which threatens an iniquitous Judah (Hab. 1:6). This places the book with Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:2), both of whom prophesied in the days of Josiah just before the captivity of Judah.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are post-captivity. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in the days of Zerubbabel when the temple was being rebuilt (Ezra 5), while Malachi comes later and records the corrupt moral condition that the returned captives had fallen into.

Jonah, Nahum, and Obadiah announce judgment on the Gentile world. The Assyrian is the subject of the first two books, and Edom is the subject of the third. Jonah prophesied prior to the captivity of Israel (2 Kings 14:25) and Nahum some 150 years after Jonah. Obadiah prophesied subsequent to the captivity of Judah (Obad. 10-12).

While a chronology helps our understanding of these books, we must remember that they all look forward to a future day. Calamities were used of God to reach the conscience of the people and as an opportunity to present future events as if already seen.

Though prophets such as Haggai and Zechariah or Habakkuk and Zephaniah prophesied at similar times, it would be a mistake to assume that their prophecies bore a similar character, the examples cited being particularly diverse.

## Hosea

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Hosea's message is to both Israel and Judah. As the house of Ahab had been judged in Jezreel (2 Kings 10:11), so would Israel be judged (Hos. 1:4). Israel's judgment would be final; they would not obtain mercy (Lo-ruhamah; Hos. 1:6).

Mercy was withheld from Israel, but the judgment of Judah would bring the whole nation under a worse sentence: "Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hosea 1:9).

Today Israel is without king or prince, sacrifice or priest; but neither is she idolatrous (Hos. 3:4). Although not presently owned of God, she will be restored (Rom. 11:1). She will learn to call Jehovah "My Husband" and no longer "My Lord" (Hos. 2:16, marginal reading).

The children of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king (Hos. 3:5). In chapter 2 a remnant—Ammi (My people) and Ruhamah (having obtained mercy)—is distinguished from their mother, a harlot from the beginning (Hos. 1:2).

In chapters 4-12, the moral corruption of the nation is exposed as Hosea appeals to the conscience of the people. The book closes with words they were to take to Jehovah (Hos. 14:2), who would respond in mercy (Hos. 14:4-8). "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hosea 14:9).

## Joel

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Joel brings before us the day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14), a day that takes in both the judgments prior to the millennium and those after it—it is the Lord’s day in contrast to man’s day. A terrible plague of insects used to stir the conscience of the people (Joel 1) is an alarm for a more terrible day—“a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness” (Joel 2:1, 2). A great, strong people (Joel 2:2), the northern army (vs. 20), will overrun the land (vss. 7-10). However, it is His army executing His word (Joel 2:11), the rod of His anger (Isa. 10:5). Like David of 2 Samuel 24:14, faith seizes hold and takes hope.

A second trumpet sounds (Joel 2:15), not now an alarm, but a call to a solemn assembly (Num. 10:7). It is a call to repentance in view of the chastisements hanging over them. The Lord will respond to the contrite spirit and broken heart of the remnant. He will drive away the northern army on account of their pride (Joel 2:20). He will restore that which the locust has eaten (vs. 25). In grace He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (vs. 28), and “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 2:32). Peter in Acts 2—the day of Pentecost—makes an application of this in view of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Titus, 70 A.D.).

Chapter 3 gives the judgment of the nations, gathered together in the valley of Jehoshaphat (vs. 2), where the harvest takes place—the separation of the good from the wicked (vs. 12; Matt. 25:32). There the Lord will execute His vengeance in the pressing of the vintage (vs. 13). Joel closes with a promise of coming blessing for Judah and Jerusalem (vss. 18-21).

## Amos

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Amos was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit, not a prophet, nor even the son of a prophet. The Lord took him from following the flock and instructed him to prophesy—“Go, prophesy unto my people Israel” (Amos 7:14-15). The language employed by Amos reflects his former occupation; beautifully the Lord fits the vessel for His own use.

Amos speaks of judgment, but if God is going to judge, He will warn His people first. “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:6-8). In keeping with this message, Amos begins his prophecy two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1), doubtless the same event mentioned by Zechariah (Zech. 14:5).

The first two chapters comprise a single prophecy; the remaining chapters are separate prophecies. Beginning with the nations that have occupied the land of Israel—Syria, Gaza and Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab—and ending with Israel and Judah, judgment is pronounced. The nations are judged for their treatment of Israel. Judah is judged for having despised the law of the Lord (Amos 2:4) and Israel for not walking in the fear of the Lord and having profaned His holy name (Amos 2:6-8). Our walk should agree with our position: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Though Amos prophesied in Israel—the ten tribes (Amos 7:10-13)—both Israel and Judah are addressed: “the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt” (Amos 3:1).

God had born with them in patience; He could no longer (Amos 7:8), for the fruits of the summer must be consumed when ripe (Amos 8:1-2). A righteous remnant would be preserved (Amos 3:12; 9:9-10). God would raise them up again; they would make gardens and eat the fruit of them. He would plant them in the land, and they would no more be pulled up (Amos 9:14-15).

## Obadiah

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The vision of Obadiah concerns Edom, the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother (Gen. 36:1). Their hand has always been against Israel (Gen. 27:40-41). We see this in their attitude when Israel was in need (Ps. 137:7; Ezek. 35:15). They are determined to cut off Israel from being a nation (Ps. 83:4-8; Ezek. 35:10). Doeg was an Edomite (1 Sam. 21-22), as was Haman (Esther 3:1; 1 Sam. 15:8; Gen. 36:9, 12).

Although Edom, along with several other nations, may be found in the prophets as coming under the judgment of God, such is the importance of the subject that the entire book, though brief, is dedicated to Edom alone.

Edom's disposition towards Jacob is again noticed when Jerusalem is sacked. Esau was among the enemy standing in the crossway to cut off those who tried to escape (Obad. 11, 14). So complete will God's judgment be upon this small but proud nation, that none will remain (Obad. 18). "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever" (Obad. 10). "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions" (Obad. 17).

## Jonah

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Whereas prophets such as Ezekiel and Hosea were called upon to live out their prophecies, in Jonah we have one whose very life is the sign itself (Matt. 12:39). The message that Jonah was to carry was simple enough: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh, however, was the capital of Assyria, Israel’s enemy, and before that message was preached, Jonah had to pass through the very depths of the ocean. There he acknowledges, “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

Ours is a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness (Jonah 4:2), a God that takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). God observed the unfeigned repentance of that great city (Jonah 3:10) and spared it from destruction (Jonah 4:11).

Though Jonah fulfilled his mission to preach to Nineveh, his pride could not accept God’s mercy to the Gentile. Jonah’s reputation was at stake; the thing he feared had come about—the judgment he had preached of had not transpired (Jonah 4:2, 3). Likewise, man in his great pride rejects the grace of God; he would have His justice (especially when it concerns another—though it condemns him also) but not His grace. We see this with the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:30).

God in mercy prepares a gourd to protect Jonah from the terrible heat (Jonah 4:6); but the gourd must be removed. Jonah must learn the ways of God’s action in grace—so it will be with Israel, and so it must be with each one of us. The very existence of this book and its unflattering account of the author are proof to us of the lesson learned.

The life of Jonah is a prophetic picture of Israel. It is the history of the unfaithful witness and God’s governmental dealings with them. Israel proved unfaithful to the testimony of God toward this world and has been temporarily set aside.

It was through Jonah’s unfaithfulness that the name of Jehovah was made known and worshipped amongst the Gentiles (Jonah 1:16), and it is through Israel’s fall that salvation is come to us (Rom. 11:11-15). In a coming day, Israel will be raised up to witness to the nations (Matt. 24:14).

Jonah is also a type of the Lord Jesus—His rejection, death, and resurrection. He is the Faithful Witness, the One who spent three days and three nights in the grave, the firstborn from the dead (Matt. 12:40; Rev. 1:5)

## Micah

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The Lord speaks in this book from His holy temple, addressing all people of the earth (Mic. 1:2). We have similar expressions in Psalm 11, Habakkuk 2, and in Revelation 15-16. When the Lord speaks from His Holy Temple, “let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20).

Jehovah will not always remain on high; He will come forth out of His place to “tread upon the high places of the earth” (Mic. 1:3). Samaria would become a heap and evil would come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem—the Assyrian invasion as detailed in Isaiah (Mic. 1:4-9).

The second chapter addresses the moral state of the people, while the third takes up the princes and prophets of Israel. Zion would be plowed as a field and Jerusalem would become heaps (Mic. 3:12)—as was the case upon its destruction by Titus and Hadrian.

In the fourth chapter, we move from the destruction of Jerusalem to her millennial glory! “But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it” (Mic. 4:1).

In the fifth chapter, we have introduced the Judge of Israel (Mic. 5:1; verses one and three are continuous, while verse two is parenthetical). Because the Judge of Israel was smitten on the cheek with a rod, Israel must be given up for a time. She must pass through deep travail and be brought to a state suited for the manifestation of her King (Mic. 5:1, 3). In that day, He will feed His flock, and when the latter-day Assyrian—the king of the North—comes into the land, He will be their peace (Mic. 5:5).

In the parenthesis between verses 1 and 3, we have a detail concerning the Messiah not found elsewhere in Scripture: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:5).

In the final two chapters, Jehovah resumes His pleading with His people: “Hear ye now what the Lord saith; ... for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel” (Mic. 6:1-2). Chapter six begins as a dialog between Jehovah and the remnant, and in the seventh chapter the prophet speaks for the remnant: “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness” (Mic. 7:9).

## Nahum

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Nahum's vision concerned Nineveh, that exceeding great city of Assyria (Jonah 3:3). Less than 150 years had elapsed since Jonah prophesied, and it had become a city of blood, full of lies and robbery, lording its sovereignty over its conquered peoples (Nah. 3:1-4).

Founded by Nimrod, a descendent of Ham (Gen. 10:11 margin; Mic. 5:6), Nineveh is a picture of usurped authority and independence from God. Nimrod flaunted his might and power before the Lord—"he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord" (Gen. 10:8-9). This is the character of the Assyrian. Though used by God as the rod of His anger, the Assyrian must be punished for his high looks and proud heart, "for he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent" (Isa. 10:12-13).

Though the invasion of Sennacherib no doubt precipitated the prophecy, it looks forward to a future day when the King of the North will again imagine vain things against Jehovah (Nah. 1:11)—"beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" (Isa. 36:18). Having passed through the land of Israel, Assyria—the King of the North—will be cut down, never to pass through it again. He is utterly cut off (Nah. 1:12-15; Dan. 11:40-41).

Though God is jealous, taking vengeance on his adversaries (Nah. 1:2), His wrath is not indiscriminate. Here in this book of judgment we find one of Scripture's most comforting verses for the day of trouble, a beacon in a time of darkness: "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nah. 1:7).

The second chapter details the capture of Nineveh. Though proud, she was no better than populous No—Thebes of Egypt (Nah. 3:8, 10). The book closes with the solemn declaration; "there is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous" (Nah. 3:19)

## Habakkuk

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Though each Minor Prophet has a unique message, the character of Habakkuk is very different. In Nahum we have the “burden of Nineveh” (Nah. 1:1), in Zechariah “the burden of the word of Jehovah” (Zech. 9:1 JND; 12:1 JND), but here we have “the burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see” (Hab. 1:1). His was a deeply felt burden over the iniquity of the people and the overwhelming calamity about to consume them. In such a day, where does the hope of the faithful rest? In Habakkuk the point is not so much the unfolding of events, but rather, it is a message to the heart of the faithful in the midst of those events. In this, Habakkuk presents the faithful remnant in Israel.

As a consequence of their wickedness, God would raise up the Chaldean, “that bitter and hasty nation” (Hab. 1:6). Their overthrow of Judah would be complete, the Chaldean absolutely devastating in their violence; but they would offend, imputing their success to the power of their god (Hab. 1:11). Faith knows that judgment is ordained of God; he established the Chaldean for correction (Hab. 1:12), but here was one more wicked than they (Hab. 1:13). Could God allow them to continue gathering men into their net as if they were fish, burning incense to the god of their success (Hab. 1:15-17)?

Habakkuk awaits his answer from his watchtower (Hab. 2:1). Faith must wait in patience; God’s word will not and cannot fail (Hab. 2:3). The heart of the oppressor was lifted up in pride; it will not be overlooked, but the portion of the just is to live by faith (Hab. 2:4). Five woes are pronounced on the oppressor of the nations, for greed and cruelty, covetousness and self-exaltation, blood and iniquity, immorality, and idolatry. Jehovah is in his holy temple; all the earth should keep silence before Him (Hab. 2:20).

The book concludes with the prayer of Habakkuk in response to the Lord’s reply. This is a prayer of faith, of full confidence in Jehovah. It recalls the glory and power of God when He brought them out of Egypt and established them in the land of Canaan. While waiting, the heart of faith can rejoice in the Lord; he can joy in the God of his salvation (Hab. 3:18).

## Zephaniah

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The book of Zephaniah is preeminently a book of judgment; its subject, the day of Jehovah (Zeph. 1:7 JND). “That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Zeph. 1:15). Despite revival during Josiah’s reign, Judah was unchanged. Baal worship continued and idolatrous priests—Chemarim (Zeph. 1:4; 2 Kings 23:5, margin)—served in the temple.

The second chapter begins with a plea to Judah, a nation without shame (Zeph. 2:1 JND). The meek of the land are exhorted to seek the Lord, for “it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3).

When God’s earthly people come under the government of God for their failure as a testimony to His name in the midst of apostate and rebellious nations, those nations must also receive the judgment that they have long deserved. The Philistines (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and the Cherethites; Zeph. 2:4-7), Moab and Ammon (Zeph 2:8), the Ethiopians (Cushites—the term is broader than merely Ethiopia; Nimrod was a descendant of Cush—Gen 10:7-8), Assyria and Nineveh (Zeph. 2:12-15) all come under judgment. These nations reviled Israel, delighting in her downfall, possessing her borders (Zeph. 2:8).

The third chapter begins with an address to Jerusalem—that filthy and polluted city (Zeph. 3:1). In the midst of this fearful darkness, a remnant is very clearly recognized (Zeph. 2:3, 7; 3:12-13). The Lord will gather them from beyond the rivers of Cush (Zeph. 3:10).

In Zephaniah, Christ is not introduced as the Messiah, but as Jehovah, “Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy; the King of Israel, Jehovah, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more” (Zeph. 3:15 JND). The language with which He comforts the remnant recalls that of the Song of Solomon—“Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, a mighty one that will save: he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will exult over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17 JND). The book begins with “the word of Jehovah”, and ends with “Jehovah”—a name that speaks of relationship.

## Haggai

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Haggai is the first of the post-captivity prophets. His prophecy consists of five messages received over the space of four months. Each message is dated relative to the second year of Darius the king. Though God had permitted a remnant of Judah to return to Jerusalem, the former relationship had not been restored. There was no throne; a Gentile ruled over the land; things were both physically and spiritually in a state of ruin. The people who had returned to the land with such joy and energy, having laid the foundation of the temple, had become discouraged.

God in His wonderful love and grace had permitted a remnant to return to Jerusalem. How quickly this had been forgotten. There was tranquility enough to build their own houses. Faith was not required for this and the world offered no resistance (Hag. 1:4). When faith is lacking, circumstances and our own will dictate our doings—"The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built" (Hag. 1:2). In neglecting the Lord's house, they had really neglected the Lord, and as a result discipline had to come in—such too is God's heart in love (Hag. 1:5-11). Though things were difficult, the Lord was still with them (Hag. 1:13). Stirred up by the message, the work resumed (Hag. 1:14).

The building that they were erecting was nothing in comparison to the former temple, and this too was a source of discouragement (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:1-9). Yet faith in the day of ruin is not pretentious and acknowledges the state of things. This was not that bright day when they were brought up out of the land of Egypt—but the same Lord was with them (Hag. 2:5). A day is coming when the latter glory of the house—still the same house in the eye of God—will exceed the former (Hag. 2:9 JND). This cannot happen until the present state of the world has been addressed, not just Israel, but all the nations. "The heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land" must all be shaken before there can be peace. (Hag. 2:6).

The fourth prophecy states the simple principle (the priests understood it) that the unclean defiles the holy (Hag. 2:10-19). They were unclean and the work of their hands was unclean (Hag. 2:14). The present work did not change that. God alone is holy and cannot be defiled, and it is only when God is admitted in our lives—which He desires in response to His discipline—that blessing can flow (Hag. 2:19).

The fifth and final message addresses itself to Zerubbabel, the leader of those that returned and a descendant of David (Matt. 1:12). With the shaking of the nations, God will establish His throne in the true seed of David, Christ, the Lord's anointed. "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag. 2:23).

## Zechariah

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Though Haggai and Zechariah both prophesied in the second year of Darius (Ezra 5:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1), Haggai's focus is the temple and its reconstruction, while Zechariah's message is broader both in scope and time. Zechariah is occupied with Jerusalem and its history from the captivity to the last days.

God is jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy, and He is sore displeased with the heathen (Zech. 1:14-15). He has executed His government upon Israel through the Gentiles, but each nation has offended and must be judged (Zech. 1:18-21)—Babylon (already fallen at that time), Persia, Greece (Zech. 9:13) and Rome.

The temple was being rebuilt, and under Nehemiah the walls of Jerusalem would be restored, (cf. Zech 2:5). All, however, a precursor of a better deliverance; the restoration of that city in a future day will be glorious (ch. 2). Zechariah lifts the eyes of the feeble remnant, setting their hope on Jehovah—what an encouragement! We too are looking beyond this scene “for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

In chapters 2-6 we have distinct visions that describe the reestablishment of Jerusalem (ch. 2), the cleansing of the people (ch. 3), the perfection of that future administration (ch. 4), the judgment of the wicked and wickedness (ch. 5), and God's providential government exercised through the four successive Gentile nations, bringing us to Christ the Branch who will build the temple and rule in righteousness (ch. 6).

Chapter 7 begins anew; it is now the fourth year of king Darius. In the remainder of the book we have the Messiah and the consequences of His rejection. Judah is scattered because they refused to hear (ch. 7), yet Jehovah will return (ch. 8) and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, “and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness” (Zech. 8:8).

In chapters 9-10, God's vengeance is poured out upon the nations. Messiah is here introduced, not in power, but as the lowly One—“behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zech. 9:9). Unrecognized, He is rejected by the nation. “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). Yet He will make good His claims through judgment. He will bring peace to Israel—both Judah and Joseph (Zech. 10:6)—the basis of which must be the covenant of blood (Zech. 9:11).

Having rejected the Messiah, the Jews will receive another who will come in his own name (John 5:43), the Antichrist, the foolish and idol shepherd (Zech. 11:15-17). While the nation values the true Shepherd at just thirty pieces of silver, the faithful remnant (the poor of the flock) observe and see that it is all according to the word of the Lord (Zech. 11:11-12).

The subject of the Antichrist and his judgment (Zech. 11:17) introduces the times of the end. Nations will besiege Jerusalem for a final time, only to be destroyed (ch. 12). Judah will look upon

Him whom they have pierced and will be filled with great sorrow (Zech. 12:10). All will be cleansed and the false prophet and idol purged (Zech. 13:1-4).

Christ was the Prophet (Deut. 18:15)—in contrast to the false prophets—but was rejected. He became a servant of man (Zech. 13:5 JND), but was wounded in the house of his friends (beloved; Zech. 13:6). Yet this humble Man, smitten of God, is none other than Jehovah's fellow, perfect in atonement, perfect in sympathy (Zech. 13:7). Judah's judgment will be severe; a third part will be brought through the fire (Zech. 13:9).

Chapter 14 takes us back to Jerusalem and the day of the Lord. God will gather all nations against Jerusalem and the city will be taken (Zech. 14:2)—this is the first siege, the overflowing scourge (Isa. 28:15). Jehovah will come forth to fight and deliver Jerusalem; He will stand upon the Mount of Olives, and it will cleave in two (Zech. 14:4). Plagues will smite the nations (Zech. 14:12). Though they will gather for a second time, they will resort to infighting, slaying one another, with Judah joining the fight (Zech. 14:13-14).

“And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one” (Zech. 14:9). Those that remain of the nations will go up to Jerusalem “from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16).

## Malachi

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Malachi is the last of the minor prophets and the closing book of the Old Testament. It also closes the testimony of Jehovah to the Jews until the coming of John the Baptist. Malachi prophesied after the rebuilding of the temple. There was an established priesthood with sacrifices and feasts (Mal. 1:7-8; Mal. 2:3). Although we do not read of idolatry, the people had sunk into a state of total indifference and insensibility. Their moral condition had never been worse. Though professing to carry on, they lacked all spiritual discernment. Malachi's message is directly addressed to the state of the people.

The book opens with an expression of Jehovah's love for Israel, "I have loved you, saith the LORD" (Mal. 1:2). God had chosen Jacob over Esau—this was sovereign election—but where was His honor? They offered that which the law expressly prohibited, completely insensible to Jehovah's rightful claims. All was weariness to them (Mal. 1:13).

Chapter 3 begins with the promise of the Lord's return, heralded by His messenger John the Baptist. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1; Matt. 11:10). The Angel of the covenant whom they sought would come in judgment (Mal. 3:1-2 JND). As the refiner's fire he would purify the sons of Levi, "that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:3). Here, as elsewhere, the Lord's first coming is connected with the full result of the second. Before that great and dreadful day of the Lord, Elijah would come and complete his mission to call back an apostate Israel (Mal. 4:5-6). John came in the spirit and power of Elias (Luke 1:17), but was rejected (Mat. 11:14; 17:12).

Even in the midst of all this evil, there is a remnant. "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Mal. 3:16).

The lukewarm state of Christendom today is morally not unlike Malachi's time. Philadelphia is likewise commended for having thought upon His name: "Thou ... hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Rev. 3:8). This is a very needful exhortation as we await the coming, not of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2), but of the Bright and Morning Star, our blessed Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:16).

## The New Testament

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From beginning to end, the Old Testament exposes man's rebellious heart. The first Adam has proven himself to be entirely a reprobate. Israel, unto whom were committed the oracles of God, brought forth nothing but wild grapes (Rom. 3:2; Isa. 5:2). What more could God do for man? Why, he sends forth His Son! "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:4-6). Oh what love! Oh what grace!

We joy in our God, and we sing of that love,

So sovereign and free which did His heart move!

When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,

He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son!

## The Gospels

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The four Gospels present something of a dilemma to man. As a philosophical text, he is disappointed. As an historic account, much is omitted. Select events are recorded, sometimes in one Gospel, sometimes in all four. We find nothing in the Gospels to satisfy mere curiosity. Chronology is dispensed with in Matthew and Luke but is generally followed in Mark and, where applicable, in John. Whereas Matthew and John were apostles, eyewitnesses to the life and resurrection of the Lord, God also chose two writers, Mark and Luke, who were not.

A great deal of effort has been wasted in attempting to reconcile the so-called discrepancies between the Gospels when no reconciliation is required. If we accept that God is the author of each and that He has chosen to present the glory of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, according to four distinct and special viewpoints, we find that there are no difficulties at all.

## Matthew

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In Matthew we have the fulfillment of prophecy and of promise. Here we find the Lord Jesus presented first as the Son of David to Israel—the Messiah, the Lord’s anointed—and then, on His rejection, the Son of Abraham, the depository of promise—“in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). The first verse therefore gives us an outline of the entire book. Matthew is especially adapted to meet the need of the Jew—then and now. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that it contains many more Old Testament quotations than the other Gospels.

## Divisions of Matthew

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Matthew may be divided into the following sections: chapters 1-4, the birth and divinity of Jesus; chapters 5-7, the principles of the kingdom, its rejection supposed, and the character of its subjects; chapters 8-12, His grace and power displayed in the midst of Israel and His rejection by the leaders and the nation; chapters 13-17, the kingdom rejected by Israel, He publicly breaks the bonds that naturally existed between Himself and the people after the flesh, and as the sower He goes forth to sow; when He acts thus in grace on the basis of promise, the way is opened up to the Gentile; chapter 18 through chapter 20:28, principles belonging to the new order of things; chapter 20:29 through chapter 25, His final presentation to Israel as the Son of David, the true King of Israel; chapters 26-28, His death and resurrection.

The genealogy of the first chapter begins with Abraham and ends with “Jesus, who is called Christ” (Matt. 1:16), or “Messiah”—both words, the one Greek and the other Hebrew, may be translated “Anointed”. Matthew alone refers to Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23; Isa: 7:14), and “He that is born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2). He was indeed Jehovah come down to dwell among His people, and He was rightly their king. Remarkably, it is the wise men from the east, Gentiles, that bare testimony of this to the Jews—yet another detail only to be found in Matthew.

Israel expected the Messiah—the prophecies of the Old Testament were known (Matt. 2:4-5)—but their expectation was entirely selfish; they looked forward to the restoration and exaltation of their nation (Luke 24:21). They felt nothing of their own wretched condition (Matt. 3:7-9). Though Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, His rejection by the nation underscores the entire book. To this day, Israel as a nation is unable to accept the character of the Lord’s first coming, though fully detailed by the prophets (Luke 24:26-27; Isa. 53).

When we do find Jesus identified with the people, it is always with the remnant. In chapter 3 we see the remnant separated by John, and Jesus with them (Psa. 16:3). In chapter 4, with John now in prison, Jesus returns into Galilee to the poor and despised of the flock (Zech. 11:11; John 1:46). John himself, though the messenger, must receive Him as one of the remnant, on the testimony that the Lord bore to Himself (Matt. 11:4). Unlike Mark and Luke, at the close of the book, we do not read of His ascension; rather, we find the Lord in Galilee with His own.

## Kingdom of Heaven

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While the “kingdom of God” is frequently mentioned in Mark and Luke, the expression occurs just five times in Matthew. Conversely, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurs thirty-three times in Matthew and not once in the other Gospels. This latter expression brings before us the heavenly character of the Kingdom: “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa. 103:19). Given the earthly aspirations of the Jew, this is particularly important. There is also a distinct dispensational significance. With Christ rejected, the earthly aspect of the kingdom has been delayed, and the kingdom has taken on a mystical form—the spiritual and invisible rule of God in the hearts of believers (Matt. 13:11). Though His throne is not yet established in this earth, there is a sphere where His authority is owned, where there is a response to the testimony of His Word.

## The Church

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Matthew is the only Gospel that mentions the church. In chapter 15, man and what he has made of the law is set aside, and God acts in grace (Matt. 15:21-28). Chapter 16 lets us see the blessed result of God acting in grace—the church—something that was yet to be. The law governed Israel; but the church’s foundation is divine, unmovable, a Person, the Son of the living God. With the church introduced, His disciples were no longer to tell anyone that he was the Christ, the Messiah (Matt. 16:20). He also begins to show them how he must “go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21), all of which is necessarily connected with the building of the church. Even when the Lord returns, it will not be as the Messiah, but as Son of Man (Dan. 7; Matt. 10:23; 16:27). The Lord will come in with great power and glory, to be displayed in a much wider sphere. As Son of Man, He is the heir of all things.

## Mark

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The author of the Gospel of Mark—John Mark (Acts 12:12)—was not an apostle, nor an eyewitness. It was this Mark who traveled with Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, but left them at Pamphylia. When it came time for their second journey, Paul felt it unwise to bring Mark (in this Barnabas, Mark’s cousin, lacked discernment—Col. 4:10; Acts 15:37-39). Later however, we find Mark restored, and Paul calls him his fellow laborer (Philemon 24). He is warmly commended to the Colossians (Col. 4:10) and Timothy is instructed to bring him with him, “for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Mark, the failing, though restored servant, is chosen by God in His sovereignty to present for us a divine picture of the perfect Servant—Jesus Christ, the Son of God—in His unwearied and faithful service. “They were astonished above measure, saying, He does all things well” (Mark 7:37 JND).

The order of events in Mark’s Gospel is by and large, chronological. A genealogy is not to be found; though required for a king, it has no significance for a servant. The Lord is not once addressed as “Lord” by the disciples.

The word variously translated “immediately,” “straightway,” “forthwith,” and “anon” occurs frequently in this book—some 26 times directly of the Lord and His acts—but rarely in the other Gospels. This is a Gospel of action; there is immediacy to what is written.

Though the shortest Gospel, it is full of details not elsewhere recorded. How beautiful—and how it should touch us—to see this blessed Servant asleep on a pillow (Mark 4:38). In Mark we see displayed both the Lord’s divine power and the depths of His feelings as man.

If we contrast chapter 4 of Mark with the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, the distinct character of this Gospel may be clearly seen. Both chapters begin with the parable of the sower, yet the subject pursued in Mark is that of the Lord’s service, its history, character and results. He was the sower—that was His service and likewise the service of His disciples. A candle is not to be hid, either by industry or laziness. In His absence the gospel goes forth, and though the King be not here, the seeds sprout and grow. At the time of the harvest He will return, and the fruit, or lack of it, will be seen. He will personally take care of the harvest. There are storms, yet the Lord is with us. The One whom even the wind and the sea obey is in the ship—it cannot sink. If we feel that He has abandoned us, it is because of our own lack of faith. He shares in all our labors.

The book may be divided in the following manner: chapters 1-3, Christ’s ministry in Galilee, the opposition of the Jewish leaders, their apostasy, and the Lord’s rejection of the nation; chapters 4-5, a summary of His personal service among the Gentiles and His people, taking us to Israel’s future raising up; chapters 6-10:45, His service resumed, though rejected by a blinded people; chapters 10:46-13, His return to Jerusalem and final ministry; chapters 14-16, His death and resurrection.

## Luke

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Luke, Paul's companion and fellow-laborer (Acts 16:10; 20:6; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11), wrote both this Gospel and the book of Acts. He addresses both accounts to Theophilus, an Italian nobleman—"most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). Though we have much from his pen, Luke records nothing of himself. From the Apostle's reference to "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), we know his occupation, and it would also appear from these verses that he was a Gentile (compare Col. 4:11, 14).

The Gospel, without at all detracting from its divine inspiration, is marked by the nature of this unique correspondence. It is an account of the Lord's life, by a Gentile to a Gentile: "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4). It is a divine portrait of Christ—a Man among men perfectly meeting their need in grace—His moral glory always shining. In Luke's gospel He is the Son of Man.

Whereas the "kingdom of heaven" is predominant in Matthew, the "kingdom of God" distinguishes Luke. This expression takes us beyond Israel and the Messiah—"all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). Yet even in Luke, the order followed is "to the Jew first, and also to the [Gentile]" (Rom. 1:16). Its message is to those who were bidden, then to the poor of the city—the remnant—and finally beyond the city to the highways and hedges—the Gentile (Luke 14:16-24). In the first three chapters we have His presentation to the godly remnant in Israel (Luke 2:25-38)—the devout few that thought upon His name (Mal. 3:16).

The "kingdom of God" also has an important moral element: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). These moral principles, applicable to all men, shine in the Gospel of Luke.

The use of the word "generation" in this Gospel and elsewhere (Luke 21:32) is perhaps confusing at first. However, all difficulties are removed if we simply remember that it is a moral expression. An example may be found in Psalm 12, verse 7. In that instance, "forever" is connected with "a generation"; clearly a lifetime is not in view. In particular, "generation" refers to the apostate masses.

The genealogy in Luke is traced back to the first man, Adam. Jesus as the Son of Man takes up the inheritance God gave to man. The temptations in Luke are presented in a moral order (Luke 4:1-13). Beginning with the most basic desire, hunger, the tempter moves on to that which man has by every means sought for himself, power and glory—"and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son" (Gen. 4:17). The final temptation—more subtle—is spiritual in character, appealing to man's religious nature.

Unlike the first Adam, the Lord Jesus is triumphant in obedience. In Luke He is ever the obedient, suffering, victorious man. He is the Man of Sorrows (Isa. 53:3). Only in this Gospel do we find such details concerning His agony in the garden: "Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

While all the subject matter of Luke is rich, it is helpful to observe the following divisions: chapters 1-3, His birth until the commencement of His public ministry—thirty years; chapters 4-5, His ministry of grace amongst the cities, towns and villages of Galilee; chapters 6-9:50, His ministry in grace, but in contrast with Judaism (the old garment cannot be patched with new cloth; Mark 2:21), closing with His glory as man; chapters 9:51-19:48 begin with His determination to go to Jerusalem and end with His entry into that city, in between which we have the judgment of those who rejected the Lord and the grace he dispensed along the way—the promises of God are accomplished by grace and laid hold of by faith; chapters 20-21, Jerusalem and the Jews delivered up to the Gentiles; chapters 22-24, the Lord with His disciples, His death and resurrection—the risen Man.

## John

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Far from being mere repetition, the subject matter of this, the final Gospel, is as distinct as that of the first three. In the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus is presented as the Son of God (John 1:34). It is God revealed as light and love. John sets forth the divine glory of His person, because of who He is—the “I am” (John 8:58).

There are many marks that distinguish the Gospel of John. While the previous three Gospels are synoptic—giving an outline of the Lord’s life—we do not find this in John. Rather, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). In this Gospel we have no genealogy, and no record of His birth, finding instead what He was in the beginning, before creation—the Eternal Son. He was God before He became Man.

As Son of God, we do not read of the agony in the garden; rather, we see His divine majesty overawing His enemies (John 18:6). There are no parables, and only one miracle in common with the other Gospels (John 6:5-14). There are a number of words peculiar to John’s Gospel, not that they don’t occur elsewhere, but nowhere with such regularity. Four of them—“love”, “world”, “believe” and “life”—are to be found together in John 3:16. On twenty-five occasions the Lord introduces His words with “verily, verily” (or truly, truly), such is their importance.

Christ’s rejection by Israel is assumed from the outset: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). That which pertains to Judaism is always “of the Jews” (such as ch. 2:6, 2:13 and 5:1)—a phrase that occurs infrequently in the other Gospels, but many times in John. John the Baptist identifies the Lord, not as the Messiah, but as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Beautifully, it is not his public testimony, but the expression of his heart—“Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36)—that turns his disciples to follow Him. John gathers to the Lord; Jesus gathers to Himself—“Follow me” (John 1:43). When Nathaniel owns the Lord as the Son of God, the King of Israel—a picture to us of the Jewish remnant—the Lord immediately introduces the “Son of Man”, a title that takes us beyond Israel to His universal headship (John 1:51).

Chapter 2 introduces us to His millennial glory. The joy of that kingdom is prefigured in the marriage scene at Cana (John 2:11), while in the cleansing of the temple we have the judgment that will characterize it (John 2:14-17).

In chapter 3 we find that the only way into the kingdom of God is through new birth (John 3:3). The flesh, no matter how religious, cannot enter the kingdom; it must be judged, and the One who is life must die. There is nothing in man pleasing to God: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). God cannot trust man (John 2:24); instead, man must place His trust in God (John 3: 36). The first three chapters are introductory to the entire book.

Going before them, they follow Him (John 10:4). He is our all: “I am the bread of life” (ch. 6); “I am the light of the world” (ch. 8); “I am the door” (ch. 10); “I am the good shepherd” (ch. 10); “I am the

resurrection, and the life" (ch. 11); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (ch. 14:6); "I am the true vine" (ch. 15).

If the Lord gathers, He also divides because of His person (John 7:43), because of His works (John 9:16) and because of His words (John 10:19). In chapter 9, the Lord Jesus and those that believe on Him are rejected and cast out (John 9:34). In chapter 10, He calls His own by name and leads them out of the fold (Judaism), that there might be one flock (the church) and one Shepherd (John 10:3, 16 JND). In chapter 11 we have the prophecy that He would die, not just for Israel, "but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:52).

In the chapter 12, Jesus answers the people, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). As He is heavenly, so will His people be. He is not leading us to a promised land here in this earthly scene, the scene of His rejection, but to His Father's house: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). Neither are we left comfortless, for the Holy Spirit is promised upon His leaving (John 14:16; 16:7). Finally, in chapter 17 we hear the Lord in communion with the Father, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

In chapters 18 through 21, we have the Lord's trial, death and resurrection. "It is finished" (John 19:30); thus the work of the Son is complete. Appearing unto Mary, He can tell her "go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). The Lord's concluding exhortation to Peter is, "Follow thou me" (John 21:22).

## The Acts of the Apostles

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Acts, Luke's second book, commences at the point where his first left off—the ascension of our Lord (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9)—“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2).

A better title for the book would be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”, for in it we see the practical guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles and the early church. A guidance that is no less real or applicable in this present day.

With the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit come down according to His promise (John 16:7), the church—the assembly of God—is formed. Prior to the day of Pentecost the church did not exist, and after the rapture the church will no longer be found on earth. These are the circumstances that give the church its true character.

Even though Acts covers little more than 30 years, it brings before us an entire outline of the history of the church.

## Outline

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The book has 5 divisions. Chapter 1 is prefatory to the whole book. While waiting for the Holy Spirit, the disciples are guided by the word of God.

In chapters 2-7, Jerusalem is the center as God lingers in grace towards the nation of Israel (compare Luke 13:6-9).

After the stoning of Stephen—chapters 8-12—the Gospel goes out first in Samaria and then to the Gentiles more generally. Cornelius is brought in, and an assembly is established amongst the Greeks in Antioch. It is there that the disciples are first called Christians. Peter is prominent.

In chapters 13-20 we have the travels and labors of the Apostle Paul. Three journeys are recorded, each beginning in Antioch and all but the last ending there. The first trip took Paul to Cyprus and from thence to Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and finally back to Antioch (13-14:26). On the second trip, the Apostle passed through Asia Minor into Europe (Acts 16) with visits in Macedonia and Achaia (15:36-18:22). The final trip begins in Antioch with the Apostle traveling through various cities of his former visits, and ends in Jerusalem (18:23-21).

From chapter 21 to the end of the book, we have Paul the prisoner carried from Jerusalem to Rome.

## The Early Church

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Acts gives the only scriptural account of the early church. Throughout, the activity of the Holy Spirit is preeminent. The assemblies are seen as and act as one body—“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4).

Peter and John go up from Jerusalem to lay hands on the Samaritans and they receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). We do not find Jewish and Samaritan churches separated on national lines—“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

There are no independent churches in the book of Acts. What seemed good to the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem is likewise recognized in Antioch (Acts 15:28, 31). “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Conversely, the separation of the early church from that which is Jewish is clearly unfolded. Individually the believer is found in an entirely new position, “he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Corporately, the church is quite distinct from Israel, “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. ... Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:10, 13). Far from being mystical statements, their application is practical. In Ephesus we see Paul separating the disciples and meeting with them in a location distinct from the synagogue (Acts 19:9).

Upon Paul’s final departure from Ephesus, he warns the Ephesian elders of attacks from without and divisions from within (Acts 20:29-30).

Paul’s return and captivity at Jerusalem prefigures what has happened to Paul’s doctrine in Christendom. Finally, Paul’s voyage from the Fair Havens to Melita give us a striking summary of the history of Christendom (Acts 27). Though the boat is shattered into countless pieces, Paul is preserved, and a few (perhaps just Luke and Aristarchus) are found with him (Acts 27:2). Not one principle laid down in this book is made obsolete by present circumstances.

Sadly, there are many today that don’t know the land they are about to enter (Acts 27:39). The church has entirely forgotten her heavenly calling—that her Head is Christ in glory—and has settled down in this world.

## Romans

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The grand subject of the Apostle's letter to the Romans is the Gospel—"The gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). The gospel is neither a philosophy nor a creed; rather the Gospel concerns a divine and glorious Person, "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3).

We do not find the word "church" until the last chapter (Rom. 16:1). The gospel was the subject of promise, not the church. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Now revealed, the gospel is no longer a promise. "For all the promises of God in him [are] yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1:20). For the Jew, the link to the promises was particularly important.

Although the letter is to Rome (Rom. 1:7), it addresses both Jew and Gentile. There were many Jews in Rome (Acts 28:17,) and throughout the letter both groups are addressed. Many examples may be cited—"I speak to them that know the law" (Rom. 7:1), and "For I speak to you Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13); "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3), and "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

When Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, he had never visited that city. No apostle had—a remarkable fact for a city that supports its position in Christianity on its supposed association with the apostles Peter and Paul (Rom. 1:10-13).

### Outline

The Epistle to the Romans may justly be called the fundamental epistle of Christian doctrine. In the first eight chapters Paul carefully and simply lays out the foundational principles of Christianity, working from man up to God.

Chapters 9-11 are dispensational. They address the question, "How does the teaching of the first eight chapters affect God's promises to Israel?"

In the third and final division, chapters 12-16, we have the practical application of the doctrine of the first eight chapters.

Each section contains within itself additional divisions. Looking a little closer at the first eight chapters, we find that the first 15 verses of chapter one are introductory. From verse 16 through to verse 11 of chapter 5, the Apostle takes up justification from sins. Having dealt with the question of sins, what of our nature? From verse 12 of chapter 5 to the end of chapter 8, the subject is deliverance from sin. The bond of the law (where it existed) has been dissolved in the death of Christ (ch. 7), and our deliverance from the flesh is in the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (ch. 8).

## Conclusion

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Sins are not overlooked in the Gospel; the bar has not been lowered. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). This is God’s standard; God has not been reconciled; it is man that needs reconciliation. In Romans, the gospel of God is the testimony of the righteousness of God. Of human righteousness, He will have nothing: “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

How can God be righteous in justifying the ungodly? The answer brings us to the feet of the Lord Jesus. Coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, He offered Himself a sacrifice for sin, thereby completely vindicating God’s righteousness, while revealing His love. God can now present Himself in grace—be propitious—to man (Rom. 3:25-26).

This book has a particular importance for the young believer. Herein we find that peace with God rests, not with our thoughts, but on God’s thoughts of His own Son (Rom. 5:1). Not only do we have peace in regard to sins, but we also have present deliverance from the power of sin. Delivered from that old tyrant we have been set at liberty, not to do as we will, but to serve our new Master, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us (Rom. 6:17-19). The Spirit by whom Christ actively lived should now be our source of every thought and action (Rom. 8:9). Not only is the Holy Spirit within us acting, but God is also acting externally, ordering all things for those “called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

## First and Second Corinthians

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Paul's ministry does not end with the book of Romans; the Apostle would take us on to the full revelation of the mystery, which beforetime had been kept secret—the church of God, the body of Christ (Rom. 16:25-27; Col. 1:23-29).

Sadly, Paul's writings are by and large neglected, and, worse still, dismissed as irrelevant for the present day. Rationalism destroys the truth by reasoning, reducing everything to a philosophy without moral force. Ritualism displaces the truth with ceremony.

Corinth was a most licentious city. Sitting between two natural harbors and connecting continental Greece in the north and Peloponnesus to the south, Corinth bustled with commerce—not unlike the world in which we live today.

The assembly there had many problems. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians looks at the internal order of the church of God. The character of the second is very different. With Titus' positive report from Corinth (2 Cor. 7), Paul opens his heart and speaks with greater liberty.

## First Corinthians

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Though addressed to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2), the contents of this letter are not specific to the saints of that city, for we find that it is also addressed to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:2).

Divisions had arisen among the believers in Corinth. Evil was tolerated in their midst, and some were even denying the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). The Apostle, having received notice through the house of Chloe and a letter from themselves (1 Cor. 1:11; 7:1), finds it necessary to defer a visit—lest he should come with a rod (1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 1:23)—and directs this divinely inspired communication to them.

A key to the book may be found in verse 9 of the first chapter: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”. The Lordship of Christ is impressed upon them—the Lord’s table, the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 10:21; 11:20)—and it is into His fellowship that we are called. It is not our own. Likewise, the power of the Spirit is everywhere presented in contrast to the wisdom of man: “We speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means” (1 Cor. 2:13 JND).

### Outline

After a brief introduction of nine verses, the Apostle immediately addresses the subject of divisions (chapters 1-4). Schools of thought were common amongst the Greek philosophers; with the gospel there was no place for such. What Paul or Apollos taught could not be separated from Christ or each other. Paul determined not to know any thing among them save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2)—he meets, and silences all thought of division with the cross of Christ. The one foundation had been laid; man was responsible for how he built upon it (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

From chapter 5 through to the end of chapter 11, Paul addresses various moral questions. Before considering the things that they had written him (ch. 7), the Apostle is compelled to deal with a specific instance of immorality amongst them (1 Cor. 5:1). “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). They were to judge those that were within, and the wicked person was to be put away from among them (1 Cor 5:13). Paul then addresses going to law, marriage, and eating things offered to idols. Some accused him of ministering for gain, questioning his apostleship and undermining that which he taught.

In chapter 10 Paul warns the professing church with examples from Israel's history. Departure from Christ will ultimately lead to apostasy. It is at this juncture that the subject of the Lord's Table is introduced: “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Ps. 78:19). The collective nature of the remembrance feast, particularly the unity of the body as expressed in the loaf, is emphasized here. “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). Whether it is the remembrance of the Lord, the Jewish sacrifice, or the pagan feast, the eaters are collectively identified with the table or altar as the case may be (1 Cor. 10:18-21).

Chapter 11 begins with something that is perceived to be of little relevance today, but which, nonetheless, has never lost its significance. The woman's head covering (and the man's lack) is an outward display of God's order in creation (1 Cor. 11:1-16). The latter part of the chapter brings before us the Lord's Supper, a subject of special revelation received by Paul (1 Cor. 11:23). In the Lord's Supper we remember the Lord and show—or announce—"the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). The bread and cup are not to be partaken of in an unworthy manner—individual self-judgment is essential (1 Cor. 11:27-29). In chapter 11 it is the individual responsibility that is brought before us.

In chapters 12-14, Paul takes up the subject of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1). By one Spirit gift is divided to each as He pleases, and, by one Spirit, gift works (1 Cor. 12:11). Though there are various gifts, there is one Spirit—"by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Gift cannot be exercised without love (ch. 13), and when gift is appropriately exercised, there is order and the church is edified (ch. 14).

In chapter 15 we find that some were calling into question the resurrection from the dead—"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12). Without the resurrection, there is no Gospel—"we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). The resurrection of the saints from among the dead, of which Christ was the firstfruits, is another of those mysteries revealed to the Apostle (1 Cor. 15:51). All that separated us from God is entirely put away—death, the wrath of God, the power of Satan, sin, disappear as far as we are concerned, in virtue of the work of Christ; and He is made to us that righteousness which is our title to heavenly glory. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Paul concludes the letter in chapter 16 with a final word on collections, his travel plans, and a closing salutation.

## Second Corinthians

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Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was written during his third and final journey. Having left Ephesus because of the uproar (Acts 19), Paul traveled to Troas hoping to meet Titus with some news from Corinth concerning his first epistle. Though a door was opened unto him for the gospel, he had no rest in spirit and passed on into Macedonia. Here Paul meets Titus and hears the good tidings from Corinth (Acts 20:1; 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-7). The letter had wrought repentance and the wicked person had been dealt with (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6). What a comfort to the Apostle.

The subject matter of this beautiful epistle is, to use the words of another, "restorative grace, according to the character and power of life in Christ, and that accompanied by the deepest exercise of the heart under the disciplinary ways of God".

### Outline

The Apostle was not a disinterested bystander, terrifying them by letters from afar. Rather, he was deeply affected, first by the state of things in Corinth, and then by the news of their repentance.

This epistle was written after Paul had met Titus, though in it he unfolds the thoughts and exercises of his heart as he awaited word from Corinth. From verse 13 of chapter 2 until we finally read of the happy reunion with Titus in verse 6 of chapter 7, we have the sweet communion between souls that have experienced the restorative effects of grace in their lives—though under very different circumstances.

Paul describes their little band as captives led about in triumph, a sweet savour unto God—a savour of death to those that rejected the gospel, and of life for those that received it (2 Cor. 2:14-15). He didn't make trade of the word of God; rather, before God he spoke, not of, but in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17).

He did not need a letter commending him to the assembly in Corinth, for they themselves were a living epistle, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). The actions of the Corinthian saints had been ample testimony of their faith. The Apostle was a new covenant minister; he had not 'laid down the law'. This is not a covenant that we are under, for the letter kills; it is by the Spirit. The Gospel reveals righteousness, not demands it; it abounds in glory (2 Cor. 3:9).

The destruction of the vessel, while it may present a weak and contemptible picture to the world, reveals the treasure that it contains and the life of Jesus is made manifest in the mortal body (2 Cor. 4:7-11).

In chapter 5 we have the confidence of one whose life is in Christ. Here we have what motivated the Apostle—and us—in his life and ministry. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The Apostle still had a great concern for the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians, and he does not fail to touch on the difficulties that remained—though, in the main, the tone is exhortative rather than assertive, nevertheless with authority. In chapters 8 through 9 liberality to the poor saints is encouraged, while in chapters 10 through 12, Paul addresses those that would question his apostleship. He feared lest there should be those that would beguile them and their minds be “corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”, bringing them into bondage (2 Cor. 11:3, 20).

The book closes with chapter 13. Since they sought proof of Christ speaking in the Apostle, they should examine themselves. If they were Christians indeed, was that not the proof they sought?

## Galatians

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Paul addresses this letter to the “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), a province of central Asia Minor. We know from the book of Acts that Paul twice traveled through this region, on his second journey (Acts 16:6) and again on his third (Acts 18:23). The Galatians were principally Gentile, never under law, and brought into the knowledge of God through the preaching of the Gospel.

The Epistle to the Galatians is short and to the point. The subject is a most critical one, the corruption of the Gospel of the grace of God. There were those that would seek to mingle Judaism with Christianity. Judaism was earthly in character, adapted to man in the flesh. Christianity is heavenly in character and totally sets aside man in the flesh.

In particular, there were those that questioned the apostleship of Paul. After all, he had not received his credentials from those in Jerusalem (Judaism’s earthly center). However, in rejecting him, they rejected the Gospel received by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12); its source was heavenly. Secondly, they sought to place the Galatian believers under law, observing days, months, times and years (Gal. 4:10), even insisting upon circumcision. There was reproach in being a Gentile believer but less if you were circumcised in the manner of the religious Jew (Gal. 6:12).

### Outline

The brief, five-verse introduction in chapter 1 is key to the entire book. “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal. 1:3, 4). We have been delivered from this present evil world; any teaching that brings us back into that sphere is a corruption of the gospel.

The first two chapters address the subject of Paul’s apostleship (received quite apart from those prominent in Jerusalem) and his special calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7). In the third chapter we have law contrasted with grace and promise. The law, coming between the promise (Gen. 12:3) and Christ, in no way voided the promise. Faith and blessing go hand-in-hand, as does the law and the curse (Gal. 3:10, 14). The fourth chapter contrasts the legal condition of Israel under the law with the saints under grace and Christ. God sent forth His Son to redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship (Gal 4:4, 5).

The contrast between the Spirit and the flesh is the subject of the fifth chapter. The liberty that we enjoy does not give us license to sin. Recognizing this, our natural tendency is to seek to restrain the flesh by placing it under law. If the law could restrain the flesh, then there is no need for grace (Gal. 5:4). Rather, we are to “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Regardless of the dispensation, the solemn principle stands: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8).

The sixth chapter presents practical principles in which we are to continue on together. In Christianity it is the law of Christ: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). As to circumcision, they were not to trouble him; the Apostle bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus—physical scars received because of his faithfulness (Gal. 6:17).

## Ephesians

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Ephesus was a prosperous city in the western coast of Asia Minor and home to the great temple of the goddess Diana. In Acts we read of two visits by Paul to that city—on his second and third missionary journeys. The first occasion was brief (Acts 18:19-21), while the second extended to more than two years (Acts 19:1, 10). Paul's last journey ended in Jerusalem, and it was during the final leg of that voyage that Paul called for the Ephesian elders from Miletus—the last time that he would see them—warning them: “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:28-29). Paul's trip to Jerusalem resulted in his imprisonment, and ultimately his transportation to Rome. It was from prison in Rome that this letter was penned.

## The Counsels of God in Christ

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In the Epistle to the Ephesians we have the most elevated development of truth. The Apostle unfolds the counsels of God concerning Christ and the church, His body (Eph. 1:22-23)—counsels that had their origin before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Romans begins with man in the depths of his depravity, whereas Ephesians begins with “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and the blessings He has showered on man—“who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). We are chosen in Him, having been marked out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself, accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, in whom also, having believed, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:4-13). The first chapter concludes with the church in union with Christ, who is head to it (not over it).

In Romans we are dead to sin and in Colossians dead to the world, but in Ephesians we are found before God in all the fullness of blessing in Christ. It is new life—quickened together with Christ—in a new position (Eph. 2:5-6). The same power that sets Christ at the right hand of God, having raised Him from among the dead, puts us into possession of these things (Eph. 1:19-20). With the believer seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, there is no mention of the Lord’s coming (Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians also bears this distinction, though for very different reasons.) In the second chapter, we have the house—“builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

In chapter three Paul begins, “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1-2), but then interrupts himself with a divinely inspired parenthesis taking in the entire chapter, in which the Apostle develops the subject of the mystery. The Gentiles are brought into blessing quite apart from Israel: “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). The prayer that closes the chapter is addressed to the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:14) and concerns that which we have through Christ as Son. In contrast, the prayer of the first chapter addresses “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:17). There we learn what He has accomplished through Christ the Man.

## The Practical Walk

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In the fourth chapter, the Apostle starts, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1), beginning the practical consequences—not the least of which was Paul’s very imprisonment itself—of that which has preceded (particularly Eph. 2:20-22). There is a walk suited to the position described. Though in Ephesians we have a mystery revealed, the book is not in any way mystical, but intensely practical (Eph. 4:1-6).

The Lord, having ascended up on high has given gifts to men (Eph. 4:8). Everything necessary for the edifying of the body flows down from the Head. From verse 17 through to verse 21 of chapter 5 we have practical exhortations for our walk. “Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ... and grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:24, 30).

The remaining portion of the fifth chapter and on into the sixth applies the truth borne out in the earlier chapters to a godly order in our earthly relationships.

Like Israel of old, we have a land, a heavenly land, which is ours to enjoy. However, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). But we have One, as Joshua did, in whom we find our strength. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ... Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:10, 13).

## Philippians

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Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia (Acts 16:12), was the first European city visited by Paul. He passed through Philippi on both his second and third missionary journeys. Paul's epistle to the Philippians was written at a later date from prison in Rome.

Previous epistles of Paul—Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians—take up doctrinal or moral issues. Here, the subject matter is very different, for it considers the Christian experience. It reminds us of Joseph's exhortation to his brethren: "So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way" (Gen. 45:24).

The word "sin" never appears. Salvation, when mentioned, is not the salvation of the soul, nor is it merely deliverance from circumstances, for glory is always its end. Salvation is spoken of as the full result in glory (for example, Phil. 1:19). We are seen journeying through the wilderness, through a world unchanged, but we are changed. We have no home here, for we are pressing toward the mark "for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14 JND). Consistent with this, the name of Jesus is peculiarly associated with this epistle, and the title "Jesus Christ" occurs throughout. He is our example.

## Christ our Life—Chapter 1

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Paul does not use the title “Apostle” in his address to the Philippians, but rather “bondmen of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:1 JND). The Philippian saints were dear to him. They were partakers in the gospel, “from the first day unto now” (Phil. 1:5). At times we know that this fellowship had taken the form of practical gifts. Though they had lacked opportunity, they once again flourished in their care for him and had sent a gift by the hand of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25; 4:10).

Through their prayer and the abundant supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this would be to his salvation. As to what form his release from bonds would take, either life or death, it didn’t matter. “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-21). Christ is our life.

He desired that their walk would be found worthy of the gospel of Christ, not terrified by their adversaries, for it is given to us to suffer for Christ (Phil. 1:27-30).

## Christ our Pattern—Chapter 2

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To complete his joy, Paul exhorts them to be “likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, ... Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:2, 5). He was the Perfect Servant and our perfect pattern.

Paul could no longer be with them; they were on their own, and they were going to have to work out their own salvation now with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), remembering, of course, that it was God that worked in them “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). In the first chapter, Paul was ready to live to serve them in the Lord (Phil. 1:24-25); in the second, he is ready to be poured out as the libation on the sacrifice and service of their faith (Phil. 2:17). They were to walk such that Paul could rejoice in the day of Christ (Phil. 2:16).

## Christ our Object—Chapter 3

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“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 3:1). Circumstances seem to get us down, but if our eye is on the Lord, we can still rejoice. Paul had every cause to be discouraged, yet joy and rejoicing are ever-present themes throughout this epistle.

There is nothing in this scene for us. Though Paul could have boasted of his earthly credentials, he counted them as nothing (Phil. 3:8). To reach Christ in glory was the goal before him. Paul had not attained, neither was he perfected (Phil. 3:12). Here he anticipates that day when his body of humiliation would be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21 JND). Paul was in this race that he might apprehend, seeing that he had been taken possession of by Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12 JND). “I pursue, [looking] towards [the] goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14 JND). Christ is our object.

## Christ our Strength—Chapter 4

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Here we have the practical admonition, “Therefore ... stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (Phil. 4:1). Are we a help or a hindrance (Phil. 4:2, 3)? Are we careful and troubled about many things (Phil. 4:6)? On what are we meditating (Phil. 4:8)? What are we doing—in whose footsteps are we following (Phil. 4:9)?

Paul had learned to be content no matter what the circumstances were: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Christ is our strength. Paul the prisoner had learned something of the riches of the One he served: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

## Colossians

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The Colossians had heard the gospel—though apparently not from the Apostle Paul (Col. 2:1)—and had received it. He could commend them for their faith, love, and hope (Col. 1:4-5). The seed had been planted, and brought forth fruit (Col. 1:6). Nevertheless, we find a hint of a problem in Paul’s reference to Epaphras: “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7). The saints at Colosse were being enticed by the allure of philosophy and ritualism. Like those of Athens, the natural man forever desires to “tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). However, what they were about to hear from the Apostle Paul would only confirm that which they had already heard of Epaphras. In returning to the elements of the world, they were, in fact, turning away from Christ; they were not holding the headship of Christ in all its fullness.

## The Glories of Christ—Chapter 1

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Having given thanks for the things that he had heard of them, Paul prays that they might be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9). God’s desire for us is nothing less. The Apostle gives thanks unto the Father for that which they—and we as believers—have as a present condition: “which hath made us meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood” (Col. 1:12-14).

The glories of Christ follow. He is the Creator of the universe; by Him all things consist. Not only has He the first place as Creator, but “He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:18-20). Thus the foundation for the universal blessing of creation is established in the cross. For those that continue in the faith, with their hope firmly grounded in the Gospel, it is a present accomplished thing (Col. 1:21-23).

Paul was not only a minister of the gospel, but also of the church—that mystery which heretofore had been hidden. Thereby he completed the Word (the revealed mind) of God (Col. 1:23-25 JND).

## Death and Resurrection—Chapter 2

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Having presented the glories of Christ, Paul now touches on his concern for them—philosophy and vain deceit. How could they turn from the glories of Christ to the rudiments of the world (Col. 2:8)? “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him” (Col. 2:9-10). They were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11). Buried with Him in baptism, they were raised again “through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). We have the reality of things in Christ. The past ordinances were “a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col. 2:17). All things flow down from the head; Christ is our Head (Col. 2:19). And as to this scene in which we live, we are dead with Christ from the elements of the world (Col. 2:20). What claim can they have on us now?

## Practical Results—Chapters 3-4

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“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above” (Col. 3:1). With our mind set on things above, we walk as heavenly people on this earth. Having put off the old man with his deeds and having put on the new; this is what must govern our life. Practical Christianity is manifested in every sphere of our life. “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17).

## First and Second Thessalonians

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The first scriptural reference to Thessalonica, a city near Philippi in the Roman province of Macedonia, is found in chapter 17 of Acts. For three Sabbaths Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, “opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3). Although some believed, including many Greeks, wicked men, incited by the Jews, troubled the city, and Paul and Silas were compelled to leave. Anxious to return, but hindered by Satan, Timotheus is sent from Athens (1 Thess. 2:18; 3:1-2, 6). It is upon his return that Paul writes his first letter to the Thessalonian saints—the very earliest of his epistles. The second followed probably within eighteen months of the first.

These letters are characterized by the freshness of first love. Word of their faith had spread abroad (1 Thess. 1:8). Having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”, they waited for His Son from heaven, their deliverer from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Such a testimony does not go unnoticed in this world, and, like their brethren in Judea, they suffered persecution (1 Thess 2:14).

Paul does not assert his apostleship; rather, in both epistles he reassures the saints concerning different aspects of the Lord’s coming. The first epistle addresses the Lord’s coming for the blessing of His saints—both for those who have died and those who are alive—in contrast to the day of the Lord (a time of judgment), of which they were knowledgeable.

In the second epistle, we find that the hope of these dear Thessalonian saints had been shaken, thinking that the day of the Lord was already come. Paul shows that certain events must first precede that day.

## First Thessalonians 1-3

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In the first chapter we find the Thessalonians waiting for the Son of God from heaven. In the second chapter, though unable to visit them, the Apostle has this confidence that they would be his joy and crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at His coming.

In the third chapter, having heard the report from Timotheus (1 Thess. 3:6) and having been duly comforted by their faith, he prays, “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:12-13). Here the Lord’s appearing with all his saints is spoken of.

## First Thessalonians 4-5

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The exhortation continues in the fourth chapter with instruction as to their walk. The chapter closes, however, with important details concerning the Lord's coming for His saints. Those that had died would rise again and would, furthermore, precede those that were alive and remained (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Given the persecution that the Thessalonians suffered and their apparent confusion on this point, this was, without a doubt, a great comfort.

Chapter 5 speaks of the times and the seasons of which they were quite familiar—the day of the Lord is extensively detailed in the Old Testament (1 Thess. 5:1). They were not children of the night; they were of the light (1 Thess. 5:4, 5). We do not sleep, for those that sleep sleep in the night, “but let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). The book closes with various exhortations.

## Second Thessalonians 1

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Suffering severe persecution, the Thessalonian saints were apparently persuaded, perhaps by a forged letter, that the day of the Lord had come (2 Thess. 2:2). In the first chapter Paul points out that a day of judgment is indeed coming on those who obey not the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:8). The Thessalonian saints were believers, and it was their persecution which gave testimony to that (2 Thess. 1:5). However, not only was it not the day of the Lord, but also, when that day would come, it would bring judgment on their tormentors!

## Second Thessalonians 2-3

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In the second chapter Paul directly addresses the error. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him—not having yet taken place—is proof that the day of the Lord is still future (2 Thess. 2:1). Furthermore, that day will not come “except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3). This is the antichrist, “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). The chapter closes with a word of comfort and with the first mention of hope—having been restored to them—in this epistle.

In the final chapter, Paul requests their prayers. He had confidence in the Lord that they would do the things commanded of them (2 Thess. 3:4). As to one who was disorderly, they were to withdraw from such. Each was to work for their bread—we are to be occupied until He comes (2 Thess. 3:6-12). Paul closes the epistle, commending them to the Lord: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all” (2 Thess. 3:16). He draws special attention to the salutation by his own hand, perhaps in reference to the forged letter.

## First and Second Timothy

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Paul's first epistle to Timothy was written from Macedonia to Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). It contains instruction for Timothy himself and, more generally, for the conduct of the individual in the assembly. The second epistle was written at a later date from prison and would appear to be Paul's final epistle (2 Tim. 1:8, 4:6).

Timothy was a young man of Greek and Jewish descent. Of his Greek father we read nothing (Acts 16:1), however, his grandmother and mother were both faithful women (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy was much loved by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 1:2). Apparently timorous, Paul finds it needful to encourage him (1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:6-7). Physically, he was afflicted by illness (1 Tim. 5:23). Though Timothy may have lacked earthly credentials, Paul could say of him, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:20).

## First Timothy

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Paul's first epistle to Timothy is characterized by the word godliness; no other epistle contains as many references (the Greek word for godliness derives from well and reverence). It was the Apostle's purpose in writing to Timothy that he might know how he ought to behave himself "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Here we have divine guidance for right conduct in the assembly, viewed here as the house of God. As such, it is to be the maintainer of the truth. In First Timothy the house is seen in order.

Chapter 1. Some had turned aside to vain discourse, desiring to be law-teachers (1 Tim. 1:6, 7). There is a right use for the law, however, its application is not to the righteous person, but to the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners (1 Tim. 1:8, 9). It was Paul's purpose in leaving Timothy at Ephesus, that he might enjoin them not to teach other doctrines.

Paul had declared unto them all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27); there is no further revealed truth. The church is to maintain and uphold the truth it has received. The end of Paul's charge is the only right spiritual condition that will enable us to carry this out—"love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith" (1 Tim. 1:5 JND).

Chapter 2. We have a Saviour-God who "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Our conduct within the assembly and before the world (the latter is especially the message in Paul's epistle to Titus) is to be characterized by godliness and honesty (1 Tim. 2:2, 3). Our conduct as men (1 Tim. 2:8) and women is important (1 Tim. 2:9-15).

Chapter 3. Instructions are given for brothers desiring to exercise oversight in the assembly, and likewise for those that would minister (serve) in the assembly (1 Tim. 3:1, 8).

Chapters 4-6. In latter times, there would be a departure from the faith; men would give heed to seducing spirits, "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats" (1 Tim. 4:3). This is the religious flesh and false godliness, against which the Apostle warns.

In these chapters we find instruction in godliness as to temporal things. "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Christianity was never a means of social advancement. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Finally, we are to "keep the entrusted deposit" (1 Tim. 6:20 JND)—the full truth of Christianity—in the face of man's most advanced intellectual opposition.

## Second Timothy

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Though it was not the last days of the church's history when Paul wrote this letter, the Apostle is nevertheless permitted to see the failure of man in his responsibility to maintain the order of the House of God. In the first epistle some had turned aside; now we find all those of Asia turned away (2 Tim. 1:15). Christendom had become a great house; things were in disorder (2 Tim. 2:20). In this epistle, then, we have instruction for the godly in a day of ruin.

Chapter 1 gives us the encouragement we need in such a day. In the first epistle the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. In the second, the emphasis is on the individual and the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). "Have an outline of sound words, which [words] thou hast heard of me", not merely as some doctrine, but "in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13 JND). There is no suggestion of giving up the truth; rather, Paul's doctrine is emphasized (such as, 2 Tim. 2:2 and 3:10). Clearly there is a cost—the Apostle was in prison (2 Tim. 2:9). "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

In chapter 2 we have our path in a day of ruin, beginning with the right spiritual condition: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:1). That path must involve separation from evil, which necessarily assumes spiritual discernment (2 Tim. 2:19-21). "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. The mystery, or secret, of godliness lies in the knowledge of God manifested in and through the person of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16). In the second epistle, the word "godliness" is only to be found in the verse, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). When the person of Christ is denied, godliness is merely a form. Professing Christendom is rapidly sinking into the dark depths of paganism (see 2 Tim 3:1-5; Rom. 1:28-31). The Holy Scriptures are our sure resource (2 Tim. 3:14-17). In chapter 4 we have our service in the day of ruin. How beautiful to see Mark restored amidst such a general departure from the truth (2 Tim. 4:11).

## Titus

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Paul's Epistle to Titus, like those to Timothy, is addressed to an individual. In all three the subject matter is godly order. Likewise, each brings before us a Saviour God. However, whereas the Epistles to Timothy are occupied with the maintenance of sound doctrine and the internal condition of the assembly, the Epistle to Titus is concerned with that which is outward—our conduct as seen by the world. Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete to set in order the things that remained and to establish elders in every city (Titus 1:5). As a people, the Cretans were known for their unruly behavior, a fact attested to by one of their own poets (Titus 1:12).

### Outline

“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:1, 2). A true Christian is not an adherent of a religion; he is one of God's elect. His walk is to be an open acknowledgement of the truth; he lives in hope of eternal life, a life that takes us beyond this world.

In chapter 1, Titus (in contrast to Timothy) is explicitly charged to establish elders (overseers; vs 7) in every city, appropriate characteristics for whom are given (Titus 1:6-9). It was important that an overseer could, by sound doctrine, exhort and convince the gainsayers. There were many unruly and vain talkers, deceivers, particularly among the Jews, that subverted the people, teaching things that they ought not, for base gain (Titus 1:10, 11).

In the second chapter, we have our conduct in personal relationships: the aged men, the aged women, the young women, and the young men—of which Titus was to be a pattern. Servants (bondmen) are exhorted “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10).

It is the grace that saves that provides the foundation for the Christian walk, not law. Furthermore, we know that Christ Himself will appear in all His glory—our Saviour “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13, 14). In these verses we have the foundation, the walk, and the hope of every believer (Titus 2:11-14).

In chapter 3, we have the Christian's conduct in this world, especially before those in authority (Titus 3:1). They were not to speak evil of any man, nor to be contentious, but gentle, showing meekness. They had been saved out of that which they were formally, not because of their own works of righteousness, but through the kindness and love of a Saviour God. We should act towards others as God has acted towards us. The Christian has a new life that acts in the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:2-7).

Foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law were to be shunned as unprofitable and vain (Titus 3:9). When a man chooses his own opinions over the Word of truth,

causing division, he is a heretic and is to be rejected after a first and second admonition (Titus 3:10).

It was not the Apostle's intent that Titus should remain on Crete. Paul would send Artemas or Tychicus to him, at which time he was to come to Paul at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12).

## Philemon

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Two individuals are prominent in this short epistle, Philemon and Onesimus. The first has a name deriving from *phileo*, meaning tender affection (love), while Onesimus may be translated profitable. The first was the master, the second his slave.

Onesimus had not always been profitable (vs. 11). Having deserted his master, we find him in Rome, perhaps seeking to escape amongst the vast throngs of that city. While he may have succeeded in fleeing Philemon, the eye of the Lord was upon him. In that city there was a prisoner, the Apostle Paul, and it was to Paul that the Spirit of God brings this fugitive. The same Spirit that had worked in the heart of Philemon now works in the heart of Onesimus—through the same servant of the Lord (vs. 19).

Converted, Onesimus is profitable to all (vs. 11). Though his soul is set free, he has not received liberty from the obligations that bound him to his master. As a Christian, he must return to Philemon. This beautiful epistle, written by Paul, lovingly beseeches Philemon to again receive Onesimus, “not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?” (vs. 16).

Without invoking his apostolic authority, Paul appeals to the heart of Philemon and his wife Apphia and to the love that we possess as partakers of the divine nature. “For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love’s sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (vss. 7-9). This was a delicate subject. The memory of Onesimus could incite the flesh if given opportunity, particularly since it is entirely possible that Onesimus had stolen from his master (vss. 18-19).

The epistle’s address is broader than simply to Philemon and his wife, for it extends even to the assembly in his house (vs. 2). How practical are the lessons it contains. Here we find love exercised in the most difficult of circumstances. In it we see the Apostle’s love for Philemon and for Onesimus whom he had begotten in his bonds. We see the stirring of that love in the heart of Philemon for one who had wronged him. Paul wisely appeals to Philemon’s love for him (vss. 9, 17, 20, 22).

Love is obedient, and Paul expresses his confidence in Philemon that the new nature would triumph, exceeding all that was requested of him (vs. 21). This is true Christian conduct, divinely recorded for our admonition.

## Hebrews

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The epistle to the Hebrews bears the name of no earthly writer. Rather, the Lord Himself is peculiarly the Author of this epistle: “God, ... Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1, 2). Christ is seen as the Apostle: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3:1).

The book is written to the Hebrews—the ‘we’ used habitually throughout—a people whose hopes were earthly. They looked for an earthly kingdom and an earthly Messiah, but where was all that now? This epistle lifts their eyes heavenward. There we see the One of whom it is written: “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8, cited from Psa. 45:6). There we see Jesus “who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour” (Heb. 2:9).

For the Jew who had received Jesus as Messiah (Luke 24:21; Acts 19:1-4), this was undoubtedly perplexing. However, for all that the Jew valued, better things are to be found in Christ: a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, a better sacrifice, in heaven a better and abiding substance, and a better country. Hebrews opens to them things seen only by faith.

For us, in a day when Christianity has become an earthly religion, Hebrews likewise takes us out of this scene, through the rent veil, into heaven itself.

Alas, there were those that had partaken of the wonders and miracles of the Holy Ghost, but were in danger of rejecting this testimony, to turn back to the dead ritualism of Judaism. This is apostasy—having come so far, and then turning from the truth. Grace rejected leaves man without remedy.

## Better Things

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The epistle to the Hebrews follows an easily discerned line of reasoning. It neither addresses an assembly, nor takes up matters of the assembly. Instead, it has the form of a treatise, its special purpose outlined above.

In the first chapter we have the Son of God: His glory as Son and Messiah, and His superiority to angels. The second brings before us the Son of Man: the Captain of salvation and Sanctifier of those He calls His brethren. Between the two we have a parenthesis: “If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, ... How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord” (Heb. 2:2-3).

The third chapter contrasts Christ as Son over His own house with Moses; this brings us to the wilderness journey. Many that left Egypt failed to enter the land of Canaan. They were to take heed, lest they too should find within themselves the same heart of unbelief. In the fourth chapter we have the subject of rest. Canaan was their destination, their rest, but there is a rest beyond the promised land—“My rest” (Psa. 95:11). There remains, then, a rest for the people of God. As with those in the wilderness, we have a High Priest—One who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who sympathizes with our infirmities, having been tempted in all things in like manner, “sin apart” (Heb. 4:14-15 JND).

The fifth chapter further develops the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, comparing and contrasting it with the Aaronic priesthood. Christ glorified not Himself to be made a high priest, but God has appointed Him a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Psa. 110:4). The writer would develop this subject further, but must first address their spiritual state; they had become dull of hearing. The things written aforetime are types and shadows, but they didn’t comprehend.

The sixth chapter is an exhortation to “go on [to what belongs] to full growth” (Heb. 6:1 JND). They were not ignorant of the principles of the doctrine of Christ—the Messiah, the Lord’s anointed (Heb. 6:1). Not only that, they had witnessed the power of the Holy Ghost, which in itself spoke of the glorification of the Lord. There was no going back; the former things would be of no help now.

The seventh chapter resumes the subject matter of the fifth. The priesthood of Melchisedec is in every aspect superior to that of Aaron. Abraham, from whom Aaron descended, paid tithes to Melchisedec (Heb. 7:9-10).

In the eighth chapter we have the new covenant—a better one—established upon better promises, of which Christ is the mediator. This is a covenant that will be made with the house of Israel (not the church): “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord” (Heb. 8:10). A new covenant necessarily makes the former old, ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

The ninth chapter contrasts the sacrifices of the old covenant with the one, perfect sacrifice of Christ, a sacrifice that does not give entrance into an earthly tabernacle—which was a figure of the

true—but rather into heaven itself (Heb. 9:24).

The tenth chapter continues with the subject of the sacrifice, now in its application to the believer. “For the law ... can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ... For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:1, 14).

## The Path of Faith

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The doctrinal portion ends with verse 18 of the tenth chapter; the path of faith in practice follows. As purged worshipers, we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. The veil is rent, that is to say, His flesh—the rent veil of the temple confirmed the access we have into the holiest, but was not the means that provided the access (Heb. 10:19-20).

Those to whom the epistle is addressed had suffered persecution, but there could be no drawing back—that would be apostasy. The writer, however, could confidently say, “We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). In chapter six the Holy Spirit is prominent, in chapter ten, the sacrifice of Christ. In each case the behavior of those who had been enlightened, or “shined upon”, is considered. In verse 39 of chapter ten, we see a distinction drawn between those “that believe to the saving of the soul” and those that draw back, having merely enjoyed the blessings (and who were now experiencing the persecution) of their professed position.

The just shall live by faith (Heb. 10:38, cited from Hab. 2:4). God’s word cannot and will not fail; Habakkuk had to learn this, as did those in the eleventh chapter. Each had to walk by faith, not by sight. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

In chapter 12 weights and sin entangle us; the difficulties of the way lead to discouragement; the hands hang down and the knees become feeble. Far above all earthly example, we have One on whom we fix our gaze, and whose path we are to consider, Jesus in the glory—the leader and completer of faith. We also have a loving Father, who sees that we do not wander out of the path, chastening those He loves (ch. 12). “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake ... thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psa. 23:3-4).

The old earthly kingdom and its characteristic Mount, the unapproachable Sinai, are contrasted with the future millennial kingdom (Heb. 12:18-24). Sinai shook with the giving of the law, but His kingdom will be established with the shaking of Heaven and Earth (Heb. 12:26, cited from Hag. 2:6-7). Grace is not a veil for sin, “for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).

The exhortations of the thirteenth chapter close the book. There could be no mingling of the old, earthly altar with the heavenly. Christ had suffered outside the gate; we go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing his reproach (Heb. 13:10-14).

## James

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The Epistle of James is one that has caused many anxious souls difficulty. Those who would falsely teach salvation through works emphasize it. However, a careful reading of the epistle and recognizing to whom it is addressed dispels all difficulties.

James writes to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, both the saved and the unsaved. In the day in which he writes, a saved Jew could still be found in attendance at the synagogue, and be zealous for the law—they were still in association with the unbelieving nation (Acts 21:20). One might have confused a believer with his unbelieving compatriot. This epistle calls upon the believer to show his faith by his outward walk—it is justification before men, in distinct contrast to Romans, where we have justification before God.

One cannot see faith any more than one can see the wind; each, however, affects that which surrounds it in a very visible way. Christendom is full of empty profession; what we find in the epistle of James is necessary admonition for today. Do we seek to blend in, or is the reality of our faith visible to all?

### Outline

Chapter 1. Acting as a Christian is easy when the winds are fair, but what is our response when the storms arise? “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jas. 1:12). Alas! We are apt to let our tongues slip; being a doer of the Word is not in our old nature. However, God the Father has begotten us according to His own will by the word of truth and, thus, doing is no longer bondage, but rather we possess a nature governed by the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:18, 25).

The second chapter presents the inseparable link between faith and practice. We are to walk as those that are to be judged by the law of liberty (Jas. 2:12). In James, Abraham’s public act of faith—offering up Isaac—is mentioned prior to his believing God. “The scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (Jas. 2:23). Nothing here contradicts Romans; all is in perfect harmony (Rom. 4). Abraham’s obedience on Mount Moriah corroborated his faith.

Chapter 3. “My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jas. 3:1). The word “master”, more correctly translated “teacher”, has the sense of a Rabbi (see John 1:38; 3:2). The rabbinical system, characteristic of modern Judaism, has no counterpart in Christianity. Moreover, to walk contrary to that which is taught is a most serious thing. More than anything, it is our speech that betrays us. “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation [behavior] his works with meekness of wisdom” (Jas. 3:13).

The fourth chapter addresses the unbridled nature. Man’s heart is full of covetousness and manifests itself in envy and strife. Such a heart finds fellowship with the world, but friendship with

the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4). The judicial spirit is condemned, as is self-will (Jas. 4:11-17).

The fifth and final chapter begins with a solemn warning against gathering riches, especially at the expense of the poor (Jas. 5:1-6). These were familiar exhortations to the Jew, who naturally looked for earthly blessing (see Amos 2:6). The believer is to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord (Jas. 5:7-8). Faithful men of old are given as examples—men of like passions such as we are. We too have a powerful resource in prayer (Jas. 5:11-18).

## The Epistles of Peter

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The character of Peter's epistles is in keeping with Peter the person. Certainly it is the restored Peter, the Apostle, feeding the flock of God; nevertheless we see in them the experiences of the Gospels (John 21:15-19). The first epistle was probably written from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), while the nearness of his martyrdom suggests that the second could be from Rome (2 Peter 1:14). The reference to Babylon is not symbolic; the verse should read, "She that is elected with you in Babylon salutes you" (JND)—it refers to an individual, not the church. (Election is individual.)

Both epistles are addressed to the Jewish believers scattered throughout Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). They had forsaken Judaism for Christianity, their inheritance was heavenly, and their Messiah glorified. Physically and spiritually they were strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11). The Apostle encourages them in their earthly path, a way fraught with trials and persecution. Salvation in its fullness is a future thing (1 Peter 1:4-5). The government of God is especially brought before us—in the first, towards the righteous, while in the second, in the judgment of the wicked.

## First Peter

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In the first chapter we have the Christian's hope—a living hope. Though there are trials, the results will have an eternal weight (1 Peter 1:7). God's daily government is to be recognized, and we pass this time of sojourning in fear, not because we are uncertain as to salvation, but because we have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:16-19).

In chapter two, verses one through ten, we have Christian privileges. In contrast to the Jewish temple, we are, as living stones, “built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Christ is the corner stone. With our service God-ward thus established, we find there is also a testimony to man: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In connection with these two—our service before God and our testimony before this world—we experience God's moral government in our lives. The ark and Dagon could not dwell together (1 Sam. 5:3). “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

Peter begins his exhortation with, “Beloved, I exhort you, as strangers and sojourners, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11 JND). He views the Christian's pilgrimage as a pathway of suffering, in the midst of which we are to conduct ourselves in such a manner so as to bring glory to God. This applies both in connection with governments and masters, as well as in domestic relationships. “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14).

When our lives are governed by the will of God, we will suffer; such a walk must be at the expense of our own will (1 Peter 4:1, 2). A path of worldly excess may have its pleasures, but those that walk in it will have to give an account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead (1 Peter 4:4-5).

We have a gift; we are to use it for the glory of God as faithful stewards (1 Peter 4:10). If we suffer for the name of Christ, then happy are we (1 Peter 4:14). None are to suffer as an evildoer (1 Peter 4:15). God works his ways of government first with those nearest Him, and so judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

The book closes with the aged Peter exhorting the elders, “Feed the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). And to the younger, “Submit yourselves unto the elder” (1 Peter 5:5). “The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

## Second Peter

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Peter's second epistle addresses the terrible wickedness of the last days of Christendom. Unregenerate teachers, denying the Lord that bought them, would entice with vain words, promising liberty, but leading souls into the bondage of sin (ch. 2). Scoffers would make a mockery of Christianity and the hope of the believer (ch. 3).

While the second and third chapters are dark, the first is bright with encouragement. Peter exhorts them to make their calling and election sure, not in the eyes of God, for that would render the words meaningless, but in their walk. He desires that our entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ would be an abundant one, richly furnished (2 Peter 1:11). Peter recalls the mount of transfiguration; how could he forget that scene (2 Peter 1:17-18). We truly have a sure word, as we await, not the rising of the sun, but the day-star (2 Peter 1:19).

While the language of this epistle, and especially the second chapter, resembles Jude's, there it is apostasy that is spoken of, and here it is sin. Peter in using the angels as an example says: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned" (2 Peter 2:4), while Jude, using a similar example, relates: "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation" (Jude 6).

It was Peter's desire that they might be mindful of the words spoken before by the apostles (2 Peter 3:1, 2). His manner of speaking offers no suggestion whatsoever of apostolic succession. Just as there were mockers in Noah's day, their voices are today loud and clear. The world, however, is not now facing a flood, but fire, and the total dissolution of heaven and earth. Knowing this, we are to be diligent, "found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

## First, Second and Third John

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John's epistles were written very late in the first century. Mystical interpretations had arisen concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; Christianity was viewed as a system that must grow and develop with time—a view widely held today. It is the “last time” (1 John 2:18). The Apostle counters these thoughts by taking the reader back to the beginning to the time when Christ was manifested here in this world.

John presents things in the abstract, that is, he gives the essential character without reference to experience. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:9) is a statement of fact. Likewise, “He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:8). These do not describe a person but that new life, begotten of God—eternal life, in contrast to what we are by nature. It is vital that we have a perspective outside the context of experience, especially when Christendom is so corrupted by false doctrine. In John's epistle, it is not a question of walking according to the light, but rather of walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

## First John

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The grand theme of the first epistle is eternal life in the Son of God. In John's Gospel we see that life everywhere displayed in the person of the Lord—"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Here we see the result in the believer as a partaker of that divine life.

This epistle is not expository, but rather the outpouring of the aged Apostle's heart. Thirteen times John refers to that which he was writing or his purpose in writing. Repeated references are made to the things that we as believers know and to those things whereby we know the true from the false. Nine times he uses the expression "born" or "begotten of God," showing what characterizes the new nature. We are members of a new family.

John writes, desiring that the believer's joy may be full (1 John 1:4). This can only come by being in communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, as known and revealed by the apostles. He writes that believers should not sin; the advocacy of Christ restores communion when we do (1 John 2:1). In closing the epistle the Apostle declares, "These things have I written to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13 JND).

In the second chapter, believers in different stages of maturity are addressed—the fathers, young men, and babes. While the young men and babes are warned of the dangers ahead, to the fathers he twice writes, "Because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13, 14). Desirous of nothing more and nothing new, Christ, who is from the beginning, is everything to them. Even the babes in Christ have an unction from the Holy One—the Holy Spirit—and "know all things" (1 John 2:20). They needed to possess nothing further; there was no new thing to know.

In the third chapter, the children of God are manifest, as are the children of the devil. In the fourth we have tests whereby we may distinguish false spirits from the true. We ought to love one another; it is characteristic of the divine nature. Such love is exercised in obedience and will not be at the expense of the truth. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 John 5:2).

We know the true God, we possess eternal life, and anything outside this is an idol. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

## Second John

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John's second epistle is addressed to the "elect lady and her children" (2 John 1). Possibly "lady" should be left as the feminine proper name "Kyria"; it is not, however, a reference to the church as some have suggested, for the church is not elected; individuals are.

Like the first, this epistle is concerned with the maintenance of the truth. John greatly rejoiced to find among her children those walking in truth (2 John 4). Again we have "that which we had from the beginning" (2 John 5). Here it is that we love one another; but the love that flows from God maintains the truth: "This is love, that we walk after his commandments" (2 John 6). Many deceivers have gone out into this world; they are not to be received and must be rejected because of their doctrine (2 John 7-10). The affectionate and hospitable nature, especially that of a sister, could overstep its mark in receiving such an individual. John warns that we should not greet such a one (2 John 10). "God speed" in the Greek is the word "rejoice" and was used as a salutation; likewise, we should not encourage those who deny the person of the Lord, even with something as innocent as a greeting.

## Third John

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This letter is addressed to the well-beloved Gaius of whom John could say, “I love in the truth” (3 John 1). Here was a brother that John could wish above all things that he might prosper and be in health—even as he prospered in his soul (3 John 2). In this epistle it is not those that are to be rejected, but rather those who are to be received: “We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth” (3 John 8).

Again the subject is the truth: “I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth” (3 John 3).

Gaius’ charity and hospitality is recorded (3 John 6). Diotrephes, on the other hand, loved to have the preeminence and would not receive the Apostle. His prating and malicious words would not be forgotten (3 John 9, 10). Demetrius had a good report of all men and of the truth itself (3 John 12).

Trusting to see them shortly, John sends greetings and instructs Gaius to greet the friends by name—and so should we (3 John 14).

## Jude

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Jude's epistle predates the epistles of John both morally and chronologically. In John's epistle the antichrists had gone out from among the Christians; in this epistle men have "crept in unawares" (Jude 4). Jude's language is similar to that of Peter (2 Peter 2), though, whereas Peter emphasizes sin—"having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin" (2 Peter 2:14), Jude's subject is apostasy, the giving up of the faith.

Jude warns against those that rejected the truth for the sake of temporal gain, meanwhile exhorting the saints to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Apostasy was not a phase in the church's history, but would continue until the coming of the Lord with His saints, as Enoch prophesied—"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14, 15).

### Outline

The book begins with the believer's security in Jesus Christ and ends with praise to a Saviour God who alone is able to keep us from falling. In-between we have three examples from the Old Testament of apostasy (Jude 5-7), three more that illustrate the progression of evil in Christendom (Jude 11), and four examples from nature, each of which ends in judgment (Jude 12-13).

Because of their unbelief, many in Israel failed to reach the promised land. Angels, who in pride departed from their original state, are kept in eternal chains awaiting judgment. The immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted in the eternal fire of judgment. In like manner, these apostates "defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8).

In Cain we see man and his religion in violent opposition to the truth (Gen. 4). Balaam said what was required for a fee and sowed corruption in God's assembly (Num. 22-24; Rev. 2:14). Finally, in Core we have one who openly rebelled against God's chosen and holy priesthood, claiming that the entire congregation was holy (Num. 16:3).

An apostate is twice dead: first, by nature, and second, in his rejection of the grace of God (Jude 12). The navigator, both ancient and modern, has found his way by the fixed and enduring placement of the stars. A planet provides no such anchor and resides in gloomy darkness (Jude 13).

The believer is exhorted in four things: building, praying, keeping, and looking. "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21).

We are to have compassion on those that have been caught up in the influence of others, though the garment spotted by the flesh is to be hated (Jude 23). For the saint of God, Jude with confidence offers this doxology, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present

you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24-25).

## Revelation

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The Apostle John wrote this, the final book of the Holy Scriptures, while exiled on the Greek isle of Patmos. It is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (not of John), “which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1). The use of the verbs “shew” and “signify” mark the uniquely symbolic nature of this book.

Peculiar blessing is attached to its reading: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). Just as Belshazzar’s gifts had no appeal to Daniel, the rewards of this world cannot entice us if we grasp the significance of this book (Dan. 5:16-17). Banished by the emperor, the Apostle describes himself as a “fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9 JND), a position that is ours also, as we await the call, “Come up hither” (Rev. 4:1).

### Outline

The Revelation may be divided into three parts: the things that John saw, chapter 1; the things which are, chapters 2 and 3; and the things which shall be hereafter, chapters 4 through 22. The first eleven chapters are, for the most part, chronological, taking us from the apostles’ day through the history of Christendom (chapters 2 and 3) to the closing judgments. Chapters 7, 10, and the first thirteen verses of chapter 11 provide us with parenthetical detail. From chapter 11, verse 19, through to the end of the book we have various sketches detailing Israel’s history, apostate Christendom, this earth, the millennium, and the eternal state. It is important to understand that the events of these chapters overlap the history of the earlier chapters.

## The Seven Churches

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In the first chapter Christ is seen as the Son of Man, not in the character with which the Apostle was familiar, but clothed for judgment (Rev. 1:13-16). John sees Him in the midst of seven candlesticks, which are the seven assemblies to whom the portion is addressed, presented here in responsibility as light bearers (Rev. 1:20).

In chapters 2 and 3, each assembly is addressed in turn. The choice of seven (completeness) and the language used throughout (Rev. 2:25; “hereafter” in Rev 4:1) cause us to understand that an historical outline of Christendom is being presented, not simply seven letters to first century churches.

The first three assemblies describe successive periods. Ephesus, the church of the first century, is characterized as having left her first love (Rev. 2:4). Smyrna is the persecuted church of the second and third centuries, which Satan as a roaring lion sought to devour. In Pergamos we see the activity of the deceiving serpent. Under Constantine, Christendom united with the pagan political world.

At Thyatira—that system over which Rome holds sway—there is a change. We now have the exhortation to “hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25), and “he that hath an ear” is no longer addressed to the church as a whole (Rev. 2:26, 29). The final four churches represent successive overlapping states that continue until the Lord’s coming. Thyatira is followed by protestant Sardis. Philadelphia is a moral state; they have kept His Word and have not denied His name (Rev. 3:8). The hope of the rapture has been restored, for they are kept “out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world” (Rev. 3:10 JND). Laodicea describes the moral state of Christendom today; claiming to be rich and in need of nothing, its wretched condition is exposed. The Lord is seen as outside the assembly knocking (Rev. 3:20). Apostate Christendom will ultimately be spued out of His mouth.

## The Seventieth Week of Daniel

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The historic events described in chapters 4 through 11 come after the rapture. The church, as with John, awaits the call “come up hither” (Rev. 4:1). In chapter 4, God’s judicial throne appears; all are His by right as Creator. In chapter 5 we see the Lamb as Redeemer; He alone is worthy to open the book with seven seals—the counsels of God concerning this earth. The twenty-four elders are the Old and New Testament saints; only they can sing the new song of the redeemed. Their presence in heaven is accounted for by the rapture.

The events that unfold with the opening of the seals (chapters 6 and 8) and the sounding of the first six trumpets (chapters 8 and 9) form the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27). This final terrible week of seven years may be divided into two 3 ½-year periods.

The beginning of the week is marked by a covenant between Israel and the revived Roman Empire—a united Europe under 10 rulers, supported by the papacy, Babylon the Great (Dan. 7:7; Rev. 13:1; 17:3). This period is marked by political conquest, sword, famine, pestilence, and political chaos (Rev. 6). Many faithful to the Word of God will be martyred (Rev. 6:9-11; 17:6).

The rise to prominence of the little horn (the Beast) marks the middle of the week (Dan. 7:7-8, 19-25; Rev. 13:1-10). All remaining vestiges of apostate Christendom (Babylon the Great) will be thrown off and destroyed (Rev. 17:16-17). Jewish laws will be changed and the temple profaned (Dan. 7:25; 12:11). The Beast will be worshipped (Rev. 13:4), while the Antichrist “opposes and exalts himself on high against all called God, or object of veneration; so that he himself sits down in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4 JND). The giving over of man to satanic power marks the second half of the week. With the sixth trumpet, the king of the North will begin his mobilization with attacks against the kingdom of the Beast (Rev. 9:13-19). The seventh trumpet portends the time of God’s wrath against His enemies and the establishment of His eternal reign (Rev. 11:15-18).

## Prophetic Scenes

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Chapter 12 takes up the history of Israel—the woman—and the man-child she bore—Christ—whom Rome sought to destroy. The chapter resumes her history with the last 3 ½-years of tribulation, a time when the dragon—the devil—will sorely persecute the Jewish remnant.

Along with the dragon, the two persons described in chapter 13 complete a trinity of evil. The Roman Empire in its final form will rise as a beast out of the sea with seven heads and ten horns. In the middle of the week, power is consolidated in a single individual—the Beast (Rev. 13:5). From verse 11 we have the Antichrist, who will work in concert with the Beast. Having two horns like a lamb, he speaks as a dragon (Rev. 13:11). While this evil trio acts out their final script, God, ever in control, intervenes in grace and judgment (ch. 14).

## Seven Vials

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The seven vials of chapters 15 and 16 are poured out during the last half of the week and fall between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. They are the seven last plagues; in them God's fury is completed (Rev. 15:1). The vials, in contrast to the trumpets, are not limited to the "third part" and are poured upon the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun. Although religious Babylon is thrown off in the middle of the week, political Babylon as a symbol of the Gentile dominion that began with Nebuchadnezzar is not destroyed until the end of the week with the last vial (Rev. 16:17-21).

## Babylon's Destruction to the Eternal State

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Chapters 17 and 18 give us the history of religious Babylon, the mother of harlots. Chapter 18 presents God's view of her destruction. In contrast, chapter 19 takes us to the marriage of the Lamb.

The next scene, witnessed by John, is of Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords, appearing with His saints. The Beast and the kings of the earth with their armies will gather to make war with the Lamb, only to be taken and thrown alive into the lake of fire; the rest will be slain (Rev. 19:11-21).

This begins a period of 1000 years during which time Satan will be bound, and those martyred under the Beast will reign with Christ—this is the millennium (Rev. 20:3, 4). At the close of the 1000 years, Satan will be loosed for a season, during which time he will deceive those nations that have feigned obedience, gathering them to their final battle, where they will be destroyed by fire (Rev. 20:7-9). The second resurrection, the resurrection of damnation, will follow, with the judgment of the dead before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15, John 5:29).

The first eight verses of chapter 21 complete the history, with the introduction of a new heaven and a new earth and the establishment of the eternal state. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

## The Heavenly Glory of the Millennium

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With the events from the fall of Babylon to the eternal state described, we now return to consider the position of the church during the millennium. In distinct contrast to “Babylon the Great”—a city—and the “mother of harlots”—a woman—we have the bride, the Lamb’s wife, descending out of heaven from God as a great city, the holy Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-10). This city is not to be confused with the new Jerusalem of verse 2, or the earthly millennial Jerusalem (Ezek. 48:15-20). The description and city are symbolic. The first five verses of chapter 22 complete the description.

### Conclusion

The words of the prophecy are faithful and true and must soon come to pass (Rev. 22:6). The state of each will be fixed for eternity—the unjust will be unjust, and the righteous will be righteous (Rev. 22:11). “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

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