

Period of Establishment, Extension & Expansion

A survey paper on the New Testament (Includes book summaries, chapter titles and five eternal truths)

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Part 2 - Summary

(Acts 1:1-18:22)

From the time Jesus (Jewish pronunciation: “*Yeshua*”) came to Earth, to the day He ascended back to God (“*Adonai*”), both His message and His means were not at all what the Jewish people expected. The nation of Israel, long lorded over, and “changed hands” by foreign nations (only briefly enjoying independent rule), eagerly awaited the coming of its military Messiah (“*Mashiach*”): overthrowing Rome, and restoring to it physical prosperity once again (Marty 3-22, Stern JNT 381).

Instead, Jesus’ mission was one of eternal rescue, reaching far beyond the current state of events, setting the stage of greatest conquest for the human race: deliverance from spiritual death, and reunification with a holy God (John 6:37-40). In the end, Jesus became the “mustard seed” He himself described (Matt. 13:32), planting truths about His kingdom into the hearts and minds of His chosen twelve disciples (“*talmidim*”). Eleven of these men, in turn, would go on to be His seeds to His church, preaching, teaching, healing, and defending His name, through the person and work of His promised Holy Spirit (“*Ruach HaKodesh*”) (Stern JNT 380).

Luke, a Greek physician, records the most detailed account of Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, as well as the history of the **Establishment**, **Extension**, and **Expansion** of the Church (Marty 84). Himself a Gentile (“*Goy*”) convert, Dr. Luke gives us a thorough and engaging look at the continuing work of Jesus, through the “Acts” of His chosen apostles (“*emissaries*”) (Stern JNT 379).

Luke’s focus then, in the book of Acts (agreed to have been written around A.D. 61), his companion volume to his Gospel, is on the personal work of the Holy Spirit (Zondervan 1272). Jesus spoke of Him on three occasions: just prior to His “last supper” (Luke 21:13-15 and Mark 13:11), from within the upper room (John 14:26-27), and upon the “Mount of Ascension,” as He was about to return into Heaven (Acts 1:8). Calling Him “another Counselor,” (the term “another,” in the Greek to mean “of the same kind”; showing triune equality of the Godhead--Dr. James F. Engle, Senior Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church in Wausau, WI), the Holy Spirit’s role would be that of helper, facilitator, and advocate to the apostles; essentially, Jesus Himself, present with them in spirit.

Following Jesus' ascension, in light of the betrayal and death of Judas Iscariot ("*Y'hudah Ben-Shim'on from K'riot*"), the initial task before His apostles, was that of electing his replacement (Acts 1:15-26). They "cast lots," as was their custom, and Matthias ("*Mattityahu*") was chosen (Stern JNT 139 & 381).

Luke then records the events which occurred on the day of Pentecost (the festival of "*Shavu'ot*"), the Jewish Festival of Weeks. Because this is the second of "three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Passover, and Sukkot," the Feast of Tabernacles), many Jews were gathered in Jerusalem at this time from all known areas of the ancient world (Stern JNT 382, Rich).

But no one could predict the scope of what was to happen on *this* day of Pentecost...

Luke writes that "they were all gathered together in one place," when suddenly the promised Holy Spirit makes His entrance (Acts 2:1). He then displays supernatural evidence of His presence through sounds ("like the blowing of a violent wind"--Acts 2:2), sights ("seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them"--Acts 2:3), and signs ("all of them...began to speak in other tongues"--Acts 2:4). The spectacle is no less than remarkable to those gathered there. Many note that although each is from a different region of the world, they hear these "unschooled, ordinary men" from Galilee ("*the Galil*") speaking in "his own native language" (Acts 2:6; 4:13) (Stern JNT 380).

The Apostle Peter, seen first by us in Luke's Gospel as a man of empty boasts, denying Jesus at His arrest, now empowered through the Holy Spirit, addresses the crowd, delivering the sermon which inaugurates what has been called the "Day of the Lord" (Marty 107). He gives a prophetic defense of what is being witnessed (Acts 2:16-21), recounting Jesus' purpose in coming to Earth, in turn, indicting them for their role in His sacrificial death (Acts 2:22-23). Peter's sermon climaxes with Jesus' resurrection, foretold by King David, contrasting the apostles' personal, testimonial proof that Jesus is alive, with the evidence of David's death and burial (Acts 2:24-32). He then closes, declaring that "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ ("*Mashiach*")" (Stern JNT 381, Acts 2:36).

Shocked and openly-remorseful (Acts 2:37), the crowd looks to Peter for absolution and salvation. Luke records Peter's instruction for them to "repent and be baptized," and to "save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:38, 40). The results of the Holy Spirit's work this day..."about 3,000 were added," new believers in Jesus Christ, founding members in the **establishment** of His church (Acts 2:41).

Immediately begins the internal ministry of the first Christian community, pooling together its resources for the good of all, adding yet more believers, as it shares publicly its testimony of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42-47).

It is interesting to note that the events of Pentecost, marking the establishment of the Church, occurred on the same day Jews traditionally celebrate "the giving of the Torah" through Moses, on Mount Sinai; itself, another milestone event. Furthermore, Shavu'ot, and its agricultural commemoration of the bringing of the harvested "first fruits" into the Temple at Jerusalem ("*Yerushalayim*") might be compared to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and God's gathering His first fruits of believers together. It was on this day, He chose to plant His Church, and thus begin the spread of His message of grace and redemption from that place, across cities, regions, continents, seas, and finally forward across time itself, impacting us still today! (Stern JNT 381, Rich)

We soon begin to see, through Peter, the outreach of the early church, with the healing of a crippled man, in Jesus' name, followed by Peter's evangelistic message of Jesus Christ to those present. This healing is "Christological" in nature; demonstrating, through the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was and is "God's glorified servant," spoken of by the prophet Isaiah ("*Yeshu'yahu*") (Marty 108). All here, however, are not led to believe in Christ. Peter and John next find themselves, like Jesus, players from the first "movie," and members of the Sanhedrin: Annas ("*Anan*"), and Caiaphas ("*Kayafa*"), as well as a handful of "other men of the high priest's family" (Acts 3-4:6, Stern JNT 379).

Together with the formally-crippled man, both Peter and John stand boldly, as Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," addresses them, placing the authority of this healing upon Jesus Christ, and pointing to eternal salvation in His name alone (Acts 4:8-12). The healed man, "over 40 years old," and standing physically before these Jewish leaders, confirms an undeniable miracle (Acts 4:22, Marty 109). Furthermore, they are amazed at the learning of these apparently "unlearned" men (Acts 4:13).

Although threatened by the apparent revival of what they saw as a “dead” heresy (begun by the crucified Jesus of Nazareth), they choose to give Peter and John a mere verbal warning (Acts 4:18).

The two apostles respond by placing the choice back on these leaders to “judge for [themselves] whether it is right in God’s sight to obey [them] rather than God,” adding it would be impossible for the apostles not to speak of events they themselves have witnessed (Acts 4:19-20). The result of this incident finds the members of the Sanhedrin at odds as to how they should “punish” these men, or if they should do anything at all, because the results of their deeds brought visible praise to God (Acts 4:21). Thus, Peter and John were released; the prayer meeting that day resulting in God’s material endorsement of their obedience:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word
of God boldly” (Acts 4:23-31)

This, in turn, prompted more fellowship, resulting in the pooling of additional resources from Jewish believers. It is here we are introduced to Barnabas (“*Bar-Nabba*”), who not only joins the Church, but brings to it money gained from a “field he owned” (Acts 4:32-37, Stern JNT 379).

Barnabas’ integrity and honesty is then contrasted against the dishonesty and disobedience of Ananias (“*Chananyah*”), and his wife Sapphira (“*Shappirah*”), themselves former land owners, each publicly struck dead by the Holy Spirit, choosing from its sale to secretly withhold from the Church some of their profit (Acts 5:1-11). This graphic demonstration of judgment served as a sobering reminder to the early church of God’s holiness (Marty 109; Stern JNT 379, 382).

As the Church continues to grow, as more Jews (and a few local Gentiles) come to faith in Jesus Christ, and as His message is validated by the Spirit’s healing of many, opposition also grows, and once more we witness the arrest of the apostles. This time, they are released that night by “an angel of the Lord” (Acts 5:12-19). The next day, the controversy over their disappearance is met with fear by the Temple guard, and the apostles are delivered--this time, gently--before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:21-26).

This results in their repeated defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, infuriating many of the leaders gathered; they now want them dead (Acts 5:33).

However, the power of the Holy Spirit shows once more, speaking wisdom through Gamaliel, a Pharisee (“*Parush*”), to the Sanhedrin, recommending they not hinder this movement. If it is a man-made cause, it will eventually fail, but if God is truly behind it, they will find themselves “fighting against God” Himself. The Jewish leaders agree, and upon having physically punished them, they again release the apostles, made now even bolder by their persecutions (Acts 5:34-42, Stern JNT 382).

They would need such boldness, as resistance to the message of Jesus Christ would soon begin to truly test their faith.

Luke then takes a moment to give us a look at the forming infrastructure of the early church, with the appointing of the first church “deacons,” seven in all, given to oversee the distribution of food equally among the widows of the growing body of believers. This is in response to apparent discrimination of “Hellenistic,” or Greek widows, and illustrates some of the early “growing pains” within the body of the Church (Acts 6:1-7, Marty 109). Even in what might appear as an unpleasant incident, we are encouraged that, even in this, “the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly;” most notably, “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

God, having established His church through the work of His Holy Spirit, now begins its period of **Extension**, with the introduction, vibrant message, opposition, and killing of Stephen, “a man full of God’s grace and power” (Acts 6:8). Stephen’s preaching divides his listeners, and as he is brought before the Sanhedrin on trumped-up charges, he accuses the Jewish leaders of ignoring the proofs of Jesus’ kingship, comparing Jesus’ trials on Earth, with those of the Old Testament patriarchs (Acts 7:2-19). He boldly challenges their core beliefs: that they can rest in the security of their land, the Jewish law, or in the grandeur of the Temple, as proofs of God’s favor on them (Marty 113). They are angered, as he shows the finger of God is pointed squarely at them, for rejecting and killing His promised Messiah. Moreover, when he then is interrupted by the Holy Spirit with a vision, and describes to them seeing Jesus “standing at the right hand of God,” the crowd is enraged, and rushes him, dragging him outside the city walls to stone him to death (Acts 7:20-58).

Luke then gives us a touching portrait of Jesus, in the words of Stephen:

“while they were stoning him, [he] prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...
[and]...do not hold this sin against them”” (Acts 7:59-60)

It is in this cacophony of brutality, we are introduced to Saul (“*Sha’ul*”), the “architect” of Stephen’s death, yet also the man whom God would soon change to expand the message of Christ to the Gentiles.

The stoning of Stephen was pivotal, in that it marked the sudden scattering of the Apostles throughout the outer regions of the known Jewish world. Stephen’s message now also convinced the governing powers of Rome that Christianity (soon after, called “the Way”) was not simply a part of Judaism; it was, in itself, completely independent, and as such, was soon considered rogue, and dangerous (Marty 113).

Following Stephen’s death, believers take time to mourn him, even as Saul unleashes his religious fury on followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1-3). Meanwhile at this time, it is believed James (“*Ya’akov*”) wrote his epistle to the Jewish believers, “scattered among the nations,” to encourage them, in the face of rising persecution (James 1:1; Marty 38, 117; Zondervan 1421).

It might be said, however, that as opposition increases, so does God’s demonstration of power. For example, we are introduced to Philip’s ministry to the Gentiles in Samaria, and he is directed by the Holy Spirit to counsel an Ethiopian official on the mystery of Christ, as described in Scripture (Acts 8:4-35). The official is led to receive, as his own, the truth and redemption found in Jesus, and in finding a pool of water, asks Philip, “Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” (Acts 8:36) No sooner does Philip bring the man out of the water, that Philip is suddenly, and supernaturally, whisked away by the power of the Spirit, continuing his preaching elsewhere, while the official begins, joyfully, his journey of faith (Acts 8:39-40).

Perhaps the most noticeable demonstration, though, of the Holy Spirit’s power is in the transformation of Saul, chief persecutor of the early church. It happens to him, as he may have said to the church at Ephesus, when he is in the midst of “transgressions and sins,” carrying in his hand to Damascus (located in the north region, above Galilee), official orders from the high priest at Jerusalem, which decreed imprisonment for followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:1-2, Zondervan 2194).

He is suddenly struck blind by a bright light, seen also by his traveling party, finding himself personally addressed by the glorified Jesus Christ (Acts 9:3-7; 22:9). Led into Damascus by those who have accompanied him, and later prayed over by Ananias, a disciple (himself led to Saul by a vision), Saul is given back his sight (Acts 9:8-17).

Filled now with the Holy Spirit, Saul no doubt turns some heads. While in the city, he meets and befriends the other disciples of Christ, returning into the synagogues, no longer seeking to persecute, but instead to preach Jesus as “the Son of God” (Acts 9:19-22).

Narrowly escaping a plot to kill him, and with the help of his newfound family of believers in Christ, he escapes to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-25). Jerusalem church leaders are understandably hesitant to accept him, but Barnabas persuades them, recounting to them Saul’s fearless preaching “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:26-28). When a plot is learned to assassinate him, he is given escape, and sent back home to Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30).

David Stern, in his Jewish New Testament Commentary, suggests that the brothers sent him so that “the other aspects of [his] spiritual life could grow to match his zeal” (Stern JNTC 256). Meanwhile, Saul’s boldness sees the church in the three major regions of the Jewish world (Judea, Galilee, and Samaria) “strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, [growing]...in numbers, living in fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). So begins the period of **Expansion** for the early church of Jesus Christ.

Armed now with the strength of a former Jewish zealot, as well as the zeal of a once simple fisherman, the Holy Spirit begins to widen the scope of God’s church, gathering to it both Jews, and Gentiles alike. Acts of healing (like that of Aeneas, as found in Acts 9:32-35), intensify, with a miracle of resurrection. Tabitha (“*Tavita*”), a faithful disciple in Joppa, days dead, her body “washed” and prepared for burial, at Peter’s command, is given life once more (Acts 9:36-41). Matthew Henry, in his Concise Commentary On The Bible, says that demonstrations such as these show that God “overrules every event for the good of those who trust in Him, and for the glory of His name” (MHCCOTB Acts Ch 9). There comes with these events yet another outpouring from many, placing their trust in Jesus Christ, resulting again in further church growth. Moreover, this growth soon finds both the Apostle Peter, and a high-ranking military official facing a new challenge of faith...

When devout, generous, “God-fearing,” Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, is unexpectedly visited by God in a vision, he obeys, sending his men to find Peter (Acts 10:1-8). The next day, we’re told, as he prays, Peter, too, receives a vision from God, in the form of a “sheet,” containing various kinds of living things deemed ceremonially unclean by Jewish standards (Acts 10:9-12). When told to “kill and eat,” Peter refuses: “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (Acts 10:13-14). He is then instructed that anything “unclean” could be made clean, by God’s power, and that he should then receive it as clean.

This vision then appears twice, each time the instruction is the same. However, with the third re-showing, comes also the Spirit’s instruction for him to go with the men who were now downstairs, as they have been sent by God (Acts 10:16-20).

We are then told that by the time he reaches Cornelius, and the Gentiles gathered together with him, Peter understands the meaning of his vision:

“God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean...I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right” (Acts 10:28, 34).

He goes on to describe the “good news of peace” found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36-43). Suddenly, without warning, and without them even being formally invited to trust by faith in Jesus, Luke records that “the Holy Spirit [comes] on all who [hear] the message,” much to the amazement of the Jewish believers accompanying Peter (Acts 10:44-46). All gathered are baptized, “having received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:47-48).

This then ignites a chain of events, with these new believers sharing with those around them, and soon word spreads of an open “door of faith to the Gentiles,” resulting in criticism from Jewish believers, upon Peter’s return to Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-3, Martyr 124). Peter explains the Holy Spirit’s role in coming to him, and the trust in Jesus of Cornelius and his family, and the Jerusalem brothers rejoice. These would later join those scattered by persecution, to begin sharing the Gospel to the Greeks (Acts 11:18-21).

With this in mind, Saul is now brought back from Tarsus to teach for a time at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Perhaps it is also during this time, Peter having fallen back into a pattern of favoritism against Gentiles, is confronted and chastised by Saul for his

hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-21). Saul and Barnabas are then sent with gifts to the believers in Judea, a growing area of danger for the Church (Acts 11:27-12:1).

It is in Judea, that Herod Agrippa I, zealous against Christ followers, orders the execution of the Apostle James (Acts 12:2). Enjoying afterwards, in doing so, the favor of the Jewish people, he finds and arrests Peter, intending to have him tried (Acts 11:3-4). Meanwhile, in the home of John Mark, believers in Jesus pray for Peter, resulting that night in Peter's angelic rescue (Acts 11:5-11). When those gathered in prayer see Peter standing before them, they are "astonished" (Acts 11:16). They listen, as he recounts to them how God led him to freedom.

The next day, Herod's anger burns, when he is unable to locate the famed apostle (Acts 12:18-19). His life ultimately ends in a violent manner when, after declaring himself as a god before the people, "an angel of the Lord [strikes] him down"; and upon hearing of God's power, the Church again grows stronger (Acts 12:21-24).

Later, having strengthened the Church in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas return, bringing with them John Mark. During a commissioning service, Saul's name ("*Responded; prayed for*") is changed to Paul ("*Small; humble*") (Acts 12:1-3) (See note about "Saul" and "Paul"). Paul and Barnabas (with John Mark) then set sail south to the isle of Cyprus, where the ruling Head, Sergius Paulus, through the blinding of his wicked attendant by the Holy Spirit, comes to faith in Christ (Acts 13:4-12) (See note about "Cyprus").

As the party turns north to Pisidian Antioch, John Mark leaves them for home. Paul's preaching then brings both rejection, and acceptance in what would eventually become the first "fully Gentile Christian community" (Acts 13:13-52) (See note about "Pisidian Antioch").

This first missionary journey climaxes in Paul's preaching boldly at Iconium, followed by his narrow escape (Acts 14:1-7). The ignorant worship of him and his party as "gods" by the Gentiles in Lystra (after witnessing the healing of a crippled man), through the interference of Jewish zealots, turns to rage (Acts 14:8-19a). Stoning Paul and dragging his body outside the city for dead, he is then revived, returning again into the city (Acts 14:19a-20). After a short travel through Syria, and Derbe, Paul returns to Lystra, to encourage the disciples there, telling them of the "many hardships" which lay ahead for

them, for the cause of the Gospel (Acts 14:20-24). It is then believed, upon coming back to Antioch, followed by his subsequent return to Jerusalem, that he may have written his first epistle, a letter to the Galatian church (Marty 134).

Shortly before leaving the believers in Syria, Paul and Barnabas find themselves in the midst of a heated debate over the requirement of the rite of Jewish circumcision for Gentile believers into the Church (Acts 15:1-2). As they journey toward Jerusalem, commissioned by the church, “they told how the Gentiles had been converted,” which encourages those who travel with them (Acts 15:3).

Paul and his party are welcomed by the brothers, even as the Jerusalem council engages itself in active arguments (Acts 15:4). Luke records it is Peter who is used to finally bring peace to this issue, when he addresses the Council, stating “we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God,” proposing instead more practical boundaries for righteous living be set up for them to live by (Acts 15:7-21). Two men, Judas and Silas, are then chosen to go with Paul and Barnabas, carrying with them a letter of clarification to Gentile believers locally, and into the far regions beyond Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-29).

After ministering together for an undetermined time in Antioch, a quarrel arises between Paul and Barnabas regarding John Mark’s earlier decision to leave them, while on the road to Pisidian Antioch (Acts 15:35-38). Stern writes that Paul “was unwilling to be burdened by a companion he considered unreliable...[while Barnabas]...was willing to put up with his nephew” (Stern JNTC 280). Fierce debate finds each going his separate ways, and the church at Antioch intervenes: Paul chooses Silas, returning into Syria; Barnabas and John Mark sail for Cyprus (Acts 15:39-41).

While on this his second missionary journey, returning to Lystra, Paul chooses a young convert, the son of a Greek and a Jewess, who may have come to faith in Christ during Paul’s initial visit there (Acts 16:1-3, Zondervan 1392). It is on this journey, the Holy Spirit gives implicit direction to Paul’s party, opening specific areas to them, while closing others (Acts 16:4-7). Led in a vision into Macedonia, a region many miles north of Lystra, they see the conversion in Philippi of a Gentile woman, Lydia, the exorcism in Thyatira of a demon-possessed slave girl, and humiliation of Paul and Silas at the hands of the Gentile authorities of Thyatira (Acts 16:11-23).

Rejoicing over their suffering while in jail, seeing it as identification with Jesus' suffering, Paul and Silas begin singing; an "violent earthquake" shakes the foundation of the prison (Acts 16:23-26). When Paul addresses the jailer, comforted they had not escaped, the jailer, and later his entire family, trust in Jesus (Acts 16:27-34). The following day, unwilling, as Roman citizens to be so mistreated and quietly dismissed, Paul's party receives a public apology, before being kindly escorted out of the city (Acts 16:35-39).

While still in the region of Macedonia, Paul's preaching in the Thessalonian synagogue, while gaining more followers, incites a riot. With the Spirit's help, he and Silas are able to slip away from harm (Acts 17:1-5). When Jewish zealots from Thessalonica learn of Paul's teaching in Berea, they follow him, stirring up the crowds, and causing Paul to escape to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remain to carry on their ministry to the Berean church (Acts 17:10-15).

By this time, the Church has become well-established, and Paul's preaching is causing a stir, even amongst the philosophers of Greece (Acts 17:17-21). Given an invitation, he addresses them as kindred intellects, appealing to their desire to know the "unknown god" (Acts 17:22-23). As a result of his "apology" to the "Lord of heaven and earth," his recount of God's sovereignty over all men, and the role of judge, given to "the man He has appointed...raising Him from the dead," a few believe, including a Greek woman, named Damaris (Acts 17:24-34).

We are told Paul decides not to continue waiting for Silas and Timothy, but leaves Athens for Corinth. It is at this time

Is it possible Paul perhaps foresaw what eventually awaited him, once he returned to Jerusalem, and this thought was used by the Holy Spirit to propel Paul on more eagerly? If so, we have no indication this hindered him. However, it is in Corinth, Paul's ministry takes an important turn...

Luke records Paul stays and works as a "tentmaker," alongside Jewish believer, Aquila, and his wife, Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3). Jewish resistance to his preaching then grows so intense, Paul's anger flares in protest against them:

"Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

Even in the wake of such a heated confrontation, Crispus, the synagogue ruler, upon receiving Paul's message of Christ, appears to resign his post, replaced by Sosthenes, who is later beaten by Jewish zealots before an uninterested Roman proconsul, Gallio (Acts 18:8, 17). Paul, understandably frustrated at the people's lack of faith is, given a vision one night. God's voice speaks courage to him, resulting in his remaining to teach in Corinth another year (Acts 18:9-11). Encouraging word is sent to him by Timothy about the growth of the believers at Thessalonica, and Paul composes for them his first letter, followed shortly thereafter, by his second (Marty 142, 148).

After this, he sets sail with Priscilla and Aquila to Syria, then to Ephesus, where the Jews there aren't quick to accept Jesus as the Christ, but because they like Paul, they ask him to remain with them longer (Acts 18:18-20). He declines, but adds "I will come back if it is God's will" (Acts 18:21).

On his way to his third missionary journey, traveling into Asia, Paul returns to the believers at Antioch, bringing us full full-circle back to the place where the ministry and impact of the Holy Spirit in him first began (Acts 18:22).

The events which follow, conclude the period of the expansion of the Church, as it becomes a permanent fixture in the lives of the ancient world.

It will soon become the **consolidation** of the "body of Christ," (I Cor. 12:27), made up of Jew and Gentile alike. It will come to be a source of life and grace to some, of contention and conflict to others...

...so much so as it is today--even so, come Lord!

Book Summaries

James

Author: James, the half-brother of the Lord*

Date: approx. 45-50 A.D.*

Audience: Messianic Jews “scattered among the nations”+

Place of Writing: Jerusalem+

Theme: Inward Faith With Outward Action+

Purpose: To Encourage Believers To Remain Strong In Trials

Summary of Content:

James opens his epistle, the “earliest of the New Testament writings,” commending the perseverance of the “twelve tribes” (Jewish believers in Jesus, “living outside of Palestine...[to escape]...intense persecution”--Zondervan 1421)(James 1:1-4, Marty 117). His is a message of “practical advice” on rightly responding in all situations and circumstances (Marty 116). He is qualified to bring such a message, as history suggests he was the first martyr to die for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Zondervan 1421).

He then follows, advocating the value of God’s wisdom, and with warnings against puffing oneself up, and the natural consequences which follow. God will reward perseverance in temptation, but He is neither to blame for bringing temptation nor for sin; and the natural consequence of sin is death (James 1:5-18). We are chided to “walk” our “talk,” to “do what [God’s word] says,” not just “listen to” it (James 1:19-25). This is especially true in regards to our speech vs. our outward witness (James 1:26-27).

In putting “feet” to our faith, we are to treat each other with equality, favoring no one person’s outward appearance over another (James 2:1-13). He argues that our faith justifies us before God, yet our works justify our faith before each other (James 14-26).

We are again reminded to “check” our tongue, and whether we are truly seeking after God’s wisdom vs. that of the unbelieving world (James 3:1-18).

Because God owns everything, including tomorrow, we are not to be envious of each other, boasting over guarantees we can never enjoy, and asking God with the wrong motives, so that we “do not receive” from Him (James 4:1-17).

Finally, as members of a Holy community, we are to care genuinely help, praying for, chastise, and restore each other in the Church. In patience, persevere under those who would oppress us; their riches will corrupt and destroy them (James 5:1-20).

* Marty 117

+Zondervan 1421

Galatians

Author: The Apostle Paul*

Date: approx. 53-57 A.D.+

Audience: Either Northern Asia Minor churches, or Southern Asia Minor Cities*

Place of Writing: Antioch*

Theme: Justification by faith apart from the works of the Law*

Purpose: To defend “the gospel of grace and the Christian life of liberty”*

Summary of Content:

In bringing his opening salutations to the Galatian believers, Paul then gives warning against false teachers; specifically, those requiring circumcision of Gentile converts, while reminding them of his credentials, as an apostle of Christ (Galatians 1:1-24).

He recounts his warm welcome by the other apostles, after his conversion, and the importance of inclusion of Gentile believers into the church, by which he chastised Peter, when Peter chose to exclude himself from them (Galatians 2:1-16). Furthermore, Paul argues that in grace, we are “justified in Christ,” and not through outward observance of the Law (Galatians 2:17-21).

He goes on to submit that the Law leads to life ONLY in faith through justification from the finished work of Jesus Christ, being blessed by faith, just as Abraham, in promise from God, was blessed (Galatians 3:1-25).

As those having “full rights of sons,” we are no longer aliens, as Hagar was, slaves to the old covenant of sin, revealed by the Law; we have become instead like Isaac, heirs to God’s promise (Galatians 4:1-31).

Paul’s final words are those of clarification: distinguishing a life of legalism under the Law, and Spirit-led living; outward showings of undeserved pride, and joyful, inward righteousness (Galatians 5:1-6:16).

He closes, by reminding them the punishment he’s endured for Jesus’ sake (Galatians 6:17-18).

* Marty 133-135

+Zondervan 1361

I Thessalonians

Author: The Apostle Paul*

Date: approx. 51 A.D.*

Audience: New converts at Thessalonica*

Place of Writing: Corinth*

Theme: The coming of the Lord*

Purpose: Commendation, and Encouragement to Excel in Faith, Love, and Hope*

Summary of Content:

Paul bids “peace” to the believers at Thessalonica, grateful for the widespread news of this founding church’s strong show of faith (I Thessalonians 1:1-10). This was important, in light of Paul’s hindered, and ultimately incomplete attempt to train these new believers in the doctrine of Christian faith, resulting in a time of intense persecution for them (Zondervan 1384).

Paul’s integrity soon came under fire by “antagonistic Jews,” and while once more commending their ability to remain strong to the foundations of their faith, he defends himself to them (I Thessalonians 2:1-16, Zondervan 1384). He adds he is saddened as he recalls how their fellowship was suddenly cut short (I Thessalonians 2:17).

Therefore, he recalls that when “we could stand it no longer,” he directed Timothy to return, and observe their progress, since he, then Timothy, had left them; delivering a benediction of God’s love and strength to come to them (I Thessalonians 3:1-13)

While hoping in the knowledge of Jesus’ eventual return to Earth, the Church is once more commended, this time for their “brotherly love,” admonishing them with a few important rules of sanctification, which no doubt he would’ve taught them personally, while with them, had he been allowed to do so (I Thessalonians 4:1-18).

Finally, he gives an encouragement to be ready for Jesus’ return, engaging in hope-filled living, building “each other up,” even as he notes they are already doing (I Thessalonians 5:1-24).

He closes with a request of prayer for himself, and for those with him; instructing visible signs of love and fellowship (and this letter) be shared among “all the brothers” (I Thessalonians 5:25-28).

* Marty 141-143

II Thessalonians

Author: The Apostle Paul*

Date: approx. 52 A.D.*

Audience: New converts at Thessalonica*

Place of Writing: Corinth*

Theme: The Lord's Coming*

Purpose: Clarification of End Time Items, Comfort and Exhortations+

Summary of Content:

Paul writes this second letter to the Thessalonian church as a supplement to his first, and begins with his thanks to God for their continued perseverance (II Thessalonians 1:4). It would seem that "some members of the congregation" needed a clearer "understanding of Paul's teaching concerning the 'day of the Lord,'" as he described it in his first letter; in light of their increased persecution, many were in fear it had already arrived (Zondervan 1389).

Paul assures the Church that those who are persecuting them will be summarily punished by Christ himself "with everlasting destruction," and excluded from the very presence of God (II Thessalonians 1:5-10). He offers a prayer for their glorification in Christ, as they continue to endure in faith (II Thessalonians 1:11-12).

He then expounds on the concept of "The Day of the Lord," clarifying some key events which must take place, prior to the return of Jesus Christ; mainly, the appearance of the antichrist, whom Paul calls the "man of lawlessness" (II Thessalonians 2:1-12). He is thankful for God's call on them to believe, and offers a prayer for their strengthening by Christ "in every good deed and word" (II Thessalonians 2:13-17).

Warning them to avoid idle men, who are "busybodies," (taking from the body of faith, without giving of their share to its work), he encourages their prayer for the further spread of the Gospel, himself offering on their behalf, a prayer for God's direction in them (II Thessalonians 3:1-15).

He concludes in a benediction of "peace," and "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" to them "at all times and in every way," noting to them his own handwriting, perhaps as evidence of his personal interest in their continued fight of faith (II Thessalonians 3:16-18).

* Marty 147-148

+Zondervan 1389

5 Eternal Truths:

1. **2 Thessalonians 1:3...** *"We ought always to thank God for you..."*

Bearing with each other takes not only patience, but true commitment to love, regardless of our assessment of the other's place of growth in faith. Accountability often means not only giving Biblical advice, but owning responsibility in each other's spiritual welfare as if it was our own, to the extent that we pray specifically for, and affirm to the other when we see, visible signs of growth in Christ. In this we can truly become one in fellowship and in love.

2. **1 Thessalonians 4:11...** *"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life..."*

By nature, I am prone to want to "toot" my own horn, gratifying myself with some great accomplishment or idea. In doing so, however, I show no one else "outside" the faith (or inside, for that matter) how much I am trusting God to move in me; the praise for Him is used up in praise for myself. It is only when I humbly live, exercising--simply--the gifts and talents He provides me, desiring affirmation first from Jesus Christ, who truly empowers me (Phil 4:13), do I enjoy the "respect" of those looking in on my life.

3. **Galatians 2:21...** *"I do not set aside the grace of God..."*

I was once one of those who tried to live the Christian life, dotting all the "I's", crossing all the "T's." This always resulted in disappointment; I never matched up, never achieved my own tyrannical standards of "righteousness." Over time, however, God has taught, and still is teaching me, that when reaching for perfection, I can reach no further than Jesus Christ. His arm, alone, is long enough to touch "perfect," and because of His saving grace, I can focus instead on pleasing Him, while asking His forgiveness when I fail. And that will indeed be a "when."

4. **James 1:20...** *"Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires"*

This is an area of daily struggle for me, and I am physically aware of it; anger. I have, over the years, trained myself not to show it outwardly, thus, when it comes, like an electrical surge, it takes the path of least resistance: my back. There may be no real object to it, either...a slow car, missed appointment, a foul word--yet it is an offense to my own standards or routine, drawing me ever into the cocoon of "me." If only this anger was His; I'd move freely; pain-to-passion.

5. **Acts 10:34...** *"God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation..."*

Having spent time as a child in an African-American daycare center, repeatedly singled-out, and discriminated against, I can identify with those judged not by the quality, but quantity of their lives (how white vs. how black, rich or poor, etc.). How beautiful it is that God, through experience amongst those homeless, continues to show me my true equality with all: sinners, so in need of His grace.

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