

Jesus Through the Scriptures

New Testament Bible Reading Challenge



Read the Bible Monday Through Friday

If you miss a day, use the weekend to catch up. If you fall behind, pick up with the current reading for that week. Mark off the chart on the back as you complete each week's reading. By the end of the year, you'll have read the entire New Testament!



Monte Vista
church of Christ

Track Your Weekly Progress

Throughout the Year

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 1-5 | 27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 15-19 |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 6-10 | 28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 20-24 |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 11-15 | 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 1-5 |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 16; 1 Thessalonians 1-4 | 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 6-10 |
| 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Thess. 5; 2 Thess. 1-3; Galatians 1 | 31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 11-15 |
| 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 2-6 | 32 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 16-20 |
| 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 1-5 | 33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 21-25 |
| 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 6; Colossians 1-4 | 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 26-28; Romans 1-2 |
| 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Timothy 1-5 | 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 3-7 |
| 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Timothy 6; 2 Timothy 1-4 | 36 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 8-12 |
| 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Titus 1-3; Philemon; Jude | 37 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 13-16; Philippians 1 |
| 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 1-5 | 38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians 2-4; John 1-2 |
| 13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 6-10 | 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> John 3-7 |
| 14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 11-13; 1 John 1-2 | 40 | <input type="checkbox"/> John 8-12 |
| 15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 John 3-5; 2 John; 3 John | 41 | <input type="checkbox"/> John 13-17 |
| 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 1-5 | 42 | <input type="checkbox"/> John 18-21; 1 Corinthians 1 |
| 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 6-10 | 43 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 2-6 |
| 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 11-15 | 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 7-11 |
| 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 16-20 | 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 12-16 |
| 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 21-25 | 46 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Corinthians 1-5 |
| 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 26-28; James 1-2 | 47 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Corinthians 6-10 |
| 22 | <input type="checkbox"/> James 3-5; 1 Peter 1-2 | 48 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Corinthians 11-13; Revelation 1-2 |
| 23 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 3-5; 2 Peter 1-2 | 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 3-7 |
| 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Peter 3; Luke 1-4 | 50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 8-12 |
| 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 5-9 | 51 | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 13-17 |
| 26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 10-14 | 52 | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 18-22 |

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Introduction

Reading the Bible helps us learn more about Jesus and draw closer to Him. In our Jesus Through the Scriptures series, we'll be reading together through the entire New Testament. There are 260 chapters in the New Testament. There are also 260 weekdays in the year. By reading just one chapter a day (using the weekends to catch up on any missed readings), you can read the entire New Testament this year.

Unlike the Bible reading programs where there is an attempt to read the whole Bible in a year (and most give up halfway through Exodus), this one is very doable. All it takes is setting aside 5-10 minutes a day to read one chapter in the New Testament.

We aren't going through the New Testament in the order they are placed in your Bible. Instead, we're going to read one gospel a quarter, and we'll mix the epistles throughout. We'll read Revelation last. We'll also read Acts right after Luke (since Acts is essentially Luke part II). So let's begin by reading Mark 1-5.

Week 1

Mark 1 — Mark begins his account of the gospel where the Old Testament ends. The book of Malachi ends by announcing the coming of John the Baptist (Malachi 4:5-6). Four hundred years later, Mark opens by saying that John is finally here preparing the way for the Messiah and baptizing people for the forgiveness of sins (verses 1-9). Mark also mentions the baptism of Jesus by John (verses 9-11), Jesus' temptations by Satan in the wilderness (verses 12-13), the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (verses 14-15), and the calling of Peter, James, and John (verses 16-20). There are also several miracles mentioned to provide evidence to Mark's Roman audience that Jesus is the Christ (verses 21-45).

Mark 2 — The healing of the paralytic is interesting to read (verses 1-13). Pay close attention to what Jesus does before healing the paralyzed man. Verses 21-22 are confusing verses to many today. But pay close attention to the context in which Jesus says them. Also, the incident in the grain field is not endorsing situational ethics (verses 23-27). Instead, Jesus is exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They wouldn't condemn David for doing something unlawful, but they were condemning Jesus for something "lawful." They were just upset that He was violating the man-made traditions that they had come up with for the Sabbath.

Mark 3 — Jesus performs another powerful miracle in this chapter (verses 1-5). We see very early in His ministry that the Pharisees were trying to destroy Him. They hated Him so much that they were willing to team up with the Herodians (verse 6). This chapter also gives a complete list of the twelve men Jesus handpicked to be apostles (verses 13-19).

Mark 4 — This chapter contains the well-known parable about the seed, sower, and soils. It is not a difficult parable to understand because Jesus takes the time to explain it (verses 1-20). There are also two parables about the growth of the kingdom of God (verses 26-32). Also, pay close attention to Jesus' power over nature (verses 35-41).

Mark 5 — This chapter contains three more miracles of Jesus. We find Jesus casting out demons (verses 1-20), healing a woman who had an illness for 12 years (verses 21-34), and raising a 12-year-old girl from the dead (verses 35-43). These accounts are mentioned to demonstrate that Jesus is who He claimed to be — the Son of God!

Week 2

Mark 6 — In this chapter, we find Jesus returning to the town He grew up in — Nazareth (verses 1-6). Many people rejected Him in Nazareth. Because of their unbelief, Jesus healed only a few people. The synagogues Jesus taught in were religious learning centers for the Jews. They are not found mentioned in the Old Testament. It seems as though they were established during the 400 years between the Testaments (as the Jews were dispersed around the world after Alexander the Great's conquests). In verses 7-12, we find Jesus sending His 12 apostles out two by two to preach the gospel and perform miracles. In verses 14-29, Mark retells how John the Baptist died. We learn that Herod killed John because he preached against their unlawful marriage in the sight of God. In verses 33-43, we read about Jesus miraculously multiplying food for 5,000 men (not counting the women and children). This is the only miracle performed by Jesus that is mentioned in all four gospels. In verses 45-56, as Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee into the land of Gennesaret (mostly Gentile territory), we read about Him walking on water! This would have taken place around 3:00 am (the fourth watch of the night).

Mark 7 — One of the Pharisees made problems was they put their traditions on the same level as God's law (verses 1-13). We have to be careful not to do the same! When healing the Syrophenician woman's daughter, notice the mother's humility and faith (verses 27-28). Jesus commended and blessed her because she had more faith than most Jews! In verses 31—37, as Jesus continues in Gentile territory, He heals a man deaf and almost mute. Don't get so absorbed in analyzing the method Jesus chose to heal the man. Instead, focus on the fact that man was healed! Do you know anyone who can do the kind of things Jesus did?

Mark 8 — As this chapter opens, we find Jesus having compassion, and once again miraculously multiplying food to people. This time the crowd consisted of 4,000 men (not counting the women and children). In Bethsaida, a blind man is brought to Jesus, and He gives him His sight (verses 22-26). In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' identity is announced by His apostles, and the Lord talks to them about His suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead (verses 27-33). Caesarea Philippi is located 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee at the base of Mount Hermon.

Mark 9 — Jesus' transfiguration takes place in this chapter (verses 1-13). Six days after the events of verses 27-38 in chapter 8, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John on a mountain and is transfigured before them. On the mountain, Moses and Elijah also appear talking with Jesus. Several scholars suggest that there are two likely places where the transfiguration took place. One is Mount Tabor. This mountain sits on the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, 11 miles west of the Sea of Galilee. The more likely place is Mount Hermon. This is the highest mountain in Israel and sits just above Caesarea Philippi. Remember, Jesus is mentioned as being in this region in the previous chapter. Also, notice in this chapter how Jesus preaches about the reality of hell (verses 38-48). Jesus taught more about hell than any preacher in the Bible!

Mark 10 — Things to watch out for in this chapter include Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage (verses 1-12); Jesus blessing a group of children (verses 13-16); Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler (verses 17-22); the unrighteous request of James and John (verses 35-45); and the giving of Bartimaeus' sight as Jesus passes through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem (verses 46-52).

Week 3

Mark 11 — At the beginning of this chapter, we find Jesus approaching Jerusalem. The importance of Jerusalem to the Jews cannot be overstated. Jerusalem was the city King David made his capital and where Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah. Jesus is making this trip knowing that in just a few days, He will be betrayed, arrested and, crucified. As you read, pay close attention to the geography mentioned. Bethany was a village only two miles from Jerusalem (vs. 1). It was where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived. As Jesus enters Jerusalem on a colt, He is praised and exalted (vss. 2-11). Take notice of all the people do for the Lord as He enters the city. The response of many of these people will change dramatically in just a few days. The next day Jesus cursed an unfruitful fig tree (vss. 12-14). This fig tree signified how unfruitful the people of Israel had become. God's judgment was about to come upon them! A great example of how corrupt they had become is seen when Jesus entered the temple (vss. 15-18). Inside this sacred place, Jesus witnessed men engaging in business and cheating visitors to the city. This was not the first time Jesus saw men turning His Father's house into a place of business (John 2:13-21). The cursing of the fig tree also provided an opportunity to teach His apostles a lesson about miraculous faith (vss. 20-26). Being able to perform miracles would be a vital part of the apostles' ministry. But they would not be able to exercise that power without faith!

Mark 12 — In verses 1-11, Jesus gives the parable of the vine-growers. This parable is about how the Jews constantly rejected God's prophets and eventually, His Son. They were rebellious people who were about to experience God's judgment. This parable made many of the religious leaders mad (vs. 12). To have the crowds turn on Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes began looking for occasions to trap Him in His words. The Pharisees and Herodians asked Him a controversial question about paying taxes (vss. 13-17). The Sadducees asked what they thought was a challenging question about the resurrection (vss. 18-27). And one of the scribes asked a question about the greatest commandment (vss. 28-34). In each case, Jesus' answer astonished the crowds! There is also a beautiful retelling of how Jesus witnessed a poor widow who gave sacrificially to the Lord (vss. 41-44). From her example, we learn that one doesn't need to be rich to please the Lord in their giving.

Mark 13 — As Jesus walks out of the temple, He says some shocking words to His apostles. In verse 2, He says, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." Once they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew questioned the Lord privately about His words. Jesus goes on to explain to them Jerusalem's future destruction (vss. 3-36). History tells us that Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. In this chapter, Jesus lists several warning signs His people were to look for to prepare them for that moment. The signs that are mentioned in this chapter have nothing to do with the end of the world. They have to do with the warning signs that would proceed God's judgment on the people of Jerusalem. Pay close attention to verse 30.

Mark 14 — Some critical things in this chapter include the unselfish and sacrificial anointing of Jesus by Mary (vss. 1-9); the plans of Judas to betray Jesus (vss. 10-11); the preparing and eating of the Passover (vss. 12-21); the institution of a new meal to be eaten by future disciples to remember the sacrifice of Jesus (vss. 22-25); the betrayal of Judas and arrest of Jesus in the garden (vss. 32-52); the corrupt trial of the Lord before the high priest (vss. 53-65); and the denials of Peter in the courtyard (vss. 66-72).

Mark 15 — Since the Jews needed permission from the Romans to have Jesus executed (keep in mind that the Lord is innocent of every charge brought against Him), the next morning He was brought before Pilate (vss. 1-15). Pilate was the governor of the region of Judea. He knows Jesus is innocent but hands Him over to be beaten and eventually crucified to please the Jews. Jesus is crucified outside of Jerusalem in a place called “Golgotha” between two robbers (vss 22-41). Crucifixion was a humiliating and painful way to die. It was reserved for the worst criminals during this time. After making sure Jesus is dead, Pilate allows a disciple named Joseph to bury His body in a secured tomb nearby (vss. 42-47).

Week 4

Mark 16 — As Mark begins talking about the resurrection, he intends to make it clear that none of the disciples were expecting it (verse 3). When the Sabbath ends, several women disciples make their way to Jesus' tomb with the intent of anointing His body for burial. It is very early on the first day of the week (Sunday morning). On their journey, they begin worrying about the size of the stone securing Jesus' tomb (verse 3). Once they arrive, the stone had been removed, and a young man (an angel) informs them Jesus is NOT there because He has been raised from the dead! The man tells the women to go and tell the others (vss. 5-7). Various translations footnote or italicize these verses (giving them uncertainty in the minds of some). However, it is important to note that nothing in these verses is new or different. The only question is, did Mark write them? Furthermore, while acknowledging some important manuscripts do not contain them, there is good evidence based on some old documents that they are authentic. Pay close attention to the great commission given by Jesus before going to heaven (vss. 15-16). This same mission is also given to us! Also, pay close attention to signs that the early disciples would be able to perform to confirm that they were, in fact, messengers of God (vss. 17-20).

Intro to 1 Thessalonians — This congregation was established by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:1-9. After spending some time with these disciples, eventually, persecution drove Paul away. Paul would later write back to this church. This letter would be designed to encourage, commend, and help them deal with some very tough issues. The date of this epistle is fairly well agreed to be A.D. 51 or 52 (making it very early in the canon). One of the keys to watch for is the expression "as you know." Paul appeals to their personal experience with him throughout the epistle.

1 Thessalonians 1 — There were two other workers with Paul when he wrote this letter (vs. 1). Since leaving them, Paul says he had been praying for them (vs. 2). As you read the first chapter, notice all of the good things Paul says about this church. They had become imitators of the Lord (vs. 6). They were deeply involved in the work of evangelism (vs. 8). They had genuinely repented by completely turning away from idolatry (vs. 9). They were eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus (vs. 10).

1 Thessalonians 2 — Paul reminded these people of the persecution that he and his co-workers had endured there (vss. 1-2). He also emphasizes his philosophy of preaching the gospel (vss. 3-6). He didn't trick or flatter the people to gain converts. Instead, he boldly proclaimed the will of God! Notice in this chapter how Paul appeals to them as parents do to their children (vss. 7, 11). Verse 9 probably refers to Paul's time making tents to support himself. Verses 14-18 single out the Jewish persecution of Christians. At this time, Satan was using the Jews to hinder the work of the gospel! He continues to use people today.

1 Thessalonians 3 — While in Athens, the saints in Thessalonica were on Paul's mind (vs. 1). They were a new church, and Paul wanted them to grow and prosper. Timothy eventually came to Paul

with good news on their progress (vss. 6-10). They were growing in their faith and love for Jesus! Paul said he would pray that they would continue in their spiritual growth (vss. 10-13).

1 Thessalonians 4 — Thessalonica was an important city during this time. It was a pagan city with corrupt morals (particularly it was immersed in sexual immorality). Paul told them to excel in this matter (vss. 1-8). They were to abstain from sexual immorality and be pure. They were also to excel in working hard and being responsible. Doing this was critical to standing out and having a good influence with those in the world (vss. 9-12). Paul would conclude this chapter by talking about the return of Jesus. It seems that these Christians had questions about their brethren who had already died in the Lord. Paul says they didn't need to worry about them. He says the dead will be raised when the Lord returns (vss. 13-18). The faithful will meet the Lord in the air and return with Him to heaven. This was to be comforting information.

Week 5

1 Thessalonians 5 — Paul picks up where he left off in chapter 4 by talking about the return of Jesus. These Christians had questions about the Lord's return. They wanted to know precisely when the event would take place. Paul reminded them that he had already taught them about this issue (vs. 1). The Lord's return was going to be like a thief in the night (vs. 2)! It was going to be sudden and surprising like labor pains upon a woman with child (vs. 3). While the unrighteous would be caught unprepared, God's people were not to be (vss. 4-5). In preparation for the Lord's return, Christians were to be alert, sober, dressed in righteousness, and encouraging one another (vss. 6-11). Verse 12 shows us that this church had elders (vs. 12). Verse 19 (which talks about quenching the Spirit) is confusing to some. It merely means to suppress the influence of the Spirit as He was directing the church through spiritual gifts like prophecy. Verse 22 needs to be one of the key verses that guide disciples in their lives.

Intro to 2 Thessalonians — Paul's interest in this church does not end with one inspired letter. While being in Corinth, Paul received more information about the welfare of this church (Acts 17-18). He learned that this church was experiencing severe persecution. It appears that a counterfeit Paul letter was sent to this church. Paul wanted to repair the damage done from this letter. He also wanted to encourage these Christians to keep being faithful to God because the Lord Jesus could return at any moment.

2 Thessalonians 1 — Paul wanted these Christians to know that he had been made aware of their suffering. God would vindicate them and bring judgment on their enemies (vss. 6-12). This was to be an incentive for them to hang in there!

2 Thessalonians 2 — Many consider this to be one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament. There are numerous translation difficulties (sometimes "he" can be "it" or vice versa), and we don't know what Paul had already taught them to guide them (vs. 5). It appears that their main concern was they thought they had missed the return of Jesus (vs. 2). Paul says they hadn't because there must first come the period of apostasy (vs. 3). Also, the "man of lawlessness" had to be revealed (vs. 3). It is unclear to know for certain who and what these things allude. In regards to the "man of lawlessness," some say it is the pope, others say a specific Roman Emperor, and then others attribute it to more severe persecution these Christians would have to face. Regardless of the view one holds with verses 1-9, the point is simple: stand firm with the teaching of the gospel (vs. 15)! Also, notice carefully how God "calls us" today (vs. 14). He calls us not through an audible voice, but through the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 3 — This epistle ends with some instructions about church discipline. Evidently, some were quitting their jobs and being lazy because they thought Jesus would return any day. Paul knew that the Lord would return like a thief, but that didn't mean Christians were to be sitting

around and being lazy until He comes. They needed to keep being responsible and avoid being a burden on others. Anyone who rejected this teaching needed to be disciplined by the church (vss. 10-15).

Intro to Galatians — Many scholars consider this to be the first epistles written (maybe written in the early A.D. 50's). It reveals the results of the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15. These churches in Galatia were established by Paul and Barnabas on their first preaching journey (Acts 13-14). These churches were upset with false teachers who promoted the idea that Gentiles must become Jews before becoming Christians. These false teachers were still binding the Law of Moses!

Galatians 1 — Instead of beginning with words of commendation, Paul begins this letter defending his apostleship (vss. 1-2). He tells them that he is amazed that they are so quickly forsaking the truth for error (vss. 1-10). Paul makes it clear that there is only one gospel and they had obeyed it! He then retells his conversion and how its radical nature is proof that the message he preached did not come from the mind of men (vss. 11-24).

Week 6

Galatians 2 — Verse 1 is likely alluding to the meeting that took place in Jerusalem in Acts 15. This meeting was of such great importance. During it the issue of Gentile circumcision for salvation was settled. By looking back at the Holy Spirit revealed, the brethren were able to determine that the Gentiles would be saved by obeying the gospel and not by becoming Jews first. In verse 3, Paul talks about how Titus (a Gentile) was used as a case study to confirm Gentile salvation without circumcision. Other Gentiles needed to look to his example! In verses 11-14, Paul puts to rest any notion that he was inferior to the other apostles. He describes a time when he confronted Peter for hypocrisy. Paul then reminds them that no person can get right with God by deeds of merit. Men are justified by faith in Christ (vss. 16-21). Verse 20 is so rich. Read it and ask the question, “Am I as committed to Christ as Paul was?”

Galatians 3 — Paul starts with a strong and sharp tone in this chapter. He is so disappointed that these Christians are allowing false teachers to deceive and bind upon them the Law of Moses (vs. 1). He refers to the miracles he performed among them as proof that he was an authentic apostle and had preached to them the truth (vs. 5). In verse 6, Paul makes a strong point that contrary to what the false teachers were promoting, Abraham was justified by faith before the instituting of the Law of Moses (vss. 6-9). Because of Abraham’s faith, God made a promise to bless all nations. This promise would ultimately be fulfilled in Abraham’s seed — a reference to Jesus Christ (vss. 15-18). Paul knows that the Jews will ask, “Why then did God give the Law if we are to be justified by faith?” His answer is the Law taught them about sin and the need to avoid it (vs. 19). The Law was given to lead them to Christ (vs. 24). Through faith in Jesus (not the Law of Moses) all people would be able to be justified and adopted into God’s family (vss. 23-29). Also notice the importance of baptism (immersion) in this process (vs. 27). Without being baptized, one cannot be clothed and put in Christ.

Galatians 4 — Paul continues his thought concerning the topic of adoption in this chapter. He emphasizes how Christ came to make us heirs, not slaves (vs. 1). Christ says we can call God our Father in a close and intimate way (vs. 6). In verses 13-15, Paul reminds these Christians of how he was sick among them. It could be that Paul had some sort of eye problem (verse 15). In verses 21-31, Paul continues rebuking them for trying to live under the Law of Moses by using an allegory. It is a surprising allegory because we would expect the Jews to be linked to Sara (Abraham’s real wife). Instead, the Jews’ religion is connected to Hagar (the slave mother of Ishmael). Paul’s point is that Christians are the ones who are free (vss. 21-31). Christians are the real children of promise (like Isaac was). Those trying to bind and live under the Law of Moses were still slaves and were persecuting the true children of God during this time (like Ishmael persecuted Isaac). Paul says this was the truth, and he wasn’t their enemy because he told them the truth (vs. 16).

Galatians 5 — Paul continues making his point that being circumcised into the Jewish religion was no longer necessary to be right with God (vss. 1-5). In verse 6, he says something profound about faith and works. In verse 10, Paul seems frustrated because he doesn’t know who is causing these

brethren trouble. This chapter also contrasts the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (vss. 16-23). If we are truly walking by the Spirit (being led by the Spirit's revealed teachings), then we should have the described fruit produced in our lives.

Galatians 6 — Every Christian has the responsibility to attempt to restore their brethren in a spirit of gentleness when they wander away from God (vs. 1). Christians are to bear one another's burdens (vs. 2). Verse 10 shows how God wants His people to treat others. Verse 11 may once again refer to some kind of eye problem Paul was battling. Paul concludes the book by emphasizing one last time that the gospel does not promote one having to become a Jew before becoming a Christian (vss. 12-18). These saints would be blessed if they just stuck with the pure teaching of the gospel.

Week 7

Intro to Ephesians — Ephesus was a very important city in the first century. The Apostle Paul established a church here towards the end of his second preaching journey (Acts 19). It all began with Paul encountering 12 men who were only familiar with the baptism of John. When they learned about the Holy Spirit, they were then baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 19:1-6). After Paul established the church in Ephesus, he would leave for a time, but later return and stay with the brethren two years (Acts 19:8-10). Before going on to Jerusalem, Paul would meet with the elders of this church and admonish them to shepherd the flock and guard against false teachers (Acts 20:17-31). This epistle is one of the “prison epistles.” The others include Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. Paul wrote these letters while being imprisoned in Rome (AD 60-62). The main message of Ephesians has to do with the unity of those in Christ. The terminology “in Christ” is used about 30 times (more than any other New Testament book).

Ephesians 1 — Notice how the Bible does teach “predestination” (vs. 5, 11). It does not promote the Calvinistic idea of predestination (the idea that individuals are chosen by God to be saved or lost, regardless of the choices they make in their lives). What the Bible does teach is God has chosen or destined the group of people who serve Him to be saved. We decide if we are going to be in that group by our response to the gospel. In verse 3, we learn that all spiritual blessings come from above and are showered upon those in Christ. Read verses 3-10 and appreciate all of the blessings you have if you are in Christ! Verses 22-23 are so rich because they show us the mighty authority of Jesus in His church. Paul says that Jesus is “head over all things to the church” (vs. 22). Not the pope or any other man!

Ephesians 2 — Paul begins this chapter by talking about every disciple’s spiritual condition before they came to Christ (vss. 1-3). Even though lost in their sins, God in His great mercy offered a way for every person to be reconciled to Him through Jesus (vss. 4-7). God’s method for saving us is by grace through faith (vss. 8-9). Grace has to do with “unmerited favor.” It is God providing a way for us to receive His forgiveness, even though we don’t deserve it. Another interesting thing mentioned in this chapter is how under the new covenant of Christ, the dividing wall that separated Jews and Gentiles (the Law of Moses) is torn down. Now both Jews and Gentiles can be at peace and become one body in Christ (vss. 11-22). Keep in mind that for centuries the Jews and Gentiles were separated. They were hostile towards one another. Now through Jesus, the two groups can become one.

Ephesians 3 — Can we understand the Bible? Verse 4 says we can! God has revealed His great mystery through His Holy Spirit to His apostles (vs. 5). In the context, the mystery has to do with how Gentiles would also be included in the kingdom of God (vss. 6-9). God being able to do this was unfathomable to the Jews. But it is accomplished through submission to Christ! In verses 10-11, we learn that the establishment of the church was not an accident. It was something that God planned to do before He made the world! In verses 14-22, we find Paul praising God for His grace. Paul

understood that it is only because of the grace of God that the Gentiles would now be able to be adopted into God's family.

Ephesians 4 — Christians are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling in the Lord (vs. 1). Are you doing that? Paul devotes a lot of attention to the theme of unity in this chapter (vss. 2-6). Unity among brethren is something that every Christian must work hard to achieve (vss. 2-3). Verses 11-12 is talking about the various gifts God has given disciples to equip others to do kingdom work. Verse 15 shows us that the message we speak and the manner in which we speak it are equally important. In verses 17-24, Paul focuses on the change in behavior that should take place in the life of the person who comes to Christ. In the remainder of the chapter he gives some practical examples of exactly how that change should look.

Ephesians 5 — Not only are Christians to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, but they are also to imitate God (vs. 1). They are to walk in love like Christ loved and offered Himself for them as a sacrifice to God (vs. 2). In verses 3-5, Paul talks about the sin of sexual immorality and how those who practice such things will not enter the kingdom of God (3-5). There is also a contrast between light (righteousness) and darkness (wickedness). Christians are not to walk in "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Instead, they are to expose them (vss. 11-14). Christians are also called to be good stewards of their time (vss. 15-17). In verses 22-33, Paul begins talking about the various roles in the family relationship. Pay close attention to how he compares the relationship of Christ and His bride (the church) with that of a husband and his wife. How Christ treats His bride is a model for how every man must treat his wife today.

Week 8

Ephesians 6 — As Paul continues with his practical teaching in the second half of Ephesians, he gives some important instructions to children. Like husbands and wives, children have important things that God wants them to do. God commands children to obey their parents (vss. 1-3)! Fathers are instructed to be the leaders in bringing up their children in the ways of God (vs. 4). Slaves are told to obey their masters and work hard for them, ultimately in an effort to please Christ (vss. 5-8). Master are also told to give up threatening and avoid being abusive towards their slaves because there is no partiality with God (vs. 9). In verses 10-12, we learn that the Lord is strong, and we must dress in His armor if we are going to defeat our enemy — the devil (vss. 10-11). Notice how spiritual warfare is current and real. Paul says that God's people are currently engaged in a spiritual battle against Satan and his workers (vss. 12-13). The weapons we need to win this battle are listed in verses 14-18. In verses 19-20, we see that Paul is imprisoned while writing this letter. He asks these Christian to pray that he would continue to have the boldness to preach the truth even in his imprisonment.

Intro to Colossians — This is another prison epistle of Paul's. This letter seems to have been written shortly after Ephesians. The purpose of it was to combat some false teaching that was troubling these Christians. Paul is concerned that they might be led away by traditions and doctrines of men (2:8). It appears that there was some controversy over the deity of Christ and a desire to worship angels (2:9; 18). Some may have even been trying to bind upon them the Law of Moses (2:16). This letter was designed to set the record straight about the deity of Jesus and our responsibility to Him as the Lord.

Colossians 1 — Like Ephesians, this epistle also begins with a prayer for the brethren (vs. 3). In verse 6, we learn that by 63 A.D (that the date when this letter was written) the gospel had spread into all the world. Epaphras is mentioned as a co-worker of Paul's and faithful brother in Christ (vs. 7). Paul says he prayed that these brethren grow in their knowledge of the truth, walk in it, and bear fruit for the Lord (vss. 9-10). In verses 13-14, we that a person submits to Christ, they are rescued from darkness, transferred into the kingdom of God, and recipients of redemption and forgiveness. Notice how the kingdom of God was in existence in the time of Paul and these Christians were citizens in it (vs. 13). In verses 15-18, we learn some very important things about Jesus. Jesus is the firstborn of all creation ("firstborn" indicates preeminence here). Jesus is the Creator. Jesus is the Sustainer of all things. Jesus is the head of the church. If you have any doubts about the deity of Jesus, make sure you read verses 19-20 carefully.

Colossians 2 — Laodicea is about 11 miles from Colossae (vs. 1). Those who are in have things they must strive to do (vss. 6-7). In verse 8, there are is a warning against being lured away from God by false teachers. In verse 9, there is another reference to the deity of Christ. In verse 10, there is a proclamation of how those who are in Christ are complete with every spiritual blessing God offers.

In verses 11-13, Paul talks about how baptism is a spiritual circumcision that God performs on sinners (this is one of the most powerful cases for the necessity of baptism in the Bible). Have you experienced this circumcision? Verses 16-17 indicate that Christians are not required to keep the holy days and laws of the old covenant. It may be that Judaizing teachers were trying to bind it upon the Gentiles in this church.

Colossians 3 — Christians are to have their minds focused on the things of heaven (vss. 1-2). When people come to Christ, the members of their earthly body should have died to the evil things of Satan (vss. 5-7). The rest of this chapter is very similar to the second half of Ephesians. Paul will offer some practical ways in which God's people must commit themselves to Jesus (vss. 8-25).

Colossians 4 –Verses 2-4 is a powerful section about the importance of prayer. Notice how Paul says we need to be praying for the success of evangelism. In verses 5-6, we see that our godly influence in the world is critical. Tychicus was a highly trusted companion of Paul's and delivered many of his letters (vs. 7). Paul also mentioned other co-workers like Onesimus, Aristarchus, Barnabas, Luke, and Demas (vss. 9-14). Paul had a lot of people helping him in the cause of Christ! Some have suggested that the letter to the church in Laodicea was lost (vs. 16). It may be that this is a reference to the letter to the Ephesians. Clearly, Paul's letters were being copied and distributed among the churches. They were intended to benefit all of the churches — even all the churches today!

Week 9

Intro to 1 Timothy — The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are unique because they are not written to local churches (like most of Paul's letters). Instead, they were written to preachers. They are written to evangelists to encourage and admonish them in their work for God. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith (Acts 16:1; 1 Timothy 1:2). He had accompanied Paul in many of his preaching endeavors. The letter of 1 Timothy was probably written in mid sixty A.D. (towards the end of Acts, shortly after Paul was released from prison).

1 Timothy 1 — Notice the close relationship Paul and Timothy had (vss. 1-2). In verse 3, we see that Timothy is in Ephesus during the time of this letter. The Ephesian church was established by Paul in his third preaching journey (Acts 19). Paul urges Timothy to teach these brethren the truth and warn them against falling for strange doctrines (vss. 3-4). It appears that Paul had received word of the problems Timothy was dealing with among the brethren (vss. 5-7). The solution to these problems was simple: continue to preach the truth! In verses 9-10, Paul gives a list of wicked deeds that will cause a person to lose their soul. In verses 12-16, Paul retells the kind of life he lived before coming to Christ. His point is if Jesus could save someone like him, He can save anyone (vs. 15)! Verse 17 provides a sound description of God. Verse 18 tells us that God has called or spoken of Timothy's work in high terms, though we do not have those prophecies recorded in scripture. In verses 19-20, we learn that it is possible for Christians to depart from the faith. The language "handed over to Satan" probably refers to church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:5).

1 Timothy 2 — This chapter begins by giving a list of people that disciples ought to pray for. Notice that no matter who is in the position of government leadership, God wants us to pray for them (vss. 1-2). In verses 3-6, we learn that God loves all, wants all to be saved and gave His Son as a sacrifice for all. In verse 7 Paul says he was given a special ministry to the Gentiles (those who were not Jews). Don't let the idea of "listing up holy hands" startle you (vs. 8). During this time, many of God's people did this gesture when praying. This verse is not putting a stamp of approval on what many charismatic groups are doing today! Verses 9-15 contain important instructions in regard to modesty and the woman's role in the church. Notice how (like in the home) God doesn't want the woman usurping authority over the man. This doesn't mean she is not equally important or doesn't have important work to do in the church. It just means God has specific roles for both the man and woman and both must fulfill and cherish those roles.

1 Timothy 3 — The majority of this chapter deals with the qualifications of elders and deacons in the local church. As you can see, they are pretty straightforward. There is no way we could break every qualification down in detail in this short article. For now, just please understand that with each qualification, God is looking for something. God is looking for men who have life experience, love for souls, influence, and have been effective in leading their own families first. Unfortunately, in our time, the most controversial of the qualifications have to do with those tied to family. Many use

these qualifications to disqualify a man, but the key to understanding them is found in verse 5. In verses 12-13, we learn that the wives of church leaders have qualifications they must meet as well. Verse 15 reveals the main purpose of this letter.

1 Timothy 4 — Some key things to look out for in this chapter include a warning concerning a period of apostasy to come (vss. 1-5), an admonition for Timothy to stay away from worldly fables and promote godliness (vss. 6-8), and encouragement to Timothy to not let people look down on his youthfulness. Instead, he was to strive to be an example (vs. 12). In verse 16, we see that a preacher must make sure he practices the things that he preaches. Otherwise, he will lose his soul!

1 Timothy 5 — The first half of this chapter (vss. 1-16) deals with how a local church is to care for widows who need help from the church treasury. Notice how a widow's family is required to handle the responsibility first (vss. 8, 16). Verses 17-18 show us that elders have biblical authority to be financially supported for their work. Verses 19-21 reveal that not even elders are above the Law of God and must be corrected when in sin. In verse 22, Timothy is warned to be careful when helping a church pick men to be leaders. Verse 23 has wine as a medicine, not as a beverage.

Week 10

1 Timothy 6 — Slavery was tolerated in the New Testament times because it was a fixture in the world (vss. 1-2). Godliness is a big issue discussed in this chapter. Paul says that godliness mixed with contentment is useful (vss. 3-6). Godliness is not “God-likeness.” Instead, it is having a high level of reverence and respect for God. In verse 8, we learn what things in life we should be content with. In verses 9-10, we learn of the danger that befalls those who are greedy and love money. Christians must never pursue greed and covetousness. Instead, they must “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (vs. 11). The “good fight of faith” mentioned in verse 12 is the fight that every disciple continues to fight today. In verse 13, Paul returns to motivate Timothy to be bold and courageous in his preaching. Like Jesus didn’t shrink back from speaking truth to Pilate, Timothy needed to never shrink back from proclaiming the gospel. Verses 15-16 provide some powerful facts that every person needs to understand about Jesus. In verses 17-19, Paul returns to warn God’s people against greed and trusting in earthy riches. Instead, they are to use their blessings to help and bless others. What Timothy had been entrusted with in verse 20, is the teaching Paul had committed to him and that he was to commit to others (2 Timothy 2:2). The false “knowledge” mentioned is probably a reference to the doctrine of Gnosticism, which was prevalent during that time.

Intro to 2 Timothy — This is the last epistle Paul wrote. While penning this letter, Paul was imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8, 16; 4:6-13). This letter is traditionally believed to have been written about 67 A.D. Paul knew his execution wasn’t far off. Timothy seemed to be discouraged in his work as a preacher, and Paul wanted to encourage and motivate him to continue on with boldness.

2 Timothy 1 — Right away, we see that Paul and Timothy had a close relationship as brothers in Christ (vss. 1-4). In verse 5, we get a glimpse into Timothy’s family life. We learn that his mother and grandmother played a huge role in him becoming a faithful Christian. Timothy may have received a miraculous spiritual gift through the laying of Paul’s hands (vs. 6). And yet, it appears he is lacking courage (vs. 7). Paul reminds him not to be ashamed of the Lord or him as a prisoner for the Lord (vs. 8). Instead, courageously continue preaching and serving the Lord! Paul says he was willing to do that even while locked up in prison (vs. 12). The charge of verses 13-14 is given to anyone who takes on the responsibility of preaching the gospel. In verse 15, we learn that contrary to Calvinistic doctrine, Christians can turn away from the Lord (vs. 15). Phygelus and Hermogenes are contrasted with Onesiphorus, who was a faithful and reliable brother in the Lord (vss. 16-18).

2 Timothy 2 — Timothy is charged to equip other men to preach the gospel (vs. 2). He also is charged to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ (vs. 3). In verses 4-6, Paul uses three different examples to emphasize the point of never quitting on the Lord (the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer). Verses 11-13 contain some trustworthy statements. Verses 14-18 emphasize the need for a

messenger of God to always focus on his work and avoid useless discussions. In verses 22-23, Timothy is given a list of things to flee from. In verses 24-26, Timothy is given the blueprint for how to be a bond-servant pleasing to God.

2 Timothy 3 — The “last days” mentioned in verse 1 are those in the days of the Christian era. We are also living in the last days! Paul says these days will always be difficult for the people of God. In verses 2-9, he gives a list of reasons as to why they will be difficult. Jannes and Jambres are not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, but they are believed to be the magicians in Pharaoh’s court (vs. 9). Verse 11 cites the trouble Paul faced on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). In verse 12, a promise is given to those who strive to live godly. In verses 16-17, the value of God’s word is announced. In the context, the promises are attached to verse 15, a reminder to Timothy to keep reading and studying his Bible. We need to do the same!

2 Timothy 4 — Verses 1-5 describe the work of a preacher. In verses 6-8, it is clear that Paul knows that soon he will be executed, but he is confident in the reward from God that awaited him. Verses 10 and 11 are an interesting contrast. After announcing the disappointment of Demas, Paul gives very encouraging words about Mark. This is the same Mark who had previously left Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 15:37-38). Even though Paul was deserted by many people, he continued to trust in the Lord’s ability to stand by him (vss. 16-18). The final verses of the chapter give a list of faithful co-workers of Paul’s in the cause of Christ (vss. 19-21).

Week 11

Intro to Titus — Like the books of 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, the book of Titus is also written to a young preacher. However, unlike the letters to Timothy, this one does not contain any admonitions about courage and zeal. We don't have much personal information about Titus. He is only mentioned 12 times in the New Testament. He seems to have been an effective preacher, working in a difficult situation with difficult brethren. Paul wrote this letter to Titus to give him some practical advice and encouragement.

Titus 1 — Paul commonly begins his epistles by identifying himself as a bondservant and apostle to Jesus Christ (vs. 1). In verse 2, we learn something important about God: He cannot lie! In verse 4, we see clearly that Paul and Titus had a close relationship as brothers in Christ. In verses 6-11, we get another detailed list about the qualifications of elders. While we often get heated debates about these qualifications today, for now let us appreciate how much elders in the church are needed. Paul says that when a local church does not have elders they are "lacking" (Titus 1:5). A few important observations about the qualifications of elders include him being a good and godly leader of his family (vs. 6), a man disciplined in his actions and emotions (vss. 7-8), and skilled in teaching the word of God (vss. 9-11). Verse 5 tells us that Titus was on the island of Crete when Paul wrote him this letter. This was a large island 160 miles long by 35 miles wide in the Mediterranean Sea. The people of Crete did not have a good reputation (vs. 12). Evidently, some of these people were promoting false doctrine among the brethren (vss. 13-16). Their teaching seemed to contain elements of Judaism that they were trying to bind on Christians.

Titus 2 — Like with Timothy, Paul also charges Titus to preach "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). In verses 2-10, Paul gives some practical teaching about godly Christian living. There is teaching for older men (vs. 2), older women (vss. 3-5), younger women (vss. 4-5), younger men, (vss. 6-8), and Christians who may have been slaves during this time (vss. 9-10). What should motivate Christian to live in this way? The grace of God (vss. 11-14)!

Titus 3 — Christians are to be in subjection to the governing authorities of their society (vs. 1). Christians are to make sure that they treat everyone with respect and gentleness (vs. 2). Verses 5-6 speak of the work of the Holy Spirit. These verses remind us of what Jesus said about being born of "water and Spirit" in John 3:5. This is a reference to hearing the word of God revealed by the Spirit, obeying it, and being immersed for the remission of sins. In verses 8-9, Paul tells Titus to speak the word of God "confidently." Paul admonishes Titus to stay focused and avoid pointless discussions and debates (vs. 9). Titus was to avoid the divisive and factious man (vs. 10). In verse 14, we find another verse that defines the life of a Christian. Are you striving to do what this verse says?

Philemon — This is a very personal letter in the New Testament. Besides Paul, there are two other people mentioned in it — Philemon and Onesimus. Both of these men are closely connected to one another. Onesimus was actually Philemon's slave. Onesimus had run away (maybe even stealing

some of Philemon's money), and through the providence of God, met Paul, was taught the gospel, and became a Christian. Paul now sends Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter. In this letter, Paul is urging Philemon (who is also a Christian) to treat his new brother in Christ right. They may have had a different status by the standards of the world, but now they were part of the same spiritual family! Now they were brothers in Christ! Although this is a short book, it teaches valuable lessons about love, forgiveness, grace, and care for brethren. This whole letter emphasizes what the Lord Himself taught in Matthew 7:12.

Jude — Although very short, this book is one of the more difficult ones in the Bible. The author is probably the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3). His purpose for writing the book is clear. At first, he wanted to write to them about the "common salvation" (vs. 3). Instead (because of false teachers), he felt the need to write to the brethren about contending earnestly for the faith (vs. 3). This book is about having the courage and ability to defend the truth of the gospel. Throughout, Jude cites many Old Testament examples of rebellion against God. Some examples include the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 7), Cain (vs. 11), Balaam, and Korah (vs. 11). Some answered questions include the mentioning of angels who are kept in chains (vs. 6)? What did they do? The mentioning of the devil arguing over the body of Moses (vs. 9). What is that all about? The mentioning of love feasts (vs. 12). What exactly are those? We don't have the specific answers concerning these difficult questions. But don't get so bogged down on those issues that you miss the point. Again, the main point of Jude is "*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints*" (vs. 3).

Week 12

Intro to Hebrews — The book of Hebrews gets a bad rap today. Many misunderstand it and teach false things from it. Others feel it is too difficult to understand and avoid it all together. Both of these things are unfortunate. Hebrews is such an important book in the New Testament. It is true that we do not know the author's name (Maybe Paul? Maybe Barnabas?), but that is not what is most important. What is most important is that like the rest of the Bible, this book was also inspired by the Holy Spirit and is extremely useful. It was written in the first century to encourage Hebrew Christians (who were being persecuted) not to leave Jesus and go back to Judaism. It is a book that continues to motivate disciples to persevere in Christ no matter what challenges come their way! A great way to sum up Hebrews is to say, "Christ is better!" Christ is better than anything Judaism or any other religion has to offer!

Hebrews 1 — The writer begins by describing all the various ways God has spoken to men in the past, but now He speaks through His Son Jesus. He also says that Jesus has been appointed an heir of all things and was used by the Father to make the world (vss. 1-2). Verse 3 describes the main reason as to why the Lord left the glories of heaven to come to the earth. He came to make "purification of sins." The rest of the chapter describes how Jesus is more superior to angels. Angels are important and powerful, but not more important and powerful than Jesus! The angels worship Him; they were created by Him; unlike Jesus, the angels do not sit at God's right hand (vss. 4-13). Verse 14 describes what angels are and what they do for God's people today.

Hebrews 2 — As the writer continues his thoughts about angels, he says that since the Old Testament Law was given through them and it proved unalterable and that those who violated it deserved to be punished, how much more should we pay close attention to the Law given through Christ? How much more should we make sure that we don't drift away from the gospel (vss. 1-2). In verse 3, notice how he calls our salvation "great." It is great because it was accomplished through Jesus; it was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles; and it was confirmed through the working of miracles (vs. 4). In verses 5-8, the writer revisits his thoughts about the preeminence of Christ. In verse 9, we learn that part of Jesus' sacrifice for us included Him becoming a little lower than angels. This was accomplished when He became a man. In verses 10-18, we learn that the sufferings Jesus endured qualify Him to help us (His brethren) when we are suffering.

Hebrews 3 — Verse 1 is the only place in the Bible, where Jesus is called an apostle. The title fits Jesus perfectly since it means "one sent on a mission with the authority to carry it out." In verses 2-6, Jesus is contrasted with Moses, using the metaphor of house building. Each built a house (a people or family), but Jesus' house is better. In verses 7-19, we see that some following Moses (after leaving Egypt) did not reach their destination because they developed evil, unbelieving hearts that fell away from God. This is mentioned by the writer as a warning to those following Jesus.

Hebrews 4 — The comparison between the Israel of old and Israel today continues in the first 13 verses of this chapter. The key term to consider here is “rest.” Due to disobedience, many of those following Moses missed their rest in Canaan. We will also miss our rest in heaven if we follow in their footsteps! Verse 12 gives a great description of the power found in God’s word. Verse 13 is a great verse to remember whenever we are tempted to sin. Verses 14-16 are so comforting to read. Like the Israel of old, we have one today. Except ours is the perfect Lord Jesus! Since Jesus is our High Priest, we can confidently do what verse 16 says!

Hebrews 5 — In this chapter, the writer gets to his main point concerning Jesus being our High Priest. He says that high priests are appointed (vs. 1), gentle (vs. 2), and offer sacrifices for the people (vs. 3). Jesus does the same thing (vss. 5-6). Except He is a priest forever (vs. 6)! To get more familiar with Melchizedek who is mentioned in this chapter, see Genesis 14:17-24. Verses 7-8 refer to what Jesus was doing while in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Because Jesus suffered and experienced trials fully as man, He is perfectly qualified to be our High Priest. He is able to sympathize with everything we go through because He experienced it in some way as well. The writer wanted to say more about the priesthood of Jesus, but couldn’t because of the spiritual immaturity of the people he was writing to (vss. 11-14).

Week 13

Hebrews 6 — This chapter continues the rebuke of Hebrews 5:11-14. The writer is disappointed that these Christians were not growing in the faith. They were still very spiritually immature (vss. 1-3). Verses 4-6 are somewhat controversial. Some think they prove there is a sin that God will not forgive. What they refer to is the mindset of those who refuse to repent so they can be forgiven. Verses 11-12 urge the readers to work diligently to apply the teachings of Christ so that they may grow spiritually. He also teaches the need for patience, faith, and endurance so that we may gain what God has promised (vss. 11-15). He says that God is faithful and will never lie or let His people down (vss. 17-18). He says that since Jesus is our High Priest, the hope that we have is like an anchor. It is sure. It is steadfast. It is strong. Therefore, we must never forsake the eternal High Priest or His way (vss. 19-20).

Hebrews 7 — Here, the writer revisits the idea of Jesus being our High Priest (after taking a brief detour to talk about their spiritual maturity beginning in Hebrews 5:10). He says that the priesthood of Jesus is something that we really need to appreciate. This chapter plays off Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek in Genesis 14 and the prophecy of Psalm 110:4. Verse 3 does not mean that Melchizedek was an angel or had no parents. It just means that unlike the Levitical priesthood, he is a priest according to genealogy. Unlike the priests from Levi, Melchizedek's parents are unknown (vss. 5-6). Verse 7 makes the argument: if Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek then that means Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. That means since Jesus is a priest from Melchizedek's line (not Abraham), He is greater than Abraham too! But for Jesus to be a priest, there also had to be a change in the Law. Jesus could not serve as a priest according to what was stated in the Old Law. The Law of Moses clearly stated that the priests could only come through the tribe of Levi. Once Jesus instituted the New Covenant, He could then serve as a priest (even though He came through the tribe of Judah). Verse 14 makes a great argument for respecting the silence of God. The writer says the Law of Moses was weak, and a change was needed to better the spiritual situation for all people (vss. 18-28).

Hebrews 8 — Jesus is not only better than any high priest ever under the old Law, but He is also serving in the perfect, heavenly tabernacle (vss. 1-6). He is the mediator of a better covenant with better promises (vs. 6). The tabernacle mentioned here is the real tabernacle where God's perfect presence dwells. The tabernacle constructed by Moses was only a shadow of the heavenly reality (vs. 5). In verses 7-13, the writer explains how Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant and instituted the new and better one that was prophesied about by Jeremiah. Under the New Covenant having God's Law on your heart and mind is essential to having a relationship with Him. This covenant also provides direct and real forgiveness of sins (vs. 12). It has made the Old Covenant obsolete and no longer needed (vs. 13).

Hebrews 9 — The writer has more details he wanted to give about the heavenly tabernacle, but didn't have time to in this epistle (vs. 5). Instead, he decided to press on talking about the covenant

ratification in blood. Verse 8-10 are talking about heaven, how Moses' tabernacle was not sufficient. What Jesus offers is better because He entered the better tabernacle (heaven) and made atonement for our sins with His blood (vss. 11-14). Covenants or testaments must be ratified by blood (vs. 15). The Old Covenant was ratified by blood (vss. 18-22). Jesus' covenant was as well (vss. 24-28). Jesus was offered one time for all time to bear the sins of many (vs. 28).

Hebrews 10 — Verses 1-4 state that sin was not deal with fully and finally under the Old Law. Something else needed to come. While animal sacrifices did provide forgiveness, it was forgiveness only in view of what Jesus would do on the cross. Animal's blood cannot atone for sin forever. Jesus' blood can and does! Verses 11-14 state that Jesus is the great once and for all sacrifice for sins! Since Jesus has done this (and since He is our great High Priest), we should respond in a certain way. We should draw near to God with a sincere heart (vs. 22). We should "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (vs. 23). We should look to stir up one another to love and good works (vs. 24). We should not forsake opportunities to worship God (vs. 25). We should not go on sinning willfully (vs. 26). The writer urges us to understand that if we leave Jesus there are some bad things that will happen to us on the Judgment Day (vss. 26-31). He concludes the chapter with a plea to not give up on following Jesus and forfeit the reward of heaven (vss. 32-35). Have endurance and persevere in the faith (vss. 36-39).

Week 14

Hebrews 11 — This is one of the greatest chapters in the New Testament. It connects back to the theme of endurance that the writer introduces in Hebrews 10:35-39. It is important to realize that people mentioned in this chapter were not “super-Christians.” Instead they were ordinary people who followed God. They were regular folks who had weaknesses and problems just like us. And yet, despite their many imperfections and difficulties, they were able to persevere and endure because of their great faith in God. We can too! We can do as Abraham, David, Joseph, Moses, Rehab, and so many others have. We all can live by faith and refuse to give up on serving God!

Hebrews 12 — Verses 1-4 continues the theme of endurance and perseverance for God. Jesus is used here as the ultimate example. The writer says that Jesus “endured the cross.” Jesus endured all the trials and tribulations put before Him and as a result has been exalted to the right hand of God. The “chastening of the Lord” mentioned in verses 5-11 can be hard for us to understand. We don’t always know why hardships and trials come our way in life. The recipients of the Hebrew letter didn’t know either. But the author wants them to think of the trials as proof that they are God’s children, instead of falsely assuming that God has forgotten them (vss. 8-9). He says that hard times can benefit us and have a positive effect on our character if we let it (vs. 11). In verses 16-17, he reminds them of Esau. It was not that Esau couldn’t repent, but once he started his life down the wrong path, it became very difficult for him to find a place to make a U-turn. Verses 18-24 use the examples of mountains to continue emphasizing the need for endurance. Mount Sinai symbolizes the Law of Moses. Mount Zion represents the New Covenant of the gospel. The point is if Mount Sinai was important, how much more is Mount Zion? Don’t give up on the New Covenant of Jesus! Verses 25-28 speak of Judaism being shaken (maybe a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem), but the New Covenant (Christianity) never being removed. As a result, we need to be true to it (vss. 28-29).

Hebrews 13 — The book of Hebrews concludes with some very practical and easy to understand admonitions about Christian living. Love the brethren (vs. 1). Show hospitality (vs. 2). Remember the less fortunate and those suffering (vs. 3). Follow God’s moral code (vs. 4). Don’t get consumed in greed and materialism (vs. 5). Trust God (vs. 6). Remember those who lived a godly life before us (vs. 7). Be devoted to singing praises to God (vs. 15). Share with others (vs. 16). Obey your spiritual leaders (vs. 17). Pray (vs. 18). Read these admonitions very carefully and make sure you apply those in your life.

Intro to 1 John 1 — This first of three epistles written by John was probably written soon after John completed his account of the gospel. The language, style and emphasis are all the same as the gospel of John. When one reads 1 John, it is clear that the apostle is writing to Christians who are under attack by false teachers (1 John 2:18; 4:1). Some seemed to have been denying that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:2). Others were taking sin lightly and teaching that it was no real concern (1 John 2:1). All of these concepts were part of the false teaching of Gnosticism. Gnosticism’s two main ideas were matter was bad (hence the denial that God came in the flesh) and knowledge was supreme (these

false teachers actually thought they had more knowledge than the apostles). In this letter, John deals with the elements of this false doctrine in a powerful way.

1 John 1 — John begins by stating the evidence he was for Jesus coming in the flesh. John says that he both saw, heard, and touched Jesus (vss. 1-2). Verse 3 shows us what biblical fellowship is and how we are to be in fellowship with God, Jesus, and His apostles. Verse 5-10, make it clear that God and sin have no fellowship! As God's children, we shouldn't have fellowship with sin either! When we sin as Christians, we should repent and confess our sins (vss. 8-10). If we do, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2 — Verse 1 shows us just how serious how sins are before God. God wants us to do our best to keep away from committing sin! Jesus died to atone for our sins and appease the wrath of God (verse. 2). Verse 3 provides a test of true fellowship with God. John says we can know we are right with God if we are keeping His commandments. The commandments John is writing about are not new in the sense that men have never heard of them (loving God and your neighbor were also part of the Old Law). They are new in the kingdom of the Messiah, however (vss. 7-11). Verses 15-17 provides of the plan the devils uses to come against us. The "antichrist" of verse 18 is not a reference to one specific person, but anyone who goes against the cause of Christ (the Gnostics during that time). John is urging these Christians to avoid falling for the lies of these false teachers. Their fellowship with God and His Son was at stake (vss. 19-24). Verse 25 mentions a promise from God that we need to keep in the forefront of our minds. The "anointing" makes mentions of is probably a reference to their Holy Spirit given gifts, like the gift of knowledge. John says that those saints who had gifts needed to use them. Doing so would help them abide in Christ (vss. 26-29).

Week 15

1 John 3 — This chapter continues John's discussion about sin. Verse 1 contrast the children of God and those of the world. God's children know Him and have a high moral standard. The world doesn't understand this because they don't know God. Verse 4 offers a perfect definition of sin. Thankfully Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sins. He was able to do this because in Him there is no sin (verse 5). Verses 6 and 9 can confuse as some translations make it sound like Christians can't sin. That would contract 1 John 1:8-9. However, verses 6 and 9 refer to the practice of sin, or remaining in sin. People who are truly trying follow Jesus won't remain in sin! When John mentions the devil sinning from the beginning in verse 8, he is referring to temptation he put before Eve in the Garden of Eden. Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan! Verse 10 states that both God and Satan have children. The one who does not love his brother is a child of Satan! In verse 11-18, John gets very practical with the concept of loving others. The one who does not love his brother is like Cain (verse 12); he is a murderer (verse 15); he does not have eternal life abiding in him (verse 15). The one who truly loves his brother will help him in his time of need (vss. 17-18). The word "believe" used in verse 23 is more than mere mental assent. It includes obedience to God. Notice how love for our brother is a critical component to "abiding" in the Lord (vss. 23-24).

1 John 4 — John says that false prophets should be put to the test (verse 1). Just because one claims to a messenger of God doesn't make it so! During that time, the people could test the false prophets by just asking them what they believed about Jesus coming in the flesh (vss. 2-3). John says the false prophets are of the world and the world listens to them (vs. 5). God's people listen to the teachings of the apostles. They are true messengers of God (vs. 6). In verse 7, John revisits the topic of love, adding the motivation of God's love for us. He says that those who are truly of God are full of love. Love is vital part of God's nature. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (vss. 9-10). Because God loves us, we should be willing to love one another (vs. 11, 19). We can't honestly say we love God (whom we haven't seen), if we don't love our brethren (vss. 20-21).

1 John 5 — Verse 1 is not true in every instance. Instead (like a proverb) it is generally true. It is a general test of those who believe in Jesus. In verses 2-3, John says that those who love God will keep His commandments. The commandments here are reference to those listed in the gospel (not those under the Old Law). Verse 4 tells us just how important our faith is. Many want to know what is the "water and blood" of verse 6? It is likely referring to Jesus' entire ministry (His baptism to His death on the cross). Verse 8 seems to reference the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word, the baptism, and the events surrounding the death of Jesus that testify of Him. Verse 11 clearly states that eternal life is only found in Jesus. Verse 13 says we live with the confidence of heaven right now if we are walking in Jesus. When reading verse 14 about pray, pay close attention to words "according to His will." Verse 16-17 are difficult, but simply mean that a brother who won't ask for forgiveness (the sin that leads to death) can't be forgiven by someone else's prayers. He needs to

repent and ask God to forgive him! Verse 18 is better translated, “does not keep on sinning (ESV),” instead of “does not sin (NKJV).” Verse 21 gives a warning that we need to heed today!

2 John — This is a very short epistle containing both doctrinal and practical instructions. The “elect lady” of verse 1 may refer to a certain woman that John knew. It could also be symbolic for the church. The letter does seem to be written to a group because many plural nouns are used. In verse 4, John announces how happy he was to know of Christians who were faithfully walking in the truth. Verse 7 gives us the purpose of the letter: to expose the fact that there were many false teachers in the world! They were many people at time denying the fact that Jesus had come in the flesh. John admonishes them not to fall for the lies of those false teachers (vs. 8). Instead, abide in the doctrine of Christ. One who doesn’t abide in the doctrine doesn’t have fellowship with the Father and the Son (vss. 9). Verses 10-11 don’t mean you can’t say “hello” to a false teacher. Instead, he means we can’t give him a greeting or show him hospitality. Doing so would imply an endorsement of him and the false teaching he is promoting. He must be given no opportunity to advance his doctrine!

3 John — Unlike 2 John (which probably was written to a group of Christians), this epistle seems to have been written to one specific Christian, Gaius. Gaius is commended by John because he walked in truth and helped brethren with their physical needs (vss. 1-6). He is contrasted with Diotrophes. Diotrophes was not a proponent of truth. Instead, he tried to suppress the truth! He tried to usurp authority in the church (vss. 9-10). Another Christian commended by John is Demetrius (vs. 12). He was a lover of truth and received a good testimony from the apostles and the rest of the brethren. Are you more like Diotrophes or Gaius and Demetrius?

Week 16

Intro to Matthew — Matthew's gospel is the most Jewish of the Gospels. Repeatedly in this book, Matthew ties Jesus to the Old Testament and demonstrates He is the prophesied Messiah. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke share similarities, Matthew preserves large sections of Jesus' teaching (ex: the Sermon on the Mount). He also uses titles for Jesus like Son of David and Son of God, and gives some details about Jesus' birth. His portrait of Jesus is enormously important to understanding and believing in Jesus as the Christ.

Matthew 1 — Verse 1 sets the tone for the rest of the book. The purpose of this book is to convince the readers that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. Jesus is the One promised to come through the families of Abraham and David (He is the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament prophets predicted about the Messiah). The Jews would have been very familiar with the genealogy listed in this chapter. Verses 2-17 emphasize how Jesus came through the kingly lineage of David. Pay close attention to some of the unique people in Jesus' genealogy (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Manasseh). Verse 21 shows us that Jesus was the name designated to Him by God. We also see in this verse what His mission was for the earth. Verses 22-25 show us what makes Jesus' birth the most special birth in the history of the world. He was born of a virgin!

Matthew 2 — The key events to notice in this chapter include the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea, the visit from the magi from the east, and the attempt of King Herod to kill Jesus as an infant. Herod the Great was an extremely wicked man. He was cruel, paranoid, and maybe even insane! To protect Jesus from Herod, God had Joseph and Mary take Him to Egypt. Herod killed a number of babies in an effort to kill the Lord. Once Herod died, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the region of Galilee and raised Him in Nazareth (vss. 19-23).

Matthew 3 — This chapter begins by announcing the ministry of John the Baptist. John appeared in the wilderness preaching repentance and about the kingdom of God. He also baptized Jews from all over Israel in the Jordan River for the forgiveness of sins. His mission was to prepare Israel to receive the Messiah when He began His ministry. This was foretold by the prophets (vs. 3). Verse 4 gives us a glimpse in how interesting and unique John looked. In verse 7, we see that John was bold in his preaching. He did not hold back in telling the Pharisees and Sadducees how corrupt they were before God! In verses 9-10, John announces how a time was soon coming when it would not be good enough to just be a physical descendant of Abraham. In verses 13-17, we read about John baptizing Jesus. Unlike the rest of Israel, Jesus was not baptized for remission of sins (He never committed sin). Instead, He was baptized so that He might obey every commandment of God (vs. 15). After being baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove, and God the Father spoke from heaven, confirming His identity as the Son of God.

Matthew 4 — After being baptized, Jesus was led into the wilderness where He fasted for forty days and nights (vss. 1-11). During this time of vulnerability, Satan came to tempt Him. Jesus defeated

Satan by trusting in God's word. With each temptation, Jesus answered Satan by quoting scripture from Deuteronomy 6-8. After the temptations, the angels came to minister to Him (possibly even giving Him food). In verse 12, we can read about the beginning of the Lord's ministry in Galilee. Jesus had to stay away from Jerusalem (keep in mind this was where John was arrested and killed). Jesus preached about repentance and the kingdom of God (vs. 17). The kingdom of God is first and foremost the rule and reign of God. It is important to understand that the encounter that Peter, Andrew, John, James had with Jesus in verses 18-22 was not their first encounter with Him. They had met Him previously in John 1:35ff. But now they are ready to immediately leave their professions permanently and be trained to become apostles. Verses 23-25 give us insight into the practical things Jesus did in His ministry. He preached in the synagogues and healed every disease and sickness among the people. His power caused large crowds from all over to come to Him.

Matthew 5 — This chapter contains the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. This is easily the greatest sermon ever preached. The blessings of living as a true disciple are found in verses 1-12. Verses 13-16 show the kind of positive influence disciples are to have on the world. The key theme of this sermon is listed in verse 20. Everything in this sermon is designed to make us more righteous than the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees during that time. Some key things to pay close attention to include: Jesus' respect for God's word (vs. 18); Jesus' teaching about lust and adultery of the heart (vs. 27); the willingness that we must have to do whatever it takes to get sin out of our lives (vss. 28-29); Jesus' standard for marriage, divorce and remarriage (vss. 31-32); and Jesus' teaching about our need to love all people (vss. 43-48).

Week 17

Matthew 6 — As Jesus continues with the Sermon on the Mount, He talks about the danger of practicing righteousness before men. Righteousness practiced before men is meaningless in the eyes of God (vss. 1-6). In verses 9-15, Jesus teaches important things in regard to prayer. He says that prayer should involve reverence (vs. 9), submission (vs. 10), and full dependence on God (vss. 11-15). In verses 14-15, notice how important the willingness to forgive others is in order to receive forgiveness from God. Many wonder if fasting is being commanded in verse in verse 16. No, it is not. Instead, He is regulating a common custom during that time. Jesus says it was okay to fast, but not for the purpose of receiving praise from others. In verses 19-21, Jesus talks about the need to stay focused on heaven. His disciples should long for heaven more than anything else! Verses 22-23 talk about the need to have spiritual vision. Verses 25-34 provide practical solutions to overcoming the problem of worry. The worry that Jesus has in mind here has to do with being consumed with greed and earthly gain (vs. 24). To overcome this, we must learn to be content and trust in God's ability to take care of us. Worrying won't change anything about our lives (vs. 27). Worrying won't solve the problems of tomorrow (vs. 34). We need to focus on taking life one day at a time! The kingdom of God that Jesus makes mention of in verse 33 has to do with the rule of God. Instead of being consumed with worrying about earthly gain, focus on allowing God to rule in your life and doing His will. He will then make sure you have everything you need.

Matthew 7 — Verse 1 is probably the most misused scripture in our culture. A careful study of the context shows that Jesus is not condemning all kinds of judging. Instead, He is condemning hypocritical judging. In John 7:24, He tells us there are times when judging others is okay and necessary. In fact, obeying Matthew 7:6 requires that we do some judging! In verses 7-11, we see that like any good Father, God loves us and is willing to give us what we ask for if it is for our good. Verse 12 contains what many refer to as the "Golden Rule." Wouldn't the world be a better place if everyone just did what Jesus says here? Verses 13-14 show us that there will clearly be more people lost than saved in the end. In verses 15-20, Jesus talks about the reality of false teachers and the need to be able to recognize and avoid them. Verses 21-23 tell us about people who are religious believers but are wrong in the things they do. Unfortunately, they describe a lot of people in our world today.

Matthew 8 — Beginning in chapter 8 (and going all through chapter 9), Matthew provides nine miracles performed by Jesus. By doing this, Matthew is clearly trying to present that Jesus was a mighty man of miracles. Jesus was one who could do things that no ordinary man could do! The miracles that He performed were designed to verify His supernatural claims and prove Him to be the Son of God (John 20:30-31). The miracles listed in this chapter include the cleansing of a leper (vss. 1-4); healing a paralyzed man (vss. 5-13); healing Peter's mother-in-law (vss. 14-15); calming a storm on the sea (vss. 18-27); and casting demons out of two men (vss. 28-34).

Matthew 9 — The miracle in verses 1-8 demonstrates Jesus' authority and ability to forgive sins. In verses 9-13, we find Matthew, the tax collector (and one who penned this gospel), becoming a follower of Jesus. It is interesting to notice the different kinds of people Jesus chose to become His apostles. In verses 12-13, we see why Jesus spent time with sinners. We would do well to consider the Lord's example in our efforts to win sinners today. The teachings of verses 14-17 discuss what is appropriate to do and what is not. Some things just don't "fit." They aren't done because it is not the proper time for them. In this case, it wasn't fit and appropriate for Jesus' disciples to fast while He was with them on the earth. In verses 18-34, we find four more miracles performed by Jesus: the healing of the woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years (vss. 20-22); the raising of the little girl from the dead (vss. 23-26); the healing of two blind men (vss. 27-31); and the casting out of a demon (vss. 32-34). It is interesting how the Pharisees never could deny the validity of the miracles. Instead, they foolishly questioned their source (vs. 34). Verses 37-38 make mention of something that we need to be praying for every day.

Matthew 10 — This chapter contains what is called "The Limited Commission." It is the commission from Jesus to His apostles to go and preach to the Jews (vss. 5-6). In verses 1-4, we find a list of names of the apostles. Notice how they all received miraculous ability from Jesus. Some things to really focus on include: the need for them to trust God as they went out (vss. 9-10); the need to continue preaching even after being rejected by some (vs. 14); the persecution that awaited them (vss. 16-23); and a warning against denying Him and putting anything before Him (vss. 32-39). Notice how any act of service (no matter how small it might be), matters to Jesus, if the motivation for doing it is right (vs. 42).

Week 18

Matthew 11 — In the first few verses, we find John having what appears to be some doubt about Jesus being the Messiah (vss. 1-3). Why John is having these doubts has been a long cause of speculation. Perhaps Jesus wasn't acting the way John thought the Messiah would. Maybe John was expecting the Messiah to liberate the Jews from Rome and free him from prison. Regardless of what John may have thought, Jesus gave him a clear answer to his question. Jesus told John's disciples to go back and report how He was doing everything that the prophets said the Messiah would do (vss. 4-6). In verses 7-19, Jesus commends the ministry of John. He says that John was the forerunner foretold by the prophets, and he did the work God gave him extremely well. In verses 20-24, Jesus curses the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they rejected Him. Do not make the mistake of thinking that verses 28-30 are saying that Christianity is easier than Judaism. Jesus is contrasting the traditions that the Pharisees added to the Law with knowing Him and being a relationship with Him. When we completely serve and follow Jesus, life is so much better!

Matthew 12 — Many mistakenly think that verses 1-8 are teaching situational ethics. They are not! Instead, they are exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Jesus' point is that the Pharisees would not condemn David for doing something unlawful (eating the consecrated bread), but they would condemn His apostles for doing something lawful (eating when they were hungry on the Sabbath). The main problem that the Pharisees had was the apostles were violating the traditions that they created for the Sabbath. David actually broke God's law! The apostles merely violated their tradition. In verses 15-21, Matthew ties the miracles of Jesus to Him being the suffering servant that the prophet Isaiah speaks of. It is interesting that no matter how much they opposed Him, Jesus' enemies could not deny the fact that He could perform miracles (vss. 22-24). After asking for yet another sign, Jesus speaks of His resurrection to His enemies in verses 39-40. This would be the sign of the prophet Jonah! In verses 46-51, Jesus says some powerful things about family. He says His true family are those who do the will of His Father. Does this describe you?

Matthew 13 — In this chapter, Matthew introduces Jesus famous use of parables to teach God's word. The purpose of parables was to take an everyday situation and cast it alongside a spiritual truth. The parables mentioned in this chapter are easy to understand but extremely powerful. They have to do with how men respond to the preaching of God's word or the great value of the kingdom of heaven. The parables that are taught include: the parable of the sower (vss. 3-9, 18-23), the parable of the tares (vss. 24-30, 36-43), the parable of the mustard seed (vss. 31-32), the parable of the leaven (vs. 33), the parable of the hidden treasure (vs. 44), the parable of the costly pearl (vss. 45-46), and the parable of the net (vs. 47-50). In verses 53-58, Jesus goes back to the town where He grew up (Nazareth). Unfortunately, the people refused to believe in Him (vs. 58).

Matthew 14 — The key events of this chapter include the beheading of John (vss. 1-12), the feeding of the 5,000 (vss. 13-21), and Jesus walking on water (vss. 22-33). The Herod that is mentioned here is Herod Antipas. He was the son of the Herod who tried to kill the baby Jesus. Verses 3-12 show

how the topic of marriage, divorce and remarriage has been controversial for a long time. After John preached the truth about it, he got his head cut off! It is interesting that the feeding of the 5,000 came about because of Jesus' compassion for the people (vs. 14). When Jesus walked on water, it was the fourth watch of the night (vs. 25). This would have been between 3 AM and 6 AM. Notice how Peter was also walking on water, but when he took his eyes off of Jesus, he fell and began to sink.

Matthew 15 — In verse 1, we see that important leaders are willing to travel from Jerusalem to Galilee in order to “check out” Jesus. In verses 2-9, Jesus rebukes them because they bound their man-made rules as God's law. They would even put their traditions above God's law (vss. 2-6). When Jesus goes into Gentile territory, He blesses a woman who has a daughter possessed by a demon (vss. 21-28). Notice how this woman's faith and persistence contributed to Jesus' willingness to grant her request. In verses 32-39, we find another occasion when Jesus miraculously multiplies food. This time He feeds 4,000 men (not counting the women and children). Unlike the previous instance (which occurred in Bethsaida), this miraculous feeding takes place within the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31).

Week 19

Matthew 16 — The rejection of Jesus by many of the Jewish religious leaders continues in this chapter. In the first verse, we find them asking for a sign. Jesus knew their hearts were hardened and promised that they would receive no other sign than that of the prophet Jonah. This is a reference to the sign of His resurrection from the dead (vss. 2-4). Keep in mind Jesus said these things to the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees would be the ones who plotted to put Him to death, while the Sadducees didn't even believe in the resurrection of the dead! Both of these groups were so corrupt that the Lord warned His people to watch out against their teachings. This is probably a reference to how they bound their man-made traditions as equal to the law of God (vss. 5-12). In verse 13, when He and His apostles went to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus wanted to know what the word on the street was concerning Him. While many said Jesus was one of the prophets, Peter declared that He is the Christ and Son of God. (vs. 16). Jesus commended Peter for accepting the miraculous evidence that confirmed His identity. He then announced His plan to build His church (vss. 18-19). Here Jesus was not talking about building a material building. The word "church" here is used to talk about those who obey the gospel and submit to Jesus as the Lord and Christ. Also notice how the church and kingdom of heaven are one and the same (vss. 18-19). While Peter is commended here for answering Jesus' question about His identity correctly, in verses 22-23, he is rebuked because he had a misunderstanding about Jesus needing to die on the cross. This was actually a concept that all the disciples struggled with understanding.

Matthew 17 — Six days after the conversation in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus showed His glory in a powerful way to Peter, James, and John (vss. 1-8). On an exceedingly high mountain, Jesus was transfigured. His face shone like the sun and His garments became white as light. Peter blunders again and is told by God the Father that Jesus has preeminence even greater than men like Moses and Elijah. Jesus commands them not to tell anyone about this experience until after He is raised from the dead (vs. 9). When they come down from the mountain, there is trouble. Due to insufficient faith, the other apostles are unable to cast a demon out of a young boy. Jesus expresses His disappointment in them and then casts out the demon (vss. 14-21). In verses 22-23, Jesus once again predicts His arrest, death and resurrection. In verses 24-27, Jesus performs yet another miracle. This one includes providing money in a fish so He and Peter could pay a poll tax.

Matthew 18 — Jesus' call to become like children is a call for us to become humble (vs. 4). During this time especially, children had very little power, wealth, rank, or authority. Verses 7-11, provide warning against causing those who serve the Lord to stumble. Verses 15-20 have to do with the practical execution of church discipline. In the context the instructions specifically have to do with making things right with a brother who offends or sins against us. These instructions were especially difficult for the apostles to understand (which prompts the question by Peter in verse 21). Jesus then goes on to teach about forgiveness. His point is that a brother who repents must be forgiven (vss. 22-35). If we don't forgive a brother, we can't expect God to forgive us!

Matthew 19 — Verse 1 marks the final turning point, as Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem for the final time. In verse 3, the Pharisees came testing Jesus with a controversial question about marriage and divorce. Jesus reminds them of God's original purpose for marriage (vss. 4-6). Verse 9 is controversial today, but the meaning is clear and easy to understand. The problem is that most do not want to obey it. These instructions about marriage only applied to those who were married. They do not apply to the unmarried (vss. 10-12). In verses 13-15, we find Jesus giving attention to children. As mentioned earlier, this was radical because children were not given a lot of respect during this time. The rich young ruler was someone who said the right things, but refused to act. He loved his stuff more than his Lord (vss. 16-22)! People like him will not end up in heaven (vss. 23-26).

Matthew 20 — In verses 1-16, we find the parable about the laborers in the vineyard. In this parable, Jesus guarantees the same reward for all of those who follow Him. This is a great parable about the grace of God! Following this parable, James, John, and their mother come to Jesus showing their misunderstanding about His kingdom (vss. 20-21). They thought that Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom and they wanted to make sure that they had high positions in it. In verses 22-28, Jesus informs that the greatest in His kingdom is not defined by position, but by service. The chapter concludes with Jesus healing two blind men near Jericho (vss. 29-34). Mark and Luke only focus on one of the men (Bartimaeus).

Week 20

Matthew 21 — This is one of the few times Jesus deliberately goes out of His way to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. As He enters Jerusalem, He clearly wants the people to see Him as the Messiah spoken of in Zechariah 9:9-10. Notice carefully how the people praised Jesus (vss. 1-11). These were those who believed in Him because He raised Lazarus (John 12:17). Since the crowd was probably thinking that Jesus was coming to start a war with Rome, it was interesting for them to see Jesus entering into the city riding on a donkey, and not a war horse! In verses 12-13, we find out about Jesus' cleansing the temple for the second time. God had a specific purpose for the temple. Doing business and cheating people out of their money were not part of that purpose! In verses 14-17, we see the disdain that the religious leaders had for the children praising Jesus. It is interesting how the children understood the truth about Jesus, while the "educated" leaders did not. The cursing of the fig tree was another miracle performed by Jesus. It was designed to expose how fruitless the nation of Israel had become and how God's judgment would soon come upon them. It also was something Jesus used to teach a lesson about faith (vss. 18-22). In verses 23-27, the authority of Jesus is challenged by the religious leaders. They wanted to know by what authority did Jesus cleanse the temple the day prior. John's testimony about Him being the Messiah and Lamb of God is where He got His authority (vs. 26)!

Matthew 22 — The parable of the wedding the feast (verses 1-14) is crystal clear in its meaning and application. It speaks of a happy time spoiled by ungrateful and foolish citizens. It is about how Israel rejected the invitation to be part of God's kingdom, while others (Gentiles) eagerly accepted it. The questions asked by the Herodians and Sadducees were designed to trap Jesus and diminish His influence (vss. 15-33). The Herodians had a controversial question about taxes. The Sadducees had a controversial question about the resurrection (keep in mind they didn't believe in the resurrection). In response to the Herodians, Jesus pronounced the responsibility of disciples to God and the government (vs. 21). In response to the Sadducees, Jesus revealed their misunderstanding of God's word (vss. 29-32). Notice how Jesus makes His entire argument about the reality of the resurrection off the tense of one word (vs. 32). The chapter concludes with Jesus asking a question (vss. 41-46). How could the descendant of David be his Lord? Answer: because He is God!

Matthew 23 — This chapter can be divided up into two parts. In verses 1-12, Jesus warns the people of being like the corrupt Pharisees. These men loved praise and position among the people. They didn't care about doing the will of God! In verses 13-36, Jesus announced eight woes to the Pharisees. They are found in verses 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29. In verses 37-39, Jesus announces the pending judgment of God on the people of Jerusalem because they rejected Him. Jesus says He wanted to bless them, but they refused to accept Him as the Messiah.

Matthew 24 — Verses 1-3 are critical to understanding the context of this chapter. The disciples are impressed with the temple and are shocked to learn that one day it would be destroyed. They asked Jesus when would this happen (vs. 3). Jesus goes on to give them a list of warning signs to look out

for (vss. 1-33). History confirms that all these things took place before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Verses 27-30 confuse many because they aren't familiar with Old Testament judgment language (Isaiah 13:10, 13; 19:1; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Amos 8:1-2). Verse 34 makes it clear that these warning signs were for that generation (vs. 34). Many false teachers make the mistake of trying to apply them to our time today.

Matthew 25 — The parable of the ten virgins (vss. 1-13) and the parable of the talents (vss. 14-30) emphasize the need to be prepared and actively working in the kingdom when the Lord comes again. Only the Father knows when His Son will return (Matthew 24:36). It will occur like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). In verses 31-46, Jesus describes what it will be like on Judgment Day. All nations will be gathered before Him (vs. 32). The righteous and the wicked will be separated (vs. 32). The wicked will receive eternal punishment in everlasting fire, while the righteous will receive eternal life with the King (vss. 41, 46).

Week 21

Matthew 26 — In verses 1-2, we see how Jesus is in full control of all that is about to happen to Him. He knew exactly what was about to transpire! The private meeting of the religious leaders to plan how to kill Jesus probably took place on the Wednesday before the crucifixion (vss. 3-5). Notice how they felt it was nearly impossible to arrest Jesus on this week (the week of Passover). Too many people who admired Jesus were in Jerusalem. The events of verses 6-13 actually took place on Saturday (John 12:1-11). Why does Matthew tell it out of chronological order? Maybe to show us something else (in addition to greed) that contributed to Judas' decision to betray Jesus. It is interesting that while Judas is seeking to destroy Jesus, Mary is sacrificing a very costly bottle of perfume to anoint Him. The lesson: sacrificing for Jesus is costly! Verse 18 shows us the preparations for the Passover meal. It appears that Jesus had made prior arrangements for the room they would meet in. It is interesting that Judas did not know about this place in advance so He could betray Jesus there. In verses 20-25, Jesus eats the Passover meal with His disciples and reveals to Judas that He knows he will betray Him. In verses 26-29, after finishing the Passover meal, Jesus instituted a new meal — the Lord's Supper. This meal would be eaten by disciples in the future to remember His sacrifice on the cross. Each time disciples eat of it they are to remember that Jesus is their Passover and the Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29). When arriving in Gethsemane, Jesus prays to His Father three separate times (vss. 36-46). When Judas arrives, he betrays Jesus with a kiss (vs. 48). This was to identify Him to the soldiers. In verses 53-54, we see that Jesus was not at the mercy of these soldiers. But He was determined to do the Father's will. After being arrested, Jesus was brought before Caiaphas (vss. 57-68). Notice carefully how corrupt this trial was! The chapter concludes with Peter denying that he knew Jesus three times (vss. 69-75). The Lord predicted this would happen earlier in the night.

Matthew 27 — After already suffering through mock trials before the Sanhedrin, Jesus is brought before Pilate because the Jews did not have the right to execute lawbreakers (vss. 1-2). In verses 3-5, we read about Judas' regret for betraying Jesus. He gives the money back and hangs himself. When before Pilate, Jesus impressed Pilate with courage and integrity (vs. 14). Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. The enemies were so determined to have Him crucified that they allowed a violent criminal to be released (vss. 15-23). When having Jesus scourged did not please the Jews, Pilate gave in and handed Him over to be crucified (vss. 24-26). Golgotha was right outside of Jerusalem (vs. 33). Jesus hung on the cross for about six hours. Once He died, the veil of the temple was torn from the top down (signifying how access to God and forgiveness of sin had been accomplished through Jesus' death), many dead people were raised, and Jesus was buried in a tomb owned by a rich man (vss. 50-53, 57-60). Also, note how determined the enemies were to ensure that no one came and stole Jesus' dead body (vss. 62-66).

Matthew 28 — Matthew's gospel ends on an enormously positive note! Jesus is raised on the third day just as He promised. He also makes several appearances to various people (vss. 1-10). Matthew also answers a vicious lie that was circulating about the resurrection (vss. 11-15). The book

concludes with Jesus being worshipped, announcing His authority, and giving His disciples the mission to go into the world and preach about the salvation found in Him (vss. 16-20). The story of Jesus ends here, but what He began would be continued through His people!

James 1 — James is one of the most practical books in the Bible. Many refer to it as “The Proverbs of the New Testament”. The writer is probably James, the brother of Jesus. In verse 5, notice how important it is to pray for wisdom. Pay close attention to the contrast found in verse 13 and 17. God doesn’t tempt, instead, He blesses! Verses 19-27 emphasize the need to not be merely hearers, but also doers of God’s word. Part of being a doer includes helping the less fortunate (vs. 27).

James 2 — This chapter opens by talking about how Christians are not to have a haughty spirit and show partiality (vss. 1-7). Jesus always treated everyone the same! It is interesting how often the poor can humble themselves and live out their trust in God easier than the rich can. The “royal law” and the “law of liberty” are the same (vs. 8, 12). They are references to the law of Christ. Verses 14-26 are a great section about faith that pleases God. The lesson is simple: true faith in God acts! It obeys what God has declared.

Week 22

James 3 — Do you ever find yourself struggling with controlling your tongue, as many do? If so, then read this chapter carefully. This chapter begins with admonitions about the tongue (vss. 2-5). The tongue is a very small part of the body, but it is extremely powerful. It is something that, if not controlled, the devil can use it to cause much harm and get us into a lot of trouble. James gives a powerful illustration by comparing it to a small flame that can start a huge forest fire (vs. 5b). Although the tongue is small, if not controlled, it can defile the whole body (vs. 6). Throughout the centuries men have been able to tame wild animals; however, they struggle with taming their tongues (vs. 8). James says an untamed tongue is a “restless evil and full of deadly poison.” The chapter concludes with practical advice about the value of seeking wisdom and sowing peace (vss. 13-18). Instead of using our tongue to say ugly things when someone makes us angry, we need to pursue peace. This section is very similar to what Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:9.

James 4 — The key admonitions in this chapter include: avoiding quarrels with brethren (vs. 1), avoiding the sin of pride (vs. 6), resisting the devil (vs. 7), and constantly striving to draw near to God (vs 8). There is also a reminder that only God has the right to judge and that our time on earth is limited (vss. 12-17).

James 5 — While there is no sin in being rich, verse 3 tells us that our riches can't save us on the Day of Judgment. What do we make of verses 8-9 that make it sound as though the return of Christ will occur soon? We must remember that for a child of God, the Lord's return is as close as his own death. Christians must live in anticipation of their Master's return every day! In verse 13, we see the value of singing and praying in our everyday lives. The concept of elders anointing sick saints with oil continues to generate much controversy and debate. It could be a reference to elders anointing and praying for those who are spiritually sick and are repenting and confessing their sins. It could also be a reference to elders with miraculous spiritual gifts using oil to physically heal brethren. Regardless of the view you hold, don't get so wrapped up in the information about elders that you miss the end of verse 14. Notice how it is the Lord, (not the elders, or the oil) who heals and raises this person up!

1 Peter 1 — This letter from Peter was written to help Christians (both Jew and Gentile) who were facing severe persecution. Many scholars say it was written in the early 60 A.D.'s (perhaps from Rome). Peter's goal is to encourage disciples to hang in there and continue working by faith in Jesus. In verse 1, we see the Christians that Peter was writing to were mostly in the provinces of northern Turkey. Verses 3-5 are encouraging to Christians of every generation. Notice that Peter says Christians have a real living hope because Jesus was raised from the dead! In verses 6-9, he describes the persecution these saints were facing and how they had persevered. In verses 10-12, we see that by having God's full and complete revelation today (the Bible), we possess information that the angels and prophets of old longed for. The language “prepare your minds” in verse 13 would be equal to us saying “roll up your sleeves.” Notice that after obeying the gospel, our lives should look different (vs. 14). We are to be holy like our Father in heaven is holy (vs. 15). In verses

18-19, we see the high cost of our salvation. Pay close attention to the indestructible nature of God's word (vss. 23-25). What an amazing promise!

1 Peter 2 — Usually, the example of milk is used to talk about something negative in the Bible (see Hebrews 5:12-14). But here, Peter uses the example positively. He says that Christians should long for the word of God like a baby longs for milk (vs. 2). Just as a baby needs milk to grow, disciples need God's word. In verses 4-11, Peter uses stone imagery to describe our relationships with Jesus. He also describes us as priests, aliens, and strangers. While many in society openly rebel against the government, we are to submit and show honor towards our government (vss. 13-17). Keep in mind Peter wrote this during the time of the wicked and corrupt Roman Empire! The chapter closes by appealing to the example of Christ's suffering (vss. 21-25). Christ was not asking these saints to endure something that He did not endure first. Since He suffered for them, they should have been willing to suffer for Him.

Week 23

1 Peter 3 — The first verse in this chapter connects back to 1 Peter 2:13. Here begins a section about the roles of life and how Christians are to behave in them. In verse 1, Peter gives practical advice to Christian women in regards to how they can influence a non-Christian husband to come to the Lord. Notice how they can influence their husbands in a powerful way by just living a faithful life to the Lord. Verse 6 urges women to be submissive and respectful towards their husbands. Verse 7 admonishes men to treat their wives right. A husband must learn his wife and deal with her in an honorable and understanding way. If he doesn't, his prayers will be hindered! Verses 8-12 give a list of characteristics and actions that should be found in the life of a disciple. Verses 13-17 are a great section about how God's people must be willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Verse 19 is considered to be one of the most puzzling verses in the New Testament. What does it mean? Many say these "spirits in prison" are referring to the disobedient in the time of Noah. Others say (and this is probably more accurate) that these are a reference to disobedient angels. It seems that Peter is talking about how Jesus (after dying on the cross) made a proclamation of victory and condemnation to some who previously rejected God. Regardless of the view you hold, don't miss the point. The point is, since Jesus overcame the persecution He faced, Christians can trust in Him to help them overcome the persecution that they face in their lives. In verses 20-21, notice the correlation between how water played a huge role in the salvation of Noah and his household, and how it also plays a huge role in our salvation today. How does it? When we are baptized in water for remission of sins!

1 Peter 4 — Verse 1 connects back to 1 Peter 3:18. Since Christ has suffered for us, we must change our mindset and lifestyle when we come to Him (vss. 1-3). People in the world will be surprised when we do this (vs. 4), but we will be doing the will of God (vss. 5-6). Verse 7 talks about how the return of Jesus should always be viewed as pending and near. Verses 7-11 offer more practical characteristics and actions that should be found in the life of a Christian. Notice carefully the emphasis placed on serving others. Verse 12 revisits the theme of suffering for Christ. Verse 16 tells us how we should view suffering as Christians. Verse 19 announces what we do when suffer for the will of God.

1 Peter 5 — Who can Christians look to for support and help when they face times of suffering? Elders or shepherds. Verses 1-4 discuss elders and their responsibility to the flock of God. They are to shepherd, oversee, and be examples to the flock. They are to be good stewards of those who God has entrusted to them. If they do so, they will receive a great reward from the Chief Shepherd (Jesus). Christians are also to look for support from one another (vs. 5). Most importantly, disciples are to look to God (vss. 6-7). They are to pray to God and cast their anxieties on Him. Verse 8 describes how fierce an enemy the devil is! Verse 10 encourages us because it reminds us of what we will receive if we persevere and suffer for the Lord. Verse 12 informs us that Silvanus (Silas) is the messenger and carrier of Peter's letter. The "Babylon" of verse 13 is probably a reference to Rome. The Mark mentioned in verse 13 is probably a reference to John Mark. He was Peter's son in the faith.

2 Peter 1 — This is a very unique letter in the New Testament. The content can be divided into two parts. The first part includes admonitions about false teachers and final words to persecuted Christians from Peter. The second part includes revelation of the future. In verse three, we see that everything pertaining to life and godliness was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles. These things have been written down and preserved for us to read today. In verses 5-7, Peter lists some key ingredients for spiritual growth. Notice how when these ingredients are applied, heaven is guaranteed (vss. 8-11)! Verse 15 gives us a hint that Peter's death may soon be at hand. In verse 16, we see that there were some who were speaking badly about the testimony of the apostles. Peter will spend the remainder of the chapter answering the charges of these false teachers. In the second part of verse 16, he emphasizes how he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Jesus. In verses 17-18, he talks about what he saw on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:1-8). Verses 19-21 have to do with what the Old Testament predicted about Jesus. Peter says the things that the prophets foretold in the Old Testament did not originate from their minds.

2 Peter 2 — This chapter brings out the problem with false teachers during this time (vss. 1-3). In verses 4-9, Peter says that God has the power to judge these evil men, since He had already done so with angels who had sinned against Him. We don't know much about these erring angels mentioned. Any effort to try to connect them to other parts of the Bible is futile and engaging in mere speculation. Peter will continue talking about false teachers by mentioning Balaam in verse 15. This man is the ultimate example of a "prophet for hire." His story is mentioned in Numbers 22. Peter's point is that these false teachers were greedy and lovers of money like Balaam. Verses 21-22 give a disturbing description of our condition when we listen to false teachers and abandon the truth.

Week 24

2 Peter 3 — In verses 1-2, Peter explains his reason for writing this letter. Verse 3 begins a section about what some false teachers were saying about the return of Jesus. Peter says that some false teachers were reasoning that because Jesus hadn't come back yet, it meant that He wasn't coming back at all. In verses 6-10, Peter reminds them that God destroyed the world before in the time of Noah and he will do it again. Only the next time it will be with fire! Since this is guaranteed to occur, we need to make sure we are constantly doing God's will and living righteously (vss. 11-14). In verse 16, Peter calls the writings of Paul "Scripture." Notice how in the first century, disciples were able to recognize what was scripture and what was not. The book concludes with an admonition to be on guard against false teachers and continue growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (vss. 17-18).

Luke 1 — Luke is a truly fascinating book in the New Testament (caution these chapters are long! That means your daily Bible readings will be longer than usual. Hang in there!). It appears to have been written to a specific person (Theophilus). Maybe this person was a governmental official. In verses 1-4, Luke emphasizes the careful research and discussions he had with eye-witnesses to Jesus and the things He did. Luke wanted Theophilus to know the "exact truth" about Jesus. In verse 5, Luke provides a critical marker in time. The birth of Jesus took place in the days of Herod the king. Herod was the king of Judea and was known as a great builder. Many of his accomplishments can still be viewed in Israel today. In verses 8-25, we can read about the special circumstances surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. Notice how both of John's parents were righteous people, and his father was a priest (vss. 5-6). John would be the forerunner for the Lord. He would prepare people's hearts to receive Jesus when He began his ministry. This was foretold in the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 4:5-6). In verses 26-38, the birth of Jesus is announced by Gabriel to Mary. It is very likely that Mary is between 14-17 years old during this time. There is a song of Mary in this chapter. In it, she praises God and speaks of what He would do through the Messiah she was carrying (vss. 46-56). There is also the prophecy of Zacharias (vss. 67-79). Notice carefully how often the Holy Spirit and His work are mentioned in this chapter.

Luke 2 — The key events in this chapter include the miraculous birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (Vss. 1-20). Notice the terrible scene and circumstance surrounding Jesus' birth (very different than how it is portrayed today). Simeon and Anna are mentioned (vss. 21-38). Both were faithful Jews who were blessed to see the coming of the Messiah. In fact, Simeon was promised by the Holy Spirit that He would not die until He saw the Messiah. Beginning in verse 39, we see that Jesus was in Nazareth of Galilee. When Jesus was twelve, due to Mary and Joseph traveling with a large group of family, He was lost for a time when they left Jerusalem. When they found Him, He was in the temple listening to teaching and asking questions (vss. 41-51). Verse 52 provides a great summary of Jesus' life from the time He was 12 years old until the age of 30 years old.

Luke 3 — This chapter opens with details about the ministry of John (vss. 1-20). John preached a message of repentance. He also baptized people for the forgiveness of sins (vs. 3). He told Israel that One was coming after him who would be mightier than he and would baptize with the Holy Spirit and judgment (vs. 16). John also baptized Jesus (vss. 21-22). After the baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and God the Father spoke from heaven confirming Him to be His Son. Verse 23 begins a section on Jesus' genealogy. Why is this here? Why isn't it exactly the same as Matthew's list? The answer to the first question is because it shows Jesus' connection to all men (going all the way back to Adam, and not just Abraham). It also makes the point that Jesus was a real man (something that can be easy to overlook and forget). The differences in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke have many possible explanations. Some think this is Mary's lineage via Levirate marriage or adoption.

Luke 4 — In verses 1-13, Jesus uses scriptures to defeat the devil. We need to do the same! Also, notice the Holy Spirit's work in the ministry of Jesus (vs. 1). Beginning in verse 14, we find the beginning of Jesus' ministry. When Jesus went to Nazareth (His hometown), He was rejected (vss. 14-30). The people even tried to kill Him! It appears that the people of Nazareth were really upset when Jesus began talking about God's blessing to the Gentiles instead of the Israelites (vss. 24-27). The rest of the chapter lists some of the miracles (supernatural acts) performed by Jesus. The Lord casts out demons (vss. 31-37). Notice carefully how the demons knew who He was and were afraid of Him! Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (vss. 38-39). She had a "high fever." This means she was at the point of death. Notice the results of the miracle were instant. After being healed, she immediately began waiting on others.

Week 25

Luke 5 — In verse 1, notice how popular Jesus is becoming at the beginning of His ministry. The “lake of Gennesaret” is another name for the Sea of Galilee. In verses 1-11, Jesus performs a miracle and calls Peter to immediately leave his fishing profession to follow Him. Please understand that this is not the first time Peter has encountered Jesus (See John 1:35-42). In verse 16, notice in the midst of a very busy life (preaching and performing numerous miracles), Jesus often slipped away from the crowds to pray. The miracle of verses 17-26 is also cited in Mark 2:1-12 and Matthew 9:1-8. In it, the deity of Jesus is on full display. Jesus was able to forgive sin because He is God and His miracle confirmed that! In verses 27-32, Matthew is called to follow Jesus. Notice how like in the case of Peter, Matthew immediately left his profession to do this. Verses 33-39 are often misunderstood. These verses have nothing to do with the New Covenant substituting the Old Covenant. In the context, they have to do with what is inappropriate and foolish to do. The point is: it was the wrong time for the disciples to fast. The appropriate time to do that would be later. Now they needed to listen to Him!

Luke 6 — Verses 1-5 are not teaching situational ethics. The disciples were guilty of breaking the traditions of the religious leaders, not the Law of God. Jesus called what David did “not lawful” (vs. 4). These Pharisees would attack Jesus and His disciples for doing what was lawful, but they wouldn’t say anything against David who did something “not lawful.” In verse 12, we find Jesus once again slipping away from the crowds to pray. Verses 13-15 provide a list of the names of the apostles. It is interesting that throughout the gospel Judas is referred to as “the traitor.” In verses 20-49, we find teaching very similar to that of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. One exception is the series of “woes” mentioned in verses 24-26. This is typically referred to as the “Sermon on the Plain” and probably contains common teaching about the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached in many places.

Luke 7 — Since Luke is the only Gentile writer of the Bible, it is interesting to notice the number of Gentiles that he mentions who are blessed by Jesus. In verses 1-10, we find yet another one. The miracle performed in the village of Nain is only found in this gospel (vss. 11-17). This is one of the three times in the gospel where we can read about Jesus raising the dead. The question asked by John through his disciples to Jesus is puzzling to Bible students. It could be that since John was suffering in prison, he was beginning to have some doubts about Jesus. Many times the devil uses suffering to put doubt into our hearts. Jesus answers John’s doubts by sending word back to him that He was doing exactly what the prophets foretold about the Messiah (vss. 22-23). In verse 28, Jesus gives John a very high compliment. But notice how those in the kingdom today are even greater than John! In verses 36-50, the haughty and proud spirit of a Pharisee is contrasted with the humility of a woman who was known as “a sinner.” This woman was looked down upon by society, but was praised and forgiven by Jesus (vs. 48).

Luke 8 — Notice how there were some women disciples who also traveled with Jesus and His apostles. They were among many who financially supported the Lord’s ministry (vss. 1-3). The

parable of the sower is one of Jesus' most famous parables (vss. 4-8, 11-15). It is easy to understand because not only does Jesus tell it, but He also explains the meaning. In verse 21, Jesus announces who His true family is. The rest of the chapter provides numerous supernatural acts performed by Jesus. Jesus exercises power over nature (vss. 22-25), demons (vss. 26-39), sickness (vss. 43-48), and even death (vss. 49-56).

Luke 9 — Notice how Jesus gave all of the apostles the ability to perform miracles (vss. 1-2). In many ways, the purpose of Luke's gospel is to answer the question found in verse 9. The miraculous feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle performed by Jesus to be mentioned in all four gospels (vss. 12-17). The taking up of the cross daily in verse 23 is referring to one being willing to suffer for Christ (even willing to die for Him). In verses 28-36, we find the events on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured being retold. Many wonder why the disciples couldn't cast out the demon in verse 40, but the Lord provides the answer in verse 41. They lacked faith! They allowed themselves to be intimidated by the demon! The rest of the chapter provides tremendous insight into what it takes to be truly committed to Jesus. Those who are truly committed understand that they are nothing more than servants in the kingdom (vss. 46-48); family matters like funerals are not more important than the kingdom (vs. 60); and looking back while following Jesus can never be an option (vss. 61-62).

Week 26

Luke 10 — In verses 1-16, we find the “Limited Commission.” This is when Jesus sent out seventy disciples in pairs to preach. The result of their work was the rolling back of Satan’s rule and dominion (vss. 17-18). The preaching of the seventy is followed by two stories about discipleship. The story of the Good Samaritan is told as a result of a Jewish man (lawyer) who failed to understand who his neighbor was (vss. 30-37). It is interesting that the story is about a Samaritan who helped a Jewish man (Jews and Samaritans could not stand each other)! After being robbed and left to bleed to death, this Jewish man’s own people refused to help him. Only a Samaritan would! The point of the story is disciples must be willing to help all people. This famous story is followed by an event that took place at the home of Mary and Martha (vss. 38-42). While Jesus was spending time in their home, Martha was busy in the kitchen and setting the table, while Mary was listening to Jesus. Jesus says we need to be more like Mary! She was doing the most important thing.

Luke 11 — At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus emphasizes several important things about prayer. He teaches His disciples how to pray (vss. 1-4). He also cites the need to be persistent in prayer (vss. 5-13). There is nothing wrong with praying about a matter over and over again. In verse 15, we see that the enemies of Jesus could never deny the legitimacy of His miracles. Instead, they foolishly challenged their source. The sign of Jonah in verse 29 is a reference to the Lord’s resurrection. In verses 37-52, Jesus announces a list of woes upon the religious leaders because they put their traditions above God’s law. This led to them plotting against Jesus and attempting to find occasions to trap Him in His words (vss. 53-54).

Luke 12 — Verse 10 catches the eyes of many Bible readers. Many want to know, “Have I committed this sin? If so, am I destined to be lost?” It is important to understand that in the context, Jesus is speaking of those who reject Him, despite all the miraculous works He did by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not that God wouldn’t forgive them, but that many of them would not be humble enough to ask for forgiveness and admit their spiritual blindness. By being concerned about committing this sin, one reveals that they are not the kind of people that Jesus is talking about here! Always remember that God will forgive any sin that a person is willing to repent of. In verses 13-14, we see that a legal dispute leads to Jesus telling the parable of the rich fool. In verses 35-40, Jesus emphasizes the need to be ready and prepared for His second coming. Verses 49-59 show us there is an urgency to the gospel’s demands. This is something that those consumed in the cares of the world fail to understand.

Luke 13 — Verses 1-9 place a special emphasis on the need for repentance. In verses 10-17, we see once again, religious leaders binding traditions as though they were God’s law. Instead of standing on the mercy and miracle performed by Jesus, they were more concerned with condemning Him for doing it on the Sabbath. Keep in mind, they had no problem with showing mercy to animals on the Sabbath (vs. 15). Some wonder why some of the Pharisees were warning Jesus about Herod in verse 31. There are two possible explanations. One is that they were lying. The other is that they were

actually trying to help Him. It is important to note that not all of the Pharisees were bad and against Jesus. In verses 34-35, Jesus is alluding to the judgment that would one day come upon the city of Jerusalem because her people rejected Him.

Luke 14 — As this chapter opens, again, we find people more concerned with binding man-made traditions about the Sabbath than they are in believing in Jesus. The hypocrisy in their thinking is exposed in verse 5. At the dinner table, Jesus teaches several parables about some of the qualities of authentic discipleship. Among these include the qualities of humility and a willingness to show concern for all (vss. 11-14). In the parable of verses 16-24, Luke (a Gentile himself) emphasizes how Jesus taught that Gentiles would be included in the kingdom of God (vs. 23), while the Jews would be kicked out (vss. 23-24). In verses 25-25, some of Jesus' most famous sayings about discipleship are listed. My personal favorite is found in verse 28. Here Jesus tells us that one of the keys to discipleship is counting the cost. Have you done that?

Week 27

Luke 15 — Verses 1-2 set up the context for the rest of this chapter. In them, we find the Pharisees and scribes grumbling because Jesus spent time with sinners. The Lord would go on to teach three parables about things lost and found. The first is the parable about the lost sheep (vss. 3-7). The second is the parable about the lost coin (vss. 8-10). The third is the parable about the lost boy (vss. 11-32). The key to understanding these parables is found in verses 2 and 25-32. In the parable of the lost boy, the father represents God, who desires to forgive and be reconciled to all people. The lost boy represents sinners who don't deserve God grace and need to be forgiven by God. The older brother represents the grumbling Pharisees and scribes who were upset that God was willing to receive sinners.

Luke 16 — The parable of the unjust steward is one of the more complex parables of Jesus (vss. 1-13). Is Jesus commending a thief? Yes and no. If you read the parable carefully you will see that Jesus commends his actions of preparing for the future (not his stealing). The point of the parable is to urge disciples to be wise with their time and resources and to prepare for eternity (vss. 9-14). The religious leaders loved money more than God! Verse 18 provides clear teaching concerning the Lord's will for marriage and divorce. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is widely discussed among brethren today (vss. 31). While there are lessons to be learned about life after death, those come as a by-product of the main points. The main points of the story are: We are not to be greedy like the rich man and the word of God is all we need to prepare for eternity. Don't get so bogged down on focusing on Hades that you miss these points!

Luke 17 — This chapter begins with warnings from Jesus about becoming a stumbling block to others (vss. 1-2). In verses 3-4, we find instructions about repentance and forgiveness. Verse 6 is referring to the miraculous level of faith that the apostles would need to develop in order to do their future work. In verse 16, Luke once again focuses on another Gentile who does the right thing. A Samaritan was willing to thank the Lord for His blessing before Jews. Verse 21 provides a very important statement about the kingdom of God. It is in our midst (some translations say it is "within us"). It is to rule and reign in our hearts. It is not to be looked upon as some man-made institution. The section beginning in verse 22 is difficult. It could be referring to the second coming of the Lord. Or, it could be referring to God's judgment on Jerusalem. Regardless of the view you choose to hold, the point is clear: be prepared! Be ready and faithful to the Lord at all times! Verses 34-36 show us that some will be prepared and some will not.

Luke 18 — The point of the parable about prayer in verses 1-8, is that if an earthly judge will help someone in need, how much more will God? The need for us to have a humble and unworthy spirit before God is emphasized in verses 9-14. The story about a rich young ruler is tragic (vss. 18-27). Here we find a man who loved money and possessions more than the Lord. His heart was more consumed with earthly treasures than the Lord! The actions of the rich young ruler are contrasted with that of the apostles, who left all to follow Jesus (vs. 28). As a result, they would receive the

greatest blessing — eternal life (vss. 29-30). In verses 31-33, Jesus talks to His disciples about His death and resurrection. This was something that they could not get their minds wrapped around (vs. 34). The chapter concludes by mentioning that Jesus gave a blind man his sight (vss. 35-43). Notice how this blind man could see that Jesus was the Christ to come through David (vss. 38-39).

Luke 19 — The story of Zacchaeus provides a huge contrast when compared to the story of the rich young ruler. Unlike the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus was willing to do whatever it took to be right with the Lord (vs. 8). In verse 10, Jesus proclaimed His mission for coming to this world. The parable of the money (vss. 12-27) may seem harsh, but the key to it is verse 26: you are responsible to do God's will with what you have! Beginning in verse 28, we read about what happened on Sunday, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem. While many praised Him as He entered, notice how the Pharisees didn't (vs. 39). In verses 41-44, Jesus is grieved because He knew judgment was coming upon the people of Jerusalem because they rejected Him. The events of verses 45-48 took place the next day on Monday (Mark 11:12-19). This is the second time in the gospel we find Jesus having to cleanse the temple of corrupt practices (John 2:13-21).

Week 28

Luke 20 — While teaching in the temple, Jesus' authority was questioned by the chief priests, scribes, and elders (vss. 1-2). The answer to their question was found in how they responded to the baptism of John (vss. 3-4). Had they accepted John's preaching they would have known that Jesus received His authority from heaven because John testified of Jesus (John 1:29-34). The parable of the vine-growers in verses 9-18 is one about the judgment that would come to these religious leaders because they rejected Jesus. Beginning in verse 19 we find several attempts made by the enemies to trap Jesus in His words (vss. 19-39). The Lord made all of these attempts look foolish (vs. 40). The question that Jesus posed in verses 41-44 was designed to demonstrate just how little the Jews understood about the Messiah. They struggled with understanding how David's descendant would be His greater and hence greater than Him. Beginning in verse 45, Jesus warns the people of being like the scribes. These men wanted a high position and appeared to be righteous, but God knew they were full of wickedness.

Luke 21 — The most difficult part of this chapter is found in verses 5-36. Many consider these verses to be among the most difficult in the New Testament. They are actually quite easy to understand when one carefully studies the context. Verse 6 is a critical verse to understanding the context. Notice how the destruction of the temple is what is under consideration. This connects back to what the apostles were doing in verse 5. This section has nothing to do with the second coming and the end of the world. Instead, it has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem by the hands of the Romans and God's judgment on the Jewish people in 70 AD (vss. 20-24). The time frame for what the Lord is talking about is found in verse 32. All of this was to be applied to the people in the first century. These words were a warning to Christians to flee the city once they saw it being surrounded by the Roman army. The difficult language of verses 25-28 simply echoes the language of the Old Testament prophets when they warned others of impending doom and judgment (Isaiah 19:1).

Luke 22 — As the Passover drew near, the enemies began seeking opportunities to take Jesus. They didn't want to do it in the open because they feared the people (vss. 1-2). Satan gave them an avenue through Judas Iscariot (vs. 3). Judas was willing to hand Jesus over to His enemies for a large amount of money (vss. 4-5). Notice how the Lord went to great lengths to make sure He was not arrested until He ate the Passover with His disciples (vss. 7-13). After eating the meal, Jesus then instituted His supper to commemorate what He would accomplish at Calvary (vss. 14-20). During this Supper, the Lord also revealed that one of the apostles would betray Him (vss. 21-24). At some point during the evening, an argument arose among the apostles in regards to which of them is the greatest God (vss. 24-27). Jesus rebuked them and told them to develop hearts of servants. After they finished their meals, Jesus and His followers headed to the Garden of Gethsemane. Once there, Jesus prayed to His Father in agony (vss. 39-46). Judas eventually arrived with soldiers sent by the chief priests. He identified Jesus with a kiss (vs. 48). While the Lord was being transported to trial, Peter followed and was even able to enter the courtyard (vss. 54-62). As the Lord predicted, when pressed on his allegiance to Jesus, Peter froze up and denied Him. While Jesus was being brought

across the courtyard, He looked eyes with him and Peter remembered how earlier in the evening the Lord predicted He would do this. He then went out and began to weep (vss. 61-62).

Luke 23 — After being unjustly condemned by the Sanhedrin for blasphemy the night before, Jesus was brought before Pilate. Notice how the enemies change the charges (vs. 2). They knew that the charge of blasphemy wouldn't stick with the Romans. Pilate (not finding wrong with Jesus) had Him sent to Herod, who happened to be in town for the feast (vss. 1-7). Jesus refused to even speak to Herod. He knew that Herod only wanted to see a show (vss. 8-12). Barabbas was an insurrectionist (vs. 19). This means that he had led a rebellion against Rome and even killed Roman soldiers. While being crucified on the cross, notice how Jesus is hanging between two criminals (vs 32). One of them believes in Jesus. As a result, He is forgiven and promised a place in Paradise (vss. 39-43). This incident has caused much debate about the necessity of baptism. Two points need to be made about this. First, while the Lord was on the earth, He had the power to save and forgive whomever He wished. Second, baptism for the forgiveness of sins is part of the Gospel age, which does not begin until after the Lord gives the marching orders of Mark 16:15-16.

Luke 24 — After dying on the cross on Friday, Jesus was raised from the dead on the Sunday morning. As you read this, notice carefully, how the disciples were not expecting this event to take place (vs. 11). This alone ends the foolish argument that suggests they came and stole the body! Why would they stage a resurrection when they were not even expecting one to happen? The appearance of Jesus to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is powerful and worth reading a couple of times (vss. 13-35). Notice how the whole Old Testament is about Jesus (vs. 27). While the gospel is about repentance and forgiveness of sins (vs. 47). Verse 49 refers to the promise of the Holy Spirit. This is exactly where Luke will pick up in Acts.

Week 29

Acts 1 — The book of Acts is probably the most exciting book in the New Testament. Acts is a sequel to the book of Luke (this is why we are reading them together). While Luke focuses on the Lord's work while He was on the earth, Acts focuses on that work continuing through disciples. In the first few verses, we learn that following His resurrection, the Lord appeared among His apostles for a period of 40 days and taught them many things about the kingdom of God (vs. 3). The Lord then told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Then they would be ready to take the gospel to the world (vss. 6-8). In verses 9-11, we read about the ascension of the Lord to heaven. Notice carefully the promise of the angels for Him to return. The other important thing to note in this chapter has to do with finding another apostle to replace Judas (vss. 15-26). Instead of trusting in their own wisdom during this process, notice how the apostles trusted in the wisdom of God. It was God who selected Matthias to be an apostle!

Acts 2 — This chapter is often called the hub of the Bible. It is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. The "they" of verse 1 is a reference to the apostles (Acts 1:26). Don't let the chapter break confuse you! The Holy Spirit baptism was only performed on the apostles here (not all 120 in the room). The miracle of tongue-speaking is referring to the apostles supernaturally being able to speak in foreign languages that they had never been taught. The people in Jerusalem who heard the apostles speak could understand them because they were speaking in their native tongues (vss. 7-11). Peter then begins preaching to them. He begins this sermon at about nine o'clock in the morning (vs. 15). It is a sermon full of Old Testament scripture references. Verses 17-21 are references to the words of Joel. Verses 25-28 and 34-35 are references to the words of David in the Psalms (Psalm 16 and 110). They are used to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus to David. The purpose of Peter's lesson is found in verse 36. Jesus is the King and Christ! In verse 37, we see that many people in the audience were convicted by Peter's message. But that was not enough. They also needed to respond by repenting of sin and being baptized (vs. 38). Verse 41 tells us that 3,000 did just that. Verse 42 gives us a great snapshot of what these newly converted people did after giving their lives to the Lord. While the "breaking of bread" in verse 42 is referring to the Lord's Supper, the same language of verse 46 is referring to the early Christians eating meals in one another's homes every day. In verse 47, we see that once people commit themselves to God, He adds them to His church.

Acts 3 — This wonderful story is pretty straightforward. There is a lame beggar healed and Peter preaches the sermon of Acts 2 again. The event takes place at the "porch of Solomon" near the temple. Notice all the different descriptions that are attributed to the Lord in the sermon. He is called "His Servant" in verses 13 and 26; the "Holy and Righteous One" in verse 14; "His Christ" in verse 18; and "that Prophet" in verse 23. Verse 25 connects Peter's sermon and Jesus to the grand promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12. The Bible's grand theme of redemption through Christ echoes from cover to cover!

Acts 4 — After Peter finishes his sermon in Acts 3, he and John are arrested by Jewish authorities and thrown in jail. In verse 8, we see that Peter (the timid man who was afraid of a servant girl) has completely changed! Verse 12, echoes the truth announced by Jesus in John 14:6. After being released, Peter and John gather with other disciples and pray for the strength to continue being able to suffer for Christ. (vss. 23-30). Notice how they do not ask God to make life easy for them. God's response in verse 31 gives them the boldness they need to continue on. The benevolent spirit of verse 32 would be so important in the first century church. Keep in mind that the Christians were Jews who remained in Jerusalem after Pentecost. In verse 36, we are introduced to Barnabas. Luke describes him as a very generous man who was willing to sacrifice in order to help his needy brethren.

Acts 5 — In chapters three and four, we find the church being attacked by outside forces (zealous Jews). In this chapter Luke shows us how the church also faced internal problems. Ananias and Sapphira lacked honesty and integrity. They wanted to appear more generous than they really were. In His righteous anger, God made an example of them (Acts 5:1-11). Verse 12 shows just how Jewish the early church was (they were still meeting at the temple). In verse 14, we find the church going, with even many of the Jewish priests being converted by the gospel. Whereas in chapter 3, we find just two of the apostles being imprisoned, in this chapter we find all of them being imprisoned. But the movement of the gospel could not be stopped because God's power was at work (verse 39).

Week 30

Acts 6 — In the first few verses, we find another internal problem in the church. There was prejudice and mistrust among the brethren. There were many out of town Jews among the first church, and some felt that certain destitute widows were not being treated right (vs. 1). Notice how this problem occurred as the church is growing. The apostles knew they couldn't allow this problem to distract them from prayer and preaching the gospel (vss. 2, 4). They decided to allow the congregation to appoint seven qualified men to be over this work (vss. 3-5). These men (probably the first deacons in the church) would ensure that the needy widows were properly cared for. Once the men were appointed, the problem was solved and the church continued to grow (vs. 7). Beginning in verse 8, Luke focuses on one of the seven men appointed — Stephen. Evidently, Stephen was preaching about the distinctions between Christianity and Judaism (vs. 11). His preaching upset many Jews and he was arrested and taken before the Sanhedrin (vs. 12). Like with the trials of Jesus, many false witnesses were brought against Stephen (vss. 13-14). Christians beyond the apostles are now being persecuted for their faith.

Acts 7 — In answering the false charges brought against him, Stephen preaches a very powerful sermon. The sermon can actually be divided up into two themes. First, he gives the Jews a detailed account of their history (vss. 2-50). While this would have been something his audience would have loved to hear, Stephen emphasizes how their history as a nation was full of mistakes and cases of rebellion against God (vss. 9, 25, 35, 39). Second, Stephen lets them know that they currently were behaving no differently than their ancestors. Just like their ancestors rejected the will of God, they were as well (vss. 51-53)! This strong message angered the court and Stephen was taken out to be stoned to death (vss. 54-60). During the stoning, Stephen saw a vision of the Lord standing at the right hand of God (vs. 56). Notice how the Lord was aware of his suffering servant. In verse 58, we are introduced to Saul. Saul took pleasure in seeing Stephen die. The prayer of Stephen in verse 60 is similar to what the Lord prayed while dying on the cross in Luke 23:34.

Acts 8 — Stephen is the first Christian we can read about dying for the cause of Christ in Acts. After his death, Saul leads a fierce wave of persecution against the church in Jerusalem. It is so bad that the brethren are forced to flee from the city (vss. 1-4). As a result of the Christians scattering, Philip (also one of the seven) goes down to Samaria and preaches the gospel. Samaritans were looked down upon by Jews. But interestingly enough, now we have a Jew (Philip) taking the message of Jesus to them. Many of the Samaritans believed the message and were baptized (vss. 5-12). This even included a man named Simon, who for a long time was a sorcerer (vs. 13). Some important information about the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit is recorded in verse 14-19. Notice Christians did not receive them immediately after baptism. They could only receive them through the laying on of the apostles' hands (vss. 14-18). Only the apostles could impart miraculous spiritual gifts! In verses 25-40, we read about the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, under the Old Law, eunuchs could not be in the congregation of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:1). Under the New Covenant they are welcomed and accepted into the family of God!

Acts 9 — This chapter records probably the most radical case of conversion in the Bible. It is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Remember, he was the one who began a great persecution against the church. And yet, once he realized that he was wrong and Jesus was in fact the Lord, he changed (vss. 1-19). He even began boldly preaching about Jesus (vs. 20). As a result, many of the Jews tried to kill him (vss. 23-25). Galatians 1:15-24 tells us that there is a three year time period between verses 25 and 26. The ability of a church to make mistakes with brethren is clearly seen in verse 26. Thankfully Barnabas was there to stand up for Paul and help him find acceptance among the brethren who at one time feared him (vs. 27).

Acts 10 — The Gentile Cornelius is described as a good man in verse 1-2. Through him, God would begin welcoming Gentiles into His kingdom. This is pretty straightforward. In verse 1-8, an angel tells Cornelius send for the Apostle Peter at Joppa (notice how God wants a disciple to preach to Cornelius, even though the angel could have done it). In verses 9-23, Peter receives a vision from God telling him that the Gentiles would now be on an equal level with the Jews. In verses 24-48, Peter arrives at the home of Cornelius in Caesarea. He preaches the gospel to Cornelius and those in his house. After hearing the message, the Holy Spirit baptism is administered from heaven on the Gentiles (confirming that they can be saved through Jesus), and they are baptized in water for the remission of sins. The point of the chapter: the gospel is for all.

Week 31

Acts 11 — Remember in Acts 10 the gospel was preached to the Gentiles for the first time. With the conversion of Cornelius and his household, Gentiles were now part of the kingdom of God. The brethren in Judea were not upset about Gentiles being baptized. Instead, they were upset about Peter eating with them (vss. 1-3). In verses 4-18, Peter recounts the miraculous vision he received in chapter 10 and how it was God's will that the Gentiles now be accepted by the Jews. Notice carefully how just being a "good man" was not enough for Cornelius to be saved. He also had to hear and obey the gospel (vs. 14). The gospel going to Antioch in verse 19 is very important. The conversion of Cornelius opened the door for other Gentiles to become disciples. The disciples first being called Christians at Antioch is significant because this was the first local church that consisted of both Jews and Gentiles (vs. 26). Verse 28 talks about a famine in the world. History says this famine occurred in AD 45-47. It appears that the brethren in Judea were hit harder by this than others. As a result, the Gentile Christians in Antioch sent relief to help them by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (vss. 29-30).

Acts 12 — The Herod mentioned in verse 1 is Herod Agrippa I. He had the Apostle James killed. Since this pleased the Jews, Herod also had Peter arrested (vss. 3-4). In this time of trouble, the church turned to God in prayer (vs. 5). Verses 6-19, recount how God responded to the prayers of the church by delivering Peter. An angel was sent to release Peter from his chains and lead him out of jail. The church rejoiced over this! Unfortunately, the jailers watching Peter were put to death by Herod. In verses 20-23, Herod experiences judgment from God. Due to his arrogance and failure to give God glory, an angel of the Lord struck Herod down and he was eaten by worms. As a result, the word of God kept on spreading (vs. 24). After Saul and Barnabas delivered the money to the needy brethren in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch (vs. 25).

Acts 13 — Verse 1 provides a list of prophets and teachers in the Antioch church. Notice how the Holy Spirit specifically commands Saul and Barnabas to embark on a preaching trip (vs. 2). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they went from Antioch to Seleucia, and from there, Cyprus (vs. 4). On the islands, they went in the synagogues (Jewish learning centers) proclaiming the name of Jesus. In Paphos they encountered a false prophet named "Bar-Jesus" and were able to convert the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (vss. 5-12). When they arrived in Perga, John Mark left and went back home (vs. 13). In Pamphylia, Saul, (who is now known as Paul) went into the synagogue and preached one of the more famous sermons in the Bible. It was a sermon that essentially connects the whole Bible story to Jesus (vss. 14-41). Many believed the teaching, while others begged Paul to come back the next Sabbath and preach again (vss. 42-43). In verses 44-51, we find the Jews persecuting Paul and Barnabas because of their preaching. Instead of quitting on their ministry, they shook off the dust from their feet and turned to trying to save the Gentiles.

Acts 14 — When they reached Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue and preached the gospel. In verse 2, we again find Jewish led persecution. Verse 3 reveals the purpose of miracles

performed by God's servants during this time. They were to confirm both the messenger and the message! Verse 6 lists several other cities Paul and Barnabas preached in. After healing a lame man in Lystra, many thought that Paul and Barnabas were Greek gods. Paul told them that was not true and beginning in verse 15, he preached another sermon. Instead of appealing to Jewish scripture with this crowd, God appealed to nature and other external proofs. In verse 19, Paul is stoned by Jews who had been won over by enemies of the gospel who came from Antioch and Iconium. Paul survived the ordeal and went to Derbe (vs. 20)! After preaching the gospel in Derbe, they returned to the cities of Lystra and Iconium, where they had already converted people. They wanted to encourage and strengthen the new Christians (vss. 21-22). They also had the churches appoint elders (vs. 23). Verse 27 closes the first missionary journey. Once Paul and Barnabas arrived back in Antioch, they reported on the success of the gospel. How remarkable it is that they were excited about the trip, even though they were severely persecuted.

Acts 15 — After Acts 2, this is probably the most important chapter in Acts. In this chapter, the issue of Gentile circumcision for the purpose of salvation is settled once and for all. To find the truth about this matter, many of the brethren met in Jerusalem to discuss it. They met in Jerusalem because false teachers promoting Gentile salvation through circumcision came from there. The issue was able to be settled by considering the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter recounts the event that took place at the house of Cornelius (vss. 7-11). There the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be saved. In verse 12, Paul and Barnabas talked about the miracles the Holy Spirit performed through them on the Gentiles. These were signs also confirming that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be saved. In verses 13-21, James recounts what the Holy Spirit revealed through the Old Testament prophet, Amos. Amos spoke of the day when Gentiles would come to God and be part of His family. The conclusion of all this was simple: Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to become Christians! All they had to do was obey the gospel and stay away from paganism! After this issue was settled, a letter was sent to the Gentile brethren in Antioch (vss. 22-35). Before going on a second preaching trip, Barnabas and Paul got into an argument about taking John Mark again (vss. 36-41). Paul did not want to because John Mark abandoned them on the first trip. Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance. Instead of allowing the disagreement to stop the preaching of the gospel, Paul and Barnabas decided to split and travel separate ways. Paul took Silas and went to new territory, while Barnabas took John Mark and went back to Cyprus.

Week 32

Acts 16 — As you continue to read about Paul's missionary journeys, it will be helpful to have maps of both the first century and modern world in front of you. The cities of Lystra and Derbe are in present-day Turkey. In verses 1-5, we are introduced to Timothy. Timothy would go on to be a great preacher and friend of Paul. Notice carefully the good reputation he had among the brethren. He was so well spoken of, that Paul decided to allow him to accompany him. Verses 6-10 provide a summary of places that Paul traveled through preaching. Notice how in verses 9-10, God specifically leads Paul to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel. This is extremely important since this would be the first time for the gospel to be proclaimed in Europe (vss. 11-12). The rest of the chapter details the conversion stories of two well-known Bible characters — Lydia and the Philippian jailer. Lydia was an industrious woman who opened her heart to the Lord (vss. 14-15). The jailer's conversion came after a series of amazing events. An earthquake occurs while Paul and Silas are in the prison, but the prisoners don't attempt to escape (vss. 25-28). If they had, the jailer would have killed himself to escape punishment from the emperor. Once he learned that all the prisoners were accounted for, he humbled himself before the Lord and was baptized (vss. 29-34). Those in his household did the same. The conversions of Lydia and the jailer mark the beginning of the church established in the city of Philippi.

Acts 17 — Verses 1-3 describe Paul's normal method of evangelism. Whenever traveling to a city, he would always first locate a Jewish synagogue. This would be the perfect place to preach the gospel to religious people who were not Christians. At the beginning of this chapter, we find Paul in Thessalonica. After converting a group of people, Paul is forced to leave the city. Verses 4-9 describe the intense level of persecution these saints experienced because they decided to follow Jesus. In verses 10-15, we find Paul preaching to those in Berea. The Bereans are described as people who were eager to hear the gospel (vs. 11). After leaving Berea, Paul traveled to Athens (vss. 16-34). Athens was a city loaded with idolatry! While Paul does preach a great sermon about the existence of God, the gospel doesn't gain much of a foothold in Athens (vs. 32). This certainly was a very discouraging moment for Paul, but he refused to quit. He continued on to the next city.

Acts 18 — After leaving Athens, Paul made his way to Corinth. There he met Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They were Jews who had been evicted from Rome by Claudius. Paul decided to work with this couple in the tent-making business. Also, as he did everywhere else he preached, every Sabbath he found a synagogue to preach in (vss. 4-5). Eventually, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth. After spending 18 months, many became Christians and a local church was established in the city (vss. 5-11). Beginning in verse 12, we find the Jews continuing to be the biggest persecutors of the church. Verse 22 brings us to the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey. Verses 23-28 show us that a third missionary journey immediately follows.

Acts 19 — The events described about John's baptism at the beginning of this chapter, must be connected to verses 24-26 in the previous chapter. These brethren Paul encounters in Ephesus

probably were confused about John's baptism because they had been taught by Apollos. Paul corrected their misunderstandings and re-baptized them in the name of Jesus (vss. 1-6). In verse 8 we find Paul once again following his normal method of evangelism. As a result of his preaching, a riot erupts in the city (vss. 11-41). Like Athens, Ephesus was also immersed in idolatry. Paul's preaching about a one true God was starting to put the idol-makers out of business. As you read about the events of the riot in Ephesus, notice the courage of Paul (vs. 30).

Acts 20 — In verse 4, we find a list of other brethren who accompanied Paul on this preaching journey. It is important to notice how Luke will begin writing in the first person (vs. 6). Now he too is traveling with Paul. Notice how important worshipping God (specifically taking the Lord's Supper with brethren) was to Paul (vs. 7). At this particular worship service, a brother dies (probably broke his neck). Paul raised him from the dead and left at daybreak (vss. 8-12). Paul's farewell address beginning in verse 17 is one of the most emotional moments to read about in the Bible. Before sailing away from Ephesus (where he had been for three years), Paul called the elders in Ephesus to meet him. He talked with them about how he preached the gospel to them and urged them to work hard in protecting their flock. He warned them about false teachers who would arise in the church and commended them "to God and to the words of His grace." It is interesting that words of Jesus quoted in verse 35 are not found anywhere in the gospels. It must have come from Paul's own personal conversations with Jesus, or maybe from someone who followed Jesus when He was on the earth. After weeping together and having a moment of prayer, the elders walked with Paul to his ship to see him off to Jerusalem.

Week 33

Acts 21 — The primary mission of Paul's trip to Jerusalem had to do with providing relief for the needy brethren in Jerusalem. It is important to note that this particular contribution weaves its way through many of Paul's New Testament letters. It is very significant because much of it comes from Gentiles. The love of Christ moved Gentiles to care for Jews (Romans 15:25-28). Verses 1-3 lists the various places Paul traveled on the way to Jerusalem. Once he arrived in Tyre, the brethren warned him through the Holy Spirit about continuing on. As Paul continued his travels, he eventually ended up in Caesarea. There he stayed with Philip (the same Philip who preached in Samaria) and his three daughters (vss. 8-9). A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea and warned Paul about imprisonment that awaited him in Jerusalem (vss. 10-11). Paul said that he was not only willing to be imprisoned but also to die for the cause of Christ (vss. 12-14). Once Paul arrived at his destination, he made a Jewish vow that for many of us raises questions (vss. 15-26). Why would Paul make a vow connected with the old Law of Moses? It is important to remember that the Law of Moses (Judaism) was more than just a religion to the Jewish people. It was also a way of life. It was part of their culture, politics, and lifestyle. Paul (a Jew) never told his people to give up the Jewish lifestyle or customs. In fact, he circumcised Timothy for the reason of not offending the Jews (Acts 16:1-5). What Paul preached against was Gentiles being forced to become Jews. He preached against binding aspects of the Old Law (like circumcision) as necessary for salvation (Galatians 5:1-6). There was nothing wrong with the Jews continuing their customs, and to demonstrate that, here he keeps one (vs. 26). Unfortunately, enemies of the gospel seize him and falsely accuse him of preaching against the Jewish customs and bringing a Gentile into the temple (vss. 27-40).

Acts 22 — Notice carefully the case Paul makes before the Jews. Throughout the entire speech he tries to make clear that he was not against the customs of Judaism. He speaks of his heritage, how he had one time persecuted Christians, and had seen the Lord on the Damascus Road (vss. 3-11). He also speaks of the Lord sending Ananias to him and baptizing him for the remission of his sins (vss. 12-16). He announces how he had been given a special mission from the Lord to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (vss. 17-22). It is important to note that there are some who try to say that there is a contradiction between verse 9 and Acts 9:7. When put together, what they show us is that the men with Paul heard something, but didn't understand what they heard. Verses 22-24 show us that the real problem these Jews had with Paul wasn't that they thought he was preaching against the customs of Judaism. Instead, it was that they refused to accept the fact that Gentiles were now accepted by God like the Jews were.

Acts 23 — Much is made of Paul's strong language for the High Priest in verses 1-5. It is very likely that Paul is being sarcastic (especially in verse 5) and showing his disapproval of the ungodliness being demonstrated by this man who is supposed to be a servant of God. Notice carefully how in verses 6-10 Paul uses the division among the Jews condemning him to his advantage. He had to do this because he knew they were not going to give him a fair trial. An often forgotten hero of the Bible is Paul's nephew. He actually saved Paul's life (vss. 12-22). His heroic actions led to Paul being moved

to Caesarea to appear before the Roman governor Felix (vss. 23-35). Paul was allowed this appearance because he was a Roman citizen.

Acts 24 — This chapter is pretty straightforward as it provides details regarding Paul's appearance before Felix. Verse 1 shows us that the Jews were so determined to have Paul punished that the High Priest traveled from Jerusalem with an attorney to bring charges against him. Verse 10 begins Paul's defense before the governor. In verse 21, Paul made known the real reason why he was arrested by the Jews. It is interesting to see that Felix and his wife seemed to be more eager to hear the gospel than many of the Jews (vss. 24-25). Unfortunately, all they did was hear it. The rest of the chapter seems to indicate that Felix never acted on and obeyed the truth he heard (vss. 26-27). The lesson is this: we must NEVER procrastinate when it comes to obeying the gospel!

Acts 25 — The end of the previous chapter informs us that after two years passed, Felix was succeeded by Festus. During this period of transition, Paul continued to remain imprisoned. This frustrated Paul to the point that he decided to appeal to Caesar (vs. 11). Being a Roman citizen, he had the right to do so. In verse 13, we are introduced to King Agrippa or Agrippa II. He was the son of the Herod Agrippa who was struck down by God in chapter 12. Paul always stands before him. It appears that at this point, Paul had become nothing more than a novelty show for these politicians. The chapter concludes with the main thought that Luke is pushing with all of this information: Paul is innocent (vs. 27).

Week 34

Acts 26 — In this chapter, we read about Paul's powerful defense before King Agrippa. Much of it is a repeat of his defenses before the Jews and Felix. He talks about how he was a good and upright Jew (verses 4-8), how he at one time persecuted the church (verses 9-11), and the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road (vss. 12-18). Probably the most familiar verse in this chapter is found in verse 28. Notice how Paul's preaching almost persuaded Agrippa to become a Christian! It is hard to determine whether or not Agrippa was being sarcastic or genuine with his remark. Regardless, Paul gives a great response in verse 29. The chapter concludes with Paul being vindicated by the Roman government again (vss. 30-32). He would go on to Rome to appeal to Caesar.

Acts 27 — This is an exciting chapter. It is important to have a map of the first-century world in front of you as you read it. There are many specific places mentioned by Luke. In the chapter we find Paul being transported from Caesarea to Rome. We see that sea travel was not easy at all. During the journey Paul suffers shipwreck (vss. 14ff). Apparently, a violent storm arises during the trip and nearly kills Paul and the rest of the ship passengers. A key part of the story is found in verses 22-25. Here we see that Paul knew everything ultimately was going to be okay. The Lord was with them and he would make it to Rome. Paul had faith that the Lord was going to take care of him! The rest of the chapter all that Paul and the rest of the ship passengers did to survive the storm. Notice carefully all the hard work they had to put in just to make it to safety. God was doing His part, but they also had to do theirs! Eventually, everyone (guards, prisoners, and ship crew) all made it safely to land (vss. 42-44). It was God's will that Paul survive this and make it to Rome.

Acts 28 — The island they arrived safely on was called "Malta." As Paul was gathering wood for a fire he was bitten by a viper! The natives felt he must have been a bad man who got what was coming to him. But when Paul healed himself miraculously, they changed their minds and called him a "god" (vss. 1-6). Paul would go on to perform several miracles on the island (vss. 7-10). Verses 11-15 describe what occurred over the next few months as Paul was eventually brought to Rome. Once in Rome, he was allowed to stay under a form of house arrest (vs. 16). During this time, Paul preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Some believed the message, while others did not (vss. 23-29). While the ending of the Acts seems puzzling, it is important to remember the overall theme of the book. Remember Acts is about the work of Jesus continuing on earth through the preaching of the gospel by His people. Acts ends with Paul doing that work and it continues on through us today (vss. 30-31).

Romans 1 — Romans is unlike any other book in the New Testament. It is the only letter written by Paul to a church that he never visited. The best way to understand Romans is to break it up in various units. Chapters 1-3 makes up the first unit. In the first few verses of chapter one, Paul speaks of his desire to visit the brethren in Rome. He wanted to preach the gospel to them (vss. 14-17). Beginning in verse 18, Paul speaks of the sins of the Gentiles. Even though they were not God's people like the Jews, they still were accountable to God and should have abstain from sin.

Unfortunately, they engaged in evil deeds (vss. 24-31). The point of the second half of chapter one is simple: the Gentiles are sinners and need a Savior!

Romans 2 — After exposing the sins of the Gentiles in chapter one, Paul wants the Jews to know that they are no different (verse 32 actually begins the transition of this thought). Like the Gentiles, the Jews had also sinned against God (vss. 1-11). They too needed a Savior! Verse 12 doesn't mean that the Gentiles had no law whatsoever, but not the written codified law like the Jews had. In verse 15, Paul makes it clear that even though they didn't have a written law, the Gentiles still knew right and wrong; this was written in their hearts. Beginning with verse 17, Paul starts rebuking the Jews. He wants to understand that they are not perfect like they claim. They may have practiced circumcision and been God's special people under the Old Covenant, but they were still sinners who had broken the Law.

Week 35

Romans 3 — The first unit of Romans reaches its climax in this chapter. In chapter 1, Paul makes it clear that all of the Gentiles have sinned against God. In chapter 2, he makes it clear that the Jews were no better; they too, had all sinned against God. In this chapter, Paul brings it all together by emphasizing that ALL have sinned. In the first half of the chapter, Paul continues his rebuke of the Jews by saying they did not take advantage of being God's special people under the Old Law (vss. 1-20). Even though God had nurtured them and given them His Law, they broke it! Even though they knew God, by their actions, they were no different than the Gentiles (vs. 9). In the second half of the chapter, Paul pens his main point (vs. 23). While the information announced here is the worst news anyone could ever hear, Paul turns right around in the next verse and gives great news (vs. 24). Through having faith in the Savior Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles could have their sins forgiven and be reconciled to God (vss. 25-31). The end of this chapter concludes the first unit of Romans.

Romans 4 — Chapters 4-6 make up the second unit of Romans. In case the Jews thought they were so good because they kept part of God's Law, Paul brings them back to earth by mentioning Abraham. The Jews may have been tempted to say, "Abraham was fine fellow and he was saved based on all the good things he did." Wrong! Instead of being justified by works of merit, Abraham was justified or "credited to be righteous" on the basis of faith (vss. 1-3). Paul's point in this section is that righteousness before God is not based on sinless perfection (something that none of us will ever be able to obtain). Instead, it is based on faith and seeking God's forgiveness. This was the will of God before the Jews even became a nation (vss. 4-12). This makes Abraham the father of faith, for all who come to God (not just the Jews). Many Jews certainly would have been upset when reading this message from Paul. The rest of the chapter is highly devoted to commending the faith of Abraham and urging us to follow his example (vss. 13-25). Like Abraham, we need to believe, obey, and trust in the Lord. This led to Abraham finding approval with God and it will do the same for us!

Romans 5 — In verse 1, Paul talks about the blessing of justification that comes with having faith in the Lord Jesus. The word "justification" is a legal term that means "to be declared not guilty." This reality should cause us to rejoice and stay faithful to God even in the midst of trials (vss. 2-5). Verses 6-10 make up a critical section of this book. In it, Paul talks about the cross and the blessings we receive as a result of Jesus dying on it. Again, this should lead us to rejoicing (vs. 11)! Verse 12 begins a very difficult section. Paul wants to illustrate how two people's actions have affected all humanity. He contrasts Adam and Jesus. While through Adam, sin and death entered into the world, through Jesus, forgiveness and eternal life entered. In this section Paul is NOT teaching original sin like some suggest. All he is doing is contrasting the effects of Adam's and Jesus' actions.

Romans 6 — God's grace is big and wonderful. But that doesn't mean we are to live and continue in sin (vss. 1-2). Instead, we must submit to God and get into Christ! How do we get into Christ? In verses 3-4, Paul says the method God has chosen for that process is baptism! If baptism is not necessary for salvation (like many suggest today), then Paul's entire argument here falls flat on its

face. When we are baptized we are buried with Christ (vs. 4); we are united with Him in the likeness of His death (vs. 5); we crucify the old sinful person (vs. 6); we die to sin (vs. 7). Paul continues the thought of one needing to die to sin to be right with God in verses 8-14. In verses 15-23, he talks about spiritual slavery. He says that in life, we are either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. Those who have died to sin through the process of baptism are to now be slaves of righteousness. In verse 23, we see that when we sin, we deserve a wage — death! But thankfully, God offers a free gift to us. It is eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ! The end of this chapter marks the conclusion of the second unit of Romans.

Romans 7 — This chapter begins a new unit in Romans. Here Paul will begin addressing an important question the Jews may have. That is, “Since God is now accepting Gentiles, where do we now stand?” In verses 1-4, he talks about how they can be “married” now to Christ (be in Christ) because when they obeyed the gospel they died to the Old Law. Verses 7-12 talk about the benefits of the Old Law for the Jews before the coming of Christ. There is a powerful point here that proves the Ten Commandments are no longer binding because they too were of the Old Law. The commandment of verse 7 (which the Jews had been released from when they came to Christ) is part of the Ten Commandments. It is actually the tenth of the Ten Commandments (vs. 7). Here Paul clearly shows that the Old Law has been replaced with the Law of Christ. Verse 11 reminds us of what happened in the Garden of Eden. In verses 14-25, the chapter concludes with Paul talking about the “wretched man” who tries to do right, knowing the Law is right, but still fails. Such a person can never be right with God for he sins despite his efforts not to do so. There has to be a better way, since no person (except Jesus) can perfectly keep God’s law.

Week 36

Romans 8 — Instead of trying to reach a level of sinless perfection (which can never be achieved), Jesus provides a better way. In Jesus, liberation from sin can be attained (vs. 1). This is contrasted with the Law of Moses (vss. 2-4). Verses 5-11 talk about people freed from sin in Christ are to live. Rather than live in pursuit of their selfish desires, people in Christ follow God's will. The rest of the chapter talks about the benefits of having a relationship with Christ. Paul speaks of things pertaining to our relationship with God (vss. 12-17), hope (vss. 18-25), prayers (vss. 26-27), and how God can work out good for us through any tragedy (vss. 28-30). Ultimately, the person in Christ is on a path to true victory because God is working for Him and through Him (vss. 31-39).

Romans 9 — This chapter begins a new unit of Romans. In chapters 9-11, Paul talks about the Jews and where they now stood with God. Under the Old Law, the Jews were physically born into God's family. Evidently, they took great pride in this and did not want to accept that under the New Covenant that was no longer the case (vss. 1-5). Now the Jews were on the same level with the other nations. They could still be part of God's family again. They just would have to do so under the terms of Christ. In fact, it was through God using them for centuries to accomplish His will that this could be possible for them and all nations (vss. 6-18). Verse 13 doesn't mean that God literally hated Esau (the oldest son of Jacob). It just means that God did not choose him to accomplish His will and fulfill His promises to Abraham. Instead of using Esau, He used Jacob. That was God's choice, and the Jews certainly never had a problem with that. Now, they do have a problem with God's choice. They do not like that God chose to bring the Gentiles in. In verse 15, God puts them in their place! He is God and He can do whatever He pleases! He can extend compassion on whomever He desires! Paul's point in this chapter is that the Jews had not been completely cut off by God. They could still come to Him. Not through the Law, but through the gospel of Christ.

Romans 10 — This chapter begins with Paul expressing his desire for his Jewish brethren to be saved (vss. 1-2). Unfortunately, most of the Jews rejected coming to Christ through the gospel (vs. 3). There are only two ways for a person to be saved. Either they perfectly obey God (vs. 5), or they travel the road of having faith in Jesus (vss. 6-17). Regrettably, many of the Jews have rejected the way of faith as prophesied in the Old Testament (vss. 18-21). They knew the truth better than anyone else, but rejected it! Paul says they were a stubborn and disobedient people (vs. 21)!

Romans 11 — What about the Jews? What was going to happen to them? Now that Gentiles were being welcomed by God, did that mean that the Jews were no longer important to God? No. Like the Gentiles, Jews were also important to God (vs. 1). God also wanted them to be saved, but they were going to have to come to Him on His terms. In verse 5, Paul says that even though most of them had rejected Jesus, there was still a faithful remnant (vs. 5). In fact, Paul wonders if the flood of the Gentiles into God's kingdom might provoke the Jews to jealousy and cause them to also come to God (vss. 11-16). In verses 17-24, Paul describes the people of God as an olive tree. That tree was full of Jewish "branches" to start with. Some of those branches were cut off because of disobedience and

wild branches (Gentiles) were then grafted in. But being grafted in was not a reason for the Gentiles to boast (vss. 20-23). The Jews could also be grafted back in if they too submitted to the gospel (vs. 24). The “Israel” of verse 26 is referring to all of those who submit to God. Anyone who comes to God through the process of faith in Christ will be saved. What a wonderful promise from God!

Romans 12 — This chapter begins the final section in Romans. After spending the entire book talking about the blessing of salvation available through Christ, Paul will use the remainder of the book to talk about how we are to respond to that reality. We need to live for the Lord (vs. 1), be renewed in our thinking (vs. 2), and use our spiritual talents and abilities to serve one another and God (vss. 3-8). In verses 9-21, Paul gives a list of other practical things that we need to do as part of God’s family. Probably the most difficult instructions are found in verses 19-21.

Week 37

Romans 13 — As Paul continues explaining how we need to respond to the salvation God has provided for us through Jesus, he talks about our relationship with the government. Paul says we need live in submission and obedience to our government (vs. 1). Government was actually established by God (vs. 2). Government was established to maintain order and strike fear in the hearts of evil doers (vss. 2-4). Imagine a world that was completely void of government. What a chaotic mess it would be! It would be similar to the people of Israel in the time of the judges (Judges 21:25). This doesn't mean that every government pleases God. It also doesn't mean that we are to submit to our government over God. It just means that Christians are supposed to be as law-abiding as possible. This bring glory to God! Verse 8 should not be seen as a prohibition against borrowing money. It is merely a command that we do our best to pay back what we owe (specifically in the context Paul is talking about paying taxes). Beginning in verse 11, Paul may be talking about the final judgment and how each day we are getting closer to it. Since the judgment is drawing near, we need to make sure that we avoid sinning so we can be prepared.

Romans 14 — This chapter is one of the most misused and debated among brethren today. In it, Paul is not promoting the idea of tolerating a brother in sin. Instead, he is endorsing allowing weak and strong Christians to remain in their respective states (vs. 3). In the context, the subject under consideration is eating certain meats and celebrating certain days. These meats had probably been sacrificed to idols or were not in accordance to Jewish dietary law. The days mentioned are probably Jewish religious feast days. Paul is trying to bring brethren together and encourage them not to bind these matters on one another. Jews didn't need to bind their days and eating habits on the Gentiles, and the Gentiles didn't need to look down on their Jewish brethren for abstaining from eating certain meats and continuing to observe certain feast days. All of these were matters of judgment and personal conscience. Instead of focusing on non-important differences, the saints in this church needed to strive for unity. Key verses in this chapter include verses 12, 19, 20, and 23.

Romans 15 — The first thirteen verses of this chapter finish off the thoughts being expressed by Paul in the previous chapter. Instead of binding personal preferences, these brethren needed to accept and serve one another. They needed to develop the humility of Christ and put the needs and feelings of one another before their own. The rest of the chapter (vss. 14-33) deals with Paul's travel plans. In verse 16, he mentions a contribution that had been taken up by Gentile Christians to assist Jewish Christians. Much of the New Testament is about Paul carrying this gift from various churches to needy saints in Jerusalem. This contribution's importance goes beyond the physical need of the Jewish brethren. It served as a symbol of the unity and love that Jews and Gentiles were experiencing in Christ. Through Christ, Jews and Gentiles had been brought together as a spiritual family. They now had a relationship and were willing to help one another (vss. 26-29). This did not place under the Old Law.

Romans 16 — There is more to this chapter than just a bunch of names listed. Every name in this chapter was a follower of Christ. Like Paul, they were all hard workers in the kingdom of God. As you read this chapter, take out a sheet of paper and write down all the names. Notice how the church is made up both slave and free men, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, etc. Sounds very similar to what Paul taught in Galatians 3:26-28! In verse 17 Paul instructs the church to watch out for those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine and to avoid them.

Philippians 1 — The beginning of the church in Philippi can be read about in Acts 16:12-40. It actually began by a river and was helped by an earthquake. Paul helped establish this local church and had a deep love for the Christians who comprised it. Paul actually wrote this letter from prison, and yet, throughout it he expresses great joy and contentment in Christ. There are some mild rebukes sprinkled throughout. This is because some of the brethren appeared to be fighting and grumbling against one another. The first eleven verses of this chapter include common salutations and a prayer. In the remainder of the chapter, Paul speaks of how privileged he felt to be able to suffer and be persecuted for Christ. Do we have the same mindset today?

Week 38

Philippians 2 — This chapter begins with an appeal to be humble and unselfish (vss. 1-4). These are character traits that Jesus had in His life. Jesus was humble and selfless enough to give His innocent life on a cross for us (vss. 5-11). Since Jesus did this, how could we ever be prideful and arrogant towards one another? Notice how in verse 12 Paul makes it clear that being a faithful Christian requires diligent effort. When combined with verse 13, we see that diligent effort added with God's grace equals salvation! In verses 14-16, we find one of the major problems with this church. There was a lot of grumbling and complaining! In verses 19-28, Paul speaks highly of two of his fellow co-workers in the cause of the gospel (Timothy and Epaphroditus). Both of those men were hard workers and highly respected by Paul. Epaphroditus appears to be very sick at the time Paul is writing this letter. Paul encourages the brethren in Philippi to have high regard for him and show appreciation for the good work he was doing for the Lord.

Philippians 3 — As Paul does in most of his letters, he warns the brethren of false teachers. The "dogs" mentioned in verse 2 are a reference to Jewish teachers who wanted to circumcise Gentile Christians. Beginning in verse 4, Paul lists his incredible credentials as a Jew living under the Old Law. He also mentions how he persecuted Christians in the name of religion (vs. 6). When he became a Christian, he gave it all up to follow Christ (vss. 7-11). The goal and prize mentioned in verse 14 are not the same. The goal is becoming "perfect" (that is spiritually maturing in the Christ). The prize is heaven. We need to accomplish the goal so we can win the prize! This is similar to a runner competing to accomplish the goal (winning the race) so he can win the prize (a gold medal). Verse 17 shows just how important apostolic example is for Christians. This is something that Paul will emphasize again in Philippians 4:9.

Philippians 4 — There were two sisters in this church who were not getting along with each other. Paul has some advice for them in verse 2. Verse 4 contains very powerful instructions, especially when you consider how Paul was in jail when he wrote them. In verses 6-7, we are given instructions concerning prayer and trusting God and the peace that will come into our lives when we do that. In verses 14-12, Paul talks about how he learned to be content in every physical situation he found himself in. Are we also content? In verse 15, we find Paul making reference again to how the Philippians helped support him financially in the cause of the gospel. Epaphroditus appears to have been the one who delivered the funds from the church to Paul (vs. 18).

John 1 — John's gospel is truly unique compared to the others. It begins with a stunning prologue, omits much of the Galilean ministry, and never mentions the church or Lord's Supper. It does mention Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and six miracles that are not found in the other three gospels. Chapter one begins by revealing important information about Jesus. We learn that Jesus is God (vss. 1-13)! He is deity! He was there in the beginning with the Father and Holy Spirit and created all things (even human beings). Understanding that Jesus is God makes it even more powerful that He was willing to step out of eternity and enter our time and space and live as a man

(vs. 14). John the Baptist testified of His identity (vss. 19-34). John knew that Jesus was the Son of God because of what he witnessed at His baptism. In verses 35-51, we find people being brought to Jesus. Andrew brought his brother Peter and Philip brought Nathaniel. All of these men would go on to be apostles. In the case of Nathaniel, notice how Jesus reveals His miraculous power to him (vs. 48). We don't know exactly what Jesus saw Nathaniel doing. Whatever it was, it brought Nathaniel to faith that He was the Son of God and Messiah.

John 2 — There are two important things mentioned in this chapter. The first has to do with Jesus' first public miracle (vss. 1-12). It took place in Cana of Galilee and it involved Him turning water into wine at a wedding. This account is here not so much to start a debate about social drinking (note that unfermented grape juice was considered a real delicacy in the NT world), but to help confirm Jesus' identity as the Son of God (vs. 11). This chapter also records an occasion when Jesus cleansed the temple of corruption (vss. 13-25). This took place early into the ministry of Jesus. He will do this again during the last week of His life. In verse 19, Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. In verses 24-25, we find another attribute of deity that Jesus possessed. He could even read the minds of men!

Week 39

John 3 — Verses 1-15 contain the famous interview that Nicodemus conducted on Jesus. While Nicodemus could not deny the miracles performed by Jesus, he was still curious about His identity. During their conversation, the Lord talks to him about being “born again.” According to Jesus being “born again” is absolutely necessary to going to heaven (vss. 3-5). This had to be shocking information for Nicodemus to hear (especially since under the Old Law the Jews were physically born into God’s family). In Christ’s kingdom, no longer would physical birth determine who was part of God’s family. Instead, it would be spiritual birth! Verses 14-15 are referring to Jesus being “lifted up” on the cross. Verse 16 is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible today. It is also one of the most powerful! The rest of the chapter is a recording of John the Baptist’s testimony of Jesus as the Savior.

John 4 — The story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well is famous. It is a great conversion story that shows the need for us to have patience when trying to bring people to Christ. It is important to note that most Jews would have never traveled through Samaria. And yet, Jesus does and even strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan woman. What began as a simple conversation about water, eventually led to this woman believing in Jesus as the Messiah. In fact, not only did she believe, but she went back to her village and brought others to Jesus (vss. 27-30). The language of verses 35-38 is referring to Jesus telling the apostles to observe all the other Samaritans coming out to meet Him. It is interesting that the Samaritans received Jesus better than most Jews (vss. 39-42). In verses 46-54, we read about Jesus healing a sick boy. This is a unique miracle because Jesus performed it from afar.

John 5 — Many have questions about verse 4. Since many of the high-quality manuscripts do not contain it, it is likely that it was nothing more than a local superstition. Notice what the sick man was waiting on an angel to do, Jesus did instantly (vs. 9)! Unfortunately, many of the Jews were more concerned with the Sabbath traditions than the miracle of Jesus (vss. 10-16). In verses 17-24, Jesus talks about the unity of purpose and work that existed between Him and His Father in heaven. There are two resurrections mentioned in verses 25-29. The spiritual one occurs when people hear and obey the words of Jesus (vss. 25-26). The physical one will occur when He comes again (vss. 27-29). There were four witnesses to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. One was John the Baptist (vss. 33-35). One was the miracles He performed (vs. 36). One was God the Father (vss. 37-38). One was how Jesus was fulfilling everything the Holy Spirit had revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah (vss. 39-47).

John 6 — Verse 4 gives us a time marker. We are about one year from the death of Jesus. There are two significant miracles mentioned in this chapter. The first is when Jesus miraculously multiplied food and fed thousands of people (vss. 1-14). The results of this miracle led to Jesus withdrawing Himself to a mountain (vs. 15). The second miracle is when Jesus walks on water later that night (vss. 16-21). The next day the people who were fed miraculously sought out Jesus in order to get another

free meal. Jesus knew physical bread was what they were seeking and taught them to seek the true bread (spiritual bread that only He provides). The point of the sermon preached in verses 26-58 is that for one to gain eternal life he must be totally consumed with Jesus. He has to be the center of a person's life! The result of this sermon is found in verses 66-68. Notice how Jesus never compromised truth to gain followers! He taught the truth and gave people the option to either accept it or reject it. Unfortunately, the vast majority of people on this occasion rejected it.

John 7 — Verse 2 gives us another time marker (the Feast of Booths). This would have occurred during the fall season. The point of the chapter is that many people during this time did not believe in Jesus. His own brothers were not even believing in Him (vs. 5). Things got very hostile for Jesus when He arrived in Jerusalem for the Feast. By this time, the religious leaders were seeking to kill Him. This was one of the reasons why (for the most part) the Lord stayed clear of Jerusalem during His ministry. As you read this chapter, notice how confused people are concerning Jesus' identity (vss. 12, 15, 20, 26, 40-44). The statement in verse 52 is a false one made by the Jews (as Jonah and Nahum were both prophets who came out of Galilee).

Week 40

John 8 — The story of the woman caught in adultery is famous (vss. 1-11). In it we find Jesus exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He doesn't condone the adultery of the woman. Instead, He forgives her and commands her to "sin no more." Verse 12 ties to the Feast of Tabernacles, as lights were part of its celebration. In verses 14-18, Jesus speaks of how both the Father and His works (miracles) testify to His identity as the Son of God. Verse 20 shows us just how hostile this entire conversation was that Jesus had with the Jews. Notice how following Jesus leads to real freedom — spiritual freedom from sin (vss. 31-32). Imagine being called a child of the devil by Jesus (vss. 44-47). The response of the Jews in verse 48 was a huge insult to the Lord, as Jews hated Samaritans. Verse 58 is a strong claim to deity. This clearly angered these hard-hearted Jews (verse 59).

John 9 — The majority of this chapter describes what happened when Jesus healed a man who was born blind. Some interesting things to focus on include the instructions that Jesus gave the man to be healed (vss. 6-12), the investigation of the miracle (vss. 13-33), and the hard hearts of the religious leaders (vs. 34). Verse 39 is talking about humility. For one to see spiritually, they must humble themselves before Jesus and realize they need Him. The Pharisees refused to have this kind of humility. This is why they remained in their sins (vs. 41).

John 10 — Jesus is the Good Shepherd (vss. 1-18). This is in contrast to the wicked leadership found among the Jews in His day. Jesus is the door (way to heaven) for His sheep (vs. 7). He gives life to His sheep (vs. 10). He lays down His own life for His sheep (vs. 11). He protects His sheep (vss. 12-13). He knows His sheep and they know Him (vs. 14). In verse 16, Jesus is speaking of Gentiles. Once again, we find confusion surrounding the identity of Jesus (vss. 19-21). The Feast of Dedication (vs. 22) celebrates the cleansing of the Temple by the Maccabees in 164 BC. It was so cold during this time that Jesus seeks shelter on the porches (vs. 23). In verse 28, we find the most important thing that Jesus gives to His people. In verse 30, Jesus doesn't mean that He and the Father are the same person. Instead, He is referring to them as being united in work and purpose. Always remember that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). In verse 31, we find the Jews once again trying to kill Jesus. The reason for their hostility is found in verse 33. Jesus makes a defense for His claim to deity from Psalm 82. These Jews were without excuse, as the miracles Jesus performed clearly testified to His identity. In verse 40, the Lord leaves Jerusalem. He will not return again until the final Passover.

John 11 — This is one of the most powerful chapters in the gospel of John. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were close friends of Jesus who lived in Bethany. Lazarus died and Jesus travelled to the village to raise Him. This would be a miracle designed to show the glory of God (vs. 4). As they make their way back to Judea, notice the attitude of Thomas in verse 16. These men were really dedicated to Jesus! Notice the faith that Mary had in Jesus (vs. 32). Verse 35 is the shortest verse in the New Testament, but it is extremely powerful! Even though Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus, He

was still touched by the sorrow of Mary and Martha. Verse 39 removes any doubt of the deadness of Lazarus. Notice how after raising Lazarus, many believed in Jesus. Some went and reported the miracle to the Pharisees. In verses 47-57, we see that this miracle made the chief priests and Pharisees very nervous. They could not deny Jesus' power (vs. 47). Instead of believing in Him, they were more concerned with not having their power taken from them by the Romans. Since more people were starting to believe in the Lord (as a result of this miracle), they then decided to do away with Him immediately (vs. 53)! They began looking for an opportune time to seize Him.

John 12 — The anointing story mentioned in verses 1-8 is not to be confused with the one mentioned in Luke 7:36-39. They are not the same. The statement made by the Lord in verse 7, may infer that Mary had a better understanding of the plan of God than the apostles. She seems to know that Jesus is going to die soon and wants to anoint His body for burial. In verses 9-11, we find a large crowd of people outside of the house on this night. These Jews were there to see both Jesus and Lazarus. It is sad that the religious were so corrupt that not only did they want to kill Jesus, but also Lazarus (since He was living proof of Jesus' power). In verses 12-19, we find Jesus entering Jerusalem mounted on a colt. This fulfilled the words of the prophet Zechariah. This entrance took place on the Sunday of Jesus' last week. Don't miss the power of verse 23. Jesus knows the time for Him to die has come.

Week 41

John 13 — The events in this chapter take place on the Thursday of Jesus' last week. As Jesus and His apostles enter into a prepared room to eat the Passover meal, He does something remarkable. He washes ALL of the apostles' feet! Verse 2 shows us that He even washed the feet of His betrayer. The lesson for us to learn from this act of service is found in verses 13-17. Beginning in verse 18, Jesus exposes Judas to be the betrayer. While Satan does tempt Judas to do wrong (vs. 2), Judas was ultimately responsible for his own actions. In verses 34-35, the Lord mentions the importance of us loving one another. This is the main way in which we can show others that we are truly His disciples.

John 14 — Even while knowing His betrayal and death were soon about to occur, Jesus was more concerned with comforting those who followed Him (vss. 1-6). Because of Him, every disciple can experience living with God in His house when this life is over! In verses 8-15, Jesus speaks of the unity that exists between He and His Father. Beginning in verse 16, Jesus makes a promise with regard to the Holy Spirit. Notice how this promise is specifically made to the apostles (vs. 26).

John 15 — Notice carefully how the branches are His disciples, not churches in a denominational structure (vs. 5). That also means that the fruit mentioned is not converting people (that would be making more branches). Instead, it is referring to living a fruitful and productive Christian life. Verses 12-17 are powerful. They show us how Jesus feels about us when we are committed to doing His will. In verses 17-27, Jesus begins preparing His apostles to be persecuted once He is gone. Instead of leaving them on their own to deal with this, He would send them someone (the Holy Spirit) to guide and help them (vs. 26).

John 16 — This chapter continues with the promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Verses 12-15 reveal a key aspect of the Holy Spirit's work — to reveal the truth from heaven! The Holy Spirit would bring to memory the teachings of Jesus to the apostles. He would reveal to them everything God wants us to know. He would also convict people of sin and righteousness. This means He would show people the right way to live. This is done through the inspired word He revealed to the apostles (vs. 8). Verses 16-22 reveal the confusion and uncertainty still in the disciples' minds. In verses 29-33, Jesus again promises the apostles that persecution would soon be coming their way. He wanted them to prepare themselves for it and take courage because He had already overcome the world (vs. 33).

John 17 — Before arriving in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says three prayers that are recorded in this chapter. He says a prayer for Himself. He mentions how He gave up His glory to come here on earth and now He wants His Father to restore that glory to Him (vss. 1-5). He also prays for His apostles. He prays that they would be firm and faithful to continue His work after He was gone (vss. 6-19). He also prays for us (future disciples). He prays that we might be united and faithful to Him and that the world would know of His glory through us (vss. 20-26).

Week 42

John 18 — John's account of the crucifixion contains information not found in the other gospels. The Romans play a much bigger role in his account and the events in the Garden of Gethsemane are not mentioned. Additional unique material includes Jesus' trial before Annas, His answer to the High Priest before being slapped, His conversation with Pilate, and the instructions He gives to John concerning His mother. All of this additional information can certainly be harmonized with the other accounts. Verse 6 is very interesting. The soldiers were probably afraid of Jesus because they knew of the great power He possessed. Verse 13 shows how many Jews resented Pilate's predecessor removing Annas as the High Priests many years earlier. Some still regarded him as the real High Priest. This is why Jesus was brought to him first. Verse 36 reveals a powerful truth about the nature of the Lord's kingdom. Pilate's question in verse 38 is probably one of sarcasm. Like many today, Pilate is probably insinuating that there is really no such thing as truth.

John 19 — While Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence, in this chapter we see that he was really a coward (vss. 8, 12). Key events in this chapter include the mocking and beating of Jesus (vss. 1-15), His being handed over for crucifixion (vss. 16-37), and His being buried in Joseph's tomb (vss. 38-42). How hard it must have been for Jesus' mother to watch her son die (vss. 26-27). Verse 34 shows us that the Romans made sure Jesus was dead before taking Him down from the cross. The Lord did not faint or pass out on the cross!

John 20 — This chapter highlights Jesus' resurrection and His appearances before many eye-witnesses. Notice how the first person He appeared to was Mary Magdalene (vss. 11-18). Why didn't Mary recognize the Lord at first (vs. 14)? Maybe it was because she was emotionally caught up in the moment and not expecting to see Him. Notice how even though He had been dead for three days, Jesus still had not yet gone back to heaven (vs. 17). He was in paradise (Luke 23:43). This is where the saved who have died, go to await the resurrection. Verse 22 is a kind of symbolic action (as the apostles wouldn't literally receive the power of the Holy Spirit until Pentecost). In verses 24-29 we read about Thomas examining the Lord's risen body. Notice how Thomas wouldn't believe without sufficient evidence! In verses 30-31 John tells us his purpose for writing this gospel. He wanted to provide us with sufficient evidence to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

John 21 — Verse 3 shows how confused the apostles still were concerning the meaning behind the Lord's resurrection. At this point, instead of preaching, they went back to work fishing in Galilee! In verses 4-14, we read about the miracle that took place the third time Jesus manifested Himself to the apostles. This miracle is very similar to the one found in Luke 5:1-11. In verses 15-19, we find the famous conversation Jesus had with Peter about love. Notice how after denying the Lord three times, here Peter reaffirms His love for Him three times. Jesus didn't give up on Peter. Instead, He forgave him and continued to use him! In the concluding verses John makes it clear that he is the one who wrote this gospel. Throughout the book he refers to himself as the "disciple whom Jesus loved."

1 Corinthians 1 — The church in Corinth was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-11). He stayed there for 18 months, even making tents to support himself for a while. After leaving Corinth, he received word of troubles in the church and questions about his teaching. This epistle served as a reply to these questions. In the first chapter, we see that one of the main problems in this church was that they were not united. They were divided and more devoted to their favorite preachers instead of the Lord (vss. 1-13). Some try to use verse 17 to argue that baptism is not important. And yet, it is clear in verses 14 and 16, that Paul did baptize people. In this context, his concern is with the Christians being divided and competing over who baptized them, instead of being united by the gospel. In verses 18-31, Paul contrasts human thinking and reasoning to God's. His point is that God does things differently than humans would expect. As weird as it may sound to some, God saves men through the preaching of His Son dying on a cross (vs. 18).

Week 43

1 Corinthians 2 — As Paul continues to contrast God’s wisdom with man’s wisdom, in verse 1 you can hear him begin answering questions people may have had about his apostolic authority. When he talks about the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” he is referring to the miracles he performed among the Corinthians. These proved he was a messenger of God (vs. 4). The “mystery” of verse 7 could not be known unless God revealed it. How did God reveal it? Through His Holy Spirit (vss. 10-15). As Jesus said would happen (John 16:12-15), the Holy Spirit revealed the word of God to the apostles and prophets. Through His revelation we are able to know about God’s scheme of redemption and what we must do to be reconciled to God. Always remember that each time we read and study the Bible we are observing what the Holy Spirit has revealed!

1 Corinthians 3 — This chapter reveals the main reason why the Corinthians were so divided as a church. They had stopped listening to God! They were still babes in Christ and carnal minded (vss. 1-3). In verse 4, Paul picks up with the rebuke found in 1 Corinthians 1:10-15. These Christians were guilty of elevating preachers because they were spiritually immature. They failed to realize that while preachers plant the seed of the gospel in the hearts of men, God is the One who ultimately saves (vss. 4-9). If the person who is converted leaves the Lord at some point, that doesn’t mean that the teacher’s work was in vain. While it is a loss for the kingdom of God, the teacher can still be saved. The teacher’s salvation is not dependent on the people he converts staying faithful (vss. 10-15). The temple of God mentioned in verses 16-17, is reference to the Lord’s church. Instead of competing over preachers, these Christians needed to understand that all of God’s people are on the same team! They are all in this work together, belong to the Lord, and have been saved for the glory of God (vss. 18-23).

1 Corinthians 4 — Paul continues defending his apostleship at the beginning of this chapter (vs. 1). Verse 4 announces something very important that every Christian needs to take heed to. Instead of concerning ourselves with what everyone else thinks of us, we need to be concerned with what God thinks! What God’s thinks about us is the only thing that really matters. Arrogance and false perception of ourselves can always be avoided if we listen to God’s word (vss. 5-6). While we can’t hear Paul’s voices in verses 8-10, it is clear that he is being sarcastic. In verse 17, notice how Paul says he could teach the same thing in all the churches during that time. Due to so much false teaching, he probably couldn’t do that today! Beginning in verse 19, Paul announces that he was coming to visit the Corinthians soon. He hopes that by then they will have corrected many of the problems they had.

1 Corinthians 5 — This chapter is pretty straightforward. Another problem in this church was they tolerated sin. Specifically, they tolerated a brother who was in adultery with his father’s wife (vss. 1-2). Paul urges them to straighten up and discipline this sinful brother. (vss. 6-13). Instead of being apathetic to his situation, they needed to demonstrate love for his soul (vs. 5). It was shameful that they were allowing him to be in fellowship with them while practicing sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 6 — In this chapter we come to another problem in this church. In addition to being divided and tolerating sin, they were also taking one another to court (vss. 1-6). In verses 9-11, Paul gives a list of practices that will keep us out of heaven. The Corinthians at one time engaged in these sins, but thankfully they repented and changed. In verses 18-20, Paul revisits the topic of sexual immorality. While in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul says the “temple” is the church, in this chapter he uses that same example to talk about our individual bodies. He says our bodies are also temples of God. Our bodies are to be used for God’s glory, not for the purpose of engaging in sexual immorality.

Week 44

1 Corinthians 7 — In this chapter, we find yet another problem in the Corinthian church. They seemed to have questions and controversies surrounding marriage and divorce. What Paul teaches about the subject needs to be in the context of the “present distress” mentioned in verse 26. History tells us that this may be in reference to famine in the world and the persecution of Christians. Due to these troubling times, Paul says it may not have been a good idea for disciples to marry. If Christians couldn’t resist the urge for sexual immorality though, they needed to marry (vss. 1-7). As you read this chapter, notice how Paul deals with the issues of marriage permanency (vss. 10-11), Christians marrying unbelievers (vss. 12-16), sexual purity (vs. 9), and what a Christian is able to do when their spouse dies (vs. 39-40).

1 Corinthians 8 — Chapters 8-10 are to be treated as a unit. In them, Paul discusses the idea of Christian liberty, using the example of meat that was offered to idols. It is important to understand that much of the meat available in the New Testament world would have been offered from idol temples. Was it okay for Christians to eat it? Was it a sin for Christians to eat meat that was used for idolatry? Or, did they have the liberty to eat it and still be right with God? These were questions that the brethren in Corinth needed answers to. Verse 9 is critical in this chapter. Here, Paul says that while it was okay for Christians to eat the meat, they needed to make sure that they didn’t use their liberty to cause others to sin. The strong Christians needed to make sure that they considered the weak.

1 Corinthians 9 — In continuing the thought from the previous chapter, Paul makes it clear that he practiced what he preached. He was the perfect example of someone who gave up his liberties in order to help the Corinthians be strong in the Lord. He actually gave up his right to be supported financially in the preaching of the gospel, so that money wouldn’t cause them to look down on him (vss. 1-15). Paul says that he was willing to give up anything in order to win souls for the Lord (vss. 22-23). In verses 24-25 Paul compares the Christian’s journey to heaven to a spiritual race. Christians must accomplish the goal (finishing the race) in order to win the prize (going to heaven). Verses 26-27 are a strong refute of the “once saved always saved” doctrine. Notice how even Paul had to discipline himself and strive to live godly everyday. If he didn’t, he would be lost, even though he had preached the gospel to others and been baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16; Romans 6:1-7).

1 Corinthians 10 — In verses 1-13, Paul talks about the past mistakes of Israel. He says that although God did bless them tremendously, they still rebelled against Him. They engaged in idolatry (this seemed to have been a constant stumbling block for them), immorality, and grumbling. Due to their constant wickedness, God punished them! Paul reminds the Corinthians of this so that they would be motivated to “flee from idolatry” (vss. 14-22). In verses 23-33, Paul says that while it wasn’t a sin for Christians to eat the meat sacrificed to idols, that didn’t mean it was a good idea (especially if it would be a stumbling block for the weak and immature brethren). As stated before, the brethren needed to consider one another in this matter.

1 Corinthians 11 — There are two issues being addressed by Paul in this chapter. There is the issue of women needing to be covered when they prayed and prophesied (vss. 1-16) and the abuse of the Lord's Supper (vss. 17-34). There is not enough room in this article to consider the many questions people have about the head covering. It seems as though this issue had become very divisive among the brethren in Corinth. In regard to the Lord's Supper, these disciples were taking it in an irreverent manner (vs. 27). The result was they had brought judgment on themselves (vss. 29-30). Paul urges them to straighten up and start taking this act of worship seriously and in the way the Lord prescribed.

Week 45

1 Corinthians 12 — After discussing the problems they had with the Lord's Supper, Paul begins addressing another problem they had with respect to worship. Evidently, these brethren were misusing their miraculous spiritual gifts in the public assembly. This particular issue will be addressed in the next three chapters. The misuse of these gifts was so outrageous, that outsiders were being negatively impacted (1 Corinthians 14:23-25). This was not to say that the gifts did not come from the Holy Spirit and were not important (vss. 4-11). They just needed to be exercised properly. In verses 12-31, Paul uses his favorite metaphor to describe the Lord's church. He calls it a "body." It is a body made up of individual members (Christians) who must each do their part. Every member is important and is needed for the body to function properly.

1 Corinthians 13 — It seems as though the Corinthians were competing over miraculous spiritual gifts. This was another sign of their spiritual immaturity and worldly thinking. Tongue speaking seemed to be the gift that everyone was infatuated with. Paul urges the brethren to pursue something greater than spiritual gifts: love. Without love, everything else they did was in vain (vss. 1-3). In verses 4-7, Paul says that love for one another looks a certain way. In verses 8-13, he says that while the miraculous gifts would one day cease, love would continue. Notice how the miraculous gifts would cease when "the perfect" came (vs. 10). Logically "the perfect" can only refer to the full measure of whatever "the partial" is. In the context, "the partial" is referring to revelation of God's will (vss. 8-9). Whenever the full revelation of God's word came, the miraculous gifts would no longer be needed. We have that today in our New Testament. The New Testament is the complete will of God for our lives. Therefore, there are no miraculous spiritual gifts in the church today.

1 Corinthians 14 — In this chapter, Paul outlines how the gifts of prophecy and tongue were to be exercised in the church. When no interpreter was present, only God could understand the tongue-speaker. Therefore, he was to be quiet (vs. 28). When an interpreter was present, two to three tongue-speakers could speak at the most, and each in turn (vss. 26-27). The purpose of gifts like this was for the edification of the church (vs. 5). Paul also gives instructions for those who could prophesy (vss. 29-40). Paul's words against women speaking in the church is often misunderstood (vs. 34). He does not mean that women can never say anything in church (otherwise they wouldn't be able to sing or confess sin). It is important to keep this commandment in the context of the gifts tongue speaking and prophesy being exercised in the church. The whole point of these instructions is listed in verse 40.

1 Corinthians 15 — Here Paul transitions and addresses another problem in this church. This one had to do with the resurrection. Some were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead, and so logically, that thinking would have applied to Jesus. Paul uses this section to clear up their misunderstanding. He emphasizes that Jesus was raised and seen by many eye-witnesses (vss. 1-11). He makes the point that if Jesus was not raised, then their faith was in vain (vss. 12-19, 29). Since

Jesus was raised, they could be sure that one day all of the dead would be raised, the Lord would return, and their work in the Lord was not in vain (vss. 50-58).

1 Corinthians 16 — Verses 1-3 provide God's prescription for a church to raise money. Notice how one of the uses of the money is benevolence for needy saints. Philippians 4:15 provides another scriptural use for the Lord's money. Paul closes the book with travel plans and names of fellow workers in the kingdom. After finishing this strong letter, Paul would anxiously wait for Timothy to report to him how the brethren in Corinth received it.

Week 46

2 Corinthians 1 — The letter of 2 Corinthians was written by Paul as a response to how the brethren in Corinth received 1 Corinthians. It tells us “the rest of the story.” It shows us that while the saints received Paul’s first letter well, and made some improvements, they still had a lot of work to do. Two important themes to watch for in this letter include Paul defending his apostleship and the contribution to the needy saints in Jerusalem. In the first eleven verses of the chapter one, Paul talks about the suffering he and his co-workers endured to bring the Corinthians the gospel. Paul mentioned this to emphasize his deep love for them. In verse 9-10 he talks about an episode (not recorded in Acts) he experienced while preaching the gospel. Beginning in verse 12, he gives his first hint in the letter that he was frustrated that many were challenging his apostleship. In verse 15, we see that some of these challenges had to do with Paul’s travel plans. Evidently, some were saying that Paul was untrustworthy because he didn’t visit them when he said he would. It wasn’t as though Paul was intentionally lying to them. He did have plans to come and see them, but things hadn’t worked out like he planned (vss. 16-20).

2 Corinthians 2 — It can be confusing trying to sort them all of Paul’s travels. It appears that 1 Corinthians was prompted by a very disappointing visit he had with them (probably one not recorded in Acts). Paul didn’t want to come to them with all these problems again (vs. 1). In verse 4 he alludes to the previous letter of 1 Corinthians again. It is important to note that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8) and sent it by Titus (2 Corinthians 7:6-8). He was so anxious to hear how they received that letter that he sent off on land to find Titus (vss. 12-13). In chapter we learn that Titus brings Paul good news. The brethren in Corinth received 1 Corinthians well and even began making changes (2 Corinthians 7). Two more important things to watch for in this chapter include how Paul commends them for exercising church discipline against the sinful brother mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 and Paul’s defense that he didn’t preach the gospel for money as some appeared to be suggesting (vss. 5-11 and 17). In regards to the sinful brother notice how church disciplined worked! The brother repented and Paul urges to them to not accept him back into fellowship and reaffirm their love for him,

2 Corinthians 3 — This is one of the key chapters in the New Testament that emphasizes how the Old Covenant has been replaced with the New. The “ministry of death” in verse 7 is reference to Moses’ Law. The “ministry of the Spirit” in verse is a reference to Jesus’ Law. While the Law given through Moses came from God and had glory, it could not give eternal life and transform us into the image of Christ. The New Testament Law given through God’s Son does that! The “liberty” or “freedom” mentioned in verse 17 is a reference to liberty from the bondage of sin. Through Jesus, every Christian has that!

2 Corinthians 4 — Continue to watch carefully for Paul to defend his apostleship. There are lot of echoes throughout this chapter. Verse 2 and 5 are shots at the false teachers who are making charges against him. Paul is saying, “I am not doing these kinds of things, but the false teachers who

are speaking against me are!” To make this matter worse, it appears that the Corinthians were listening to these false teachers. It appears that they were accepting them before Paul! Verse 7 is a beautiful metaphor. In it the gospel is described as a great treasure placed in lowly containers (human preachers) to show God’s power. In verses 8-12, Paul continues to defend his apostleship by describing all he went through to spread the gospel. In verse 17, Paul describes the persecutions as “light afflictions.” He says that none of them would cause him to give up on working for Jesus (vss. 16-18).

2 Corinthians 5 — How could Paul go through so much and yet continue to preach the gospel? This chapter answers that question. In verse 1, Paul makes it clear that the prize of heaven was always before him. The imagery beginning in verse 2 is of clothing. Paul says that as disciples we should want to be better clothed (we should want to go to heaven above remaining here on this earth). In the rest of this chapter he continues to unpack this idea. Key passages to key in on include verses 4, 6-10, and 17. In verse 19, Paul refers to the gospel as the “ministry of reconciliation.” Through the preaching of it, men can be reconciled to God. Verse 20 is another clear shot at false teachers and Paul continuing to defend his apostleship.

Week 47

2 Corinthians 6 — This chapter begins with Paul listing many of the persecutions he endured while preaching the gospel (vss. 1-10). Paul lists these things to continue defending his apostleship. Evidently, the Corinthians had been tolerating false teachers who claimed that Paul wasn't a real apostle (vss. 11-13). Verses 14-18 are often misused today. While there are many secondary applications that can be made from them, in the context, Paul is talking about their need to stay away from pagan idolatry.

2 Corinthians 7 — After urging the Corinthians to stay away from idolatry, Paul rejoins the material he began in 2:13 (when he spoke of sending Titus to them). According to Titus, the brethren in Corinth received Paul's first letter extremely well. They even were lead to repentance (vss. 1-10). Notice how repentance is not just feeling bad about doing something sinful. It also includes a sorrow that leads one to stopping and turning from sin.

2 Corinthians 8 — In this chapter, Paul begins talking about a big issue mentioned numerous times in the New Testament — the collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Evidently, the brethren in Macedonia were giving in an extremely generous way (vss. 1-4). They did this because they had first given themselves to God (vs. 5). Paul says that it was time for the Corinthians to follow their example (vs. 6). While they had started getting involved in this work at one time, unfortunately, they had not finished it (vss. 10-15). Paul appeals to them to do what they had promised by pointing to the example of Jesus (vs. 9). Paul was soon going to send a trusted brother to receive their gift and accompany him with it to Jerusalem. Paul wanted to do it this way to avoid false accusations being brought against him. Maintaining integrity was very important to Paul.

2 Corinthians 9 — The theme of giving continues on in this chapter. Paul wants these saints to follow through with their promise to help the needy brethren in Jerusalem so they won't be embarrassed (vss. 1-4). Some of the New Testament's most important principles on giving are found in this chapter (vss. 6-7). Unlike what the "health and wealth" gospel teaches, God says we are not to give just so we can get. In verses 10-11, we learn that God blesses us with the material wealth not so that we can hoard and be selfish. But so that we can use it to bless and help others. Paul wants these Christians to give to sacrificially and trust that God will continue to take care of them. This is an attitude that we must challenge ourselves to imitate today!

2 Corinthians 10 — Notice the change of tone from Paul in this chapter. In the previous two chapters, Paul appears to be light and gentle when urging the Corinthians to give. Now, he appears to be angry (as he is once again defending personal attacks made against him by false teachers). We see this especially in verses 2, 7, and 10. If these false teachers could discredit the messenger, then they could discredit the message! In verses 12 and following, Paul has some things to say about the boasting of his critics. In the next two chapters, he will continue to defend his apostleship and expose the error of those who spoke evil against him.

Week 48

2 Corinthians 11 — In continuing the theme from chapter 10, Paul is vigorously defending his apostleship against the false teachers. Evidently, there were false teachers among the Corinthians who claimed that Paul was not an authentic apostle (vss. 1-6). Paul reminds these brethren that he preached the gospel to them for free! Even though he was entitled, he never took wages for the work that he did among them (vss. 7-11). Since they seemed to be so impressed with the boasting of the false teachers discrediting him, Paul (reluctantly) has to list his accomplishments as a true apostle of Christ (vss. 16-33). Notice how it is quite a list! Do you think the false apostles who criticized him could measure up?

2 Corinthians 12 — This is one of the more interesting chapters in the New Testament. In verses 1-6, Paul talks about a man who was caught into the third heaven. This man was able to see and hear amazing heavenly things. This man was in fact Paul! As an apostle, Paul was able to experience many things like this. But to keep him from being full of pride he was given a “thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7). Much has been speculated about this thorn. What we know is that it came from Satan, it brought Paul much anguish, Paul prayed that God would take it away, and God allowed it to remain (vss. 7-9). Notice how God’s answer of “no” to Paul’s prayer did not make him angry and bitter. Instead, he accepted God’s will and continued to be thankful and dependent on Christ (vs. 10). In verse 12, Paul reminds them of the signs he performed among them that demonstrated he was a real apostle. In verses 19-21, he urges them to continue correcting the remaining problems they have before he comes to see them shortly. While they had made some corrections, Paul wanted them to know that they still had a long way to go.

2 Corinthians 13 — This chapter is pretty straight forward. It is actually a continuation of verses 14-21 of the previous chapter. Paul warns them to stop listening to the false apostles and listen to him (a real apostle of God). Pay close attention to verses 1-2, 5-6, and 10. Paul clearly wanted these saints to do some personal examination (something we always need be doing) and make the necessary changes. Their eternal souls were on the line!

Revelation 1 — This is one of the most abused books in the Bible today. Much of the abuse comes as a result of failing to notice the sign-posts mentioned in the first chapter. This book would be a “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (vs. 1). It was written specifically to the seven churches of Asia (vss. 4, 11). It was written during a time of persecution of Christians (vs. 9). The things prophesied about would soon come to pass (vs. 1, 3). The language of the book would be “signified” (vs. 1). In verses 12-17, John gives a glorious picture of Jesus. Instead of taking everything literally, let us stand in awe of His majesty and power! Let us appreciate how Jesus is pictured as victorious and ready to lead His people to victory over their enemies! Let us understand that He is fully in control of all things and knows exactly what is going on in His church! Jesus is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Revelation 2 — In this chapter, Jesus will begin personally addressing the seven churches of Asia. Each message He gives has a similar pattern. He announces some good things that the church is doing, some things that they were doing wrong, and what they needed to do to get back on the right track. The first church the Lord speaks to is in Ephesus. This is the same church Paul helped establish on his third missionary journey (Acts 19). While this church was not tolerating false teachers (vs. 2), their zeal and passion for kingdom work was dying (vs. 4). The solution for their problem is found in verses 5-7. The church in Smyrna was poor physically, but rich spiritually (vs. 9). Jesus told these saints that more days of intense persecution were coming (vs. 10). The church in Pergamum was also facing intense persecution (vs. 13). Unlike the church in Ephesus, this church was tolerating false teachers (vs. 14). The church in Thyatira was also doing the same (vss. 20-23). Jezebel was the wicked wife of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:31). Her name being mentioned here is probably symbolic of this church tolerating a false prophetess (an immoral woman who was just as wicked as Jezebel). God takes His people accepting false doctrine very seriously!

Week 49

Revelation 3 — Jesus addressed three more of the seven churches of Asia in this chapter. The church at Sardis was not strong spiritually (vss. 1-2). Verse 5 is a great verse to combat the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” According to Jesus, a saint’s name can be erased from the book of life! The church at Philadelphia was persevering and doing their best to remain faithful to Jesus (vss. 7-8). Jesus promised to keep them for an “hour of testing” that would affect the whole world (vs. 10). It is hard to determine exactly what the Lord is referring to here. The point is, He could see the perseverance of His people in this city and would protect them in the days ahead. The church of Laodicea was lukewarm (vs. 16). Jesus used the bad water problems of the day, as an example, to emphasize how they were not faithful to Him. They too needed to repent and get back on fire for the Lord (vss. 19-22).

Revelation 4 — After the personal addressing of the seven churches, in this chapter John is able to see what is going on behind the spiritual curtain. He is actually able to see a vision of God the Father on His throne in heaven. A good chapter to read before this one is Isaiah 6. There, Isaiah is able to have a similar experience before going to preach to the people of Israel. The door pictured in verse 1 is actually the third one mentioned in Revelation. Jesus mentioned two other doors when addressing the churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea in chapter 3. Notice how, while on the throne, God is pictured as majestic, holy, and full of glory (vss. 5-11). Notice how those in heaven exalt His name and worship Him because He is worthy.

Revelation 5 — This is certainly one of the more important chapters in Revelation. It begins with John noticing a book (sealed up with seven seals) in the right hand of the Father. This book is extremely important because within it lies the outcome for God’s people and the persecution they were facing at the hands of Rome. There is great weeping in heaven because it appears that no one is worthy to open the book and reveal the story of Revelation (vss. 1-4). That is, until Jesus appears (vs. 5). Notice how Jesus is portrayed as both a Lamb and Lion. He is the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the world and Lion from the tribe of Judah. The latter is no doubt a reference to the prophecy of Jacob in Genesis 49:8-10. Jesus is the ultimate expression of power and authority from the tribe of Judah! Once Jesus is revealed to be able to open the book with the seven seals, those in heaven rejoice and worship Him (vss. 6-14). If God’s people were going to be able to overcome the persecution of a world empire, then Jesus would have to lead them to victory!

Revelation 6 — Again, remember the book with the seven seals reveals the outcome of the battle of God and His people versus Satan and the corrupt Roman Empire. As the Lamb (Jesus) breaks each seal, an element of the story of Revelation is told. The breaking of the first seal probably has to do with the conquest of the gospel in the first century (vss. 1-2). This is essentially what the book of Acts is all about! The breaking of the second seal probably has to do with the conflict that would come as a result of the preaching of the gospel (vss. 3-4). Again, this is something that we can read about in the book of Acts. The breaking of the third seal (vss. 5-6) probably has to do with economic

hardships those who refuse to compromise their faith would experience (their refusal to bow down to the emperor as god). The breaking of the fourth seal probably has to do with the Christians being murdered for their faith (vss. 7-8). The breaking of the fifth seal has to do with dead saints asking God to avenge them (vss. 9-11). The breaking of the sixth seal is loaded with the apocalyptic judgment language (vss. 12-17). God finally avenges His people and brings down their enemies. Similar judgment language is found throughout the Old Testament (Amos 5:20; 8:9; Isaiah 13:10; 19:1; Ezekiel 32:7).

Revelation 7 — After the breaking of the first seven seals, there is a break in the action (an interlude). In the midst of revealing the judgment that would come upon those persecuting His people, God begins marking His people (vss. 1-4). In verses 4-17, there are several important things to notice. First, the 144,000 is symbolic for a complete numbering of God's people. With this number God is letting His people know that He knew exactly who they were and that they belonged to Him. Second, notice how the 144,000 are on the earth (vss. 3-8). This is the opposite of what Jehovah Witnesses teach today! Third, the primary message of this vision is to motivate suffering persecuted Christians to continue to endure and know that ultimately they would be victorious and be able to rest with God in heaven (they would be rewarded for their faith!).

Week 50

Revelation 8-9 — Remember in chapter 6, Jesus (the Lion and Lamb) began to open the book with the seven seals. He actually opened the first six. Before the opening of the seventh seal, in Revelation 7, God assured His people that He knew them and would take care of them. In this chapter, the seventh seal is finally broken. Once it is, there was a silence in heaven. The seventh seal opens up another series of seven in Revelation (the seven trumpets). These seven trumpets represent God's judgments on the Roman Empire. By this time, the empire had become extremely wicked. By persecuting Christians because they would not bow down to the emperor as god, the emperor was trying to destroy the Lord's church. The blowing of the first six trumpets are found beginning with verse 7 (and it continues all the way through chapter nine). The first four seem to do with natural calamities. The fifth may represent a plague of some kind (9:1-12). The sixth seems to point to external invasions (9:13-19). Remember it is hard to be dogmatic with apocalyptic language. Regardless of how you interpret the judgments, the point of them is found in Revelation 9:20-21. The judgments were designed to motivate the wicked to repent! This is why only a third of everything was destroyed with the blowing of the first four trumpets. God was showing mercy to the people and trying to give them a chance to turn to Him. Unfortunately, they did not.

Revelation 10 — Chapter nine concluded with the sounding of the sixth trumpet. In keeping with the pattern we find in the series of seven in Revelation, chapters 10-11 follow with an interlude (a break in the action). This interlude is designed to give comfort and hope to God's people during this difficult time. The chapter begins with a strong angel coming down from heaven full of glory (vs. 1). The angel had a little book in his hand (vs. 2) and announces judgment of God's enemies (vs. 3). He is in the process of unleashing seven peals of thunder, but is told to stop by God (vs. 4). Evidently, these seven peals were more warning judgments from God. Since Rome was refusing to repent, God decided they had had enough warnings. God was fed up and decided to no longer delay His final judgment on Rome (vss. 5-6). The seventh angel was going to sound his trumpet and its blowing would signify God's complete judgment on the empire (vs. 7). In regard to the little book, John is told to eat it (vss. 8-9). It would be bitter to his stomach, but sweet in his mouth. Ezekiel had a similar experience in Ezekiel 3:1-3. The "little book" is significant because it contained the message of judgment upon the enemies of God's people that God wanted John to preach. This message would be "bitter-sweet." It would be bitter because it is hard for a preacher to tell people that they are about to be punished by God and lost forever if they refuse to repent. It would be sweet because the message would give assurance to God's people that in the end they would prevail and be vindicated by God.

Revelation 11 — This chapter is essentially a summary of the rest of this prophetic book. The temple and holy city mentioned are probably references to the church (vss. 1-2). Notice how the church is being persecuted or "tread under foot." The two witnesses prophesying were probably a reference to the proclaiming of the gospel by the disciples (vs. 3). Because of their preaching, they were persecuted. Verses 5-6 may refer to their ability to perform miracles to confirm the message

they preached (Mark 16:15-19; Hebrews 2:3-4). While disciples were being put to death, the world celebrated (vss. 7-10). But after a period of time, God stepped in and vindicated His people (vss. 11-14). The church was not destroyed as the persecutors may have thought. People continued to obey the gospel, the Lord executed complete judgment on the empire, and Christ reigned as the victorious king over His kingdom (vss. 15-19).

Revelation 12 — In this chapter, the enemies facing God's people during this time are introduced. The woman of verses 1-2 is probably referring to the faithful people of God. The child is clearly a reference to Jesus. He was brought into the world through the Jews (God's people under the Old Covenant). The red dragon of verses 3-4 is the devil (vs. 9). He is the one who tried to destroy Jesus when He first came into the world (Matthew 2:1-23). When he could not destroy Jesus and prevent Him from dying on the cross, he then decided to persecute God's people (the church — vs. 6). The subject of verses 7-17 has nothing to do with the origin of Satan. In keeping with the context of the book, the verses probably refer to Satan's attempt to stop Jesus work at Calvary. When he couldn't, he decided to assault God's people until the end of Rome (or maybe even in the end of the world?).

Week 51

Revelation 13 — After the introduction of the red dragon in chapter 12, two more enemies are introduced in this chapter. It is important to note that both of these enemies work for the red dragon. The first is the beast that comes from the sea (vs. 1). He has ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns, and blasphemous names on his heads. He speaks blasphemous words against God, makes war against the saints, and receives worship from those on the earth (vss. 4-9). Eventually, he will be defeated by God (vs. 10). The second enemy mentioned is the beast that comes from the earth. He has two horns like a lamb, speaks as a dragon, and exercises the authority of the first beast (vss. 11-12). He deceives people into engaging in false worship. If they don't, he has them killed (vss. 13-17). His number is one of defeat — 666 (vs. 18). The two beasts probably symbolize different corrupt aspects of the Roman Empire. The sea beast probably represents the political aspect, while the earth beast may represent the false worship system (emperor worship).

Revelation 14 — This chapter begins with saints standing with the Lamb in victory (vss. 1-5). The 144,000 number is not to be taken literally. Instead, it represents all the faithful people of God. In verses 6-7, an angel appears announcing the judgment of God against Rome. In verse 8, another enemy is introduced (the harlot). The harlot seems to represent the immorality that had permeated throughout the empire. Those who follow her and the beast are given a stiff warning in verses 9-12. While those who die faithful to God are given wonderful news in verse 13. Verses 14-20 are interesting. God's patience with Rome is up. Her sins are full and she will soon experience God's full judgment! This section is loaded with apocalyptic judgement language. The point is, God is going to bring Rome down!

Revelation 15 — After revealing the wrath that would come upon Rome in the previous chapter, in this chapter, God takes time to offer great comfort and encouragement to His church. Before going into detail about Rome's demise (in chapters 16-20), God spends some time painting an aftermath scene of victory for the saints. The chapter begins with seven angels carrying seven plagues (vs. 1). In these plagues, "the wrath of God is finished." God is finished bringing down Rome and the church is pictured as victorious over the beast and those who are in allegiance with Him (vs. 2). After this victory, God's people sing the songs of Moses and the Lamb (vss. 3-4). In the Bible, it is not uncommon to read about God's people singing a song of victory after deliverance from their enemies (Exodus 15:1). The remainder of the chapter seems to deal with the executing of God's judgment and the glory of God that is revealed through it (vss. 5-8).

Revelation 16 — Many consider this chapter to contain the climax of the book. The seven bowls of wrath are introduced. They are the third series of seven in the book. These bowls represent God's full wrath being unleashed on the Roman Empire (vss. 1-12). Notice the contrast between the judgments found in verses 2-9 to chapter 8:7-13. Instead of a third of things being destroyed, now all of it is! These judgments seem to have to do with Rome experiencing natural calamities, plagues and eternal invasions. Even after receiving the judgments, they still refused to repent (vs. 10).

“Armageddon” literally means “hill or mount of Megiddo.” It is located in the Jezreel Valley. A number of Old Testament battles were fought here. In verses 13-16, the language is being used to refer to a spiritual battle taking place between God’s army (the church) and the devil’s army (Rome). It has already taken place and God’s army won! Verses 17-21 emphasizes this point when it describes what takes place when the seventh bowl of God’s wrath is poured out.

Revelation 17 — The judgment of the harlot (the immorality of Rome) is announced in this chapter. Notice how widespread the influence of immorality is throughout the Roman world (vss. 1-5). Verse 6 is another reference to the persecutions of Christians. Because of her sin, the harlot’s destiny is announced in verse 8. Verses 9-13 are difficult. They likely refer to various emperors that the devil would use to persecute Christians. They would wage war with the Lamb and His people, but would be defeated (vs. 14).

Week 52

Revelation 18 — This chapter continues the story of the fall of Rome (the empire persecuting God's people during this time). In verse 1, an angel is described as coming down from heaven with great authority. He has the authority to execute God's judgment. The language of verse 2 is similar to what we find in Isaiah 21:9. It is being used to describe how God is bringing down Rome like He did with Babylon in the Old Testament. The reason for her demise is clearly stated in verses 5-8. Her judgment from God would cause those in the world to mourn (vss. 9-19). Why? Because as her prosperity was taken away, so would theirs! God tells His people to rejoice about this information (vs. 20). As He promised, He has vindicated and led them to victory over their enemies (vss. 21-24).

Revelation 19 — This chapter continues to theme of the previous (only it focuses more on the downfall of the beast and false prophet). The chapter can actually be broken down into three units. First, there is the praise and worship of God by his people because He leads them to victory over enemies (vss. 1-5). Second, there is the marriage supper between the Lamb (Jesus) and His bride (the church) (vss. 6-8). Third, there is the judgment of God brought upon the beast and the false prophet (Vss. 11-21). Verses 9-11 are very interesting. Notice how angels may be great and wonderful, but they are not to be worshipped! Verse 10 tells us who we are to worship.

Revelation 20 — This chapter continues the story of God's judgment by announcing the doom of the greatest enemy of God's people — the devil. The first few verses talk about God stripping Satan of his ability to use Rome to persecute His people anymore (vss. 1-6). Once that takes place, Satan will be down but not out. He will continue to assault Christians until the end comes and God throws him into the lake of fire forever (vss. 7-10; also see again Revelation 12:10-17). When this occurs, the Judgment Day will also take place (vss. 11-15). On this day, the dead will stand before Jesus and be judged according to their deeds. Those whose names are not found in the book of life, will also be cast in the lake of fire and experience spiritual death. As you read this section, ask yourself, "Right now, is my name found in the book of life?" If so, are you doing your best to make sure it remains there (Revelation 3:5)?

Revelation 21 — After the final judgment of the wicked is announced, in this chapter John transitions and talks about the everlasting blessings for the righteous. The language of verse 1 is similar to that of 2 Peter 3:13. The church in her glory is clearly what is under consideration in verse 2 (Hebrews 12:22-23). In heaven, the church will be in the perfect presence of God (vss. 3-4). She will be completely separated from wicked people (vss. 5-8). She will be in a place of perfect security (vss. 9-14). She will be in a place of perfect beauty (vss. 15-21). She will be in a place of eternal and glorious blessings from the Lord (vss. 22-27). It is important to note, that many also hold the view that this section is not talking about heaven, but the church in her glory after the downfall of her enemies. Similar language in the Old Testament is used to describe God's people in this way (compare verses 3-4 with Isaiah 25:8). Because the language of Revelation is apocalyptic, it is hard to be dogmatic with either view.

Revelation 22 — As John brings this final book of the Bible to a close, he takes us back to the beginning by mentioning the “tree of life” (vs. 2; Genesis 2:17). What was lost in the garden between God and man will be regained in heaven (vss. 1-5)! Notice how the time factor for many of the prophecies in the book is repeated in verses 6-12. In verses 8-9, we learn once again that angels are not to be worshipped. Verses 18-19 offer a great warning to anyone who tries to change or distort God’s word. In verse 20, Jesus is making reference to His coming judgment on Rome. Notice how the last verse of the Bible (vs. 21) doesn’t talk about the judgment of God. Instead, it talks about the grace of the Lord Jesus being extended to all. Praise God for His amazing grace!